

## Display Christian Loyalty When a Relative Is Disfellowshipped

<sup>1</sup> The bond between family members can be very strong. This brings a test upon a Christian when a marriage mate, a child, a parent, or another close relative is disfellowshipped or has disassociated himself from the congregation. (Matt. 10:37) How should loyal Christians treat such a relative? Does it make a difference if the person lives in your household? First, let us review what the Bible says on this subject, the principles of which apply equally to those who are disfellowshipped and to those who disassociate themselves.

<sup>2</sup> **How to Treat Expelled Ones:** God's Word commands Christians not to keep company or fellowship with a person who has been expelled from the congregation: "Quit mixing in company with *anyone* called a brother that is a fornicator or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even eating with such a man. . . . Remove the wicked man from among yourselves." (1 Cor. 5:11, 13) Jesus' words recorded at Matthew 18:17 also bear on the matter: "Let [the expelled one] be to you just as a man of the nations and as a tax collector." Jesus' hearers well knew that the Jews of that day had no fraternization with Gentiles and that they shunned tax collectors as outcasts. Jesus was thus instructing his followers not to associate with expelled ones.—See *The Watchtower* of September 15, 1981, pages 18-20.

<sup>3</sup> This means that loyal Christians do not have spiritual fellowship with anyone who has been expelled from the congregation. But more is involved. God's Word states that we should '*not even eat with such a man.*' (1 Cor. 5:11) Hence, we also avoid social fellowship with an expelled person. This would rule out joining him in a picnic, party, ball game, or trip to the mall or theater or sitting down to a meal with him either in the home or at a restaurant.

<sup>4</sup> What about speaking with a disfellowshipped person? While the Bible does not cover every possible situation, 2 John 10 helps us to get Jehovah's view of matters: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, never re-

ceive him into your homes or say a greeting to him." Commenting on this, *The Watchtower* of September 15, 1981, page 25, says: "A simple 'Hello' to someone can be the first step that develops into a conversation and maybe even a friendship. Would we want to take that first step with a disfellowshipped person?"

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it is just as page 31 of the same issue of *The Watchtower* states: "The fact is that when a Christian gives himself over to sin and has to be disfellowshipped, he forfeits much: his approved standing with God; . . . sweet fellowship with the brothers, including much of the association he had with Christian relatives."

<sup>6</sup> **In the Immediate Household:** Does this mean that Christians living in the same household with a disfellowshipped family member are to avoid talking to, eating with, and associating with that one as they go about their daily activities? *The Watchtower* of April 15, 1991, in the footnote on page 22, states: "If in a Christian's household there is a disfellowshipped relative, that one would still be part of the normal, day-to-day household dealings and activities." Thus, it would be left up to members of the family to decide on the extent to which the disfellowshipped family member would be included when eating or engaging in other household activities. And yet, they would not want to give brothers with whom they associate the impression that everything is the same as it was before the disfellowshipping occurred.

<sup>7</sup> However, *The Watchtower* of September 15, 1981, page 28, points out regarding the disfellowshipped or disassociated person: "Former spiritual ties have been completely severed. This is true even with respect to his relatives, including those within his immediate family circle. . . . That will mean changes in the spiritual fellowship that may have existed in the home. For example, if the husband is disfellowshipped, his wife and children will not be comfortable with him conducting a family Bible study or leading in Bible reading and prayer. If he wants to say a

5. When disfellowshipped, what does a person forfeit?

6. Is a Christian required to cut off all association with a disfellowshipped relative living in the same household? Explain.

7. How does spiritual fellowship within the home change when a family member is disfellowshipped?

1. What situation can test a Christian's loyalty?

2. According to the Bible, how are Christians to treat those expelled from the congregation?

3, 4. What sort of fellowship with disfellowshipped and disassociated people is forbidden?



prayer, such as at mealtime, he has a right to do so in his own home. But they can silently offer their own prayers to God. (Prov. 28:9; Ps. 119:145, 146) What if a disfellowshipped person in the home wants to be present when the family reads the Bible together or has a Bible study? The others might let him be present to listen if he will not try to teach them or share his religious ideas."

<sup>8</sup> If a minor child living in the home is disfellowshipped, Christian parents are still responsible for his upbringing. *The Watchtower* of November 15, 1988, page 20, states: "Just as they will continue to provide him with food, clothing, and shelter, they need to instruct and discipline him in line with God's Word. (Proverbs 6:20-22; 29:17) Loving parents may thus arrange to have a home Bible study with him, even if he is disfellowshipped. Maybe he will derive the most corrective benefit from their studying with him alone. Or they may decide that he can continue to share in the family study arrangement."—See also *The Watchtower* of October 1, 2001, pages 16-17.

<sup>9</sup> **Relatives Not in the Household:** "The situation is different if the disfellowshipped or disassociated one is a relative living outside the immediate family circle and home," states *The Watchtower* of April 15, 1988, page 28. "It might be possible to have almost no contact at all with the relative. Even if there were some family matters requiring contact, this certainly would be kept to a minimum," in harmony with the divine injunction to "quit mixing in company with anyone" who is guilty of sinning unrepentantly. (1 Cor. 5:11) Loyal Christians should strive to avoid needless association with such a relative, even keeping business dealings to an absolute minimum.—See also *The Watchtower* of September 15, 1981, pages 29-30.

<sup>10</sup> *The Watchtower* addresses another situation that can arise: "What if a close relative, such as a son or a parent who does not live in the home, is disfellowshipped and subsequently wants to move back there? The family could decide what to do depending on the situation. For example, a disfellowshipped parent may be sick or no longer able to care for himself financially or physically. The Christian children have a Scriptural

8. What responsibility do Christian parents have toward a minor disfellowshipped child living in the home?

9. To what extent should a Christian have contact with a disfellowshipped relative living outside the home?

10, 11. What will a Christian consider before allowing a disfellowshipped relative to move into the home?

and moral obligation to assist. (1 Tim. 5:8) . . . What is done may depend on factors such as the parent's true needs, his attitude and the regard the head of the household has for the spiritual welfare of the household."—*The Watchtower* of September 15, 1981, pages 28-9.

<sup>11</sup> As for a child, the same article continues: "Sometimes Christian parents have accepted back into the home for a time a disfellowshipped child who has become physically or emotionally ill. But in each case the parents can weigh the individual circumstances. Has a disfellowshipped son lived on his own, and is he now unable to do so? Or does he want to move back primarily because it would be an easier life? What about his morals and attitude? Will he bring 'heaven' into the home?—Gal. 5:9."

<sup>12</sup> **Benefits of Being Loyal to Jehovah:** Co-operating with the Scriptural arrangement to disfellowship and shun unrepentant wrongdoers is beneficial. It preserves the cleanness of the congregation and distinguishes us as upholders of the Bible's high moral standards. (1 Pet. 1:14-16) It protects us from corrupting influences. (Gal. 5:7-9) It also affords the wrongdoer an opportunity to benefit fully from the discipline received, which can help him to produce "peaceable fruit, namely, righteousness."—Heb. 12:11.

<sup>13</sup> After hearing a talk at a circuit assembly, a brother and his fleshly sister realized that they needed to make adjustments in the way they treated their mother, who lived elsewhere and who had been disfellowshipped for six years. Immediately after the assembly, the man called his mother, and after assuring her of their love, he explained that they could no longer talk to her unless there were important family matters requiring contact. Shortly thereafter, his mother began attending meetings and was eventually reinstated. Also, her unbelieving husband began studying and in time was baptized.

<sup>14</sup> Loyal upholding the disfellowshipping arrangement outlined in the Scriptures demonstrates our love for Jehovah and provides an answer to the one that is taunting Him. (Prov. 27:11) In turn, we can be assured of Jehovah's blessing. King David wrote regarding Jehovah: "As for his statutes, I shall not turn aside from them. With someone loyal you will act in loyalty."—2 Sam. 22:23, 26.

12. What are some benefits of the disfellowshipping arrangement?

13. What adjustment did one family make, and with what result?

14. Why should we loyally support the disfellowshipping arrangement?