

# Is Disfellowshipping a Christian Practice?

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December, 2000

Is disfellowshipping and suspension a Christian practice? If so when should it be done? Who should do it? Can we prove it from the Bible? Is the Bible specific enough for us to know? How does it square with the teaching of Jesus? Have many people become confused?

From my first encounter with the Worldwide Church of God in the late 60's and early 70's disfellowshipping was a common practice. Not being close enough to issues I never really knew the details of why certain people were put out of the church, I only knew it was something that was done quite regularly.

As I recall the scenario usually went something like this. Trouble would brew between church members or some person would have a problem with something. Maybe a girl would wear too much make-up or wear clothing not

appropriate. At that time an issue that usually was attributed to young men was hair length. Many people were coming into the church at that time and the Biblical teaching on these things was not familiar to some. Other issues such as questioning Sabbath day observances, Holy day observances, tithing and other things were being questioned.

So consequently, if someone questioned doctrines, the leadership, or some other issue that might be viewed as divisionary, the minister would contact that person to talk. It might only be over something that would be construed as a bad attitude. If the person didn't accept the minister's counsel, he or she might be asked to stay home from services for a week or two. This is known as '**suspension**'. If the person decided not to come back to services, no one would even know. All they would know, unless they asked the minister pointedly,

is that the person decided not to come anymore.

If the person decided to push the issue, the minister might take one or two deacons with him next time. If the person was still not convinced he/she was stepping out of line, the issue began to get more serious. If, over a certain length of time the person might disclose some of the issues that were going on to some other person, the minister might look on the matter as divisionary and grounds for **disfellowshipment**.

The next time you hear of the person is one Sabbath you come to church. Before the sermon or during the sermonette time, the minister will announce to the congregation that so-and-so has been disfellowshipped. The discourse may go something like this:

**In accordance with Biblical commands and the doctrine and longstanding practices of the church, it is my unpleasant duty as a pastor to announce the disfellowshipment of John Smith from the Worldwide Church of God for cause. As a result of this disfellowshipment, members are asked not to fellowship with Mr Smith.**

**The Church does not bear any ill will toward Mr Smith or his family but wishes repentance and reconciliation to the church and to this fold.**

If the person became sorry for the offense he/she had caused, they could apologize and could be welcomed back into the fellowship once more. Sounds simple, sounds logical, but did it work? What were and are the fruits?

In all my 30 years of being associated with the church, rarely have I seen anyone who has publicly been disfellowshipped, come back

into the fellowship of the church under these circumstances. Most often the **suspension** turned into **disfellowshipment** and further alienation to the point where that person no longer was even heard from and was soon forgotten. In passing conversation that person's name might be brought up in conversation where the question is asked, "I wonder why so and so never came back. I can't imagine what the problem might have been. Certainly it wasn't so bad as to stay away from church. Oh well. Sure hope he/she comes to see the light".

If this is a practice that God ordained to correct individuals, to bring them back into the fold, why does it seem so few ever return? Maybe it's just me, but how about you? How many people have you seen return to the fellowship of the church? If indeed the numbers are few, why? Furthermore, if it is supposed to be the method of the church to deal with problems, what are we to make of it? Is God a failure? Would He give us instruction, knowing most of the time the person would turn away? Does He care? What is His attitude?

As I recall in those early years we were all very excited about learning new things out of the Bible and we all seemed to fall in line with the practice of disfellowshipping as well. All of us were in some way or other taught by Herbert W. Armstrong and Ambassador College. Most of what we were hearing and studying was honorable, was right, and was the truth. Mr Armstrong continually said "don't believe me, just because I say it, believe what you read out of the pages of your own bible." Again we were all so excited about it and were committed to go through anything to stay with it. Disfellowshipping was one of those things we didn't want happening to us.

As we look back now we must ponder and think about some of the things we, as a church, did. Did we do these things as a matter of following Christ's instruction or did we carry

out some instructions taught by Herbert Armstrong, as he understood the Bible? Mr Armstrong often used the example of a crate of apples. If one of those apples turned rotten, it had to be thrown out or else the whole crate would turn rotten.

Let's stop right here and take a close look at this premise. Is this view of problems in the church and how they are to be dealt with, scriptural? Is this the way Christ would have handled them? Really? Before we answer that question we must be sure. We can't simply trust our own human logic. We must read and study the things Jesus taught and lived. If what we're doing can stand up to that test, of course it's right. But on the other hand, if we see a misunderstanding or conflict here, we've got to find out what it might be.

Could it be possible Mr Armstrong may not have understood everything and that he might have overlooked something? Mr Armstrong was a great religious leader of our time, but he was not God. He was not infallible. He made mistakes, but he always said we must be willing to make the changes necessary once we see the error of our way. He always said one of the signs of God's true church was, that it would be willing to change once proved it needed to. Another thing Mr Armstrong said was that if any issue started out on a false premise, any conclusions later on would have bad fruits and would turn out wrong. This too is most absolutely true and is scriptural.

But let's step back for a moment and take a birds eye view of the church in this 21<sup>st</sup> century and where it has come to. Look at the many splits and schisms that have occurred since Mr Armstrong's death. Why? Why after his death? Why not before his death?

To me the answer is simple. Mr Armstrong governed on this basic premise that this is the way church government ought to operate. Nip

the problems in the bud before they have a chance to develop and get full blown. If you could do this, you could maintain a pretty tight and smoothly run operation. So in order to do this, a minister had to keep a close watch on things. He, may even unwittingly encouraged informants to keep him abreast of goings on.

If he sensed the problems getting out of hand, he had to deal with them promptly, even if it meant getting rid of the '**rotten apple**' causing it. This, again, was done in all sincerity in keeping with what Mr Armstrong had taught. And it was carried out with all the more zeal when he deeply viewed it in the best interest of the 'flock'. He was to be the shepherd of his local congregation and it was his 'duty' and responsibility to God and to Christ.

So again the question, is it a right principal from scripture to remove someone from the fellowship of believers? Is it a thing that Christ delegates to someone on earth to do, to issue a directive telling someone, unless they change their way of thinking, they were **not to attend** services, and those who do attend are **not to contact** that someone? What scriptures should we turn to and prove these things? We must look at and evaluate every scripture that seems to give this instruction in the light of all others on the subject. In addition to that, we must evaluate everything in the light of which Christ taught and lived.

#### **'Marking' (Romans 16:17-18)**

"Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."

This verse usually accompanies any formal disfellowshipping. It is used to lend support to

the practice. The context of the verse is in the closing part of the book, or letter to the Romans, that Paul wrote in about 56 AD. In the first part of the chapter Paul commends certain of the faithful people, even giving their names. And then at the last gave this admonition to be careful and avoid those who might be stirring up trouble. Lets analyze this verse closely.

To do so we must lay aside any preconceived notion about things. We must lay aside in our mind any thoughts we might still have, remembering how so often it was used in the past. And as Mr Armstrong also said “it was much harder to unlearn error than it was to learn new truth.” So then let’s proceed to read this verse as if it were the first time we read it.

First of all we can see Paul is addressing the general assembly of all the church members at Rome, for he says “Now I beseech **you brethren**”... If he were writing to some evangelist or some other person he most certainly would have made that distinction. Proof of this is when he wrote the books of 1 and 2 Timothy. So then by saying brethren, he’s saying: “Look, you all know what you’ve learned from me or the Old Testament scriptures. If anyone seems to be contrary to that, don’t be taken in. A good way would be simply to avoid them.” The very next verse he says why “by good words and fair speeches *they* deceive the hearts of the simple”.

Is this anything different than what Christ said? Notice Mat 24:5. “For many shall come in my name saying, I am Christ and shall deceive many”. Or how about Matthew 7:15 where he says “beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” **Same thing**. Basically here Christ is **speaking to his followers**. He’s not just speaking to one person to have that person warn the flock. He’s speaking to those who would follow Him and his message. Paul

simply told the people at Rome the very same things Christ foretold over 25 years before. This was not something new.

Secondly the word ‘mark’ comes from the Greek word *skopeo*, which simply means ‘consider’ or ‘take heed’. We might say it this way to take note of those people and what they’re saying. Again, hearken back to what Christ said. He said ‘**beware**’. Paul said ‘**mark**’. No difference.

But how has this word been used? Has it not been used in a most emphatic way? Whenever a person is ‘marked’ in this way that person is ‘**branded**’ by name. If some in the congregation were not aware of that person being a problem, they are now forewarned. It begins to color anything that person might say to you in the future. **It imputes an evil motive might be lurking in that person and you “best not be talking to them”**.

It also insinuates that the ‘ministry’ is in the best position to know this and he’s only doing it for your good. Both of these ideas could, more than likely, be false. He might, deep down in his heart, think he’s doing it for your good, but what about individual responsibility? Both Christ, as well as Paul, laid the responsibility to ‘**beware**’ or ‘**mark**’ squarely on the shoulders of each and every follower...**not to any individual leader only**.

In other places Paul specifically names a person that may have turned aside from the faith, but Christ rarely did. In Luke 13:32 He called Herod a fox. But rarely did He forewarn anyone about some specific individual. He was so careful not to do that, even his own closest disciples didn’t know who would betray him. Doesn’t that sound a bit strange in light of this foregone discussion? Rather Christ spoke in generalities such as with the Scribes and Pharisees. Whenever Christ spoke of someone by name or singled him or her out, it usually

was in praise of that person or to honor him or her in some way.

In summary, we should be able to see, that ‘marking’ someone in this way, as pointed out in Romans 16:17-18 is something all of us must continue to do. Take note of what any and all are saying. If it measures up, fine. If not, be careful. **The responsibility is ours.** It’s not given to any man who claims to represent Christ, or in Christ’s service as a command to ‘brand’ that person.

### **1 Corinthians 5**

This is another example that is used to support the disfellowshipping practice. It’s the example of a man having an affair with his own mother. Let’s examine this example closely.

First of all Paul again is writing this letter to the church at Corinth. It is thought to have been written prior to Passover about 55 AD. Notice the words “unto the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1:2). Notice when the action was to be carried out: “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together...” (1 Cor 5:4). So the instruction is written to **a body of believers**, not a certain evangelist, such as Timothy. **It was their collective responsibility to deal with the problem, not a specific minister.**

Another thing we can glean from this first letter is that the church at Corinth had not grown that much, spiritually, since it’s inception. Even though it had been over 20 years since Pentecost in 31 AD they still were carnal (1 Cor. 3:1-3). Knowing this, it must have been quite difficult to live in a city such as Corinth with it’s temple prostitution and other sinful practices and not be affected. It could very well have been a city very much like the city of Sodom in which Lot lived.

Paul no doubt felt a deep responsibility to write

a stern warning to wake them up. He had been told of the goings on in that city and probably understood the conditions there. None-the-less there could be no excuse for the kind of behavior of some man carrying on with his own mother this way. It had to be dealt with!

So he wrote the letter, and since it was prior to the Days of Unleavened Bread, he also used it as teaching a lesson of how leaven works in our lives. Just a little can affect the whole lump. He was all the more disturbed about the situation because they felt good about themselves in that they were able to tolerate it. They were puffed up. So Paul proceeded to give them instruction of how we are to hate these kinds of things. Not that we hate people but the sinful behavior generated by the society around them.

Writing to the Church at Ephesus Paul basically said the same thing. This church area, no doubt, was afflicted with the same type of society at that time. In Ephesians 5:11 he admonishes them “have no **fellowship** with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them”...

Again the scripture is consistent in this regard that if you continually rub shoulders with people of a corrupt nature, it’s going to rub off. You will eventually be affected. Take a look at 1 Cor. 15:33. Paul says “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners”. The Greek word here for communications is *homilia* meaning ‘a being crowded together’. The word for manner is *ethos*, meaning “habit”. So a good rendering of this verse could be “Don’t kid yourself, if you continue to tolerate evil, you, yourself can be corrupted and develop the same kinds of habits.

But let’s be honest about it. This example of the immoral person in 1 Corinthians 5 is far different than most disfellowships you and I have been familiar with. Most of the problems

in the church start small and grow over misunderstandings of doctrine or leadership and are perceived by some as leading to divisions. They are not one and the same and to use this as supporting the practice of disfellowshipment is misapplying scripture.

## **2 Thessalonians 3:6**

“Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”

This is another verse which some might use to claim it's okay to 'shun' a person in the church. It's also used in support of the practice of disfellowshipment. So again the verse must closely be evaluated on the context in which it was written and held up to the instruction Jesus taught and lived.

The Young's Concordance renders the meaning for withdraw as “to withdraw self, avoid, **beware of**”. So Paul is instructing the Thessalonians again to **beware of** and stay away from the brethren who are practicing a certain manner of living. Those who “walk disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.” What's he talking about?

The Greek word for disorderly here is *ataktos* meaning ‘unruly or out of order’. So what does this mean? The very next verse Paul explains that he had heard there were some who were not working and going about into everyone else's business but their own. He is simply saying stay away from that and don't begin practicing that kind of behavior. Again, very much like 1 Corinthians 5, if you get too close to that type of person you begin to take on their habits. So Paul is telling **the brethren** there to ‘beware of’.

And when Paul is mentioning the tradition he

handed down to them, he's simply saying go to work and earn money to provide for yourself and family. Don't mooch off others. Be productive. It was his example and was what he wanted them to do.

This instruction is not to shun or stay away from the people but rather from **the behavior** of those who were being disorderly. It's the **behavior** that is the problem, **not the people**. Again, like Eph. 5:11, he says “have no fellowship with the unfruitful **works** of darkness but rather reprove them...”

The fellowship one is not to have is with the **unfruitful works of darkness**, not people. So when this verse is used to support disfellowshipment, it's taken out of context and is wrong.

## **Christ's Example**

When it comes to disfellowshipment, how does it square with Christ's example and teaching? We must look closely because he says “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction and many there be that go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it (Mat. 7:13).

Furthermore he says “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven: but he that does the **will of my father** which is in heaven (Matt 7:21).

So here Jesus is telling us to search diligently and follow after a certain way of life—a certain way that leads to life. He further indicates that it is only those doing **God's will** are allowed to enter (Matt 7:21).

So what is **God's will** concerning disfellowshipment? Let's look a key scripture.

“Even though it is **not the will of your Father** which is in Heaven, that one of these **little ones** should perish” (Mat. 18:14).

So who are these “little ones”? Is Jesus talking about children? Let’s look closely. To get the context of what God the Father’s **will** is concerning these ‘little ones’ we have to back up to Matthew 18:1. In Matthew 18:1, it says the disciples came to ask Jesus about who would be the greatest in God’s kingdom. By this time, being with Jesus day and night they may have begun to feel a little exclusive as to their own importance and they wanted to find out. So Jesus began to teach them.

So He called a little child and set him in the midst of them. The Greek word for “little” is *mikros*, meaning small. It’s no doubt the root word for microscope, microns, etc. Therefore the little child was small, possibly less than 5 years of age. But is it little children he is talking about?

In verse 3 he says “Except you be **converted** and become **as** little children—you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. The word ‘converted’ comes from the Greek word *strepho* meaning ‘turn’. So He’s saying a person must turn and become **as** a little child.

He goes on in verse 4...”whosoever therefore shall humble himself **as this little child...** and whosoever shall receive **such** a little child in my name.... but whoso shall offend one of these ‘little ones’ **which believe in me...**

There’s the clincher... a ‘little one’ who believes in Christ. Can a little child believe in Christ...a little child less than 5 years old? Well... maybe, but we can see from the previous verses it says “**as** a little child.” It’s quite obvious Jesus is referring to an adult person; a person new in the faith or someone **who may not have grown very much.**

Just because a person is a ‘little one’, it doesn’t mean he or she just started attending services. They may well have been attending for years. They may well have been persons very much like the person in Corinth where Paul said they had not grown very much...even in 25 years. He said they were in need of the basic essentials of a little child getting started in life. For Paul says “I fed you with milk and not with meat: for hitherto you were not able to bear it neither yet now are you able.” Notice John 16:12. Jesus is telling his own disciples He had something to tell them but said they were not able to “**bear them now.**” Can we get the picture? The Corinthians as well as Christ’s disciples at one point in time were small. They were adults, not children and yet they were **small** spiritually. They were yet ‘**little ones!**’ (1Cor. 3:2.)

So if a ‘little one’ seems to be questioning something and is viewed by some to be causing division, should he or she be suspended? Should they be disfellowshipped—put out of the church? **Does a minister know the heart or intent of the individual having the disagreement?** Is it his job to know? Could the minister be wrong? What if the minister **offends** one of these ‘**little ones**’ by suspending or disfellowshipping someone?

Look at the example of David being anointed as king. Samuel, was ready to pick Eliab as God’s anointed, but “the Lord said unto Samuel, ‘look not on his countenance, or the height of his stature,... for the Lord sees not as a man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart’” (1 Sam. 16:7). Imagine that! Here was a man, Samuel, who was close enough to be able to talk to Christ, about to make a mistake in selecting a person to be king, whom God says he did not recommend. Can you fathom that? Now if Samuel could make a mistake like that do you not think it possible ministers, too, can

make these kinds of wrong judgments concerning those they view as causing division? Think about it...

But you say, someone has to make these calls, these judgments—but—what about Matthew 7:1-5, where Jesus is giving instruction on judging. He says ‘**Judge not**’. Is this for the rank and file member only? And does it mean **condemn** only? Some have said this word ‘judge’ should be rendered as ‘condemn’ and the statement in Mat. 7:1 should read **condemn not**.

The Greek word for Judge is *krino*. It can mean condemn but it can also mean ‘call in question, conclude, decree, determine, esteem, ordain, think, or my sentence is’. Out of 107 times where ‘*krino*’ is used only six render it as condemn or damn. The rest are those mentioned. When we look closely at Matthew 7:1-5 the context clearly indicates that it does not **only** mean condemn. In verse 2 He says with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.” So clearly this is not only condemning people. This is “concluding, calling into question, decreeing, determining, esteeming, ordaining, thinking, or sentencing.” **It’s a general statement of the way we deal with other people is the way we will be dealt with.** In verse 3-5 Jesus gets a bit more specific when he shows how people are prone to look at the faults of others when the fault is with them.

So when a minister makes a decision to suspend or disfellowship, he is clearly ‘judging’ in the broad sense of Matthew’s usage. Could this be a violation of what Jesus told us **not to do**?

All of the splits and schisms since Mr Armstrong’s death seem to be mute testimony to the judging mentality. Why can’t we be more tolerant of each other??

Let iron sharpen iron. Have a little thicker skin and let people have the opportunity to express themselves. Let the congregation have the ability to be exercised to discern right from wrong and to grow thereby; to lay this responsibility on **their** shoulders instead of on the shoulders of the ministry. Laying this responsibility on the shoulders of the ministry often leads them to remove that person from the fellowship of the congregation. Why? The reason, as stated before, is to be able to nip the problems in the bud and get rid of the **rotten apple** before it has time to affect the other apples.

### All Members Need to Learn

Look at the parable of the tares (Matt 13:24-30). This parable Jesus gave indicates there is danger in removing tares from a wheat field...even when you know absolutely which is a tare (weed) and which is wheat. Could there be a greater purpose for weeds and wheat to dwell together until the harvest? Leaving them together they both struggle for survival. It’s possible some of the wheat can be choked out, but by the same token struggle produces strength. Do Christians need to be able to deal with these kinds of problems and build strength while doing? If we never have to answer questions of why we do what we do and do so without the minister intervening, what kind of strength are we building?

It goes back to our purpose for being. Why is God only calling some now? Why are there firstfruits? Why is God teaching and training some now? What kind of training is going to be necessary to be on the team in developing a peaceful ‘World Tomorrow’?

Think about it. When Christ returns to this earth, His first mission is to go to war to put down rebellion. But how will peace really come and how will it continue to grow and be maintained? That’s where the saints come in.

The people now trained in exercising forbearance, longsuffering and patience are going to be those Christ will use to build the peace. Can Christ use someone who is trigger happy or quick to remove people causing trouble? Is this the way He wants things done? Will peace suddenly happen when He returns?

Jesus says “blessed are the peacemakers....” We must be learning that job now. To grow in longsuffering we have to have something with which to **suffer long**. To build muscle, a weight lifter must push against a greater and greater force. To build patience and longsuffering we need to be exercised also. The only way possible to build these character traits means being in an environment where you get hit on from time to time. Suffering wrongfully allows us to build strong spiritual muscle. Removing someone from the fellowship of believers who seems to be contentious, just because he or she may not understand something the way you do, only removes the opportunity to grow in that regard.

How many ‘little ones’ have been put out of the church since the church began? How many ‘little ones’ have been uprooted because some other member has been told not to come to church and they were offended by that? How many people have stopped coming when they see the hypocrisy in people shunning or avoiding contact with others simply because they have been told to do so? Young people especially are keen to see this hypocrisy the same way God does.

In Isaiah 65:1-5 God says those who He ‘spreads out his hands to’ walk in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts: a people that **provoke** me to anger continually to my face... which say to one another **don’t come too close, you’ll defile me! For I am holier than you.**” Wow! Could this possibly

be giving us a little insight to what God really thinks of how we suspend or disfellowship? Read on: **“They stifle me... they infuriate me!”**

What would we say if God tells us it makes him mad every time a person is removed from the body of believers? Especially if He hand picked that person to be called into the fellowship in the first place? How serious is it? God hates sin, but He does not hate people. His way is constantly seeking out ways to find that one that goes astray, just the opposite of disfellowshipment.

As stated above, most often when a person is disfellowshipped, 1 Corinthians 5 is used where incest was taking place and Paul gave the instruction to remove that person from their fellowship. But how often are you told the second half of that story? If Christ inspired the first letter to be written would he not have inspired the second? Let’s see what he said.

“Remember that man I wrote to you about, who has caused all the trouble,...I don’t want to be harder on him than I should. He has been punished enough by your **united disapproval**. Now it is time to **forgive him** otherwise he may become so bitter and discouraged he won’t be able to recover. Please show him now that you still do love him very much.” (2Cor 2:7-8).

Did you get that? **Paul is saying to the congregation, not the ministry**, that, just as with a **united disapproval** they removed him, they, unitedly need to contact him and forgive him. It does not say here that the man was sorry for what he had done. Maybe he had repented. Another view could be taken, however, in that by contacting the person, actively going to the person, being willing to put the past in the past, it might lead to his ultimate repentance—which is toward God.

## **Disfellowshipping—A work of the Scribes and Pharisees**

In Matthew 23:2-3 Jesus said, “The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but **do not you after their works; for they say, and do not.**”

Jesus acknowledged their position—their proper role in teaching the people. They were the educated and rightly needed to be teaching the things Moses instructed centuries ago. And he said **all** that they tell you to do from that instruction, given long ago. was proper, was right, was from God and needed to be obeyed. But in the same sentence, when Jesus is telling them what to do he is also telling them what not to do. He says “**do not you after their works**”.

The word work comes from the Greek word *ergon* meaning ‘deed, doing, work’. So what were some of the deeds the Pharisees and Scribes were doing? The Scribes and Pharisees were good at making themselves look ‘good’. But behind the scene, they were guilty of ‘extortion’ and ‘excess’ among other things (Mat. 23:25). When we think of extortion, we think of someone demanding something (usually money) from someone or else. Or else what? Extortion usually has a threat: “If you don’t pay up we’ll throw you in jail” or worse, like the Mafia: “We’ll blow you away!”. So extortion indicates using the position of leadership in a ‘lording over’ type way, intimidating the people to obey or **pay the consequences**.

Look at John 12:42. Here, Jesus was going about teaching people and doing good. He went to church, kept God’s Holy Days and did all the things required, but He didn’t fit the stereotypical person that the elders thought would be a true follower of God. Consequently there was a ‘division among the people

because of him’ (John 7:43). And “nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but **because of the Pharisees** they did not confess him...” (John 12:42).

Why not? Why not talk openly about something or someone doing good? What could be the harm in doing that? Well, you say nothing, but why didn’t these leaders want to voice their belief? Read on: “**lest they should be put out of the synagogue**”.

Just like extortion for money, there was an extortion to remain a good church member. And in order to do so, you could not have any other opinion about any other person, no matter what good that person was doing. If it did not conform to the leadership’s view, you were guilty of an infraction and would have to pay the consequences. In this case be put out of church—**suspended or disfellowshipped**.

In John 9:22 it says “**the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue**”. In fact Jesus foretold this would happen in our day. He said “**they shall put you out of the synagogues**”. Hold on!! It gets worse. He says “**yea the time comes that whosoever kills you will think that he does God service.**” Seems impossible that it would be possible. Hard to believe, but there it is. Does it seem any less likely then that some minister could eject a person or suspend a person from attending church thinking they are doing right, “doing God’s service”?

Now think for a moment is Jesus saying true Christians would be put out of churches that plainly are not following the Bible as their authority? No way! In this society today many churches exist that call themselves Christian. They claim to be Christ’s, but don’t even keep the same Holy Days as Christ kept, much less the Sabbath. True Christians would not be put out of a church they know is not the one Christ

built and is building. True Christians would be **suspended**, and told not come, **‘marked’** or disfellowshipped from the **‘body of believers’**.

But again, why would people be put out then as well as now? The answer is right there in John 12:42. The reason they, at least many of the leaders were tight-lipped about supporting Jesus, was that **“they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”** These leaders were concerned about their position—their status—and possibly their paycheck as well as their impression with the people. They were such a tightly knit group, so focused on every little detail, that they overlooked the obvious.

Do you think times have changed that much from then to now? Take a look at the young man who was blind from birth and Jesus healed him (John 9:34). The Jews were so steeped in their own self-importance it was they who were blind and not the young man who was healed. Look at the attitude they displayed to the young man. Why do you think you are? **“You were altogether born in sins and do you teach us?”** I can imagine them saying: “Don’t you realize who we are and all the education we’ve had? How can you possibly know something more than we do? Why we know you, you’ve not gone to college. What can you know about the scripture? We’re ministers, we’re highly educated. We not only went to college. We were at headquarters and have been a pastor of many churches since and you’re sitting there trying to tell us something!! Ridiculous! **“...and they cast him out.”**

Again, I won’t belabor the point but one of the **‘works’** in which they seemed to be involved in Jesus day was putting people out of the church. Now you or I can’t put people out or suspend them. After all we are not the **‘authority’**, but to be a good church member we must go along with the decision and shun them who are put out—or else that just might be our fate as well. It becomes a matter of intimidation and it was

a **‘work’** of the Pharisees in Jesus day and something He told his followers **not to have a part in.**

### **Disfellowshipping Still Practiced—Long After Church Began**

Were they still putting people out of church after Christ went to heaven? Apparently so. Take a look at 3 John 10. It says Diotrephes would not receive certain people in the church and to those who did receive them he cast them out of the church. What does this look like? It isn’t specific about why he put them out except that Diotrephes **“who loves to have the preeminence among them”**.

Apparently this had to be someone who may have been ordained at one time to such an office, because he claimed the authority to boot a person out of the church for one reason or another. This also couldn’t have happened unless the people accepted the practice, or at least went along with it, fearing themselves to oppose it, lest they be the ones to be thrown out.

Now who were these brethren who were being thrown out? The answer to this question is all of 3 John. John starts out the chapter by praising certain of the brethren for receiving people for their courage **“as”**, they, **“walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth”**. Some, such as Diotrephes, didn’t think they were walking in the truth but others did. And what did John say? He said they were faithful for receiving such. Notice verse 5. **“Beloved, you do faithfully whatsoever you do to the brethren, and to strangers”**... What? **“To strangers”**. Apparently, some were showing kindness to some people who were not even members of the church, and because of that John praised them for doing so. But, again, what did Diotrephes think of it? He ejected them from the fellowship.

Doesn't this have a ring of present day application? I think we can safely say it does. The reason being is that human nature is the same today as it was back then.

### Summary

We can see certain sections of the Bible that seem to indicate support for disfellowshipment, but when we hold them up to Christ's teaching to love and forbear with one another the answer is clear. His desire is for reconciliation and not disfellowshipment. Only then can we expect our prayers to be heard. "First be reconciled to your brother..." (Mat 5:24).

When we look closely also, we can see the Pharisees practiced suspension and disfellowshipment and it certainly looks like one of the 'works' Jesus said his followers were not to do. **Therefore it is not a Christian practice to be part and parcel with.** Many mainstream Church of God churches today talk a good line about going back to the faith once delivered but in actual practice follow in the footsteps of the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus said "except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the

scribes and Pharisees ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 5:20). Therefore it should be something we look long and hard at and come away from.

The real essence of God's will is in Mat. 18:11-14. "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, does he not leave the ninety and nine and goes into the mountains and seeks that which has gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you he rejoices more of that sheep than the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so **it is not** the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these '**little ones**' should perish."

God's will is to 'seek out'. Look for ways to encourage and exhort. Our calling is to "walk... with lowliness and meekness with **longsuffering, forbearing one another in love endeavoring** to keep the bond of peace" (Eph 4:1-3). This is our mission and part of the 'great commission' in "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;" (Mat. 28:20).

Let's be about our Father's business.

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