

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

On December 28, 2012, we received the following comment:

“I [was] wondering if you have written an article about the wicked Disfellowshipping policy as practiced by the Society? If so, what’s the article’s name? Maybe it would be good to write an open letter to the [Governing Body] in this matter. It’s a pure evil practice, a disgrace to the Christ and the Father. If you don’t acknowledge a person as a human being, how could one expect to be forgiven their own sins? Well, they can’t.”

To the author, thank you for your email. No, we have not written an article on the matter of disfellowshipping. But we will make a few comments here to let you know our view of the matter.

Our ministry focuses on the actual, authentic, plain and open teachings of Jesus. We notice that Jesus did not discuss administrative issues in any of his discourses. He left that to the individual groups who choose to take up his ministry. He said, as recorded by Matthew:

“Truly I say to you men, Whatever things you may bind on earth will be things bound in heaven, and whatever things you may loose on earth will be things loosed in heaven. Again I truly say to you, If two of you on earth agree concerning anything of importance that they should request, it will take place for them due to my Father in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst.” – *Matthew 18:18-20*

Thus, Jesus allows each group to establish their own administrative rules. As for us, we do not consider a disfellowshipping policy in itself to be evil, wicked or a disgrace to the Father or the Christ. The Bible clearly establishes a precedent for such a procedure. We note that the apostle Paul, who formed many congregations, did establish certain administrative rules, including a rule of expelling unrepentant sinners. He wrote:

“But now I am writing you to 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. For what do I have to do with judging those outside? Do you not judge those inside, while God judges those outside? ‘Remove the wicked [man] from among yourselves.’” – *1 Corinthians 5:11-13*

However, what we **do** consider disgraceful is **how that policy is carried out**. The apostle John spoke of one brother who misused the disfellowshipping policy:

“I wrote something to the congregation, but Diotrephes, who likes to have the first place among them, does not receive anything from us with respect. That is why, if I come, I will call to remembrance his works which he goes on doing, chattering about us with wicked words. Also, not being content with these things, neither does he himself receive the brothers with respect, and those who are wanting to receive them he tries to hinder and to throw out of the congregation.” – *3 John 9-10*

The problem with Diotrephes was that he was arrogant, prideful and intolerant of other views. Rather than engaging in a healthful interchange, as did Paul and Barnabas when they were faced with a difference of opinion with the brothers in Jerusalem (*Acts 15:2*), Diotrephes sought to expel those who disagreed with him. When a religious association engages in Diotrephes-type behavior, they have gone too far.

As we see it, the solution is not the removal of a disfellowshipping policy, but the proper administration of one. That can only occur when those making the decisions are truly spirit-led individuals who understand the purpose of such a policy, and who understand the Father's love and the Christ's mercy. 'Physical men' are hardly capable of exercising judgment fairly or wisely:

“But a physical man does not receive the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot get to know [them], because they are examined spiritually. However, the spiritual man examines indeed all things, but he himself is not examined by any man.” – *1 Corinthians 2:14-15*

We believe that if those in appointed positions understood their true relationship to God, as his children, and grasped the significance of the spirit of the Father dwelling in them, they would handle matters in a much more loving manner. As Paul stated:

“Do you not know that you people are God's temple, and that the spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, which [temple] you people are.” – *1 Corinthians 3:16-17*

Such spirit-led overseers would know that God's spirit not only dwells in them, but also in the other members of the congregation. They would be far less inclined to 'destroy the temple of God' in their brothers by wrongly, jealousy, impatiently, and disgracefully disfellowshipping or failing to reinstate their repentant brothers and sisters.

This is why we emphasize the matter of sonship. Knowing that we are all faith sons of the Father in the heavens, and joint heirs with Christ Jesus, is the best insurance against theocratic malpractice, and religious dysfunction. It is also the best insurance against unrepentant sinful behavior because the erring one would know that he would be dragging the Father's spirit with him into his unhealthy behavior. When we cannot find enough strength and love for ourselves to stop or avoid wrong behavior, we can often find that strength in our love for God.

Truly, sonship is the key to all matters of human behavior. And it is the 'small rudder' that will turn our 'ship of faith' toward our heavenly Father. When more of us understand and accept our sonship, fewer of us will fall into the category of unrepentance, and thus the policy of disfellowshipping will be utilized far less frequently and then only when a true danger to the spiritual health of the congregation exists.

Finally, for those among our association who find themselves in a disfellowshipped position, and are seeking to please God, we direct you to **Question and Response, dated September 1, 2012**, and **Question and Response dated November 29, 2012**. You may find some helpful suggestions in these responses.

“*Elaia Luchnia*”
