

DISFELLOWSHIPPING

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I read an article in the Journal Issue # 197 page 3 about disfellowshipping. In this article the author told about things he said or did in his Church (not a church of God) that made people angry (for example he preached that they shouldn't bring firearms to church) and then how it made him feel to be disfellowshipped. He called it 'ghosting' which is an appropriate term as people who are disfellowshipped are cut off suddenly and usually without any explanation from long-time friendships and made to feel as if they don't exist at all. Is this the way Christians should treat one another?

Before the article in the Journal came out, I listened to an online 1978 WCG sermon given by Dean Blackwell about this subject. [1] He talked of a movie called Becket about a man who was disfellowshipped from the Catholic Church. The excommunication scene [2] was terrifying as the man Becket was consigned to the ever-burning flames of hell-fire. This story was told to make the point that disfellowshipping is not done to terrify people, but for correction that will hopefully lead to repentance and return of the offender. The minister then gave scriptures, for example, 1Corinthians 5, to show that disfellowshipping is a Biblically acceptable practice of the Church of God,

After listening to this sermon I realized that there were important scriptures that Mr. Blackwell left out, namely those that give examples of UNJUST DISFELLOWSHIPPING, for example, 3John 1:9-11.

Notice the difference between the two examples: In 1Corinthians 5 all church members knew about the sin the man was committing and the Apostle Paul wrote to the entire church, not just to a church leader as to how to deal with this man. But in the second example, of 3John 1:9-11, no sin is mentioned. People were being cast out just on the leader's say-so.

This link gives an article written by Mr. Herbert Armstrong in which he demonized ministers whom he disfellowshipped. There is a list of ministers' names at the end of the article. [3] After reading this, which example do you think this article portrays - 1Corinthians 5 or 3John 1:9-11??? Do we know what sin these ministers were committing to deserve being disfellowshipped?

Natthew 21:33-43, Mark 12:1-11 and Luke 20:9-17 give the parable about the Lord of a vineyard who gave charge over his vineyard to husbandmen. He then sent people to them to receive of the fruits of his vineyard, but the husbandmen treated them badly, beat them, CAST THEM OUT, and finally even killed the Lord's son whom he sent to them. The question is then asked, "What shall the Lord of the vineyard do to these wicked husbandmen?" The answer is that he would utterly destroy them and give charge of the vineyard to others who will render the fruits of it as they should do. The scriptures in Matthew are a little different in that they refer to the husbandmen as the keepers of the Kingdom of God to give people the fruits of his kingdom. And

when they failed to render the fruits of the Kingdom, the Lord said that the Kingdom would be taken away from them and given to others.

This parable is telling us that the Kingdom of God was taken away from the Jews and given to the Church of God leaders who are expected just as the Jewish leaders were, to render the fruits of the Kingdom to anyone the Lord sends to them. If they treat people badly, begin to beat their fellow servants, send them away empty and cast them out unjustly will not the Lord of those husbandmen take away the Kingdom from them too? Of course he will. In fact all Christians, not just ministers and leaders, can apply this parable to themselves by examining the way they are treating people whom the Lord sends to them day by day to receive the fruits of his kingdom.

John 9 gives another unjust disfellowshipping, the casting out of the man born blind. This story gives us the example of Jesus who when he knew that a man was cast out of the synagogue went to visit him personally to see if he believed. How many of us have done this for our Church of God brethren who have been cast out without our knowing the circumstances?

1 Corinthians 5 shows the proper use of disfellowshipping by putting the casting out of the man committing incest in context of casting leaven out of our homes in the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Here, casting out physical leaven pictures how to properly apply disfellowshipping in casting sinning brethren out of the church. Just like putting physical leaven out of our homes and putting sin out of ourselves, this requires recognizing leaven (sin) when we see it in the church and having the mindset of keeping the church holy. We must do this in the church because a little leaven leavens the whole lump. A good example of how sin has spread like leaven in the Churches of God is divorce and remarriage. In 1974 Mr. Armstrong adopted the Protestant remarriage permission doctrine. Then in 1977 he married a divorced woman. The Lord says divorce followed by remarriage and marrying a divorced woman is committing adultery (Mat 5:32, Mar 10:11) but no outcry was made in the church, the doctrine spread and today is accepted and taught by many of the WCG offshoots.

The truth about disfellowshipping is that there are two extremes that we must not fall into. On the one extreme the church ignores sin as it enters in and so it spreads like leaven. On the other extreme, disfellowshipping is applied as a form of spiritual abuse done to people who do not deserve it. Practicing either extreme is going to result in a church that does not reflect God's righteous character or his will.

In practicing disfellowshipping we must apply scriptures like 1 Corinthians 5:11 which lists and specifies sins that are appropriate for casting out to make sure there is no injustice done to faithful Christians. Mr. Armstrong disfellowshipped his daughters for wearing makeup, which is a commandment of men, not a commandment of God.

We must realize that we members of the Church are expected to do more than pay and pray. We must know what is going on in the Church and learn how to become righteous judges because 1 Corinthians 6:3 tells us that we shall someday judge angels. An important rule for judging is: "He that justifies the wicked and he that condemneth the just are both alike abomination to the Lord" (Pro 17:15) How can we learn to become righteous judges if we do not have any proper procedure for disfellowshipping or even conduct a hearing so that both sides can be heard?

Notice that there is a procedure in Matthew 18 that ultimately brings a sin out into the open and to the attention of the whole church (ekklesia) who then participate in the judgment.

We must apply scriptures like Galatians 6:1 telling us to restore a sinner in the spirit of meekness. The sinner needs to know that he is valued and loved and that we want him to repent of the specified wrong behavior and return. The Apostle Paul wrote 2Corinthians 2:4-8 asking the church to forgive and restore the man who had been cast out in 1Corinthians 5.

We are actually emulating our God when we teach and practice proper disfellowshipping. God was the first to practice righteous disfellowshipping when he cast out Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden for their sin. Then he showed love and mercy by making a way for sinning mankind to be reconciled to him. And in the final analysis, God says that he desires all men to be saved, but also says in scriptures like Matthew 25:30, Luke 13:28 and Revelation 22:14-15 that all deliberate and unrepentant sinners will ultimately be CAST OUT of his Kingdom.

This subject is so important that there should be a booklet written on it to teach new members so that they will know up front to expect that this punishment will be applied if they fall into sin and refuse to repent.

For those who have been disfellowshipped because of actual sin, the message is to REPENT because the Lord has CALLED you. He LOVES you and he WANTS you in his Kingdom. And you have to understand that sin is not going to be accepted in his Kingdom.

For those churches who call themselves Christian yet practice unjust disfellowshipping, the Lord has this to say to you and your victims:

Isa 66:5 Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.

REFERENCES

[1] Disfellowshipping Sermon given by Dean Blackwell 1978

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVplzxI_DoY

[2] Excommunication Scene of the Movie Becket

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRt2cKvJLIE>

[3] God Commands That We Should Avoid Certain Ones by Herbert Armstrong The Worldwide News Feb 25, 1980 [http://www.herbert-w-armstrong.com/other_materials/ww_news/WWN_1980%28Prelim No 04%29 0225_w.pdf](http://www.herbert-w-armstrong.com/other_materials/ww_news/WWN_1980%28Prelim%20No%2004%29_0225_w.pdf)