

Adjustments to Handling Serious Wrongdoing in the Congregation

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1. The *2024 Governing Body Update #2* announced adjustments in the way serious wrongdoing will be addressed by the elders. This document outlines those adjustments, which should be implemented immediately. The body of elders should meet within one week following the release of this document to review this direction. In addition, the circuit overseer will review this material with the elders during his next visit to the congregation following the release of this document. If the body of elders has questions about a specific case, please write to the Service Department, providing complete details. In due course, the *Shepherd* and *Organized* books will be revised to reflect these adjustments.

JEHOVAH “DESIRES ALL TO ATTAIN TO REPENTANCE”

2. Our wonderful Father, Jehovah, “does not desire anyone to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance.” (2 Pet. 3:9) So it is not surprising that throughout the Bible record, we find Jehovah appealing to sinners to repent. He urges those who had strayed from true worship to return. For example, Jehovah tried to lead Cain to repentance. (Gen. 4:6, 7) David was led to repentance after he committed serious sins against Jehovah. (2 Sam. 12:13) “*Again and again*” Jehovah urged the nation of Israel to repent. (Jer. 7:25; Ezek. 33:11) At Revelation 2:21, regarding that woman Jezebel, Jesus said: “*I gave her time to repent.*” This is in harmony with Romans 2:4, which tells us that God in his kindness tries to lead sinners to repentance.

3. In the *2024 Governing Body Update #2*, we received clarification on three scriptures.

(1) In harmony with 2 Timothy 2:24, 25, a committee of elders will lovingly correct and instruct a wrongdoer with the goal of leading him to repentance.

- The study note on 2 Timothy 2:25 for “those not favorably disposed” explains: “Paul uses a Greek word that in this context refers to people who resist Christian teachings or who place themselves in opposition to them. *Paul may have had in mind, among others, those in the congregation in Ephesus who had a negative attitude toward following Scriptural counsel or heeding admonition from brothers taking the lead.*” Today, this could include brothers and sisters in the congregation who disregard Scriptural counsel and become involved in serious wrongdoing.

- The study note on 2 Timothy 2:25 for “God may give them repentance” says: “*When a Christian elder mildly corrects or instructs ‘those not favorably disposed,’ the good result may be repentance, or ‘a change of mind.’ . . .* The credit for such a change in thinking and attitude goes, not to any human, but to Jehovah, who helps the wayward Christian make this vital change. Paul goes on to mention some of the beautiful results of such repentance—it leads the sinner to a more accurate knowledge of the truth, it helps him come back to his proper senses, and it enables him to escape from Satan’s snares.—2Ti 2:26.”

(2) As outlined at 1 Corinthians 5:13, a person who refuses to repent must be removed from the congregation. However, the committee will still try to help him see the need to return and will arrange for a follow-up meeting in a few months.

(3) We also clarified our understanding of 2 John 9-11, which we learned applies specifically to apostates and others who actively promote wrong conduct, not to all those who have been removed from the congregation.

4. Let us consider in more detail how these clarifications relate to how wrongdoers should be dealt with in the congregation.

HOW CAN ELDERS COOPERATE WITH JEHOVAH IN ‘LEADING A SINNER TO REPENTANCE’?

5. When a Christian becomes involved in serious wrongdoing, he needs the assistance of the elders so that he can restore his relationship with Jehovah and regain good spiritual health. (Isa. 1:18, 19) Before forming a committee to meet with a wrongdoer, the body of elders should establish that there is a solid basis for doing so.—*sfl* chap. 12 pars. 1-40.

6. When meeting with a Christian who has become involved in serious wrongdoing, the goal of the committee is to *‘lead the sinner to repentance.’* (Rom. 2:4) The committee may decide that it would be appropriate to meet more than once with the wrongdoer in order to reach his heart. Meeting with him more than once will allow time for the individual to grasp the gravity of his wrongdoing and its effect on his relationship with Jehovah, and most important, to repent and ask Jehovah for his forgiveness. (Ps. 51:1-4; Prov. 28:13) Meeting with him more than once will also allow the committee to try to reach the individual’s heart by means of the Scriptures.

7. By skillful use of the Scriptures, the committee should try to reach the wrongdoer’s heart and lead him to repentance. If through your efforts Jehovah gives the individual repentance, this is a cause for rejoicing. (Luke 15:7; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Pet. 3:9) In such cases, appropriate restrictions will be temporarily imposed. If the wrongdoing is widely known or likely to become known, a brief announcement of the reproof can be made to the congregation. Restrictions should be viewed as temporary and should be removed without delay as the individual makes a spiritual recovery. Of course, with certain kinds of wrongdoing—such as child abuse, apostasy, and scheming to end a marriage—restrictions will need to be in place much longer. (*sfl* chap. 12 pars. 10-12; chap. 14 pars. 22-24) Whatever the case, the elders will also provide shepherding so that the individual can keep making straight paths for his feet.

WHAT IF A BAPTIZED MINOR (UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE) BECOMES INVOLVED IN SERIOUS WRONGDOING?

8. When a baptized minor becomes involved in serious wrongdoing, two elders (not a committee) will meet with him along with his Christian parent(s) or legal guardian(s). The elders

will exercise patience as they work with the parents to understand the minor's attitude. They will also find out what steps the parents have taken to assist their child.

9. If the minor has a good attitude and the parents have the matter in hand, the two elders may determine that it is not necessary for the minor and his Christian parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to meet with a committee. The elders will check with the parents periodically to ensure that the minor is receiving needed spiritual assistance.

10. If the minor's wrongdoing is widely known or likely to become known, the following brief announcement may be made to the congregation: "A matter involving [name of person] has been handled by the elders." Also, the two elders may impose some temporary restrictions, such as not commenting at meetings and not caring for student assignments on the midweek meeting. As the individual makes a spiritual recovery, the temporary restrictions should be removed by the two elders without delay.

11. If the minor persists in a wrong course despite the assistance offered by two elders and his Christian parent(s) or legal guardian(s), a committee will meet with the minor and his Christian parent(s) or legal guardian(s). If the minor is unrepentant, he would be removed from the congregation.

12. What about minors who are currently disfellowshipped? The committee involved with the disfellowshipping can meet with the minor and his Christian parent(s) or legal guardian(s) to see how the minor is doing. If the minor has abandoned his sinful course and has a good attitude and if the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) have the matter in hand, an announcement can be made that the minor has been reinstated. The elders would impose temporary restrictions, such as not commenting at meetings and not caring for student assignments on the midweek meeting. Thereafter, two elders from the committee will monitor the minor's spiritual progress so that the restrictions may be removed in keeping with his spiritual progress. If the minor is an apostate or is promoting serious wrongdoing, the committee would not meet with the minor and his Christian parent(s) or legal guardian(s). If the minor was disfellowshipped by a committee in another congregation, the elders should follow the direction in the *Shepherd* book, chapter 19, paragraphs 13-16.

13. What about individuals who were disfellowshipped as minors but who are now adults? Such ones can be visited as the elders reach out to disfellowshipped ones.—See [paragraph 17](#).

WHAT IF A WRONGDOER DOES NOT RESPOND TO THE COMMITTEE'S EFFORTS TO RENDER SPIRITUAL ASSISTANCE?

14. Not all who Jehovah tried to lead to repentance responded positively. Similarly, a wrongdoer may not respond to the committee's efforts to render spiritual assistance.

15. "*Remove the wicked person from among yourselves.*" (1 Cor. 5:13) An unrepentant wrongdoer must be removed from the congregation. However, when the elders inform a person that he is being removed from the congregation, he should not be left hopeless. The elders will explain what steps he can take to be welcomed back into the congregation. If the individual is not an apostate or actively promoting wrongdoing, they will also inform him that they would like to meet with him again in *three months* to determine if he has had a change of heart. In some cases, but not all, the committee may determine that there is a basis for reinstating the individual at that time. On the other hand, if he has not had a change of heart or if additional time is needed (see the special caution in [paragraph 16](#)), the elders will endeavor to reach out to him every *six months* if he is agreeable, unless he requests

reinstatement before that time. At such visits, the elders may pray with the individual and warmly appeal to him to repent and return.

16. **Caution:** Although a repentant individual should be reinstated without delay, such sins as child abuse, apostasy, and scheming to end a marriage require special caution. (2 Pet. 2:9, 10) The elders must protect the flock.—John 10:11-13.

SHOULD THE ELDERS ENDEAVOR TO MEET WITH ALL DISFELLOWSHIPED INDIVIDUALS IN THE TERRITORY EVERY SIX MONTHS?

17. Yes, if the individual is willing to meet. As stated above, at such visits, the elders may pray with the individual and warmly appeal to him to repent and return. Of course, this would not apply to individuals who are known apostates or who are actively promoting wrongdoing. This adjusts what is stated in the *Shepherd* book, chapter 25, paragraph 20.

HOW SHOULD PUBLISHERS TREAT A PERSON WHO HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM THE CONGREGATION?

18. When a person has been removed from the congregation, we “*stop keeping company*” with that person, “*not even eating with such a man.*” (1 Cor. 5:11) However, as explained and demonstrated in the *2024 Governing Body Update #2*, if the person attends congregation meetings, a publisher can use his Bible-trained conscience to decide if he will give a simple greeting and welcome the disfellowshipped person to the meeting or not.

19. A Christian may also choose to invite a disfellowshipped person—perhaps a relative, a former Bible student, or someone he was close to in the past—to attend a congregation meeting.

WHAT ABOUT INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE DISFELLOWSHIPED IN THE PAST, PERHAPS EVEN MANY YEARS AGO?

20. In some cases, individuals who were disfellowshipped years in the past may not even recall the reason they were disfellowshipped. They may have abandoned their wrong course years ago. In other cases, they may still be involved in some form of wrongdoing. If an individual is neither a known apostate nor is actively promoting wrongdoing, the elders may visit him. At such visits, the elders would offer to pray with the disfellowshipped person and make a warm appeal to him to repent and return to the congregation.

21. If a person has been away from the congregation for a significant period of time, he would no doubt be very weak spiritually. Therefore, if such a person is willing, the elders could arrange for an elder or a well-qualified ministerial servant to conduct a Bible study with him even before he is reinstated. In the case of a disfellowshipped woman, a mature sister could be assigned to conduct the study. This would include individuals who may still be involved in some form of wrongdoing but who wish to receive help to come to repentance. Of course, the person would have to want to return to the congregation, and the elders would *always* be the ones to arrange for such a study.

22. Rather than making many rules, the elders should be guided by Bible principles to decide how they will assist disfellowshipped individuals to come to repentance.

HOW CAN WE HARMONIZE THE ABOVE DIRECTION WITH 2 JOHN 9-11?

23. Second John 9-11 warns us of a contaminating influence, saying: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your homes or say a greeting to him.” Who are Christians instructed to avoid? The context indicates that this refers to

“everyone who pushes ahead and does not remain in the teaching,” and therefore it applies to apostates and those who actively promote wrong conduct. Such ones should not be greeted by individual Christians, visited by the elders, or invited to attend Christian meetings.

APPEAL COMMITTEES

24. The following adjustment regarding appeal committees was not included in the *2024 Governing Body Update #2*.

25. **What if a wrongdoer gives evidence of genuine repentance only when he meets with the appeal committee?** If *both* the original committee and the appeal committee agree that a wrongdoer is genuinely repentant *when he meets with the appeal committee*, he may remain in the congregation. This adjusts what is stated in the *Shepherd* book, chapter 17, paragraph 7, point 2. The appeal committee would meet only one time with the individual.

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