

## e-concepts

### A Weekly Publication of Relational Concepts Inc.

## Managing Relationships with Adult Children Living in Sin

By David DeWitt

Although there are exceptions, most of today's institutional churches are not likely to remove fellowship. The temptation of the sincere Christian family is to take that role upon themselves. They understand that something must be done about adult children who claim Christianity but live in sin.

But a family is not a church, a network of believers across the city. When families see themselves as a church, strange things can happen. Families (and other institutions) may exclude people for social or political or cultural issues that are not legitimate reasons to remove fellowship. They might remove someone who smokes, supports liberal political views, or has blue hair. On the other hand, they may not take a stand at all because they believe the only stand to take is to remove fellowship (*not to associate with...not even to eat with such a one*—1 Corinthians 5:11). When parents see the devastating effect that would have on the family, they often (or usually) opt for doing nothing at all.

It is my observation that mature Christian parents of adult rebellious children make an outward statement, which takes a physical (not just a verbal) stand against sin. This varies with the family and the situation. There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution. But good parents do not practice removal of fellowship. For example, they may refuse to attend an unbiblical wedding, but do not shun the married couple after the wedding. That way they have taken a definite strong position for the truth of the Word of God, which is more than just verbally saying, "they know where I stand." But it also does not assume the family is a church practicing the removal of fellowship. Or a family may decide not to finance the college expenses of a child cohabitating with a girlfriend or boyfriend. But they do not exclude them from family activities.

### Prevent Influence—Don't Remove Fellowship

In some cases, the ongoing situation is also sinful. For example, if an adult child marries an unbeliever, the wedding is wrong but the marriage is not. That is, if you knew a believer married to an unbeliever, you would not say their marriage was unbiblical (1 Corinthians 7:13). But if the marriage was between two homosexuals, then the marriage itself would be sinful (Matthew 19:4-6). Therefore, it would be more than the wedding that could not be tolerated.

In some cases, rebellious adult children are like *leaven*, spreading their sin to all the family. Good parents will not allow that. So the sinful adult child must be quarantined because the principle *a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough* (1 Corinthians 5:6) is true everywhere, including families. And in some cases, it is impossible to have family fellowship with the sinner, without that influence. But the purpose of the social limitation is to protect the family, not to *deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh* (verse 5). In other words, good parents will focus on the rest of the family, not the sinful adult child. Quarantine is for the protection of the healthy (Leviticus 13).

In the case where adult children are, say, homosexuals or atheists who want to flaunt their sin, good parents will place limitations on attending family activities. But the purpose here is not removal of fellowship, but protection of the family from the leaven-effect of their sin. For example, a homosexual adult child might be invited to a holiday meal but not be allowed to bring their gay or lesbian partner. But if the homosexual, coming alone, was promoting the tolerance of his or her sin to their siblings, or degrading the parents for not tolerating it, then he or she might also be banned from family activities. At another time, the parents would still be open to have lunch with the homosexual son or daughter because they are preventing their influence, not removing fellowship.

Of course, all believers should have the primary motivation to please God and be true to His Word. **But the removal of fellowship (*not to associate with...not even to eat with such a one*—1 Corinthians 5:11) has two specific goals:**

1. To *deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh* if they don't repent so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 5:5).
2. Keeping the sin from influencing other believers because *a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough* (verse 6). Good Christian parents, it seems to me, only have the second of these goals for their families.

P.O. Box 141456 • Grand Rapids, MI 49514 • [relationalconcepts.org](http://relationalconcepts.org)