

Comments on JW safeguarding policy as outlined in Watchtower of May 2019 – Why CSA is rarely reported externally.

STUDY ARTICLE 19

Love and Justice in the Face of Wickedness (Part 3 of 4)

“You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no one bad may remain with you.”—[PS. 5:4](#).

SONG 142 Holding Fast to Our Hope

PREVIEW*

1-3. (a) According to [Psalm 5:4-6](#), how does Jehovah feel about wickedness? (b) Why can we say that child abuse is opposed to “the law of the Christ”?

JEHOVAH GOD hates all forms of wickedness. (**Read [Psalm 5:4-6](#)**.) How he must hate child sexual abuse—an especially repugnant wicked deed! In imitation of Jehovah, we as his Witnesses abhor child abuse and do not tolerate it in the Christian congregation.—[Rom. 12:9](#); [Heb. 12:15, 16](#).

²Any act of child abuse is absolutely opposed to “the law of the Christ”! ([Gal. 6:2](#)) Why can we say that? As we learned in the preceding article, the law of the Christ—that is, all that Jesus taught both by word and by example—is built on love and promotes justice. Governed by this law, true Christians treat children in a way that makes them feel safe and genuinely loved. But child abuse is a selfish, unjust act that makes a child feel unsafe and unloved.

³Sadly, child sexual abuse is a worldwide plague, and true Christians have been affected by this plague. Why? “Wicked men and impostors” abound, and some may try to enter the congregation. ([2 Tim. 3:13](#)) In addition, some professing to be a part of the congregation have succumbed to perverted fleshly desires and have sexually abused children. Let us discuss why **child abuse is such a grave sin. Then we will consider how elders handle instances of serious wrongdoing, including child abuse**, and how parents can protect their children.*

1. Child abuse is dealt with as a sin. It is the elders’ job to handle sin. Parents will most likely report first to the elders.

A GRAVE SIN

4-5. How is child abuse a sin against the victim?

⁴ Child abuse has far-reaching consequences. It affects the victims as well as those who care about the victims—their family members and their Christian brothers and sisters. Child abuse is a grave sin.

⁵ ***A sin against the victim.**** It is a sin to inflict unjust pain and suffering on others. As we will see in the next article, the child abuser does just that—he hurts the child in devastating ways. He betrays the child’s trust, robbing the child of his or her security. Children must be protected from such a wicked deed, and those who have been victimized by it need comfort and help.—[1 Thess. 5:14](#).

6-7. How is child abuse a sin against the congregation and against the secular authorities?

⁶ ***A sin against the congregation.*** When someone who is a part of the congregation becomes guilty of child abuse, he brings reproach on the congregation. ([Matt. 5:16](#); [1 Pet. 2:12](#)) How unfair that is to the millions of faithful Christians who are putting up “a hard fight for the faith”! ([Jude 3](#)) We do not tolerate in our midst individuals who unrepentantly commit wicked deeds and who bring reproach on the good name of the congregation.

⁷ ***A sin against the secular authorities.*** Christians are to “be in subjection to the superior authorities.” ([Rom. 13:1](#)) We prove our subjection by showing due respect for the laws of the land. If someone in the congregation becomes guilty of violating a criminal law, such as by committing child abuse, he is sinning against the secular authorities. (Compare [Acts 25:8](#).) While the **elders are not authorized to enforce the law of the land, they do not shield any perpetrator of child abuse from the legal consequences of his sin.** ([Rom. 13:4](#)) The sinner reaps what he has sown.—[Gal. 6:7](#).

8. How does Jehovah view sins committed against humans?

⁸ ***Above all, a sin against God.*** ([Ps. 51:4](#)) When a human sins against another human, he also sins against Jehovah. Consider an example from the Law that God gave Israel. The Law said that a man who robbed or defrauded his neighbor was behaving “unfaithfully toward Jehovah.” ([Lev. 6:2-4](#)) Certainly, then, when an individual who is a part of the congregation abuses a child—robbing that child of his or her security—he is behaving unfaithfully toward God. The abuser brings great reproach on Jehovah’s name. For that reason, abuse must be condemned for what it is—a gross sin against God.

2. Elders do not see it as their responsibility to handle or report crime. The phrase tells us what elders do not do, hiding the fact that in most cases they do nothing.

9. What Scriptural information has Jehovah's organization provided over the years, and why?

⁹Over the years, Jehovah's organization has provided an abundance of Scriptural information on the subject of child abuse. For example, articles in *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* have discussed how those who have been sexually abused can deal with emotional scars, how others can help and encourage them, and how parents can protect their children. Elders have received detailed Scriptural training on how to handle the sin of child abuse. The organization continues to review the way congregations handle the sin of child abuse. Why? To make sure that our way of handling the matter is in harmony with the law of the Christ.

HANDLING INSTANCES OF SERIOUS WRONGDOING

10-12. (a) When they handle any matter involving serious wrongdoing, what do elders keep in mind, and what concerns do they have? (b) According to [James 5:14, 15](#), what do the elders endeavor to do?

¹⁰When elders handle any matter involving serious wrongdoing, they keep in mind that the law of the Christ requires that they treat the flock with love and do what is right and just in God's eyes. As a result, they have a number of concerns when they receive a report of serious wrongdoing. The elders are primarily concerned with maintaining the sanctity of God's name. ([Lev. 22:31, 32](#); [Matt. 6:9](#)) They are also deeply concerned with the spiritual welfare of their brothers and sisters in the congregation and want to help any who have been victims of wrongdoing.

¹¹In addition, **if the wrongdoer is a part of the congregation, elders are concerned with trying to restore him if that is possible. (Read [James 5:14, 15](#).)** A Christian who gives in to wrong desire and commits a serious sin is spiritually sick. This means that he no longer has a healthy relationship with Jehovah.* In a sense, the elders are spiritual physicians. **They endeavor to make "the sick one [in this instance, the wrongdoer] well."** Their Scriptural counsel can help him to restore his relationship with God, but this is only possible if he is genuinely repentant.—[Acts 3:19](#); [2 Cor. 2:5-10](#).

¹²Clearly, elders have a weighty responsibility. They care deeply about the flock that God has entrusted to them. ([1 Pet. 5:1-3](#)) They want their brothers and sisters to feel secure in the congregation. For that reason, they act promptly when they receive a report of serious wrongdoing,

3. When the accused person is a member of the congregation the elders see it as their responsibility to restore him spiritually. This sets up a conflict of interest between assisting the perpetrator and protecting children.

including child abuse. Consider the questions that appear at the beginning of paragraphs 13, 15, and 17.

13-14. Do elders comply with secular laws about reporting an allegation of child abuse?

Explain.

¹³ **Do elders comply with secular laws about reporting an allegation of child abuse to the secular authorities?** Yes. In places where such laws exist, elders endeavor to comply with secular laws about reporting allegations of abuse. (Rom. 13:1) Such laws do not conflict with God's law. (Acts 5:28, 29) So when they learn of an allegation, elders immediately seek direction on how they can comply with laws about reporting it.

¹⁴ Elders assure victims and their parents and others with knowledge of the matter that they are free to report an allegation of abuse to the secular authorities. But what if the report is about someone who is a part of the congregation and the matter then becomes known in the community? Should the Christian who reported it feel that he has brought reproach on God's name? No. The abuser is the one who brings reproach on God's name.

15-16. (a) According to 1 Timothy 5:19, why are at least two witnesses required before the elders take judicial action? (b) What do elders do when they learn that someone in the congregation is accused of child abuse?

¹⁵ **In the congregation, before the elders take judicial action, why are at least two witnesses required?** This requirement is part of the Bible's high standard of justice. When there is no confession of wrongdoing, two witnesses are required to establish the accusation and authorize the elders to take judicial action. (Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16; read 1 Timothy 5:19.) Does this mean that before an allegation of abuse can be reported to the authorities, two witnesses are required? No. This requirement does not apply to whether elders or others report allegations of a *crime*.

¹⁶ When they learn that someone in the congregation is accused of child abuse, elders endeavor to comply with any secular laws about reporting the matter, and then they conduct a Scriptural investigation. If the individual denies the accusation, the elders consider the testimony of witnesses. If at least two people—the one making the accusation and someone else who can verify this act or other acts of child abuse by the accused—establish the charge, a judicial committee is formed.* The absence of a second witness does not mean that the one making the accusation is untruthful. Even if a charge of wrongdoing cannot be established by two witnesses, the elders recognize that a serious sin may have been committed, one that

4. The wording here is carefully chosen to give the impression that elders consistently report the crime. In England and Wales the law does not require them to do so. The branch will advise them to report only if an identified child is at risk.

5. The fact that this instruction has to be given to elders emphasises the fact that there is a culture of not reporting the crime. Rather than leaving it to secular authorities, elders embark on their own investigation which blurs the boundary between sin and crime.

6. The "two witness" rule means that most accusations do **not** result in judicial action. A second witness to abuse is rare. Elders do not remind victims or parents at this stage that they can report externally.

deeply hurt others. The elders provide ongoing support to any individuals who may have been hurt. In addition, the elders remain alert regarding the alleged abuser to protect the congregation from potential danger.—Acts 20:28.

17-18. Explain the role of the judicial committee.

¹⁷ ***What is the role of the judicial committee?*** The term “judicial” does not mean that the elders judge, or rule on, whether the abuser should be punished by the authorities for breaking the law. **The elders do not interfere with law enforcement; they leave criminal matters to the secular authorities.** (Rom. 13:2-4; Titus 3:1) Instead, the elders judge, or determine, whether an individual can remain in the congregation.

¹⁸ When elders serve on a judicial committee, their role is spiritual, or religious. Guided by the Scriptures, **they judge whether the abuser is repentant or not. If he is unrepentant, he is expelled, and an announcement is made to the congregation. (1 Cor. 5:11-13) If he is repentant, he may remain in the congregation.** However, the elders will inform him that he may never qualify to receive any congregation privileges or to serve in any position of responsibility in the congregation. Out of concern for the welfare of children, the **elders may privately warn the parents of minors in the congregation of the need to monitor their children’s interactions with the individual.** When taking such measures, the elders are careful to maintain the privacy of those hurt by the sin.

7. Even when there is a second witness (guilt is established) and judicial action is taken, elders still take no responsibility for reporting the crime.

8. An abuser can stay a part of the congregation if he can convince three elders that he is genuinely sorry.

9. This safeguarding step relies on elders following through on this instruction and remembering as and when new families arrive. There is no procedure for auditing to check what actually happens.

10. The whole process and the language used in association with it (“investigation”, “judicial”) gives the impression of a legal process even though the article is telling us it is not a legal process.

Victims and parents are left with the impression that everything that can be done has been done when, in fact, no action has been taken in respect of the crime.