

Depending on the law of the land where he lives, the molester may well have to serve a prison term or face other sanctions from the State. The congregation will not protect him from this. Moreover, the man has revealed a serious weakness that henceforth will have to be taken into account. If he seems to be repentant, he will be encouraged to make spiritual progress, share in the field service, even have parts in the Theocratic Ministry School and non-teaching parts in the Service Meeting. This does not mean, though, that he will qualify to serve in a position of responsibility in the congregation. What are the Scriptural reasons for this?

For one thing, an elder must be “self-controlled.” (Titus 1:8) True, none of us have perfect self-control. (Romans 7:21-25) But a dedicated adult Christian who falls into the sin of child sexual abuse reveals an unnatural fleshly weakness. Experience has shown that such an adult may well molest other children. True, not every child molester repeats the sin, but many do. And the congregation cannot read hearts to tell who is and who is not liable to molest children again. (Jeremiah 17:9) Hence, Paul’s counsel to Timothy applies with special force in the case of baptized adults who have molested children: “Never lay your hands hastily upon any man; neither be a sharer in the sins of others.” (1 Timothy 5:22) For the protection of our children, a man known to have been a child molester does not qualify for a responsible position in the congregation. Moreover, he cannot be a pioneer or serve in any other special, full-time service.—Compare the principle at Exodus 21:28, 29.

Some may ask, ‘Have not some committed other types of sin and apparently repented, only to repeat their sin later?’ Yes, that has happened, but there are other fac-

tors to consider. If, for example, an individual makes immoral advances to another adult, the adult should be able to resist his or her advances. Children are much easier to deceive, confuse, or terrorize. The Bible speaks of a child’s lack of wisdom. (Proverbs 22:15; 1 Corinthians 13:11) Jesus used children as an example of humble innocence. (Matthew 18:4; Luke 18:16, 17) The innocence of a child includes a complete lack of experience. Most children are open, eager to please, and thus vulnerable to abuse by a scheming adult whom they know and trust. Therefore, the congregation has a responsibility before Jehovah to protect its children.

Well-trained children learn to obey and honor their parents, the elders, and other adults. (Ephesians 6:1, 2; 1 Timothy 5:1, 2; Hebrews 13:7) It would be a shocking perversion if one of these authority figures were to misuse that child’s innocent trust so as to seduce or force him or her to submit to sexual acts. Those who have been sexually molested in this way often struggle for years to overcome the resulting emotional trauma. Hence, a child molester is subject to severe congregational discipline and restrictions. It is not his status as an authority figure that should be of concern but, rather, the unblemished purity of the congregation.—1 Corinthians 5:6; 2 Peter 3:14.

If a child molester sincerely repents, he will recognize the wisdom of applying Bible principles. If he truly learns to abhor what is wicked, he will despise what he did and struggle to avoid repeating his sin. (Proverbs 8:13; Romans 12:9) Further, he will surely thank Jehovah for the greatness of His love, as a result of which a repentant sinner, such as he is, can still worship our holy God and hope to be among “the upright” who will reside on earth forever.—Proverbs 2:21.