

Reference Document

“The Benefit of the Doubt Jehovah’s Witnesses Never Get”

Every Claim, Source, and Verification Status

How to Use This Document

Each entry identifies a specific factual claim made in the video, the source it is based on, where to verify it, and any notes on confidence level. Claims are organized in the order they appear in the video.

Verification levels:

- **PRIMARY** — Sourced from court rulings, legislation, official Watchtower publications (including internal manuals like *Shepherd the Flock of God*), government inquiries, or other official/regulatory records. Primary sources can stand on their own.
- **SECONDARY** — Sourced from reputable investigative journalism, published firsthand accounts, or established legal/advocacy resources. Secondary sources support claims and are strongest when paired with a primary source.

SECTION 1: The Talk

Claim: On the June 2026 JW Broadcast, at the graduation of the 159th class of Gilead (the organization’s missionary school), Governing Body member David Splane gave a talk urging that people be given the benefit of the doubt because we do not have all the facts.

- Source: JW Broadcasting — June 2026 monthly program (159th Gilead graduation), talk by David Splane
- URL: jw.org/en/library/videos (June 2026 program)
- Verification: PRIMARY — the organization’s own broadcast.
- Key quote: “we need to give people the benefit of the doubt when we don’t have all the facts”

Claim: David Splane is a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

- Source: jw.org, “Who Are the Members of the Governing Body?”
- URL: jw.org — [Governing Body FAQ](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY — official organizational statement.

Claim: Splane built the talk around the Bible figure Lot, noting that the apostle Peter called Lot “righteous,” and argued the audience could not prove Lot was not older than Abraham.

- Source: JW Broadcasting — June 2026 program, talk by David Splane; Bible reference 2 Peter 2:7-8
- URL: [2 Peter 2:7-8 \(New World Translation\)](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY — the broadcast and the cited scripture.
- Key quote: “you can’t prove that he wasn’t”

SECTION 2: The Judicial System

Claim: When a Witness is accused of serious wrongdoing, a judicial committee of elders meets in private to decide whether the person is repentant, and can expel (“disfellowship”) them.

- Source: *Shepherd the Flock of God* (September 2025 edition), the elders’ manual; corroborated by *The Watchtower*, April 15, 2015.
- URL: [The Watchtower, Apr 15, 2015 \(corroborating\)](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY — internal manual and official magazine.

- Note: The repentance determination is documented in Section 4 of this reference.

Claim: Disfellowshipping results in shunning: other Witnesses, including family members, are directed to cease association with the expelled person.

- Source: jw.org, “Do You Shun Former Members of Your Religion?”
- URL: jw.org — [Shunning FAQ](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY — official organizational statement.

Claim: Disfellowshipping offenses include conduct the organization defines as serious — among them tobacco use, sexual immorality, and apostasy (which can include the expression of disagreement with the organization’s teachings).

- Source: *Shepherd the Flock of God* (September 2025 edition), which enumerates disfellowshipping offenses.
- Verification: PRIMARY — internal manual.
- Note: The apostasy/doubt point is documented further in Section 3.

SECTION 3: The Doubter

Claim: A 1980 letter from the organization’s headquarters conveyed that a Witness who merely disagrees in thought with the organization’s teachings can be treated as an apostate and is liable to be disfellowshipped, even without promoting contrary views.

- Source: Raymond Franz, *Crisis of Conscience* (Commentary Press) — firsthand account by a former member of the Governing Body.
- Verification: SECONDARY — published firsthand account by a former Governing Body member.
- Note: Franz documents a September 1, 1980 letter sent to all circuit and district overseers.

SECTION 4: The Turning Point — Judging the Heart

Claim: 1 Samuel 16:7 states that man sees only the outward appearance while Jehovah alone sees the heart.

- Source: *New World Translation*, 1 Samuel 16:7.
- URL: [1 Samuel 16:7 \(New World Translation\)](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY — the organization’s own Bible translation.
- Key quote: “mere man sees what appears to the eyes, but as for Jehovah, he sees what the heart is”

Claim: The Watchtower instructs that elders on a judicial committee must disfellowship a person if genuine repentance is not manifest to them.

- Source: *The Watchtower* (Study Edition), April 15, 2015, “Why Disfellowshipping Is a Loving Provision.”
- URL: [The Watchtower, April 15, 2015](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- Key quote: “If genuine repentance is not manifest to the elders who serve on a judicial committee, they must disfellowship the person.”

Claim: A 1996 Watchtower applies 1 Samuel 16:7 to elders, urging them to imitate Jehovah’s impartiality because it is easy for a human to judge by his own standards.

- Source: *The Watchtower*, November 15, 1996, pp. 25-27, “Are You Imitating Our Impartial God?”
- URL: [The Watchtower, Nov 15, 1996, pp. 25-27](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.

- Key quote: “Christian elders do well to imitate Jehovah by looking at the spiritual qualities of a fellow believer.”

Claim: The Watchtower teaches that Jehovah is “the examiner of hearts,” an ability it contrasts with what God’s creatures are able to perceive.

- Source: *The Watchtower*, June 15, 2003, “Questions From Readers.”
- URL: [The Watchtower, June 15, 2003](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY — official Watchtower publication.
- Key quote: “Jehovah God is described as ‘the examiner of hearts.’”

SECTION 5: Where the Benefit of the Doubt Goes

Claim: The Australian Royal Commission found that the organization’s Australian branch had recorded allegations against 1,006 alleged perpetrators of child sexual abuse since 1950, and that not one had been reported by the organization to the police.

- Source: Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Australia), Case Study 29.
- URL: [Australian Royal Commission — Case Study 29](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY — official government inquiry.
- Note: Stated by senior counsel assisting, Angus Stewart, on the organization’s own case files.

Claim: The Royal Commission found that the “two-witness rule,” as applied to child sexual abuse, showed a serious lack of understanding of the nature of such abuse and did not adequately protect children.

- Source: Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Australia), report on Jehovah’s Witnesses.
- URL: [Australian Royal Commission — Case Study 29](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY — official government inquiry.

Claim: In 2019 the Pennsylvania Attorney General opened a statewide grand jury investigation into the handling of child sexual abuse within Jehovah’s Witnesses. As of 2025, 17 members had been charged following grand jury presentments since 2022, with multiple convictions and prison sentences.

- Source: Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General (charging announcements); aggregate figures reported by the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.
- URL: [Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY (Attorney General announcements) and SECONDARY (newspaper of record for the aggregate count).
- Note: As of mid-2025, a grand jury report on the organization’s systemic handling of these cases had not been publicly released. The figures above reflect charges and convictions of individuals.

Claim: The Pennsylvania investigation was prompted in part by reporting that Witness leaders had ostracized and punished survivors who spoke up about abuse or sought help from police.

- Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (2018 investigation); reporting by FOX43.
- URL: [FOX43 — Pennsylvania grand jury investigation](#)
- Verification: SECONDARY — investigative journalism.

Claim: The elders’ manual requires two or three eyewitnesses to establish wrongdoing and directs that this procedure applies to child abuse allegations. Where there is a single witness and the accused denies the accusation, the wrongdoing is “not established” and no judicial committee is formed.

- Source: *Shepherd the Flock of God* (September 2025 edition), Chapter 6 and Chapter 9.
- Verification: PRIMARY — internal elders' manual.
- Note: A confidential manual issued only to elders; copies are widely available and an edition was tendered in evidence to the Australian Royal Commission. The two-witness requirement is found in Chapter 6 and is applied to child abuse via Chapter 9.
- Key quote: "A committee should not be formed if there is only one eyewitness."

Claim: The same manual provides that a victim of child sexual abuse is never required to make the accusation in the presence of the accused, and may submit it in writing or be accompanied by a confidant.

- Source: *Shepherd the Flock of God* (September 2025 edition), Chapter 6 and Chapter 9.
- Verification: PRIMARY — internal elders' manual.

Claim: In a letter dated March 14, 1997, the Watchtower directed U.S. congregations to report known child molesters to its headquarters; the responses were compiled into an internal database.

- Source: *J.W. v. Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of New York, Inc.* (2018) 29 Cal.App.5th 1142 (describing the March 14, 1997 letter); *The Atlantic* (2019) for the database.
- URL: [J.W. v. Watchtower \(2018\) 29 Cal.App.5th 1142](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY (appellate court opinion) and SECONDARY (*The Atlantic*).

Claim: A California woman (J.W.) was molested as a child by a congregation elder, Gilbert Simental. When Watchtower refused to produce the 1997 documents even after a court order, the court imposed terminating sanctions, and a judgment of \$4,016,152.39 was entered against Watchtower and upheld on appeal.

- Source: *J.W. v. Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of New York, Inc.* (2018) 29 Cal.App.5th 1142 (Cal. Ct. App., 4th Dist., Case No. E066555).
- URL: [J.W. v. Watchtower \(2018\) 29 Cal.App.5th 1142](#)
- Verification: PRIMARY — published appellate court opinion.
- Key quote: "the trial court entered judgment in favor of J.W. and awarded her \$4,016,152.39"

SECTION 6: Additional Supporting Sources

***The Atlantic* — "A Secret Database of Child Abuse" (Douglas Quenqua, 2019)**

- URL: [The Atlantic \(2019\)](#)
- Verification: SECONDARY — long-form investigative journalism.
- Contains: The March 1997 letter, the instruction to mail reports to headquarters in a sealed blue envelope, and the resulting database. Reproduced in full by RealClearReligion at realclearreligion.org

Reveal / The Center for Investigative Reporting — reporting on the database

- Verification: SECONDARY — investigative journalism citing sworn deposition testimony.
- Contains: A Watchtower official's sworn deposition describing how the blue-envelope reports were scanned into per-congregation files; in the Lopez litigation, Watchtower disclosed receiving 775 blue envelopes from 1997 to 2001.

A note on analysis

The video's central argument — that the benefit of the doubt within the organization consistently flows toward the institution and away from the vulnerable individual — is the creator's analysis and commentary, built on the primary and secondary sources catalogued above. The sources document the facts; the interpretation of what those facts mean is editorial.

All Watchtower publications can be read at the Watchtower Online Library (wol.jw.org) and at jw.org. Court opinions are available through the California Courts and public legal databases.