

Accountability: Part One

Accountability Begins with God

Hebrews 3:12-13 ESV

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Why Does Accountability Matter?

Accountability has been the buzz word amongst Christians for some time now. Search Amazon.com and you can find truckloads of books that tell you how to, what to and when to be accountable. While most people will agree accountability is a good thing, we need to step back and ask the motive question: why should I be accountable?

Start Wrong End Wrong

Many accountability groups fail simply because they begin wrong. The focus is upon the book, the group, how often to meet, or where to meet. Often times, it is not the method that leads to failure but the mindset. And the mindset we must begin with is that we are ultimately accountable to God. We are a redeemed object of God's creation. We will one day stand before his throne and give an account as a steward of our time, gifting, influence and possessions. The effectiveness of our attempts at accountability begin with this understanding.

Judas or Joseph?

Let me give you a couple of examples of how this works. Judas. If there was ever a guy who had the best accountability group, Judas would have to be at the top of the list. Yet, as we know, his life was a total waste and ended in miserable failure. How about another name: Joseph. If there was ever a guy who had a reason to walk away from God, it would be him. Betrayed and sold into slavery by his brothers, ends up in a foreign country and working for a guy who's wife continually seduces him to get naked. Yet, Joseph resists temptation and makes an amazing statement in response to this woman's request: "*How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?*" (Genesis 39:9). Joseph understood something, his life was ultimately accountable to God.

Outward Systems Alone Don't Survive

Perhaps this foundational understanding gives us some insight into why so many Christians walk away from God during their college years? What will happen when you move out and mom or dad aren't there to check in on you? What will happen when your friends are no longer there to keep you on track? What will happen when your small group leader or youth pastor aren't seeing you each week?

Bottom Line: Accountability Begins with God

Bottom line: if we are only accountable to these outward systems, our accountability will fail. If this whole idea of accountability is going to work, we must begin with seeing ourselves as first and foremost accountable to God.

Accountability: Part Two

Accountability Involves Other People

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Limited Perspective

Moving on from the foundational understanding that our accountability begins with God, we also have to recognize that accountability does involve other people. Even with our best intentions to honor the Lord and pursue holiness, we will fall short in our efforts. As we seek to evaluate our own condition, we must recognize we have a *limited perspective*.

Lettuce in your Teeth

Allow me to illustrate with an illustration. Your morning routine probably included you looking in the mirror for some amount of time to assess your condition. Hair, face, teeth, clothes and general appearance were all checked. You did the best with what you had and said, "I'm good." But then at lunch time, you pulled out a turkey sandwich with big, leafy, green lettuce. While you enjoyed that wonderful sandwich, what you didn't notice was that a piece of that leafy, green lettuce became stuck in your teeth visible for all to see. For the rest of the day, you went to class, went to the store and talked with friends all with a nasty green blemish in your teeth. From your perspective, everything was fine. But for everyone else, it was clear you have some issues. All of the embarrassment could have been avoided if someone would have kindly told you, "I think you have something in your teeth." That is the problem with a limited perspective.

Independence can be Dangerous

Because our perspective is limited, we all have blind spots and we are in need of other people to address those areas. We must learn that we cannot be healthy, growing and fruitful Christians all by ourselves. This is why the Bible so often speaks of the importance of relationship. After God's work of creation and repeatedly declaring it good, there was one thing God said was not good: man being alone (Genesis 2:18). Added to that, the model given to us in the book of Acts is that of Christians purposefully meeting together to study God's word, pray and be together (Acts 2:42).

A Culture of Independence

This idea of community is one we need to pay attention to as we live in a culture that fights against real relationships and genuine community. Take some time to observe how we can be prone to hyper-independence, how individuality is exalted and dependence upon others can be seen as a weakness. The self-made entrepreneur is the icon of American culture, but Scripture does not exalt such uber-independence.

Bottom-Line: Accountability Involves Others

The bottom-line is that you can't watch yourself by yourself. If we do not have the help of others to see ourselves as we are, serious consequences await! We will soon begin to listen to our own

arguments, believe our own lies and buy into our own delusions. We will forget God's clear warning given to us in the book of Proverbs that "*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice* (Proverbs 12:15). We must have those in our life who lovingly exhort as they address these blind spots in our lives.

Which leads us to the third point for next week: accountability prevents deception.

Accountability: Part Three

Accountability Prevents Deception

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Blinded by Sin

Part of the power of sin is that it has the ability to blind us to the truth, leaving us unaware of the attitudes, lusts, and idols within our lives. Our sin is so subtle in how it blinds us that we can easily find ourselves saying things like, "My sin isn't as bad as it could be" or "This attitude is not sin, it is just part of life" or worse yet, "This sin is under control. After all, no one is perfect."

Not on my own

Because our sin is so deceptive and leaves us blind to its full extent, we need input from others to correctly diagnose our heart's condition. The puritan John Owen has noted that each of us can have strengths in a variety of areas, but we are all lacking when it comes to discerning our own sin. He rightfully states that on our own, we will never develop a competency for recognizing our own sin - we need the help of others.

David and Nathan

A helpful example of the deceitfulness of sin and the need of others to speak into our lives would be that of David and the prophet Nathan. As the prophet tells a story which mirrors the sin of King David, David has no problem seeing the guilt and deserving punishment of the supposed offender. But it is not until Nathan connects the dots with the declaration, "You are this man!" that David sees his sin for what it is. That is the deceitfulness of sin.

So now what?

So what do we do with all of this talk of accountability? While there are multiple lessons to be learned in each of these posts, I would sum all of it up with two statements.

1. Respond to God - never begin to think that your attempts at accountability will somehow improve your acceptance before God or move you into the "good person" category. All of these efforts to maintain accountability are simply in response to who God is, not an attempt to prove our worth to God. If God is challenging you on your need for accountability, be sure that the motive is because 'God is worth it' and not 'I am worthy.'

2. Recognize your need for others - your spiritual health depends on it. Several questions to ask:

- Do you have Christian friends that have permission to confront you, exhort you and encourage you?
- Are you seeking out these types of friendships that can promote accountability?
- Are you being a friend that lovingly holds others accountable?

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