

CHARACTER CRUNCH

Part 8: Accountability

October 30, 2005

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Most of us place high value on good character. We debate about it in our elected officials, expect it from our spiritual leaders and evaluate it in everyone around us. We want to be known for it, and we want to instill it in our children. Even so, we find that our good character tends to break down during “crunch time” – when the pressure is on and when things are going wrong. We struggle during the tough times because we fail to “exercise” the traits that make up good character during our normal, everyday lives when pressures and expectations are more manageable.

For many of us, the least desirable and most resisted trait that defines our character is accountability.

We all have weaknesses and blind spots that we will not or can not acknowledge. This tendency creates one of the most substantial barriers to the development of not only strong character, but spiritual maturity as well.

Our refusal to neither extend nor accept loving accountability...

1. Perpetuates our character deficiencies.
2. Positions us outside the blessings of God.

The Bible is clear in its teaching that we all need accountability in our lives. In fact, one of the most detailed instructive passages in the New Testament is devoted to outlining a process for loving accountability.

Matthew 18:15-20 (NLT) *“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the fault. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. ¹⁶ But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If that person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. If the church decides you are right, but the other person won’t accept it, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector. (AMP) ¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you forbid and declare to be improper and unlawful on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit and declare proper and lawful on earth must be what is already permitted in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I tell you, if two of you on earth agree [harmonize together, make a symphony together] about whatever [anything and everything] they may ask, it will come to pass and be done for them by My Father in heaven.”*

Seven Accountability Rules

1. Biblical accountability is to be practiced primarily – but not exclusively - between believers. The longer someone has been a Christian and the more knowledge they have of scriptural truth, the more accountable they should be.

Luke 12:47-48 (NLT) *“The servant will be severely punished, for though he knew his duty, he refused to do it.”⁴⁸ “But people who are not aware that they are doing wrong will be punished only lightly. Much is required from those to whom much is given, and much more is required from those to whom much more is given.”*

2. Biblical accountability is part of God’s provision for overcoming the negative consequences of sin, for protecting a believer’s witness and ultimately for maintaining the appropriate image of Christ in the world.

II Corinthians 5:20-12 (AMP) *“So we are Christ’s ambassadors, God making His appeal as it were through us. We as Christ’s personal representatives beg you for His sake to lay hold of the divine favor now offered you and be reconciled to God.”²¹ For our sake He made Christ virtually to be sin Who knew no sin, so that in and through Him we might become endued with, viewed as being in, and examples of the righteousness of God [what we ought to be, approved and acceptable and in right relationship with Him, by His goodness.”*

3. Biblical accountability should begin with a private, face to face meeting. The exception being in cases where a public meeting is necessary because the wrongdoing is public knowledge.

Galatians 2:11-14 (NLT) *“But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him publicly, speaking strongly against what he was doing, for it was very wrong.”¹² When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile Christians, who don’t bother with circumcision. But afterward, when some Jewish friends of James came, Peter wouldn’t eat with the Gentiles anymore because he was afraid of what these legalists would say.”¹³ Then the other Jewish Christians followed Peter’s hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was influenced to join them in their hypocrisy.”¹⁴ When I saw that they were not following the truth of the Good News, I said to Peter in front of all the others ...”*

4. Biblical accountability can expand to include “one or two” additional witnesses who are able to confirm the original wrong doing.

Deuteronomy 19:15 (NLT) *“Never convict anyone of a crime on the testimony of just one witness. The facts of the case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”*

5. Biblical accountability can advance to the level of church discipline when previous efforts have been disregarded.

1 Corinthians 5:2-13 (MSG) *“... Shouldn’t this person and his conduct be confronted and dealt with?³ I’ll tell you what I would do... You must not simply look the other way and hope it goes away on its own. Bring it out in the open and deal with it in the authority of Jesus our Master.”⁴ Assemble the community— and ⁵ Hold this man’s conduct up to public scrutiny. Let him defend it if he can! But if he can’t, then out with him! It will be totally devastating to him, of course, and embarrassing to you. But better devastation and embarrassment than damnation. You want him on his feet and forgiven before the Master on the Day of Judgment.”⁶ Your flip and callous arrogance in these things bothers me. You pass it off as a small thing, but it’s anything but that...¹¹ I am saying that you shouldn’t act as if everything is just fine when one of your Christian companions is promiscuous or crooked, is flip with God or rude to friends, gets drunk or becomes greedy and predatory. You can’t just go along with this, treating it as acceptable behavior.”¹² I’m not responsible for what the outsiders do, but don’t we have some responsibility for those within our community of believers?¹³ God decides on the outsiders, but we need to decide when our brothers and sisters are out of line and, if necessary, clean house.”*

6. Biblical accountability depends on the withholding of fellowship as a means of moving someone toward repentance.

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 (NIV) *“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.”¹⁵ Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”*

7. Biblical accountability should always be motivated by a loving desire to see relationships fully restored.

Luke 17:3-4 (NIV) *“So watch yourselves. “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.”⁴ If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”*

Three Accountability Truths

1. Your responsibility to hold others accountable does not depend on your degree of personal sinlessness.
2. The more mature you are as a believer the less emphasis you should place on things that offend you and the more emphasis you should place on things that offend God.
3. Know that you can never achieve your potential in Christ without submitting yourself to authentic God honoring accountability.