

## **Churched: We are Accountable (Matthew 18:15-17 and other related Scriptures)**

- We generally have a love-hate relationship with accountability. We hate it if we are personally called to give an account and we love it when it's about holding others accountable for some responsibility or injustice.
  - God has designed accountability to be a blessing to everyone, especially those in the Lord's Church. Accountability by definition is being personally responsible for one's obligations. Its benefit or bane is found in the application of accountability.
  - There are **two simple, yet profound** life truths about accountability in God's Word:
1. **We are accountable to God** (Gen. 2:16-17; Heb. 9:27; Psalm 94:2; Jer. 17:10; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 19:9; Rom. 14:12)
    - a. Accountability began in the garden before the Fall when God commanded Adam to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or else death would come (Gen. 2:16-17)
      - i. Judgment comes after death and no one escapes it (Heb. 9:27).
      - ii. God is the Creator, King, Savior and the "true and righteous" (Rev. 19:9) "*Judge of all*" (Ps. 94:2; Heb. 12:23) who searches all hearts and minds (Jer. 17:10). Everyone "will give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12)
    - b. Deeds reflect belief or unbelief and salvation will show up in "good works" (James 2:26)
      - i. Sinners are accountable for their deeds of unbelief (Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:8-9; Rev. 20:11-13)
      - ii. Saints are accountable for their deeds of belief (Rev. 22:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:10-15)
  2. **We are accountable to one another** (Matthew 18:15-17)
    - a. God has called us to hold each other accountable in two ways:
      1. Practicing the "one another" ministry (Rom. 15:14: "...*admonish one another*")
      2. Practicing the process of church accountability (or what is commonly called church discipline)
- **Four basic assumptions:**
    1. Church accountability is for any professing believer, not for "*so-called brothers*" (1 Cor. 5:9). God judges outsider, the church judges its professing believers

2. Church accountability is for all who associate with the church (members and those who regularly participate)
  3. Church accountability is for sinning believers, not for immaturity as we all need to grow (1 Thess. 5:14: “*admonish the unruly*”)
  4. Church accountability is for believers who disobey God’s clear commands, not about disputed matters of personal conviction.
- There are two questions to answer in understanding church accountability:

1. **What is the purpose of church accountability?**

- a. **To defend God’s honor and holiness** (1 Pet. 1:15-16; Rev. 2:5). Since God is holy and called His people to be holy, sin is a dishonor and demands repentance (Rev. 2:5, 16, 21-22; 3:3, 19) and accountability (Matt 18:15)
- b. **To deter the church from sin and maintain purity** (1 Cor. 5:7). Sin in the church is like yeast in flour which spreads and permeates the whole. God wants sin addressed which motivates a “*fear of sinning*” (1 Tim. 5:19-20)
- c. **To display before a watching world God’s hatred of sin and love for righteousness** (Acts 5:11-13). It is not the church’s mission to avoid make sinners comfortable, but to love them and share the gospel which will offend their sinful hearts.
- d. **To deliver a sinning believer with gentle restoring love** (Heb. 12:6, 10; Gal. 6:1). God disciplines those He loves. True love wants the best for others and sin is never the best in those we love, so pursuing restoration is an act of love.

2. **What is the process of church accountability?**

- a. **Step 1:** Private reproof (Matt. 18:15). Pursuit of a sinning brother or sister in Christ is commanded. Do it humbly and purely (Matt 7:3-5: deal with your sin first) and pursue them one-on-one.
- b. **Step 2:** Protective rebuke (Matt. 18:16). If the sinning brother or sister rejects your private reproof, take with you some “witnesses” who stand with you about their need to repent and to make sure the sin is being addressed accurately (Deut. 19:15)
- c. **Step 3:** Public recognition (Matt. 18:17a). If the sinning brother or sister in Christ continues to be unrepentant, the church is called to actively pray for them (if they don’t know them) and pursue them (if they know them and have the opportunity).
- d. **Step 4:** Purifying removal (Matt. 18:17b-20). If the call to repentance continues to be rejected, the professing believer is to be addressed in the following ways:

- i. Treat them as an unbeliever (*“as a Gentile and a tax collector”*), yet continue to be a gospel witness while calling them to repentance.
  - ii. No longer extend the benefits of church fellowship, yet continue to pray and seek their restoration (1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:6)
  - iii. Their removal is viewed as being delivered over *“to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”* (1 Cor. 5:5). This addresses how being taken out of the environment of loving fellowship exposes them to the realm of Satan’s domain where consequences will be experienced and Lord willing, sorrow and dissatisfaction with sin will be fully felt.
- If genuine repentance is expressed, then forgiveness and fellowship with the church can be restored (2 Cor. 2:8). The church is not a fellowship of sinless people, but forgiven sinners who, by God’s grace are pursuing a life pleasing to the Lord.