

**ACCOUNTABILITY**  
[jkroberts\\_us@yahoo.com](mailto:jkroberts_us@yahoo.com)  
[www.pacolethillsbaptist.org](http://www.pacolethillsbaptist.org)  
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Matthew 18:15-20

1. In its original form I titled this message, “Commanded to Confront; the Discipline of God’s Children.”
  2. In retrospect I think its current title is better because it is God’s intent that every member of His family is to be accountable to Him and to each other.
  3. In response to a question the disciples asked, Jesus shared some important truths related to how the family of God is to function.
- NOTE: In a truly functional family mutual accountability is the norm, and that should be true in any local church as well.
- a. Those who become part of the family of God do so by being converted and becoming like children.
  - b. Members of God’s family are to be humble and are not to cause others to stumble.
  - c. We are to value one another and not despise one another. (Handle with care.)
  - d. Jesus takes personally how we relate to and treat each other.
4. The passage we are looking at this morning deals with an issue that is ignored in many churches.
  5. Here we have clear guidelines, set forward by Jesus Himself, concerning our responsibility to confront and deal with sinful behavior within the family of God; particularly as it relates to a local church.
  6. Everything Jesus said in this passage relates directly to this issue including verses 19 and 20; two verses that are often quoted and applied out of context.
  7. All children need to be disciplined, and that includes God’s children as well. Hebrews 12:5-11
- NOTE: God disciplines us because He loves us, and holding ourselves and others accountable is an act of love when done in the right way and for the right reason.
8. God sometimes disciplines His children without the help and cooperation of their church.
    - a. Ananias and Sapphira. Acts 5:1-11
    - b. 1 Corinthians 11:30-32  
Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.
      - (1) In Corinth the Lord’s Supper was divisive rather than unifying.
      - (2) Consequently those responsible were being disciplined by God.
      - (3) God’s discipline is always redemptive in its purpose.
  9. However Jesus made it clear that the family of God has a responsibility to self-discipline and to promote accountability.

**I. The reason for discipline and accountability.**

- A. The reason is not meant to be an excuse for legalistic nitpicking, rather it involves dealing with ongoing and unconfessed sin within the local body of Christ.

- B. The word sin means missing the mark; living below or outside of the standard God has set for us.
  - C. Jesus commanded, "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault."
- NOTE: Later manuscripts include the words, "Against you."
- D. No one sins in a vacuum; all sin is against God and impacts others.
  - E. When obeying Jesus in the area of accountability we must always keep in mind God's goal. "God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness." Hebrews 12:10

## **II. The responsibility for discipline and accountability.**

- A. Every child of God should care about every other child of God.
- B. So where, according to Jesus, does the responsibility lie related to confronting an erring brother or sister?
  1. The first person responsible to deal with sin is the person committing the sin.
  2. The second person responsible is the individual who is sinned against or who becomes aware of the situation.
  3. Others are to be involved only if the situation cannot be resolved one on one.
- C. Paul provided some guidance related to accountability and church discipline. Galatians 6:1  
Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.
- D. How can we say we love the Lord, the Church, and our fellow Christians if we ignore behavior that brings reproach upon the Lord and the Church, and causes harm to a brother or sister in Christ? Proverbs 27:6  
Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

## **III. The goal of discipline and accountability.**

- A. Conformity to Christ. Romans 8:28-30  
And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.
- B. Holiness. Hebrews 12:7-11  
It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.
- C. Usefulness. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4  
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God

## **IV. The process of discipline and accountability.**

- A. It is to be a private process if possible.
  1. The person who is sinned against or becomes aware of the situation is to, "Go and show (reprove) him in private (between you and him alone)."

2. The word show or reprove means to bring to light or expose.
  3. If the person listens, confesses, and repents of his or her sin the matter is settled and is to go no farther.
- B. It is to involve as few people as possible.
1. If a one on one process does not succeed then two or three others members are to be enlisted.
  2. The individual is to again be confronted and every fact is to be confirmed.
  3. Again, if the person being dealt with responds positively the matter is settled.
- C. It is to become a public process only as a last resort.
1. If the erring member refuses to listen to the small delegation the matter must not be ignored, it must be brought before and dealt with by the church.
  2. If the offender listens to the church the matter is settled.
  3. A refusal on the part of the offender to listen to or respond to the church calls for expulsion from the church. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler — not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES. (See also Romans 16:17, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14)

## **V. The authority to discipline and to hold accountable.**

- A. The Word of God.  
The church speaks and acts authoritatively when it speaks and acts in accordance with God's Word.
- B. The will of God.  
The church speaks and acts authoritatively when it fulfills the will of God. 18
- C. The help of God.
1. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth (referring back to the two or three witnesses) about anything that they may ask (in seeking the purity of the church), it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 19
  2. The word agree comes from the Greek root of the word symphony—being one with each other concerning the situation being dealt with.
- D. The promise of God.  
For where two or three have gathered together in My name (to confront a sinful brother or sister), I (Jesus) am there in their midst. 20

## **APPLICATION**

1. Only God knows the damage and harm that has been done to the church because of its inability or unwillingness to accept what the Bible teaches about church discipline.
2. Only God knows how many of His children have strayed from the fold, or who remain in the fold causing it great harm, because the church will not take this matter seriously.
3. Jesus has promised to be with, and in the midst of, His churches that take personal and corporate holiness seriously.
4. Sadly, I am not sure that in these last days of the church age it's possible to do what Jesus told us to do, and that may be the reason that churches are not impacting their communities.