



Accountability for All the Wrong Reasons

by R. Scott Rodin



Most all Christians would agree that accountability is important to the process of growing as disciples of Jesus Christ. We seek accountability for ourselves and we agree to hold others accountable for the sake of spiritual development and public witness. In this way, true accountability is an integral part of carrying out the command to “make disciples.”

Yet there is another aspect to accountability that is important to understand. Accountability is a response to sin. And there is some irony in this.

On the one hand, the purpose of godly accountability is to re-focus us on what is true and right. It corrects distortion, realigns skewed views and actions, and brings truth back into clarity. In its proper form, accountability catches us when sin’s distorting power is taking hold and brings us back to the straight and narrow path of obedience and righteousness.

On the other hand, sin is most often expressed in the form of distortion. Sin’s power lies in its ability to take what is true and right, what is good and holy, and skew it to the point that it not only ceases to serve its divine purpose, but actually becomes an obstacle to spiritual growth.

Consider then what happens when accountability itself is the victim of this distorting effect of

sin. How alarming is it when the vehicle for correction and realignment is itself out of alignment and fundamentally incorrect?

The purpose of this article is to call our attention to the ways that accountability can become distorted with the result that it is used by the enemy to perpetuate sinfulness rather than curb and correct it.

Accountability takes two forms; we submit to accountability and we hold others accountable. In both, the opportunity is present for the corrupting power

“Accountability can become distorted and used by the enemy.”

of sin to pervert the original intent. Let’s look at each.

In our effort to live as followers of Jesus Christ, we rightly seek out accountability to help us see in ourselves what we might not otherwise see. Friends can call us to account and, if lovingly applied, the accountability they hold us to can have redeeming and curative effects in our lives.

However, this supposes that we seek to submit ourselves to the oversight of others for the right reason, and that is not always the case. As a consultant, I have been asked by clients whether it was a good idea to join ECFA in order to bolster campaign contributions. While I understand the question, I question the motive. Is it right to

seek to join an accountability group in order to use the seal of approval for our own gains? If so, our efforts to meet its standards and hold to the prescribed ethical criteria will likely be met with frustration and reticence, since the end goal is not accountability per se but the benefits of membership.

We can do the same on the personal level. We can seek to belong to an accountability group in order to wear the badge of submission without ever really seeking to engage in the hard work that such a group should require. We may react with anger or frustration when others lovingly challenge us to a higher level of godly living. If our motivations are not right, we will be threatened by accountability rather than opening ourselves up to its transforming power. When sin is allowed to so distort the motivation, the benefits are lost.

Submitting ourselves to the accountability of others for the right reasons requires hard work, which yields results that are critical to our ability to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. With this important tool for the kingdom at stake, we must be on guard not to allow distorted motivations to rob us of the benefits of true accountability, whether as individuals or as ministries.

We can also witness sin’s distorting power in the second form of accountability; namely, in our role as ones who are called to hold others accountable. When people come under our accountability, they grant us a great deal of power. And power corrupts. Those who entrust us with accountability look to us to have pure motives and to seek always to have their very best interest in mind. This responsibility requires humility, spiritual matu-

riety, and a genuine compassion for the well-being of others. We may need to confront, convict, probe into areas of hurt and remorse, challenge and console. All of these require that our motivation be true and our attitude be one of humility and grace.

It is the same with the trust we put in ECFA. We trust that its motives will be pure and its leaders will always seek to carry out their responsibilities with the well-being of members as the primary concern.

As those in whom this trust is bestowed, we must guard against the temptation to use the power we have been given for counterfeit purposes. Without doubt, sin's distorting effect has the potential to turn the power of accountability into manipulative power. We cease to be agents of God's redemptive purposes when we use the trust given to us to wield power, manipulate behavior and use accountability to justify our own sinful behavior.

I witnessed this latter temptation in the mid-1980s during the Ethiopian famine. In a response to horrific television images of starving children, thousands of people were motivated to give funds to help the relief effort. Some were motivated by guilt and others by Christian compassion to care for the poor and suffering. These differing motivations surfaced when news hit that some grain sent from U.S. relief agencies was rotting on the docks of Mogadishu due to internal logistical problems. Those who were motivated by guilt used the news to justify their decision to stop sending aid, even if the agency they had funded was not even remotely involved with the suspect grain.

Their claim that they were "holding agencies accountable" was a smokescreen for their own lack of conviction about their giving. Their actions were in sharp contrast to those motivated by compassion who called and sought out more information, wanting to make their giving decisions based on trustworthy data. These were people for whom accountability was a means to helping them make godly decisions about giving, and not a quick and cheap excuse to justify their desire to keep their money for themselves.

Accountability can be a powerful witness to our desire to grow and mature as disciples of Jesus Christ. It is a sacred trust we give to others and others bestow on us. It can be the guide, the curb, and the correcting lens to help identify the distorting power of sin in our

“Inability to set priorities is the second most frequent complaint of team members.”

lives. However, in every case we must guard against this wonderful tool becoming corrupted to the extent that it is a source of distortion itself. In every case we need to be asking, "why am I seeking accountability?" and "what are my motivations in holding others accountable?" If we can check wrong motives and correct distorted attitudes, then we can benefit more fully from this important aspect of the disciple-making process. ☪

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