

## Accountability: A Mirror of the Gospel?

By Carrie Cavanaugh

The gospel is simple. First it describes our need as sinners alienated from God. Secondly, it tells the good news that God in His mercy gave His son, Jesus, to both pay for our sins and impute His perfect life to us. This story of our fallen condition and God's work of redemption is something we need to hear more than once – no, it's something we need to be continually preaching to ourselves and to each other. Accountability is one way we can do just this!

The first impression people have when they think of accountability is confrontation over sin. Indeed, this is a vital part of what accountability is and as such it reflects the first part of the gospel – recognition of our sin. Another way of looking at it is by acknowledging God's justice. God is the perfect judge who not only sees all things, but even knows the motivations of our hearts. Also, He is Holy and can leave no sin unpunished. Thus His wrath must be appeased for the sinfulness He sees in us.

It is here in the gospel story that God's mercy is revealed as Christ takes our place as the one punished. Mercy, likewise, has a place in the realm of accountability as forgiveness can be extended and new beginnings meted out.

There are times when the one who is being held accountable needs to feel the impact of their transgression and there are other times when the most effective means of encouraging growth will be to show mercy. Knowing which one to implement comes from wisdom rather than some kind of set criterion. The reason for this is that wisdom is not absolute. That is, its principles apply in general, but not necessarily in every case. Just as Christianity is about more than just a legalistic adherence to a set of rules, but rather a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, so too accountability should also be within the context of a relationship. Although this may make wisdom sound elusive, we have access to it and thus it's blessings through God who gives it to all who ask.

This mixture of justice and mercy, recognition of sin, and the freedom of forgiveness, is lived out in accountability in more ways than just a response to sinfulness. In fact it shapes the way we interact. That is, as fallen people we expect each other to struggle to be what we ought to be and thus we need to check up on each other. We need to recognize that as people born after the Fall, we lack the ability to do good on our own. Thus when we hold someone accountable, we need to lift them up to God asking that He would give them the strength to do what they are called to. Yet another aspect of this gospel perspective is spurring one another on towards holiness. For the gospel doesn't stop with a declaration of sinlessness, but rather we are being sanctified day by



day. Likewise, make it a regular practice to encourage the one you are holding accountable to love and pursue the good things they are held accountable for.

Finally, Jesus warns that before we try to correct someone else for their sin, we need to examine ourselves and deal with our own sinfulness. This is a good reminder because an accountability relationship, especially one at work, often involves a hierarchy. Thus it is all the more easy to feel capable of offering judgment. However, it is not only Biblical, but also pragmatic to likewise hold yourself accountable. For, the humility and integrity of one who holds themselves accountable, will go a long way in building rapport with the one they likewise hold accountable.

Just as gospel means “good news”, let our accountability relationships be a blessing to those we hold accountable! Rather than a feeling of dread, those being held accountable should feel hope as they know someone is standing behind them willing that they will succeed.

For all these reasons, accountability is one way that we can preach the gospel to those who work under us.

