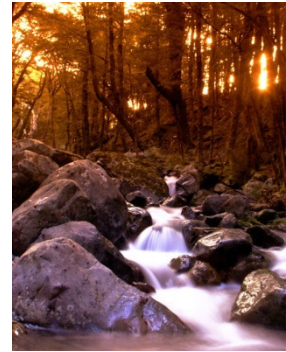


Accountability and Revival

The Missing Ingredient in America's Search for Renewal



J.L. Dagg, well-known nineteenth century author, noted, *“It has been remarked, that when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.”* The deplorably low state of Christianity in America is traceable to the absence of accountability.

The pastor of a large church, 2,000 in attendance, informed the church leadership that one of the church leaders was involved in a sinful relationship. Then the pastor proceeded to lay out a plan based on the disciplinary/restorative guidelines given in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew. The leadership would not follow the biblical mandate for dealing with the sinning brother. *“We’ve got to love him, not discipline him,”* was the consensus of those in leadership. The pastor had no choice but to resign.

The *“see no evil, hear no evil, deal with no evil”* approach to sin in the church is epidemic in scope. Those who would be true to Christ dare not ignore this solemn obligation of accountability by looking the other way while pretending all is well.

The theological category of sin has been replaced with the psychological concept of therapy. James Twitchell comments:

We have in the last generation tried to push shame aside. The human-potential and recovered-memory movements in psychology; the moral relativism of audience-driven Christianity; the penalty-free, all-ideas-are-equally-good transformation in higher education; the rise of no-fault behavior before the law; the often outrageous distortions in the telling of history so that certain groups can feel better about themselves; and the ‘I’m shame-free, but you should be ashamed of yourself’ tone of political discourse are just some of the instances wherein this can be seen. (For Shame: The Loss of Common Decency in American Culture, p. 35)

Modern churches are never far behind secular trends. With a muddled vision of God and a watered-down idea of sin, there’s no one to be accountable to and nothing to be held accountable for. Feel-good religion is the predictable outcome once the concept of sin is abandoned.

The breakdown of accountability is seen in every sphere of national life.

Accountability and the Family

One explanation for the awful state of the American home is as follows. The men were pulled out of their homes during World War II and shipped off to war. In order to manufacture munitions for the war effort, the women were pulled from the home and recruited for the factories.

Once the war ended, the men returned, but in many instances, they never really came home. Scores of men abandoned domestic and parental authority. Correspondingly, vast numbers of women followed the revolt initiated by their husbands. Accustomed to enjoying their own income, and deceived into thinking they were no longer needed in the home, they left home in mass and became part of the workforce.

The children were handed over to the state. The hearts of the parents were fixed on things and concerns other than their children. *“He that spareth his rod hateth his son”* (Prov. 13:24). Fathers and mothers didn’t care enough to discipline their sons and daughters. Sensing rejection from their parents, the children were on their own. Turning to the sensuality and rebellion in rock music, the Sexual Revolution was launched.

Now decades later, we are reaping the devastating consequences of irresponsibility as well as following suit by sowing seeds that will yield certain destruction in the future. The train is derailed and it is high time to get it back on the tracks!

The average church youth group and the typical Christian School merely reflect the devastation that comes from shirking parental authority. Parents who use the TV as a baby-sitter, education as a surrogate service, and rock music for entertainment are virtually guaranteed to lose their children to the world.

Accountability and the Church

One of the credit card companies used the slogan, *“Membership has its privileges.”* What they failed to say was that membership also included obligations (namely the responsibility to pay your bills!). We’re living in a day of lowered expectations. Many church people have been conditioned to expect very little from their leaders. Likewise consumer/market-driven religion requires very little from its “audiences.” Back when church members signed covenants and publicly pledged their loyalty, church membership had genuine meaning. Sadly, today the concept of accountability is foreign to the vast majority of those who claim affiliation with a local church.

Jesus Himself outlined the process for maintaining unity and peace among believers in Matthew 18:15-20. Here the primary purpose and goal is restoration. An individual offense called for a private face-to-face confrontation. Should that fail to produce reconciliation, the offended is charged to go again with one or two witnesses. The principle of two or three witnesses was laid down in Deut. 19:15. If this didn’t effect restoration, then the matter was to be publicly addressed before the entire church. If no repentance was evidenced after this measure, then the sinning brother was to be corporately regarded as an unsaved individual. All possible steps are to be taken to restore the fallen and to avoid this public spectacle. But this drastic action is necessary to remove the erring brother’s detrimental influence from the church as well as preserve the church’s testimony.

The integrity and purity of the church demands shunning the unrepentant.

Jesus promised His presence in this essential matter of discipline. *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (v. 20). This verse is often quoted in prayer meetings, but the preceding verses make it clear that this promise of Christ’s presence pertains to the process of dealing with sin in the church. After outlining the steps in verses 15-17, Jesus said, *“Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven”* (vs. 18-19). The church has authority, based on the principles of God’s Word, to declare whether a person is bound in sin or is loosed from sin. The church does not determine these things, but declares the judgment of heaven based upon the standard of Scripture. When a church makes such judgments on the basis of the Word, they can be sure heaven is in accord. Christ is so jealous over His name that He pledges His manifest presence when His people act to preserve the integrity of His holiness by implementing church discipline.

There are scores of churches who claim adherence to biblical standards of morality, but very few who practice or enforce the standards they claim to believe. *“BELIEVE like a CONSERVATIVE, BEHAVE like a LIBERAL”* is the standard operating procedure among countless “Bible-believing” congregations. Where are the churches who hold married couples accountable for keeping their marriage vows? Evangelical and even fundamental congregations are just slightly behind the liberal Protestants in accommodating the divorce culture. Faithfulness to one marital partner at a time now means little more than faithfulness to serial monogamy. In any other culture this practice is known as polygamy.

How many ministers roar like lions in the pulpit, but cower like sheep when it comes to implementing the truth they preach. It reminds me of the big, bad wolf who huffed and puffed, but never got around to blowing the house down! When there is no “bite” to back up the “bark,” preaching is just a meaningless exercise which eventually no one takes seriously. “Soft-treading” and “letting things slide” have reduced countless congregations to little more than religious clubs.

It’s one thing to say, *“I believe the Bible is the Word of God,”* or *“I am committed to the authority of Scripture.”* It’s quite another thing to obey the clear directives of Scripture. Don’t listen to what people say. Watch what people do! Conduct is the only real indicator of an individual’s true beliefs. Actions do speak louder than words. Belief affects behavior, and behavior reflects one’s real beliefs.

Accountability in Society

William Jefferson Clinton, our president, has a string of scandals stretching from Arkansas to the White House. He has been investigated for alleged misconduct in White-water, file-gate, China-gate, and the Paula Jones case. Before becoming President there was Jennifer Flowers and now there’s Monica Lewinsky. He has been, and still is, an ardent supporter of every pro-death initiative, including the barbaric partial-birth abortion. Bill Clinton has sought to legitimize sodomy by vigorously promoting the homosexual agenda. Time and space, not to mention the shame of even speaking about such sin in detail, will not permit the chronicling of the deceit

and treachery of this presidency. Added to this, Bill Clinton is also a member of a Baptist Church!

Concerned with the immoral content and conduct of the Disney Corporation, the Baptists displayed their moral outrage by announcing an official boycott against the entertainment giant. Is acceptable entertainment more important than truth and purity within the ranks? Why should secular corporations be held to a higher standard of morality than affiliate member congregations and members within those congregations? Why throw stones at the pagans for their vulgarity when there is no effort to discipline “unruly brethren” and compromising congregations? Shouldn’t sin in the camp be dealt with first before the sins of society? Does it seem strange to you that the Baptists can’t bring themselves to execute discipline on this man and/or the church that would sanction his membership?

Examples of such inconsistency and blatant compromise are legion. God’s Word is crystal clear, *“Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly”* (2 Thess. 3:6).

How can churches be the moral consciousness of society when there is no accountability for moral infractions within the body? If God’s people abandon God’s standards, can we really expect Congress and the American public to hold public officials to a standard?

If this president walks, and it is almost certain he will, we can say good-bye to the rule of law and the Constitution. And when that happens, perilous times can’t be far behind.

The current theological confusion and compromise which mark modern churches are traceable to the failure to separate from doctrinal error and heretics. *“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God....If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds”* (2 Jn 9-11). Spurgeon said, *“Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin.”*

Permissiveness, tolerance, accommodation, and cowardice all pave the way to apostasy. Praying for revival without repenting of sin and obeying clear-cut scriptural mandates is sheer hypocrisy. Where there is no obedience, there will be no revival!

The Blessing of Obedience

In the beginning days of our ministry my wife and I got invited to a “revival-ready” church. The spiritual intensity was incredible. People were struck with a sense of God’s presence when they came on the church grounds. The response was overwhelming. People would cry out to God in brokenness, sometimes for hours, until the victory was secured. The enthusiasm was contagious. People came from all around to be in the services.

We began to wonder why this meeting was so different from the others. What had preceded this outpouring of grace? Upon investigation we discovered the church had implemented some hard obediences before we arrived. First, the church took measures to reconcile with a

property owner next door. Second, the church had gone through the steps in Matthew 18 to bring a disorderly deacon to repentance. This was done in the right spirit, but failed to bring about change. Though difficult, the people knew the right course was to excommunicate the erring brother with the intent of restoration. By fully adhering to the Word of Christ, these dear people were rewarded with a remarkable sense of His presence and revival blessing!

I recognize some congregations are so far removed from the standard of Scripture that they would never consider this biblical mandate. In those cases it might be better to start all over than to endure the futility of attempting to reform apostasy. But there are many churches who could, if their pastors would lead them, turn from their passivity and live up to the light of Scripture.

We've all heard that line, "If it ain't broke, then don't fix it!" In our case how about, "If it is broke, then FIX IT!" In revival sin is judged because individuals feel their accountability to their Creator. Accountability, both individually and corporately, to God and His church, must precede revival.

I think the opening statement by Dagg is true—*"When discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it."* I also believe when discipline returns to a church, Christ will come also. NOW is the time to ACT in OBEDIENCE!

—Harold Vaughan