

## ACCOUNTABILITY

### The Book of Philippians #17

The Amtrak train derailment in Philadelphia last week has brought to light the area of accountability. It was a tragic incident in which 8 people were killed and over 200 were injured, some of them critically. The train was approaching a four degree curve to the left and should have been traveling at 80 mph approaching the curve and 50 mph within it. But it was traveling at 106 miles per hour before it entered the curve. The engineer applied the emergency brake and slowed the train to 102 miles per hour before the front of the train started shaking and suddenly stopped. The entire train then went off the track and three cars rolled on their sides.

But who was at fault? Who should be held accountable for this accident? Was the engineer at fault? He suffered a concussion and cannot remember what happened. So right now we have no information from him. Was it the result of an object being thrown at the train? There are reports of several trains on that line being hit by objects which shattered their windshields. Could this have diverted the attention of the engineer? Was it the lack of funding that caused it since the Positive Train Control system which was installed and would have slowed the train automatically was not yet functional due to what has been called "budgetary shortfalls, technical hurdles and bureaucratic rules"?

Eventually a conclusion will be reached and someone or something will be held accountable. Until then we await their findings. But there is a need for accountability. Someone must be held responsible for this accident in order for our sense of justice to be satisfied. We don't want to jump to any conclusions as some are apt to do. But we do want to find the cause, whether that be person or technology, so that we can prevent similar things from happening in the future.

Accountability is something we as Christians are acquainted with through Scripture - accountability in this life and in the next. And Paul speaks of it in the second chapter of Philippians.

#### PHILIPPIANS 2:14-16

*“Do all things without grumbling and complaining; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.”*

For the past several weeks we have looked at the first part of these verses – about not grumbling or complaining and holding fast to the word of life. Today I want to speak about the last part where Paul links the ability of the Philippians to “hold fast the word of life” to the successful running of his race and how it would be a cause of glory for Him in the day of Christ.

Paul is known as one of the greatest apostles and an outstanding example of a Christian living out his faith. He needs no other proof than the working out of his own salvation in order to show himself approved in the eyes of Christ. His sufferings alone would be proof enough. So how could anything the Philippians do have any impact on the work that Paul accomplished and his subsequent reward?

First of all we must understand that Paul is not talking about losing or not finishing the race he is in. Neither is he talking about forfeiting his salvation. The race he is in and the salvation that is his is not dependent on the works of others, only on the work of Christ. So nothing others can do will negate the work of Christ in his behalf. What he is concerned about is that his preaching to the Philippians would fail

to result in a harvest of believers joining him in heaven. If this were to occur then his work would have been in vain.

To do something “in vain” is to do something without any success to show for your efforts, when there is a lot of effort but no fruit or reward as a result of this effort. Now sometimes we have to labor long and hard before we find success. And such was the case with Paul. At this point in time he had spent many years teaching and encouraging the Philippian church. He had made converts during the time of his initial visit and was consistently attempting to bring maturity out of their fledgling faith, especially in light of the persecution they both were suffering as a result of it.

Now we all know that maturity is a process. It does not happen overnight. Just consider childrearing. It takes several years, sometimes decades before we see the true manifestation of the fruit of our labors. The true test comes when our children leave the home and are left with only the guidance we gave them and the consequences they alone receive as a result of making their own choices. That is why Scripture gives us these words:

PROVERBS 22:15

*“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him.”*

PROVERBS 29:15

*“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.”*

PROVERBS 22:6

*“Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

There is a process to be followed in order to bring maturity out of inexperience – to bring the decision making process in line with what is best for all. And just as the actions of the Philippians reflect the work Paul had done among them, so the actions of children shine a light on the work their parents have done with them.

Poorly behaved children reflect poorly on their parents and well-behaved children reflect well upon their parents. There is not always a one-to-one ratio between the behavior of children and the quality of their parents. Some children are in constant rebellion against authority starting at a young age in the home and this continues throughout most if not all of their adult life until and unless God gets a hold of their heart rather than just their head. And no parent is perfect. The same heart that resides in a child also resides in a parent. Both must surrender to the authority of the Father above.

But in general, whatever behavior you see children engaging in is a reflection of what the parent either allows or feels helpless to change. The actions of our children provide a spotlight for others to judge the effectiveness of our labor in raising our children. Did we labor in vain or were we successful in training them in the way of righteousness? When they bring us joy in their adult years we breathe a sigh of relief. When they bring pain we fall to our knees and pray for the day that a change will come and we can once again rejoice over the day of their birth.

We may not be entirely at fault when the light of disappointment shines upon us as parents. But shine it does. And we have cause to wonder, did we labor and toil in vain in our efforts to point them to the light? For some it may seem the answer is yes. But, as the saying goes, “It ain’t over ‘till it’s over.” There is always hope for change as long as the breath of life resides in each of us. However, there does come a time when God calls us all to account for our actions. This holds true for our children as well.

To the people of Israel the Law was given through Moses. In this Law there were instructions on who to deal with stubborn and rebellious children.

#### LEVITICUS 21:18-21

*“If any man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father or his mother, and when they chastise him, he will not even listen to them, then his father and mother shall seize him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gateway of his hometown. They shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey us, he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death; so you shall remove the evil from your midst, and all Israel will hear of it and fear.”*

This is probably where the expression “I’m going to put the fear of God into him” came from. The possibility of being stoned to death would certainly make me think twice before I rebelled against my parents. Luckily we are no longer under law but under grace. Nonetheless, our modern day punishment is still to remove the evil from us, only we do it through incarceration. When caught those who have rebelled against the law of the land are arrested, sent to jail, given a trial, and if found guilty they are sentenced and locked away from those to whom they would do harm. This is our modern-day equivalent of removing the evil from among us.

There have been several incidents over the past 16 years where young men have gone to schools and movie theatres randomly shooting people. Some have ended up killing themselves, others were captured before they could do so. As a result many people have looked at their parents to determine how the children ended up doing such bizarre and evil things. There has not been a satisfactory answer to any of these incidents. In hindsight several things may have contributed to it and some things could possibly have been done to avert these incidents. But this comes from a position of hindsight. None of these parents had solid evidence at the time or any advance knowledge of the evil that their child was capable of. If they had most would have taken their child to the nearest city officials and explained that they needed help in removing this evil from society, even though it was their own son.

It is sad that the actions of the sons who perpetrated evil on innocent children should shine such a negative light on their parents. But that is the way of it. Even the parents ask, how could this have happened? What could I have done to prevent this? Why was I not aware?” Questions well worth asking but questions that may have no answers.

Yet Paul asks the same question as a parent of the church in Philippi. Are they holding fast to the word of life? Have they ceased from grumbling and complaining? Do they have the same attitude which Christ Himself had? Is God still at work in them to will and to work for His good pleasure? Or were all of his efforts in vain? Did they receive the word eagerly as children in the faith but turned away from it in their adult years? And how will this reflect on me, the father of their faith? Did I labor and toil in vain over them?

In order to find the answer to these questions he is hoping to send Timothy to learn of their condition.

#### PHILIPPIANS 2:19-24

*“But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; and I trust in the Lord that I myself*

*also will be coming shortly.”*

You may remember that Paul first met Timothy in Lystra on his way to check up on the churches he visited on his first journey. Barnabas had parted ways with him in Antioch so Paul chose Silas to go with him on his second journey. When they came to Lystra they met a disciple of Jesus named Timothy who was well spoken of by the brethren who were there (Acts 16:1-3). Paul wanted Timothy to go with them and he agreed. From that point on Paul and Timothy were nearly inseparable.

Paul speaks of Timothy in many of his letters and calls him: his beloved and faithful child in the Lord; someone who is doing the Lord's work; a brother; God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ; a kindred spirit who is genuinely concerned for the welfare of others. He speaks of him as one who served with him like a child serving his father. He called him his son and his true child in the faith. Timothy was dedicated to the service of Christ and through prophetic utterance and the laying on of hands he received a spiritual gift, most likely the gift of teaching (1Timothy 4:14-16). When Paul left Ephesus for Macedonia he entrusted the church at Ephesus to Timothy so that he might correct strange doctrines that were arising there and to bring order out of confusion (1Timothy 1:3-7).

Timothy was a trustworthy companion to Paul and was with him in Berea, Corinth, Macedonia, Thessalonica, Troas, Ephesus as well as Philippi. So Timothy has knowledge of the churches which Paul has established. There is perhaps no one better who understands Paul's love and concern for the Philippians than Timothy. So Paul is about to send him to Philippi to learn how they are doing.

Today we can use cell phones, land-lines, fax machines, teleconferencing, Skype, FaceTime, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and many other ways to communicate with those who are distant from us. Not so in the days of Paul and Timothy. You couldn't just put a tracking device on your spiritual children's cell phone to see where they hang out. You had to travel the distance by foot and by boat in order to check up on your kids.

But this was more than a "how are you doing" kind of visit. This was a checkup on their spiritual condition. He knew that they were suffering for the sake of the gospel just as he was. He was in a prison himself at this time and, though he expected to be released soon, could not come and go as he wished (Philippians 1:25). So he needed to send someone he could trust to bring back a report on how they were holding up under persecution.

We have no record of the report that Timothy provided to Paul on the condition of the church at Philippi, for this is the only letter we have concerning them. But we do know that Paul was released from prison, traveled to Philippi and saw the condition of the church for himself. Since Paul said he would send Timothy, as soon as he saw how things went with him, perhaps they went together. We do not know. But certainly there was not much time between when Paul wrote this letter and when he was released and able to visit them in person. SO perhaps they went together.

But whether they went together or Timothy went alone, he was not the only person Paul sent to Philippi. He also sent Epaphroditus to hand deliver his letter to the Philippian church.

#### PHILIPPIANS 2:25-30

*“But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow.*

*Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.”*

Epaphroditus was someone whom Paul considered a brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier. He was from Philippi and was sent by the church as a sign of their love and to bring provisions for Paul while he was in prison (Philippians 4:18).

#### PHILIPPIANS 4:18

*“But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.”*

Paul sent Epaphroditus back to Philippi because after a period of near death sickness, he was longing for his fellow believers in Philippi and was distressed because they had heard he was sick but did not know of his current status. The return of Epaphroditus would show the church that he lived through his illness over which they would rejoice. This in turn would cause Paul to be less concerned about the Philippians and their ability to provide for and hear from Paul. So Epaphroditus is sent back to the Philippian church ahead of Timothy to calm their fears and to prepare the way for Timothy and Paul to return.

The concern Paul had for the Philippian church and the concern they had for Paul was based on love. And out of this love came a sense of accountability. The Philippian church was accountable to Paul for their behavior because they received the message of the gospel of Christ through his teaching. But Paul was also being held accountable by Christ for his work among the Philippians. Ultimately though, all would give an account of themselves to God.

#### ROMANS 14:10b-13

*“For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.’ So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this – not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way.”*

To be fair there are some who are not accountable to us nor we to them, for the Bible tells us not to waste our time with people who do not produce fruit or who do not receive our message.

#### MATTHEW 10:14

*“Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet.”*

#### MATTHEW 7:6

*“Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”*

When I first started in the ministry I was counseled by another pastor to be careful of spending too much time with people who were not willing to change. Some people simply want your attention and seem sincere every time they meet with you. But over time you begin to see that they have no intention of changing. By spending an inordinate amount of time with them you are robbing people who truly want

and need your time. We must spend our time wisely and we must not take out our pearls and give them to people who will only trample them underfoot.

I learned this lesson in a practical way. I spent many months trying to help a man move from his state of dissatisfaction with his spiritual life to one where the Spirit life within him would become real. He seemed sincere and was more than willing to listen to my counsel. But one day he professed to me that he wished to capture and hold on to the moments that had been fleeting for them – those spiritual highs where the Lord seemed real and personal, and kind and loving. They were precious to him but very fleeting. He desired this sense of intimacy with God to be more permanent.

I responded first by attempting to understand what he was saying and to bring a sense of reality to the situation. I explained that our bodies were not meant to stay at a heightened state of an emotion, that life was not meant to be a constant stream of highs. Besides, there would be no highs if there were not valleys and low places before and after our mountain top experiences. I then asked if what he truly desired was something more than just an emotional high. Was he was seeking after a consistent sense of the Spirit in his day to day life where the presence of God was known even if not felt?

I knew this person well so when he responded in the affirmative, I asked a question that was crucial to the beginning of his journey to find this consistent sense of the Spirit. I asked, *“What are you willing to give up in order to receive all the Spirit has for you?”*

As I waited for his response I could see the wheels of his mind turning but he was reluctant to answer. I think he understood there was a cost to be paid for the intimacy he desired. And he was not yet ready to pay that price. So he had no reply. I knew then there would be no need for an accountability partner for him. There were many things that I could have helped him overcome and let go of in order to be closer to achieving his goal of a greater intimacy with Jesus. But he was not willing.

His response reminded me of the rich young ruler when he asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life. The reply came back, “Sell all your possessions and give them to the poor.” When the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he owned much property.

And so it was with my friend. I did not hear much from him after that visit. Eventually all communication stopped. No more calls, nor more emails, no more visits. He went away grieving because he owned much sin and was not willing to part with it. This was six or seven years ago. I eventually stopped spending time with him; First, because he stopped communicating with me, and second because my communication with him had fallen on deaf ears.

After that God placed someone else in my path who wanted this same intimacy with Jesus. I ended up meeting with him nearly every week for six years because he wanted to change and he was willing to face his past and give it to Jesus. Sometimes there were baby steps and sometimes there were giant leaps. But it was always a journey in the same direction. He desired change so I desired to show him how. I was his confessional, I was his confidant, I was his encourager, and I was his teacher. The pearls cast before this person were worn with dignity and received with grace. There was no need to dust my feet after meeting with him.

Part of my job was also to be an accountability partner to him. I had his permission to ask about his success or failures over certain areas of sin and he in turn was willing to give me honest answers because I was not there to be his judge. I was there to be his partner in overcoming these sins. My job was to lead him to the truth about the Father so that by my example he could see that the Father came not to judge but

to forgive. His job was to remain honest about his sin, confess it and receive God's forgiveness.

Paul was the Philippian church's accountability partner, as he was to all those whose spiritual life came about as a result of his preaching the gospel of Christ. He checked up on all the churches periodically and communicated with them through letters and his fellow workers. He did this not only because he felt responsible for them as his children in the faith, but also because he truly loved and cared for them. But he also knew that his Accountability Partner would one day hold him accountable for the work he had done among them. He hoped that they were holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ he would have reason to glory because he did not run in vain or toil in vain, that his efforts were indeed producing eternal fruit in their lives.

All of us struggle with one thing or another. All of us have a sin which easily entangles us (Hebrews 12:1). Some of us are more successful at overcoming them than others, but all that we are tempted with is common to each of us (1 Corinthians 10:13). We need encouragement in this life to continue to run the race with endurance. We need accountability partners. Even Lone Ranger Christians need their Tonto.

That's why Scripture tells us countless times to encourage one another.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

*"Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing."*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:14

*"We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone."*

HEBREWS 3:13-14

*"But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end."*

There are many places to go today that help people overcome their struggles. There are organizations to which people go for alcohol and substance abuse. Many of these have been helpful to those struggling with addiction. There are also many counselors and self-help groups available to help people with whatever they are struggling. People who struggle with pornography can even use technology to help them refrain from certain sites. They can also provide reports to an accountability partner if given permission to do so.

There is no a lack of places to go for help. But there is a lack of God-centered people in these places. When looking for someplace or someone to hold you accountable make sure they have the Spirit of Christ residing within them; for He is our Counselor and Guide. He is the One who holds the Truth. We are already deceived when we give in to sin. It would be a shame to walk into another snare of the devil by looking to secular help for a resolution to your spiritual struggles. The outward sign of our struggles is only a reflection of the inward condition of our heart and mind. Our mind needs to be renewed and our heart needs to be changed. This is the job of the Holy Spirit. So seek out someone in whom the Spirit resides in order to receive truth in your innermost being. It is the Spirit of Jesus who has overcome the world. The world cannot overcome itself. If we are to have victory over sin we need to use the tools God has given to us for victory – and that is the Spirit and one another.

LUKE 9:1-2, 10

*“(Jesus) called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing.”*

*“When the apostles returned, they gave an account to Him of all that they had done.”*

Even the apostles gave an account to Jesus while on earth for the responsibility which had been entrusted to them. We too will give an account of ourselves for the responsibility which was entrusted to us while on earth. What a disappointment to Jesus if the apostles had come back and said that nothing had happened because they were too timid, too afraid, or had too little faith to do what Jesus had told them to do.

In the case of the Philippian church, if the Philippians had not manifested the salvation which they claimed to have experienced at the hand of Paul, then Paul's efforts in preaching and teaching them God's word would have been in vain. His concern was that if there was no earthly fruit from his labor then there could be no heavenly reward for either himself or his hearers.

In the same way, if we are spending time with others proclaiming the word of God, instructing them in His ways, and encouraging them to grow in this knowledge and grace, yet no fruit is produced and no change is made, then our efforts have been in vain. This does not rule out the fact that God says His word will accomplish its purpose and will not return void, or that some efforts do not produce fruit except over many months or years. But the general principle holds true.

Even Scripture tells us to shake the dust off our feet if our message is not received, and that our blessing on a house will return to us if it is not welcomed or deserved. We should be aware of how much time we are spending with people who are not producing any fruit and move on quickly so that we can produce a harvest from those who are willing to have the seed of faith planted and nourished in their life.

As I close let me make this ancient passage more personal by asking three questions. First, if the actions of the Philippian church reflected on the effectiveness of Paul's ministry for which he was to give an account, how do the actions of this congregation reflect on our church and on its leaders? Second, how do the actions of the leaders reflect on the congregation? And third, how do the actions of a few affect the many?

Let's take them one at a time.

**How do the actions of the congregation reflect on our church and its leaders?**

If the word of the Lord is being proclaimed truthfully and is lived out by its leaders, yet the followers of these same leaders do not show this same fruit, then it reflects poorly on the leaders. It is not a matter of being perfect. None of us has any possibility of perfection until Christ returns and takes us home. And we are not talking about being sinless. We all sin and we all seek forgiveness for it. Imperfection is not the issue. Rebellion against God's command is the issue. If someone practices sin after hearing the measuring stick of God's word for righteousness living then this becomes an issue that affects the entire congregation.

One would expect that sowing good fruit into the congregation by the leaders would produce good fruit in the congregation. But even if some or one member of the congregation is in constant disobedience and rebellion, it reflects badly on the whole. That is one of the reasons Paul says to the Corinthian church to remove the offending person from among them (1Corinthians 5:1-13). Bad fruit cannot be allowed to

spoil the rest of the God's fruit.

1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-2, 6, 13

*"It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.... Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven.... Remove the wicked man from among yourselves."*

**How do the actions of the leaders reflect on the congregation?**

If the leaders are not teaching the word of God correctly or if they are not living a righteous life, then it reflects poorly on the congregation and their witness to the surrounding world is hindered. An inaccurate or blasphemous teacher needs to be removed from the congregation for the same reason that a sinning member of the congregation is removed. Bad fruit cannot be allowed to spoil the rest of God's good fruit. And they cannot be allowed to lead others astray with their teaching. In Revelation we read of such a person.

REVELATION 2:18-22

"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.

But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads my bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her in a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds."

Accountability comes to those in the congregation who tolerate false teachers and join them in their falsehood. Likewise there is accountability for the false teachers who refuse to repent. Knowing that we all stumble in many ways, James cautions us against becoming a teacher of the Word, warning us that teachers of the Word will incur a stricter judgment than those who do not teach (James 3:1-2). It would seem that those who join with the false teacher will also incur pretty strict judgment.

**How do the actions of a few affect the many?**

Does the name Achan ring a bell? After marching around the city for seven days the Lord delivered the town of Jericho into the hands of Joshua and Israel. The next town to be conquered was city of Ai. Assured that the Lord would be with them as He had at Jericho, they were shocked when they not only lost the battle but also lost 36 of their warriors at the hand of the enemy. So they inquired of the Lord why this had happened and the Lord replied that there was sin in the camp. A man named Achan had taken some spoils of war that the Lord had expressly forbidden to be taken. The Lord revealed this to Joshua and as a result the man, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him were stoned and burned. Once the sin and the sinner was removed from among them, the Lord again gave them victory over their enemies (Joshua 7:1-8:29).

When one man disobeyed God by taking some spoils of war from Jericho, the whole nation was affected. They were not able to win the next battle because God was not with them. Until they would rid themselves of one man and his complicit family, God would not empower them for any further victories.

It would appear that the greater body is needed to ensure that sin is uncovered and punishment is meted out. Individual members are responsible for bringing sin to the awareness of the leaders. And it is the responsibility of the leaders to ensure discipline is carried out. If sin is not uncovered, or uncovered sin is not punished, then it would appear that the entire congregation suffers and is held accountable.

This begs the question, what battle is the Christian church losing today because there is sin in their midst which is not being dealt with? Certainly some denominations have willingly brought sin into their house by disregarding the word of the Lord, just as Achan did. But what about those who hold true to God's word? How victorious are we? And when we are not, do we look to see why God has not granted victory? Do we look to see if there is sin in our house? And if we do, how are we to handle it?

Any accusation of hidden sin must be handled properly and certainly the response to any sin in our camp sin is slightly different today than it was in the days of Joshua. Nonetheless removal is still required if there is no repentance. Here is how Paul and Jesus tell us to handle sin in the congregation.

#### MATTHEW 18:15

*"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."*

#### 1 TIMOTHY 5:19-20

*"Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning."*

And what do we do after punishment has been given and the offending party has repented and asked for forgiveness? We stop the punishment, forgive the transgression as Christ has forgiven us, and restore the person to fellowship.

#### 2 CORINTHIANS 2:6-8

*Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow."*

#### 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."*

The purpose of discipline is so that the person will come to his senses and find a heart of repentance. Once that repentance is found and exercised, the responsibility of the church is to forgive and restore them back into fellowship. One transgression from a member does not equate to a lifetime ban on fellowship any more than one transgression from us should generate a lifetime ban on forgiveness from the Father. We are to forgive as God has forgiven us. And that involves being restored to fellowship.

The Scriptures say that we should not be deceived about our actions. The actions of a few do affect the many and the actions of each one of us will affect the outcome of our eternity destiny.

GALATIANS 6:7

*“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.”*

We are each individually accountable to the Father for our actions here on earth. But we are also accountable to the leaders and members of our congregation amongst whom we live out our Christian faith. Do we grumble and complain? Is our hold on the word of life tentative? Are we struggling with secret sin with no lasting victory?

If you have answered “yes” to any of these questions perhaps you should consider taking the next step in your journey and find an accountability partner – someone who will hold you accountable for your actions, who will love you through the hard times and rejoice with you over each victory, no matter how small.

Ecclesiastes tells us that:

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10

*“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.”*

It is helpful to have someone who can lift you up when you fall. And that is the part that an accountability partner plays. He does not condemn you when you fall but rather helps you to get back up. It may be difficult at first to reveal some struggle you are having with sin. But if you truly want freedom let me ask of you the same question I asked of my friend, “What are you willing to give up to find it? What value does pride hold when you compared to the value of broken chains and banished fears? Whatever the personal cost is for you to find freedom, are you willing to pay it?

Jesus said:

JOHN 8:34, 31-32

*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.”*  
*(But) If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

And James echoes this by saying:

JAMES 5:16

*“Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.”*

One of the ways Jesus provided for us to be free is through the confession of our sins to one another. This is not a formal ritual where only a priest can forgive sin, though this concept of confession to another believer does have its roots here. This is confession to someone who knows the word of God so they can use these words to assist you in finding your freedom. This is someone and can keep your confession between the two of you yet bring it to God for healing.

If you are interested in an finding accountability partner but don't know how to go about it you can speak to me or you can go online to this website. It will give you the basics for finding an accountability partner that will fit your particular need.

<http://www.allaboutgod.com/christian-accountability.htm>

As good as we might be and as sincere as our efforts are, none of us can set another person free. But we can assist each other in finding freedom through the word of God, through confession and through prayer. The hope of every accountability partner is that the person seeking help finds the One who sets the captives free and binds up the brokenhearted, gives them beauty for ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning and a mantle of praise instead of a spirit of weakness (Isaiah 61:1-3). Our job is not to grant freedom, but to show them the path that leads to freedom. We hold them accountable to the Lord for He alone can set the captives free. And when He sets them free it is no temporary freedom. It comes with a lifetime...No, let me rephrase that. It comes with an eternal guarantee.

JOHN 8:36

*“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”*