

How Should Biblical Accountability Work in a Church?

The Bible teaches that Christians are under the authority of Jesus Christ. He is Lord. Anyone who is not under the authority of Jesus Christ is not a Christian. During this age, Jesus has relegated authority to His Church. Most Christians agree on this but how that authority plays out can vary from church to church. Many believe that pastors, who definitely hold a position of authority in the church, are like judges who wield all authority. Often, pastors act as if they are the final authority. However, according to the Bible, the church is the final authority. Pastors are supposed to be overseers that should be regarded by the flock as important authorities who carry out the wishes of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. But when it comes to matters of judgment, it is the entire church that is in authority. We can see how this should look when we consider Jesus' teaching about restoring brothers who are caught in sin. He said that if a brother sins, one of the members who is aware of it should go to him to tell him his sin (assuming he actually sinned). If he does not listen, it does not say to go to the pastor as if he is the police and judge. Rather, it merely says to take another brother or two. If he still refuses to listen, it does not say to go to the pastor and report it so that pastor can levy judgment. It says to tell it to the church. The pastor(s) are a part of the church that hears the testimony of the two or three witness. If the church agrees, then the church (not merely a pastor or board of rulers) is supposed to speak as one voice. If the man does not hear the church, then he is to be regarded as an unbeliever (even if he turns out later to be a believer). It is the church that is in final authority, not a pastor or group of pastors.

For all of this to bring about restoration, a church must first itself be under the authority of Jesus Christ. If it is merely acting like a club of people who happen to hold to the same creed but live as if Jesus is not Lord, then that church is really not well prepared to exercise its authority. The crucial element is submission to Jesus Christ.

So, any person (whether "laymen" or pastor) that lives as if he rules over his own life is NOT in a position to hold people accountable. (See Matthew 7:1-3.) Those who are submitted to Jesus as their Lord are humble people. A proud person is not submitted to Jesus as his Lord. What is a good way to tell if a person is proud or not? Sometimes, it can be difficult to tell merely by observing outward appearances. Jesus noted that the Pharisees looked very spiritual, as if they were true servants of God. Yet, inwardly they were wolves. But by mere casual reading of the gospels, we easily see that the Pharisees lacked humility. Those who lack humility do not receive instruction. They might be ordained and even hold doctorates in theology, but if they are not teachable, they are not humble. So, if a church is "RULED" by a pastor or pastors who typically have difficulty receiving instruction or rebuke, they are not qualified to hold people accountable. All they have is the unbiblical fall back of "lording it over" those under them. They use their positions of authority to control the flock and this only stifles the authority that Christ invests in His Church. It is not at all how He wants accountability to look. It is the opposite.

So, if you are looking for a church that exercises biblical authority (accountability), look for one that is led by men who serve rather than exercise their authority. Look for one whose leaders are humble, like Jesus.

Characteristics of a teachable man:

– Gratefulness to the one who confronts him about his sin

When initially confronted with his sin, a man may resent the reprover. But once genuine repentance has taken place, he sees everything differently. He realizes that the one who confronted him is his true friend and is thankful. If you notice that people seem to be afraid to approach a man about his sin or some issue, that might be a sign that previous attempts to approach him went bad. Perhaps he became angry or used words to demean the one who approached him. Perhaps he uses his credentials as pastor or degrees in learning to silence any who might try to rebuke him.

"Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you. Reprove a wise man and he will love you" (Proverbs 9:8).

If a man remains bitter over the efforts others take to show him his sin, he exhibits characteristics of an unbeliever or scoffer (not teachable/humble). But after a man truly repents, he values the efforts that others

took to restore him. It was Nathan who rebuked David over his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. After that, David valued Nathan's friendship all the more. He remained David's close adviser until his death. Listen to David's valuation of the ministry of reproof:

"Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon the head; Do not let my head refuse it" (Psalm 141:5).

If, after a man is confronted about his sin, he seems resentful and ungrateful, he has not seen his sin. He exhibits the characteristics of a scoffer. In some way, he does not agree with the charge against him. Perhaps he feels unjustly treated and singled out. If he was truly caught in bondage to some sin and refuses to hear rebuke, he not only disagrees with the one trying to help, but he is in disagreement with God.

Other related verses about teachability:

"He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, And he who rebukes a wicked *man only* harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise *man*, and he will love you" (Proverbs 9:7-8).

A wise son *heeds* his father's instruction, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke" (Proverbs 13:1).