

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **2 Corinthians 2:5-11**

**Living God's Word—A Walk Through The Bible**  
**January 11, 2015**  
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This past summer Kim and I attended the musical “My Fair Lady” at the Guthrie. This has been one of the many musicals that have been favorites of mine since I was a young boy. I’m a nut for musicals like “The Music Man,” “Mary Poppins,” “The Sound Of Music,” “Phantom of the Opera,” “Les Miserable,” and many others.

One of the many wonderful songs in “My Fair Lady” is the one where Eliza sings, *“Don’t talk of love, don’t tell me how much, if you’re in love, show me.”* The point is that she is sick of words; sick of good intentions; sick of meaningless gestures; she wants love in action.

A true fact of life is that it is easy to talk a good game; it is easy to impress people with our good ideas and intentions. Yet it is another thing to put those words into action; it is another thing to make those good intentions actually happen; to do them with care and integrity.

This same thing is also true with our Christian faith and personal discipleship. As you may know it is so easy to use lots of religious jargon and words, to go through some of the motions of what Christians are supposed to do, and as a result appear to be a faithful believer. Yet there is sometimes a big difference between one’s appearance on the outside and what is actually in one’s heart.

This is what the Apostle Paul was reminding people and churches about in his many Epistles and letters. One example in our Bible Walk is found in his 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter to the Corinthians, 2:5-11. Paul writes these words: *“to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.”*

Paul wrote these words in order to hold the people in that church community accountable to their faith. He is reminding them about putting their faith into action by forgiving those who caused them grief; he is reminding them to forgive in the sight of Christ; to be aware of Satan’s schemes of wanting people to harbor hurt and revenge. Faith, according to Paul, needs accountability.

A number of years ago the BTK serial killer (who had brutally murdered 10 people) was arrested down in Kansas after 31 years on the run. Lo and behold Dennis Rader had been a long-time active member of a Lutheran church; he had even just been elected president of this congregation. Needless to say the pastor and congregation were totally shocked that there were two different characters to this person.

It is always difficult to know what is deep down in the heart of a person. That is why, of course, we always need to remember that only God is able to judge one’s heart and true faith; only God truly knows if one is merely living for their own gain; just trying to to impress others by saying they believe; or whether they are living to bring glory to God through Jesus Christ.

One of the ways however you and I can put our words of faith into action; one of the ways we can grow as a disciple of Jesus is to find a person or be part of a group where we covenant with each

other to help keep us accountable. It is a relationship where we honestly open up our hearts; share our feelings and temptations; trust someone and/or a few others to walk with us in prayer, understanding and honest feedback.

One thing I know is that most of us in our Lutheran background are usually pretty nervous about this idea of being accountable with our faith in Jesus. We mostly want to be independent, we don't want anyone to remind us of what we should or should not do. Most of us are afraid of having someone asking us about how we are growing in faith; how we are living that faith each day.

Yet the wonderful God-thing that has been happening at Messiah these past few years has been the increasing numbers of people who have been getting involved in Bible studies; in various small groups; in mission outreach opportunities; in faith accountability relationships. God's Holy Spirit is truly using these growth producing opportunities to produce wonderful faith and fruit in many.

Much of this fruit is seen in how large numbers of you are coming to worship very faithfully; many are worshipping more from the heart rather than just following the hymnbook; growing numbers of you are listening with open hearts to the Holy Spirit's message to you; many are taking notes, listening on cable TV (Internet/Streaming); lots of you are going out and living that message each day. I have heard many say there is definitely something exciting happening in this place.

It is interesting these past years how some theologians, pastors and church people have openly attacked some of the very fast growing and evangelical congregations that are springing up around the country. Some have claimed that these churches are just using gimmicks; just using ways of manipulation to get so many people to worship and join.

Now some of these claims have been true with some of the success gospel churches that promise people success, prosperity, an end to their problems, happiness and peace. Yet the interesting thing is that for many of the most thriving and dynamic churches their focus and mode of operation these past years has become very different than what you might think.

What a number of these churches have become are what is termed "high commitment" churches. This means that if a person wants to be a member of this church they need to make a real and totally accountable commitment.

This commitment includes things like worshipping faithfully each week; being part of a Bible study and small group; giving a tithe of one's income; volunteering to use their talents in a ministry; being part of a mission to others outside of the church; having daily devotions where they read the Bible, pray for others, pray for their church.

Yet the really interesting thing about many of these high commitment churches is that each person needs to meet with a trained mentor each year for a time of accountability. Each person is asked to give an accounting of how they are doing in their commitment to worship, grow, give, etc.

In this accountability, it is important to note, there is certainly lots of grace, understanding, encouragement. It is a process that doesn't expect perfection yet does expect a commitment to growing as a disciple. At the end of this interview this person is then asked if they want to become a member or if they want to continue as a member for another year.

What is distinctive about these churches is that their actual membership may be just a small percentage of the numbers of people who worship each weekend. For example some churches like Willow Creek in Chicago and Eagle Brook in the Twin Cities have only a few thousand actual members, while they have 15,000 to 25,000 people who worship each weekend.

Contrast that with most mainline denominations today (like Lutheran) where out of their membership rolls only 28% to 38% of the people are active in the sense of worshipping at least once a year and giving some kind of donation. Needless to say, the numbers of people in these churches who are committed in the way high commitment churches expect is very small.

Therefore with their very unapologetic emphasis on commitment with accountability; with praise worship and teaching time messages, these churches are the fastest growing in the world today. Also they often have thousands involved in small groups for faith growth and renewal.

Recently I talked with a young woman in the Cities who said that in this New Year she is planning on going to the YMCA and paying a personal trainer to work with her exercise routine several times a week. She wants to work on her arms, her stomach and upper body, and her overall fitness.

This young woman said she has tried it many times all by herself but it hasn't worked. She needs someone who will help her be accountable; someone who can give her exercise routines to do that will help her meet her goals; someone who will keep encouraging her when she doesn't feel like it or when the going gets tough.

This, of course, is also what the Apostle Paul talks about as far as our Christian journey and walk in faith. Paul talks about being a disciple of Jesus—the root word of disciple being discipline. It takes discipline for us to grow as a disciple of Jesus; it takes discipline to live our faith in Christ each day.

Just think, my friends, if each one of us had a personal spiritual trainer, one who will help us grow and exercise those areas in us that are our growing edges. Just think if someone would commit to help us—pray for us; encourage us; help us with our patience, anger, generosity, care for others, listening, whatever. What areas would you need coaching help with?

This, of course, is Messiah's vision goals for each of us—where we as seekers connect with others seekers and with small faith groups of people; where we find love, acceptance and care in our daily journey; where we are empowered to make a positive impact in our personal relationships, in our marriage and family, in our work, in the community.

Just think, my friends, how exciting it is to be part of a church congregation where the people are totally committed in their walk in faith and accountability. A church like, of course, is totally focused on worship that doesn't worship the tradition but worships God; a church whose focus is completely on being mission and outreach centered; a church who loves Jesus and loves other people unconditionally.

My friends, I believe we at Messiah are growing more and more each week as a committed and faithful congregation. I invite you this morning to respond in faith to the unbelievable grace and love that God has for you. I invite you to make your church involvement and worship not just a going through the motions; may you commit yourself each day to focus on God's mission and on growing as Christ's disciple.