

Osaka International Church

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Title: "Our Accountability Before God and Man"

Key verses:

Proverbs 27:17 — "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." (NASB)

Romans 14:12 — "So then each one of us shall give an account of himself to God." (NASB)

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again, gathered together at church for the first time in a month now that the state of emergency has been lifted. I'm happy to be with you to fellowship together in person.

For the sermon today, I had originally planned to share with you some ideas I learned from one of my favorite books. But then, last week, we received some sad news which has changed the atmosphere of today's meeting. I realized that my original topic was not suitable for a day like today. So, instead of that topic, I have decided to share with you a message that was born in my mind two months ago. For the past two months, I have been churning in my mind a possible sermon on a serious topic ... a serious but necessary topic in the Christian Church. Today's sermon is not about last week's news, but as I begin outlining the message, you'll see that it does seem related to some degree to the recent news.

The topic of my sermon today is "Accountability." This is a word I have often heard used in Christian circles ever since my days in a Christian fraternity while a college student. It is important that each of us be accountable to at least one other fellow Christian, somebody who can be close enough to us to ask us how we are doing spiritually. You'll notice that the first verse I have chosen as a theme verse for my sermon is Proverbs 27:17 (NASB) — "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

And if accountability is important for us average Christians, how much more crucial is it for our Christian leaders? It is vitally important that every Christian leader be answerable to somebody: to a group of elders, or to a bishop, or to a denominational leadership board. All of us are fallible human beings, and susceptible to temptation and sin, so we ought to have somebody who can check up on us and make sure we are walking in accordance with Christian morals. This is especially true of leaders, who are examples to their church congregations.

It was about two months ago that I started thinking about this topic of Accountability. I watched some YouTube video interviews describing some disturbing revelations surrounding a world famous Christian leader. I'm referring to the Christian apologist named Ravi Zacharias. I don't know much about him, but I remember watching two or three lectures he gave a few years ago. Those lectures impressed me and I thought I'd like to hear more from him. He passed away last year, and recently there have been a number of serious revelations about various kinds of misconduct by him. It was quite shocking to learn that this man had been engaging in misconduct for many years. How could he have gotten away with it for so long? Apparently, he was so well-respected and so powerful within his ministry that people were afraid to confront him with signs that something was amiss. And there were many signs over the course of many years.

While listening to that story, two thoughts came vividly to mind. One was the apparent lack of accountability there must have been in his ministry. The other thought was a Bible verse that really hit me in my younger days and which kept me away from major sin. The verse is the second half of

Numbers 32:23 (NASB) — “. . . be sure that your sin will find you out.” *Be sure that your sin will find you out.* If you think you can get away with doing some sin, be sure that it will be found out some day. Maybe your brothers and sisters will eventually find out — that would be embarrassing, wouldn't it? Even if they don't find out, certainly God will judge you for it sooner or later, in this life or in the next. The second theme verse for today's message is Romans 14:12 (NASB) — “So then each one of us shall give an account of himself to God.”

Well, that is the introduction to my message today. Next, I would like to share with you some specific thoughts that have been going through my mind these past two months on this topic of Accountability. I have entitled my sermon, “Our Accountability Before God and Man.” I began today by saying I was taught in my younger days that each of us ought to be accountable to at least one other fellow Christian. When I sat down to start searching the Scriptures to outline this idea, the first verses that came to my mind were more directed toward our accountability before God. So, I am going to start there.

Part 1: Our Accountability Before God.

Let me share with you one of the verses that I have lived my life by. This is found in the last two verses of the Book of Ecclesiastes, in the Old Testament. This book is one of my favorite books in the Bible - I don't know how many Christians say that Ecclesiastes is one of their favorites, but such is the case with me. And the last two chapters of that book have always been especially touching to me, especially the last two verses.

Let's look at Ecclesiastes 12, verses 13 and 14 (NASB) — “The conclusion, when everything has been heard, is this: Fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. ¹⁴For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”

The author of Ecclesiastes has filled his book with many observations about life, some positive and some negative. And then he comes to his conclusion. There are two essentials in life: Fear God . . . and Obey God's commandments. To “fear God” has two main aspects: mainly, it means to have a sense of awe and reference toward God; secondarily, it means fearing God's displeasure and fatherly discipline. Fearing God means to always have a sense of His presence in our lives and to seek to revere and honor Him in the things we do, say, and think.

The second essential is to obey God's commandments. This is vitally important because God will, in the end, judge every act we have done, whether it was good or it was evil. This verse has spurred me to live my life with the knowledge that, in the end, God will examine everything I have done, so I had better live a life of reverence and obedience. I have not been perfect - far from it - but I live with this future perspective in mind.

Romans 14, verse 10 (NKJV) — “But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”
Verse 12 (NKJV) — “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”

Some day, each of us will stand before God to give account for our actions, both Christians and non-Christians. In Revelation 20:12 (NASB) we read about the last judgment — “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”

We will be judged according to our deeds. This is not teaching salvation by good works — no, in many places throughout the New Testament we read that salvation is by faith in Christ. What we read about here is that we will be held accountable for all of our deeds.

Let me share with you some more details about what will happen to Christians specifically at the day of judgment. In 1st Corinthians 3:12-15 (NASB), we are exhorted to build on the Christian foundation of our lives with useful deeds rather than useless deeds — “Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, ¹³each one’s work will become evident; for the day [of judgment] will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each one’s work. ¹⁴If anyone’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet only so as through fire.”

I shared this passage with you a couple years ago. When we build on our foundation with useful deeds, we build with gold, silver, and precious stones. But if we build with useless works, that is wood, hay, and straw, which will simply be burned up and lost in the end. Such a Christian will still be saved in the end, but he will get no reward. To me, this is a really sad end, and I encourage my brothers and sisters to do useful things for our Lord, for the kingdom of God. Exercise your spiritual gifts, find a place of service in the Body of Christ, the church. I plan to say more on this topic in another message some time later this year.

Well, that is all I have time to share with you today on Part 1: Our Accountability Before God.

Let’s go on to Part 2: Our Accountability Before Man.

The first verse that comes to my mind under this heading is Hebrews 10:24 (NIV) — “ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”

Consider how we may spur one another, encourage one another ... toward love, and toward good works. It is so important to be *encouraging*, *inspiring*, *spurring* one another to advance in our Christian walk and service.

Let’s look at the first half of Colossians 3:16a (NKJV) — “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another ...” We are to be *teaching* one another... and also *admonishing* one another ... with *wisdom* ... after having the word of Christ dwelling in us fully. That’s an important point: we can admonish and instruct one another, but do it wisely and in accordance with the word of Christ as we find it in the Scriptures.

It is important that each of us be accountable to one or more fellow Christians, someone who can be close enough to us to be able to ask some private questions, like “How has your spiritual life been like

the past week?” ... “Are you reading your Bible?” ... “How is your prayer life?” ... “How is your family life?” We need to be encouraging and building one another up.

I started today’s sermon by quoting Proverbs 27:17 (NASB) — “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” Companionship is important, especially the type that will challenge us to grow. And it can be a reciprocal relationship, where each one “sharpens” the other like iron sharpening iron.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NASB) — “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor; ¹⁰for if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up!”

None of us should be alone in living the Christian life. All of us need encouragement ... and accountability. If one is alone, that can potentially lead to a fall. I began this sermon with a reference to the Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias, who apparently didn’t have anyone he was accountable to. He had secret sins which he could indulge more and more over the years. I told you that I had watched some interviews about him on YouTube. The most impactful of these was an interview with another Christian apologist named Josh McDowell, a man who has maintained a high degree of integrity. Forty years ago I saw McDowell speak when I was a student at UCLA and his books helped lead me to Christ.

At the end of that YouTube interview, McDowell was asked what are the top ways of implementing a layer of accountability that our ministry leaders should follow. Josh McDowell’s topmost answer was this: “Give people the freedom to confront you, no matter who you are. Just say, ‘If you see anything in my life, my actions, my attitude, or anything that you might have any question about, ... [then ask me]. And if I respond in a negative way to it, react and confront me with that. Give people the freedom to confront you - that’s one of the biggest things.”

Well, I am not in the ordained clergy. I am a lay person and during the past three years I have sometimes been invited to give the Sunday sermon from this pulpit. Speaking from this spot and commenting on the Word of God is an awesome responsibility, something to be taken very seriously. James 3:1 (NASB) says, “Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”

I would like to take McDowell’s recommendation and invite you to examine me and hold me accountable. If you see anything amiss in me, please call it to my attention. I’ve said something similar to my wife. Way back during our courtship, and a few times after getting married, I told her that I wanted to hear her “wise words of wisdom” and that she shouldn’t hold back if there was something she needed to say to me. So, I would like to invite my brothers and sisters here at church to hold me accountable and point out to me anything that you see that looks amiss, something that I should work on and correct.

Well, in my bookcase, I have a book entitled “The Man in the Mirror” (by Patrick Morley), a book written for Christian men to examine their lives. The last chapter of that book is about Accountability. I would like to share with you some of this man’s thoughts on this subject.

Morley calls accountability “the *missing link* of Christianity.” Many men want to be their own boss, so they avoid having to be answerable to anyone. But we need each other. Earlier, I quoted for you Proverbs 27:17 (NASB) — “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” We all have blind spots in our lives and it is useful to get another Christian’s perspective on ourselves. We need the sharpening that this image implies. Having an “accountability partner” who will challenge us with pointed questions about how we are doing in our lives.

Morley tells us that the purpose, the goal, of accountability is so that each day, we “become more Christ-like in all our ways.” That is, *to be a disciple*. Morley gives a definition of accountability: “To be regularly answerable to qualified people for each of the key areas of our lives.” “To be regularly ... answerable ... to qualified people ... for each of the key areas of our lives.”

“Regularly.” Morley says that it is his experience that meeting once-a-week with your accountability partner is the best.

“Answerable.” Businessmen have to be answerable to somebody. Companies set goals and expect their people to meet those goals, and to answer to their superiors about how they used their time and resources. As in business, Christians should set goals and live by certain standards if we are to achieve our purpose of becoming Christ-like. Being answerable to someone helps us make sure we keep reaching for those goals.

“Qualified people.” You should pick a reliable and compatible person as an accountability partner. Most of all, this person should love Christ and seek to see you succeed. The person should be someone you respect and whose judgment you trust.

“Key areas.” These include relationship with your wife, with your kids, and with God. We should be wise stewards of our time and money. We should watch our moral and ethical behavior.

Of utmost importance, Morley says that we must give our accountability partner “the right to ask us the hard questions. Unless we have some people who are measuring, and help us measure, our success in the key areas of our lives, then we *will* lead a secret life, a life not held answerable to the commands of Christ. Let there be no error in our thinking: No man can live the Christian life alone. Left to our own devices we will convince ourselves of our own infallibility. ‘The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?’ (Jeremiah 17:9). ... Being held accountable gives another person the right and responsibility to take the initiative ... To be accountable is to give answers to the questions we are asked. In your life, does anyone ask you questions?”

Morley concludes his chapter with a reminder of the main purpose of accountability: “To each day become more Christ-like in all of your ways.”

To become more Christ-like day by day. This brings to mind Ephesians 4:22-24 (NASB) — “That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, ²³and that you be renewed in the spirit of your

mind, ²⁴and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

I love this image: putting off the old self, like putting off old clothes ... being renewed in the spirit of our minds ... and putting on the new self, the likeness of God, the image of Christ.

And I will close with Galatians 2:20 (NASB) — “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

Here is the essence of Christian living. Christ has been crucified and we, too, give up our lives, give them up for Him ... we recognize that our life is not our own but is His, and He lives in us and we live our lives for Him by faith, with gratitude that He gave His life for us.

Let us strive more and more to be like Christ.