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SERIES: WE ARE FREE (A Study of Galatians)

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TITLE: Accountability

Accountability, I have discovered, is a four-letter word. We don't like it; we don't like to do it. Accountability is often uncomfortable for the person receiving it, and also for the person giving it. What about you? When I say the word accountability, do you get sick to your stomach? Do you feel a sense of resentment? Do you feel a sense of “Well, why are you holding me accountable, when you've got your own problems?”

In my years as an executive coach and consultant, I have found that accountability is essential. It doesn't matter if you're a nonprofit or a for-profit business. It doesn't matter if you are a Fortune 500 company or a Ma-and-Pa shop. If you're serious about achieving your goals, you need to have accountability. If we as Christians are going to glorify God in our daily lives, accountability is essential. Did you know that even in the early church, accountability was necessary and displayed? Well, it was, and that's what we want to talk about today.

Well, I'm excited to get back into our study “We Are Free”. We are picking it back up in Galatians Chapter Two. What we have seen so far in Galatians, is Paul's declaration of the true Gospel. The true Gospel comes from Jesus Christ. Paul has been saying this Gospel that he has been preaching was not his creation; it was not created by some other person, but rather by Jesus Christ himself. We found that in Galatians Chapter One. We know from the book of Acts, and from Paul's account here, that the only explanation for his change from being a church persecutor, to a church planter, is the encounter with a risen Christ. We've also learned from our study, that this Gospel, the true Gospel, was not received from Peter to Paul. Paul did not even meet Peter until three years after his conversion. He didn't get this Gospel message from the churches of Judea, because they did not even know Paul face-to-face, according to Galatians One.

Thankfully, when Paul went back to Jerusalem, 17 years after his conversion, he discovered that the pillars of the church, Peter, James, and John, were holding to the true Gospel. As Paul said, *he had not run in vain*, when he returned back to Jerusalem. The Judaizers there were promoting a legalistic version of Christianity, which says your salvation comes freely by grace, *plus* following the law - more specifically, you must be circumcised. The Jerusalem leaders rejected the message of the Judaizers, and when they met with Paul, they gave him the “right hand of fellowship”. In other words, they were partners in the Gospel. Paul's Gospel is authoritative - not just in Galatia, but everywhere - even in Jerusalem - and that's where we pick it up in Galatians Chapter 2, beginning in verse 11 (ESV):

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

Here we have one of those awkward accounts in the Bible. After Paul has just again defended his apostleship and the true Gospel, he kind of makes a sidestep here, and says, “but when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him face-to-face.” So, Peter went to Antioch, and while there, Paul opposed him. We would say today he “called him on his stuff”. Now some people might think, “Well, that's not right. What's so special about Paul?” Well, nothing is special about Paul, at least in comparison to Peter. Both were commissioned by Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel. Both had experienced that Salvation by grace through faith. And as we know, both were used by God to build the early church. And, if you read the book of Acts, you will see the first 12 chapters are really dedicated towards the ministry of Peter, while the remaining 16 chapters are dedicated towards Paul's ministry. So both are co-laborers in the Gospel. Paul is not better than Peter. And Peter's not better than Paul. This all comes back down to the Gospel. And what Paul is doing here, is holding Peter accountable. What about? Verse 12:

¹²For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

I find this verse terribly interesting, and I hope you do too. So Peter here has been opposed or called on his actions. He was held accountable by Paul. For what? Well, according to verse 12, Paul says that certain men came from James to Peter. As I've read through the commentaries, there's some debate whether or not these people were actually associated with James or not. I think it's pretty obvious to say that these were not friends of James, but rather these were the Judaizers - the legalists who were trying to distort the Gospel. They said they were from James, but I would assume that they actually were not.

What do I base that off of? Well, I think because of the interaction that Paul had with Peter, James, and John on the topic of the true Gospel. They understood the Gospel. But also consider what James had said about the Judaizers. In Acts 15:19, James said: “it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles.”(NASB) So these men were Judaizers, as Paul said, party of the circumcision. And we know from this passage that they were teaching a false gospel—a gospel of legalism - which is *no gospel at all*. Once you add anything to the Gospel, it ceases to be Good News. It returns back to religion and despair. That's what legalism is, and that's what religion does.

So in Galatians 2:12, Paul says these false teachers - these Judaizers - came to mess with Peter. When they found Peter, he had been eating with the Gentiles. What you miss in the English is, it's not that he had snuck away and had this one-off meal with the Gentiles. No, this had been part of his routine; he was regularly eating with the Gentiles, and eating what they had been eating.

I don't have time to go into it, but we have to remember that part of Judaism was adhering to the dietary laws. The Jewish people considered the Gentiles to be unclean. They were dirty - they were contaminated by their actions, and by what they consumed - so the Jewish people would not have contact with them. They wouldn't socialize with them. And I think we've lost this in

American culture, but at the time of this writing, eating and diet identified you. It's part of what made you unique and part of a people group. Here in America, you can go down the street and find an Indian restaurant, Mexican restaurant, a soul food restaurant, a Chinese restaurant, a German-Fusion-Japanese restaurant. That would not have been the case 2000 years ago. There was a cultural identity with what people ate. Jewish people would have eaten Jewish foods. And Gentiles, depending on where they were from, would have eaten their food with their own people. This was a big deal. And for the Jew, they had very strict dietary laws. Those laws were intricately tied to their religious practices. They were symbolic of holiness. It was to show that they were set apart by God. They wanted to be clean when they entered the presence of God. But by eating with Gentiles, this was against their dietary laws.

But Jesus completely changed this. Listen to Jesus' words in Mark 7:15-20 (ESV), "[There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.](#)" ¹⁷ And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸ And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him."

You can see that Jesus stirred things up, but you can also see why He did this. He says those dietary laws do nothing for you in regard to your Salvation. Because what you put in your mouth doesn't save you, nor condemn you. Rather, it is the condition of your heart. And Peter got that. In Acts 10:9-16, he said that "what God has made clean, do not call common". So now, after all these years of holding back from eating bacon, Peter is eating it by the truckloads with the Gentiles. But then what happens - these Judaizers come to him, they catch him eating pork, and what does big, bold Peter do? He drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

Now, if you're like me, I read that, and I go, "What an idiot. Peter, you're a coward. I mean, you're Peter the Bold. Yeah, sure you may have denied Jesus three times, but you were brash, and you are an in-your face kind of guy. What's your problem, dude?" He cared about what other people thought. He was more concerned about man's opinion than God's. Paul says he withdrew. Withdrew is a military term, which means retreating from the battle lines. He retreated. We don't know if this happened immediately, or it was gradual. But he was afraid of the Judaizers. But why? They had no authority. They couldn't arrest him. I guess they could have killed him, but that would have been foolish. But he's intimidated, he's afraid, and he began to waver in his faith. He took his eyes off of God and put them back on man.

It's easy to cast a stone at Peter, but then I think of my own actions. You see, you and I can't cast any stones at Peter. That doesn't mean that we should not, or would not, call him on it. But for us to think that we have not done it, or do not do it, is a lie. At the beginning of our time, we talked about accountability. I'm certified as an executive coach. I help people, when they need it, to accomplish their goals. I can help them identify why. I can help create a pathway to success, but *without* accountability, chances are they will not succeed. As a football coach or a basketball

coach, I hold my kids accountable to practice, to study the plays, to display Christlike character on the field, and to do their very best. And when they don't, I call them on it, in love.

You and I today, I believe, should do two things, because of what we've studied in Galatians 2. The first is to **be open to accountability**. As the body of Christ, we go better together. As the body of Christ, we know we can accomplish more when we link arms for the mission of God. I'm not talking about linking arms with nonbelievers, or churches that preach a false gospel. I'm talking about a true partnership within the body of Christ. If we are serious about growing in our faith, and we are serious about reaching the lost, then we have to be open to and seek out accountability. What gets measured gets done. So, let's be open to godly accountability.

Second, we must **be willing to call people in their disobedience to God**. We live in a time where we've redefined accountability as hate, and love as blind tolerance and acceptance. When we love someone, we will show them both compassion and accountability. You see, when we endorse - silently or publicly - a false gospel, heresy, or blatant sin in the life of a believer or a nonbeliever, we are sinning. That is not love; that is hate. We must lovingly, as Paul did, hold each other accountable as brothers and sisters in Christ. In some cases, this is in private, and maybe if it's a public sin, it might be in public, as Paul did here. But we need to be held accountable, and we need to hold others accountable as well.

N: Let's talk more about this with Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole. I'd like to hear from each of you on this topic. Arnie, do you have a specific accountability partner, and how important is it to have one?

A: I think it's critical to have accountability partners, and yes I do - I have. And you know, there's different feelings on this. My number one accountability partner is my wife. And I know some people say, "No, you know, you need to have others." And then I do. I have a best friend. We've held each other accountable for years. I think it's very important. As a researcher, we've studied accountability partners and yes, they do help. But you just have to be aware, that your accountability partner is only as good as you let them be. So if you're not willing to disclose, then it's very problematic.

N: Absolutely it is. Yeah. I think accountability partners are essential. And I guess I'm kind of like you -my wife has become my best friend. And because of that, when she holds me accountable, it drives me nuts. But I love it also, because she wants what's best for me. And she wants me to be the man that God has called me to be. And so I've done that as well, but I also have other people who hold me accountable in certain areas, and I've found it very beneficial - frustrating at times, but incredibly helpful. Cara, I'm curious, from your perspective, have you ever held another believer accountable? Now, obviously we don't want details, or names, and the specifics, but if you have, how did you approach them, and what was the result?

C: I approached them in private at first. Okay. And then when the things weren't resolved, I took three other people that know me very well, that knew this person as well. And that would hold me accountable, if it was on me, if that makes sense. So then once we - it progressed. And

then there was the four of us. We invited spouses, her and her spouse in, because we figured that we would like the black-and-white, sort of man's perspective, into it. But I think in all situations, "What is my part in this? is something – "What's our motives?" In that particular situation though, I would say that the end result was God actually removing this individual, so not my call. In the end, I think - unfortunately I don't know - but I question, whether the person was a believer or not - kind of one of those wolves in sheep's clothing. However, I used to go and read that part in the Bible, where it showed how to resolve conflict, where you go in private and whatever. And I always thought that sounded kind of old fashioned to me, but actually, once I put it into practice, I can see how it is actually the best way to make sure everything is the way it should be.

N: Yeah. The reality is our motives do matter. And as you have found, a Biblical way - the Biblical way to handle these situations - you found it to be best. The one thing that you discovered was, we're responsible for our part. We're not responsible for how people respond. People may turn on us. People may reveal that they aren't really a Christian, and that they really don't care about what God says. They may reject us, or they may say, "You're right. I was wrong." And they repent. But regardless, we are responsible for our part, to lovingly talk to the people we know and that trust us, so that they can become all that God has called them to be. That's hard. It's not easy. Sometimes the results are what we would hope for, and sometimes they're not. But we are responsible for us, and that's what you just shared with us here.