

Why We Need Accountability

Many in the church today are struggling with secret sins. In fact, studies show that in several areas of their lives, Christians are living by the same standards as those in the world.

I spoke about this problem recently when I was ministering at Lakeshore Vineyard Fellowship in Holland, Mich., pastored by my friend Paul Bradford. I asked the men there to fill out a survey to see how their group compared with the national average.

On the survey, I asked the men if they had bought a lottery ticket, watched a PG-13 or R-rated movie, looked at pornography, masturbated or skipped church within a specified number of months, and if they were divorced.

After we tallied the results, I told them that in every area but one—purchasing a lottery ticket—their responses were equivalent to those given on the nationwide survey. In other words, their tendencies to look at pornography, masturbate, get divorced and so on were on a par with those of men in the world.

So what does this mean? I believe that the standards in the church are eroding before our eyes, and it is as if no one seems to notice. Even great men of God focus on “faith” or “vision” in their weekly messages rather than addressing the sin issue.

It's hard for many Christians to enter into all that God has for them because they are living double lives—professing God publicly but privately eschewing His commandments. Each time they sin, they fall a bit farther from where they should be and often spin out of control because there is no one to help.

This is true for Christian leaders, too. But it is not God's plan! The Christian life is supposed to be lived in community with others who know and love us and are willing to confront us when we need it.

Each of us needs at least one person with whom we can be completely honest about anything in our lives—someone who will not judge us but will hold us accountable to walk in the Spirit so that we do not fulfill “the lusts of the flesh.”

Robert Tilton, former pastor of Word of Faith Family Church in Dallas, is a good example of someone who might have benefited from this type of relationship. He was flying high in the 1980s but crashed suddenly in the 1990s, losing not only his ministry and his church but his marriage as well.

When I first met him in 1979, I was impressed by his humility. He seemed to really love Jesus.

As his ministry mushroomed, Joy and I got to know his wife, Marte, and their children. We lost touch with Marte during the downward spiral but several years ago became aware of how God had brought her through the dissolution of their marriage and ministry. Recently we published her book, *The Only Way Out Is Through*, which chronicles her journey () and shows how God's grace sustains a person who gets to the top and then loses it all.

Whatever ultimately caused her husband's downfall, his story demonstrates the need for pastors and leaders to live transparent lives and to be accountable to other godly men and women. This may mean embracing a lifestyle and values that are more in keeping with biblical standards.

Otherwise, there is little to set Christian leaders apart from the world. So many of them have been elevated to celebrity status! Even ministries such as Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) that boldly proclaim the gospel have taken on many of the trappings of secular "celebrity."

And in some segments, people we look to as Christian leaders have adopted the lifestyle, too, including the habit of floating in and out of marriages. Just look at the list of "evangelical celebrities" who are divorced: Joyce Landorf, Sandi Patty, Amy Grant, Michael English, John Jacobs of the Power Team, and many more.

Yet their music continues to sell; their books continue to sell; people still attend their rallies. And no one says anything to call them to account.

It's time for us, at every level, to hold one another accountable in love. It's time for us to give up our secret sins and link up with trusted brothers and sisters in Christ who can help us in our walks with God.

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