

Leading Forward

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"Accountable to Whom?"

Accountability implies concepts like accounting, responsibility, and reporting. Most of us want our leaders in government, in business, and in churches to be accountable. In many situations accountability is built into a process or into a job description. For instance, a personal expense report is accompanied by the

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receipt for each expense. This enables the accountant to justify the reimbursement of the expense to the person reporting it.

Sometimes a person reaches a point in life that causes him to believe he is beyond accountability. Over the years he has proven himself to be a person of integrity and a person capable of making wise decisions. The result is that the person begins to bypass the system. He makes independent decisions without consulting others; he spends money that no one has approved; and he takes responsibility away from those to whom it was assigned. Does that sound like an Enron situation? The truth is that it could be a church situation.

Whether a person is a pastor, a church staff member, a church leader, or a church member, each one is responsible and accountable to others. Ultimately, we would all say that we are accountable to God, but we are also accountable to flesh and blood. Governmental laws make us accountable in terms of the use of funds and their distribution. Biblical laws make us accountable in terms of moral behavior and relationships to each other. Church polity makes us accountable to a congregation that may express its accountability through the whole congregation, through a committee, or through a group or body of leaders.

Why do I write these words? It is because of the frequency with which calls and visits come through my office that deal with a failure of accountability within the church. Often it is a pastor whose desire to get things done takes him outside the boundaries of permission and authorization. Sometimes it is a church leader who wants things to happen faster than the current church process allows. The result is the same – conflict in the church and conflict between believers.

If I were to pastor a church again, I would want certain things made clear. I would want

to be accountable to some group (congregation, elders, deacons, leadership team) and would want the church to know to whom I am accountable. I would want to allow people in the church to do the tasks that go with their places of service (willing to help equip or train them but never taking over their job). I would want the finances of the church to be above reproach by having a clear budget, multiple people involved in the processing and distribution of funds, precise financial reports, and expenditures based on the authorization process of the church.

Is this an over-the-top rant about something that sounds too old-fashioned? I don't think so. I believe it is on target. At least four of our churches have experienced significant embezzlement in the past five years; several churches have dismissed staff because of conflict resulting from a lack of accountability, and too much time is spent cleaning up messes that didn't have to be messes. T

The only remaining point is this: information received is only helpful if it is put into practice! If you personally or your church needs help with accountability, contact DBA. We are accountable to you.