

Accountability and Leadership

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[0 : 00] I'd like for a few moments this morning to turn back to the passage that we read. I'll eventually come to it. I'm not going to come to it immediately, but I will be coming to that passage shortly.

But I want to set the scene, first of all, with you and preach for a short time. We'll sing then again and then we'll go ahead with the ordination.

And I want to say a few words then as well. So you'll only bear with me today and pray that God will take his word and apply it to our hearts and consciences.

Generally speaking, the philosophy of the day in which we live is an individualistic philosophy. Now, I know that's not true of everyone and there's exceptions to that.

But generally speaking, we do live in an individualistic society. I've asked the last just to put up one or two slides, which for me can highlight the thinking of some people that maybe underlies people thinking.

[1 : 04] The key to success is keeping company with people who uplift you, whose presence calls forth your best. Okay, next one.

Never mind what others do, do better than yourself, beat your own record from day to day and your own success. These are Facebook things, aren't they? That's what we get every so often people and you get hundreds of likes.

Yahoo, that's what we do. Next one. Do what your heart desires, never hold back a thing. Don't worry so much about what others think because at the end of the day, what makes you happy is really what matters the most.

Like. Next one. Why waste your time getting hurt by someone when there's someone else out there waiting to make you happy? You go out of church today, there'll be someone on the pavement just waiting to make you happy.

Someone desperate to really make you feel great about yourself. That is generally often, it feeds into the philosophical thinking of our day, which is that it's all about me.

[2 : 08] It's all about me becoming happy. That is what life is about. It's my way and it's my life and I am answerable to nobody but me and that can often be, and it's very often the thinking that people have which will encourage them in their rejection of Christianity and of the gospel.

We can even take that individualism into our ideas of community so that people will say that they love the idea of community even in the Christian context.

But it can be in the temptation is that it's on my own terms. Community the best bits, the easy bits of community, the bits that are nice, the bits that are acceptable.

Not the messy bits, not the committed bits, not the sacrificial bits, but the easy bits on my terms. And so the spiritual challenge for us, I think from day to day, certainly my challenge is recognizing that we are accountable to God, primarily and absolutely.

And that from the very beginning that Satan has come in and challenged that and said right at the beginning to Adam and Eve, you don't need this guy to reign over you. He's made you but now you can live on your own.

[3 : 25] You can be like God's yourself. You can have it all and you can leave him at the sidelines. You know, Jesus recognized that himself in the parable of the talents, didn't he?

When the king gave these guys different talents and eventually they said to themselves, we don't want this king to reign over us.

And that was a spiritual picture of the rebellion of our hearts that says that same thing. There's a kind of universal fingers getting, two fingers getting stuck up heavenwards by humanity in our sinful rebellion.

People argue we're sophisticated today. We have moved on and we're free from the need for this oppressive rule of a Victorian concept of God and of kingship.

And that I guess in quite extreme terms is maybe where we're at. We might not see it sometimes like that and we might not recognize it in some ways. But it's extreme certainly that is where we are.

[4 : 35] But the reality for us is that nobody is unaccountable. Nobody. Despite protestations of those who like to feel that they are completely in control of their own lives and answerable to no one.

You're all answerable to your families. You're accountable to your parents or to your husband or wife, to your boss, to the community in which you live, to the courts, to the police, to Europe.

If you're a secularist then you're accountable to the secular society that you belong to. And in this interestingly, increasingly secular society we find there's never been probably a society in history that is more legislated over and for.

So there's a great deal of accountability. And yet we continue to plow out these posters that encourage an individualistic and self-centered way of thinking.

You might have guessed by now that the theme is accountability. True accountability, biblically, is what will set us free. That is what sets us free.

[5 : 52] Because true accountability, biblically, from God is an expression of love. And it's an expression that is at the very core of relationship.

Accountability is at the core of loving relationship. And when sin has come in and has rejected God and rejected our Creator in whose image we are made, then our accountability to God is also wrecked and becomes a reason for rebellion in our hearts and lives.

Sin wrecks that relationship of love and accountability. Christ comes to redeem that. So we see accountability at the very core of our human relationships.

And we see at the very core of our spiritual relationship. Because we first see it in the Trinity. We first see it in that most fundamental of societies, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Perfectly equal, but each accountable to one another. The Holy Spirit being willing to be sent from John 17, told the ascent into the world.

[7 : 13] Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:38, willingly subjecting himself to the Father, being accountable to the Father. And God himself in 1 Corinthians 11:3, accountable as head within the Trinity at that level.

Ah, accountability to one another, loving accountability. None of them just as if it were possible. And I say this carefully, turning their backs on each other to go their own way.

But in that unique relationship, Trinitarian relationship, which is both three persons and one, there is this intra accountability where there is freedom in perfect loving trust towards one another, joy and goodness and grace and absolute subjection and submission and love to one another.

And as created beings, someone want to sit with Trin will maybe, just sit with them, that would be nice. As created beings, we know and we recognise that we are made in God's image.

And that ultimately, we are accountable to God, because we are made in his image, just as there's accountability within the Trinity. So we are accountable as created beings to God.

[8 : 36] He's our Creator, but he's also our judge and our Savior. Now generally, humanity bristles at that.

Sometimes in our sinful nature, we bristle at that accountability. And if you spoke of that accountability to many people around you who are not Christians, they would bristle at that idea.

And they would rather testify to the posters that we put up at the beginning about being accountable to nobody and just only caring about the people who will make you happy and make you feel good about yourself.

So we know that God's word says that, that we are found wanting, that we don't choose that accountability with him, that we are rebels. Yeah, really? Yes, we are rebels against him.

And that grace what pulls us back into a right relationship with him. Matthew 25, 31 reminds us that there's a day of reckoning. I don't think we speak much about that today.

[9 : 46] And I confess and admit and seek your forgiveness. I don't preach enough about that. There is a day of accounting for all of us before the living God who's created us.

And we need to recognize that. And if we reject the rescue package that has come through Jesus Christ, then we will remain lost and separated and be consigned to what Jesus calls outer darkness.

That is a separation from him, eternally, a relational separation. You know, we struggle even with the word, the concept of hell, because we think of it, we don't think of it relationally.

We think of it as some kind of place that is a horrible place or an evil place, which it is.

But primarily it's a relational separation from the God of love and grace and goodness to whom we are accountable.

[11 : 09] And we can choose to live our lives by the posters, or we can choose to come under the word of Jesus Christ.

So for us as Christians today, we have come to understand the paradox of grace. The paradox of grace, which is expressed very well in Galatians 5.1, it is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

Stand firm then in this freedom. So that as believers, as Christians, we have come to recognize God's Lordship, we've come to recognize that we are accountable to Him, we've come to recognize that He is in His great grace and love given as an amazingly full and complete rescue package that we simply need to accept and take Him into our hearts.

And then when we do come under His Lordship and His accountability so that we obey Him out of gratitude, that that is freedom. That's what we've come to express, that we have found freedom in that, true freedom.

See none of us has absolute freedom. Go back and I rewind to the beginning, we're all accountable. You're accountable at every level of your life, you're subject to other things and most of all you're subject to your own sinful heart if you're not a Christian.

[12 : 34] But in Christ what we recognize and know and see is that we have true freedom, freedom as we were created to have under accountability to Him and we recognize Him and have that accountability in the context of love, releasing us from the slavery of this impossible individuality of the posters that is simply wishful thinking, that is simply pie in the sky thinking that we like to put on our Facebook to make us feel great about ourselves and to see how many likes, how many people will like us on these things.

So the paradox of grace is that we come under His Lordship, doesn't it? That today we're able to say as Christians, He is Lord. I will have this man, this King to reign over me.

I will obey Him. I do see my sinful rebellion and my desire to be Lord of my own heart and yet I come confessing that and I recognize His justice and His grace.

I recognize this verdict, this damning verdict that He's made but also this amazing grace that He's shown to me in my life through the cross.

That is, for us as Christians today, a massive step. It's never an insignificant confession to make. That is an impossible, a miraculous step, a born again step that we've made that is able to accept willingly His Lordship but it's also a step where we have become embraced by His love, set free by this incredible Savior who has paid the price for our rebellion and sin.

[14 : 36] We are accountable today. You sit here as a Christian, accountable today out of gratitude, recognizing that He has a great present for us but also a great future, that we are in a battle together but we do so as we serve Him as love because we have come to understand His Lordship or we serve Him as Lord because we've come to understand His love.

C.S. Lewis says something very interesting. He says, God can't give peace and happiness apart from Him because there is no such thing.

And that's an important reminder for us that all other peace and happiness which may be accounted such is fleeting and is temporary and is vacuous ultimately and that genuine and true peace and happiness comes in relationship with our God as we submit in our accountability to Him.

So that is the reality for us as individuals, as Christians and that is many ways at the core of the gospel. It's also the reality for the church of which we're apart today and for our own congregation, St. Columba is here and as visitors for your own churches wherever they are if you belong to a church.

Because the church reflects God, it reflects the Trinity, that intra-accountability, it reflects grace, that recognition of submitting to the Lordship of God and we become a community.

[16 : 25] That's what happens. We become a community under His Lordship and under His love. We are not a religious bowling club or a religious whatever club or society or gathering of people.

We are a community under the Lordship of Christ and as a community of believers we are accountable to Him and we are accountable to one another as believers and we are accountable in the context today of appointing new leaders, we are accountable to the leadership that God is placing over us.

Now we come to the passage in Acts chapter 20 and we see one or two very important things here for us just to consider as we draw things towards a close.

In verse 28 when Paul is speaking to the spiritual leadership to the elders and Ephesus, probably a fairly young group of men in a young church, no more than three years old.

In verse 28 he says to them, keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, be shepherds of the church of God which He bought with His own blood.

[17 : 59] So there's this recognition right away from what Paul says and also what he said throughout the whole New Testament that these structures that put in place come from God.

This is the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Now he does that through the church. He does that through the callings and the characteristics and the giftings and the qualifications and the choice of the people and the thoughts of the leadership.

But it is not about simply putting in place a human institution or a human organizational structure. It's not simply either mimicking what the world does in terms of leadership or even leading the way in terms of leadership.

It's completely unique because apart from anything else it's a servant leadership that is being put in place. But this is Christ's structure for our community, for the community of the church, for the family of God of which He is head and of which everyone else, leaders included, are the body.

And this is what He has done for us, the keep watch over the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. So the Holy Spirit is involved today. The Holy Spirit has been involved from the beginning.

[19 : 24] We've come humbly, I hope, and prayerfully to the conclusions that we've come to for making you elders and deacons today. And we believe by faith the Holy Spirit will be the one who will ordain these guys today.

And God knows our hearts. And God knows how difficult we find accountability. And God knows how difficult we find the Christian walk we sung at the beginning about putting our armour on because of the battle that we face and the struggle and let's stop thinking that the Christian life is about the posters, about whatever will just make us happy because it's much bigger than that.

It's much deeper than that. And it is primarily about what will make us holy. One day we will know absolute happiness eternally, but God knows our hearts.

And this is what God has chosen for His structure for His family. It's open to abuse. It's open to failure. It's open to sin. But this is what He's done for us.

He knows that all of us need warning, need encouragement, need help, and need patience. First Thessalonians Paul speaks to the church, says, He's warned those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone, always be kind to each other and everyone else.

[20 : 50] And so we've got this structure that God set, pastoral structure that God sets in place because we're in a battle. And none of us would go into the battle without some kind of encouragement and strength and help and protection and leadership.

We're there for each other. We're there to teach one another. But we have over as overseers, deacons there to encourage and help the leaders in their task and in practical ways.

And why is He given us these structures to pastor, to care, to lead, to encourage, to challenge? Why is He given us these things?

Because as Christians, we too will stand before the judgment seat of God. Second Corinthians 5, 10 makes that clear. Not to be told our eternal fate because that has already been made clear in Christ.

But a judgment of works, a judgment of rewards to see how we've lived, to see whether we are accepted into glory with the rewards that He gives or whether we simply as it were get in by the skin of our teeth.

[22 : 14] Strange concept, but biblical nonetheless. If any man builds on this foundation, that is Christ using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, His work will be shown for what it is, reward or loss.

So the sense in which our life in Christ, the responsibility we have in Christ, with Christ and with the Holy Spirit, matters. It matters how we live and we can't do it on our own.

So we have community, we have the gospel, we have the church and we have the overseers that He's given us to point us towards living and sampling that life.

So we recognize that the Holy Spirit oversees the structures that we are putting in place today. And we also recognize therefore that leaders are set apart by God.

The overseers, the elders and the deacons, they have gifts set them apart through the will of the current leadership and also the will of the people and prayerfully we believe that that has been made clear.

[23 : 22] And can I say to the new leaders today and also to the existing leaders and indeed to everyone that the leaders are in a privileged position and a responsible position.

Undoubtedly they must give account for how they will live. We all must give account but particularly in the position that they find themselves in, obey your leaders and submit to their authority under Christ, they keep watch over you as men who must give account.

Men who must give account, it's really solemn stuff to take up this position. It's not a position of privilege in the sense that we kind of sit back and feel that we've earned this place.

It's a position that really throws us into our knees, independence and on trust. The elders, maybe particularly, not many of you, James 3, should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you will know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Solemn words about God watching over us, God's appointment, God's Holy Spirit working in these things, that we need to submit ourselves to Christ and mould ourselves into His image.

[24 : 35] It's solemn, yes, but it's joyful. So I say to them, the guys, but also to all of us to remember them and to take the advice that Paul gives here to the Ephesians church, keep watch over yourselves.

Verse 28, keep watch over yourselves. That is guard your souls. Remember that, guard your souls as you come into this position of leadership.

You need to look after your own soul as you are given account to reach out and look after the souls of others. No good to just somehow reject or neglect that.

Remember you need to be holy in this work. Keep watch over yourselves. Be prayerful. Be vigilant. He encourages us to do that, to just keep watch over our own souls.

Remember you're also a disciple. Remember you are accountable. Becoming a leader in the church doesn't make you unaccountable. We must all be accountable to one another. I must be accountable to you guys and likewise within the church.

[25 : 49] There's no hierarchy at that level. When anyone who thinks the pastor, the minister or the elders become unaccountable or don't need to be held to account, then it's unbiblical and misguided.

We recognize that. Keep watch over yourselves and recognize Christ's centrality and shepherd the people.

Keep watch over yourselves and over the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. The deacons have an important role. Practically they are both helping the elders and outworking practical love in every way they can in the shepherding of the people.

Why do you do that? Because they're blood-bought. Be shepherds of the church of God which He bought with His own blood.

We are a blood-bought people. The blood of God, precious, the most precious gift of all.

[26 : 54] As you pastor the people, as you look at the people and as you, as a people, sit here together today, remember that we are together in Christ, a blood-bought people.

So shepherd them by remembering that. Shepard them by knowing the truth because Paul goes on to speak about false teachers are going to come in and just cause havoc. So the truth is hugely important.

Know your Bible. Able to share that with others and shepherd the people. The model, that's what we want here in St. Clum is the model not just of leadership but of congregational life is leadership in people together and loving relationship.

Leaders who lay down their lives, who will serve, who will care in the light of eternity. Similar to Paul. Paul was in some kind of fusty academic that came in and taught theology and left the people.

He was deeply loved by the people. You can see that by the responses, this weeping and this brokenness, the fact that he said they would not see each other again. And above all, as leaders, as spiritual leaders, open your Bible with people.

[28 : 02] Teach them the truth. Lead by example. Remember the King, don't show favoritism. We have all of God's people to share the truth with and you have been brought to the kingdom for such a time as this.

I truly believe that. And we have great encouragement, great days ahead as we depend on the Holy Spirit and as we trust in God. And he has appointed this and there are many people in this city that we hope we will reach with the gospel of God.

Amen.