

## What's The Deal At Stone Creek Church Part 13

Accountability & Discipline

*Galatians 6:1, Matthew 18:15-17*

*Memory Verses: Galatians 6:1*

### MANUSCRIPT

#### Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

What's the deal at Stone Creek Church? For the past 3 months we've been answering that question by exploring our vision statement:

**Depending on Christ we will reach our world with the Gospel to see lives completely transformed.** Our vision statement leads us to our 6 core values; a reliance on the Word, constant prayer, authentic worship, relational outreach, strategic missions, and intentional discipleship. This is our plan for reaching the world, and seeing lives transformed.

In addition to that, for the past four weeks we've focused our attention on the last of these core values; intentional discipleship; the way by which we disciple ourselves and make disciples of others. It is this last core value by which everything else we've discussed in this series hangs on. For example, in familial fellowship we learn what it means to be a faith family which practices intentional discipleship by loving each other, praying for one another, and bearing one another's burdens. As a faith family, and as a true fellowship, we encourage one another to share the Gospel through relational outreach and strategic missions. And last but not least, Intentional discipleship means that we give graciously, lead through serving, and hold tightly to orthodoxy. In fact, everything we do here at Stone Creek Church in one way or another deals with intentional discipleship.

But why is that? Why is our personal discipleship and the discipleship of the church so important that it must be intentionally on our minds at all times? Could it be that our discipleship serves a greater purpose than just our personal purity? No doubt, personal purity is of the utmost importance, but purity for the sake of purity, if it doesn't serve a higher purpose, could be just as vain as hedonistic paganism. There must be something else to this whole intentional discipleship thing that we haven't yet touched on.

Listen to **Ephesians 3:10-11**. Here we see that God has established the church to reflect His character, wisdom, and glory in the midst of a fallen world. **2 Corinthians 5:10** makes it clear that we will all give an account one day to God for what we have done, whether Good or Evil. **Ephesians 5:25** shows us clearly that His love for the church is so great that it cost him the life of his Son. Why does he love the church so much? **Ephesians 5:27**; Because he loves his son even more and wants to present the church to him as his spotless, holy, and completely purified

bride. Our purity, our discipleship is extremely important because it is God's gift to His glorified Son; the savior of the universe. Now do you understand? Now do you see why we must be intentional about spiritual growth in ourselves and in the church?

And, it is usually at this point in the conversation where you say, "but what about our sin? We aren't perfect, and we can't ever be perfect in this sinful world." And, this is true. God knows that each of us within His church still wrestle daily with our remaining sin. Therefore, it would be impractical to expect those in the church to live with a sense of purification or completion. We are not a perfect bride; not by a long shot.

But, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't strive for such perfection. In fact, we should run after it with all of our being if we indeed truly love Jesus Christ. So we confess our common struggle with sin, and our mutual need for God's mercy and grace, and of course as we mentioned last week, we spur one another on toward maturity by encouraging our brothers and sisters to walk worthy of the calling. As iron sharpens iron, so we sharpen each other and help form one another into the pure and acceptable Bride of Christ. We intentionally disciple one another for this reason!

We sometimes refer to this process of mutual discipleship as accountability. As we disciple one another in the church we keep one another accountable to the commands and precepts of the Bible. And, as covenant partners this accountability increases. It is one thing for us to watch over the souls of our Christian co-workers, or Christian classmates. But, the Bible makes it clear that we are beholden to a greater degree of accountability when it comes to those who are within our own local church. Those we have covenanted to partner with here at Stone Creek are those who God has given us to be watched by and to watch over.

Sometimes this can be uncomfortable. No one likes to be told they are doing wrong or that they may be leaning outside of the will of God. But it is necessary to keep us Holy and set apart as the Bride of Christ. In fact it is so important that scripture gives us the necessary tools, and steps to keep each other accountable, and in dire circumstances, when discipleship, and accountability lose their efficacy and our partners continue in un-repentant sin, and a plan for restoration.

And, so, this morning I want to briefly talk to us about our responsibility to keep one another accountable in our walks with Jesus, to keep each other accountable to the purity of the bride, and when necessary, to restore one another through church discipline. The main point this morning; **We Must Keep One Another Accountable For The Sake of A Purified Church.**

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### **Exercise Accountability Over The Church For Righteous Living.**

Again, God has granted us the grace and ability to spiritually discipline ourselves. Look at **2 Timothy 1:7**. As we mentioned two weeks ago, the first step of intentional discipleship is personal discipleship. So, as those who desire to follow Christ, we partake of God honoring things such as reading the word and prayer in order to keep ourselves free from sin.

But, we are prone to wander are we not? And, sometimes either knowingly or unknowingly we wander from righteous living and get entangled in sinful living again. Therefore, we cannot keep ourselves accountable nor trust the success of our discipleship solely to our own doing. This is why we must depend upon faithful brothers and sisters to help us. This is why the church is commanded to lovingly encourage those of us who wander away to repent. Look at **Galatians 6:1** which tells us that if someone is caught in sin it is our responsibility to restore them gently. **Galatians 6:2** encourages us to bear our brother's burdens; especially the burden of their sin. And **Luke 17:3** commands us to rebuke those who sin so that they might repent. There can be no doubt; accountability is necessary for righteous living. But it is essential that we recognize that the road of accountability is a two way street. We must both agree to be held accountable and to hold others accountable.

First **we must willingly submit ourselves over to the church body, granting them the right to keep us accountable.** This may be harder for some than actually holding others accountable. Our society has made us adept at pointing out the flaws in others, but we are still somewhat uncomfortable with having our flaws pointed out to us. We are even more uncomfortable with giving people access to the most vulnerable corners of our soul. We have to change our mindset. Instead of the standard thinking that a win is when we manage to conceal our problems we must learn to accept reproof from others as a gift. **Proverbs 12:1** tells us that we must love accountability, and if we hate reproof we are stupid. **Hebrews 12:11** tells us that accountability yields the fruit of righteousness in us. And, **Proverbs 15:32** reminds us that accountability helps us gain intelligence. We must understand that accountability is an act of grace. A true covenant partner is not looking for revenge or to cause you undue pain. Rather, a true friend, who loves you like a brother or a sister wants to help you. They want to cure you from the sinful cancer that will destroy your life if left unchecked. As hard as it is for them to tell you that you have cancer or to hear them say that you have cancer, it is way worse to simply ignore it.

Also, another thing to consider is that, if left unchecked, the cancer of sin will not simply destroy you, but it will destroy the church too. When confronting the sin of someone in the church Paul asks in **1 Corinthians 5:6** do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Meaning a little sin, doesn't just destroy you, it destroys the whole

church. Listen, **My sin must be dealt with for my sake and the sake of the church**.

So, how exactly does it work? Do I just wait for someone to approach me and point out areas of my life that I can do better on? I feel that submitting yourself to accountability needs to be a little more intentional. If we look to the life of Christ and the ways of the early church who met mainly in houses, we find that a biblical model for accountability is primarily small groups comprised of same sex individuals. This is why we think small groups are a good model for accountability, but d-groups are the best model.

Within the small group model, confession, which is fundamental for accountability, becomes easy and acceptable. **James 5:16** tells us to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another and **John 1:9** tells us that when we confess our sins we are cleansed of all unrighteousness.

So first we must allow others to keep us accountable, and secondly, **we must accept the responsibility as followers of Christ and covenant partners of our local church to keep others accountable.** Again, we must first be free from sin (repentant of sin) in order to reprove others from their sin. **Matthew 7:3** cautions us that before we can take the speck out of someone else's eye we must first take the plank out of our own. **Romans 2:3** points out that we will be judged for judging others if by doing so we are hypocrites guilty of the same unrepentant sin.

Once we are free of our own issues, we then can hold others accountable, but only in a spirit of humility that recognizes that we are all sinners. It's true, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. I may not have committed your sin, and you may not have committed mine but the fact that I can help you deal with your sin means that I need you to help me deal with mine too. As Jim Denison says, "we must remember, we're not telling others we are better than them. We're beggars helping beggars find bread, but, at the end of the day, it's the bread that matters!" It's not what I've done wrong or what you've done wrong that is the most important thing at play here... it is the glory of Christ represented by a pure bride of Christ. I love you and I want to see you freed from sin. I love the church and I want to see it pure and set apart for Christ. **We Must Keep One Another Accountable For The Sake of A Purified Church.**

So, we must submit ourselves to be accountable to others and we must also commit to keeping others accountable. But, when it comes to being accountable for the sake of the purity of the church... **We May Be Subjected To Church Discipline For Spiritual Restoration**. I pray that that is never the case; that it never comes to that, but we must be prepared none the less. Sometimes those who are covenant partners of the local church still fall away from the faith and fall into sin regardless of those who love them and care for them, and regardless of the efforts of those who have tried to restore them and call them home. They cling to the world and its

sinfulness instead of Christ and in an unrepentant spirit they malign the name of Christ with their sin, and if we are covenant partners with them, we cannot allow that to happen, for them and for Christ.

**1 Corinthians 5:1-5** tells us the story of a man who is caught in the sin of having sex with his step mother. And instead of calling the sin out, calling for repentance, and restoring this brother back to righteous living, the church just went along with it. Paul calls the church to essentially kick the man out of the church until his flesh is destroyed and his Spirit is saved.

**Matthew 18:15-17** gives us more enlightenment into this process. There are 5 steps. Step one; if a covenant partner has sinned against you or is living in unrepentant sinfulness and you know about it, you should personally go to that person (not talk about them behind their back) and lead them to repentance. This is still under the umbrella of regular accountability. If they repent all is well and nothing more need be done. If there isn't repentance then move to step 2.

Step two; take it to their small group, d-group. They are then responsible for drawing their friend to repentance and seeing them restored. If they repent and are restored then nothing else needs done. Again, this is still under the umbrella of regular biblical accountability. If they still don't repent of their sin then we move onto step 3.

Step three; this is when it starts to move from accountability to church discipline. take it before the entire church so that every covenant partner can pray for them and encourage them to repent. If after a time of prayer and encouragement, they refuse to repent and be restored move to step 4.

Step four; let them be as a gentile or tax collector (an outsider) – meaning let them be removed from the fellowship of the church and no longer be considered a covenant partner. The glory of God can no longer be defamed by a so called believer who doesn't live for Christ.

If step four is necessary, this doesn't mean that we have given up on them. At that point the church should continue to pray for them that they would repent and be restored. It is their hope that in the time away from the fellowship of the brothers and sisters in Christ that they would yearn for Christ and his church to the point that they would repent and return.

Again, our prayer is that it would never get to this point with any Covenant partner, but if it did, we would be doing it not out of vengeance or anger, but out of love wanting to see them desperately restored to Christ. **We must never defame the purity of Christ's church either by refusing to discipline the unrepentant or by doing so abusively. We Must Keep One Another Accountable For The Sake of A Purified Church.**

## Application

So, what are you to do with this this morning? First, recognize that we are a church that takes intentional discipleship, accountability, and church discipline very serious. It's biblical, and if it's biblical we are going to put it into practice.

That means that if you are a part of our church you have a responsibility as a covenant partner to both be accountable to the church and keep those in the church accountable. So the question remains; Who are you being accountable for? And, Who are you being accountable to? Hopefully as D-groups continue to kick off you will find it there. If you are not in a D-group for the time being, perhaps you can find some accountability or an accountability partner in your small group. If you don't have a small group... what are you waiting for? It's almost impossible to be accountable if you are not in a close relationship with caring and like minded people.

## Conclusion

The purity of the Bride of Christ is on the line! Do you recognize the seriousness of this? Is Christ worthy of a pure bride? If so, are you serious enough about it to submit yourself to being kept accountable by the church, small group, d-group, accountability partner, and are you serious enough about it to be involved in keeping others accountable as well? **We Must Keep One Another Accountable For The Sake of A Purified Church.**