

## **Our DNA**

### **We Embrace Accountability**

**I John 1:5-10**

**May 29, 2022**

**Pastor Ellis White**

8 years ago, I began meeting with a close friend of mine to work through a book called Multiply. As a church, we felt the Lord calling us to a season of disciple-making (that is helping others to become disciples or followers of Jesus) and this book helped us to talk about what that might look like. We met weekly and discussed what it looked like to make disciples in our lives, and, honestly, I was doing this more to help my friend than to help myself. But, as this friend has the ability to do, he turned the tables on me, and very gently, yet with firmness asked me: "Ellis, where are you making disciples of people outside the church?" I realized that there was nowhere I was doing that. There were no relationships in my life with those outside the church. And I was spending all this time telling other people to share their faith, and yet here I was not following Jesus' command myself.

If you hadn't figured it out yet, pastors don't have it all together. We pastors, just like the rest of you have areas of our lives that are a work in progress. Or to put it more bluntly, as the passage we are looking at today will show us, we all sin; and any person who tries to convince themselves or others that they don't sin is lying. Perhaps you wouldn't call my lack of sharing my faith with unbelievers a sin, although it was disobeying Jesus' command, but at the very least my hypocrisy in teaching others to do what I myself was not doing was definitely a sin. And if my friend hadn't said what he said, I probably would have remained unaware of my own sin. And I think it is the same for us all. We all sin, and often we are unaware that we are doing it. So, what can we do, if we want to get rid of those areas of our lives? We can embrace accountability.

Welcome to Chapel Hill today. My name is Ellis and I'm one of the pastors here and we're continuing in our series called DNA. We are talking about what makes Chapel Hill unique. We believe there are 9 parts of our DNA, split into three sets of three. We call these sets head, heart and hands, what we believe, how we behave and what we do. The last two weeks we have been focusing on that heart set: how we behave. And we have heard that we embrace three things in how we behave: humility, courage and accountability. I'd encourage you to go back and listen to Pastor Julie's message on humility, and Pastor Mark's message on courage; they were both challenging and transformative for me. But today, we're going to talk about what it means when we say we embrace accountability.

My hope today is that you might discover why we embrace accountability, how we embrace accountability, and what you can do to begin embracing accountability. Why, how and what. So, let's start with the why.

Why should we embrace accountability?

Have you ever seen a UV flashlight? Well, I've heard that they can detect stains on surfaces, so this week, before we had cleaned our house, I decided to get a UV flashlight and see what stains I could find hiding in plain sight. Take a look! Poor Ezra! I think he was a bit embarrassed. But, honestly, Ezra, this reflects much worse on me than on you! I could not believe the dirt that was hiding, and yet, when I shone the UV light on it, it was there. Sin is the same. It remains hidden until we shine a light on it. And accountability is that light. Here is how John, one of Jesus' closest friends puts it:

"This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all

unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:5-10 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

In this passage John is telling us that our sin loves to hide. So often we aren't aware of our shortcomings; like in my story I shared at the beginning. It's like we are walking in the darkness. But when we shine light on our lives, our sin is revealed. Just like when I shined the UV light on my house, the dirt was revealed, so when we shine God's light into our lives, our sin is revealed. That's why we embrace accountability. Accountability is the process of shining that light into our lives to reveal what is really there. Without accountability, we will deceive ourselves into thinking we don't sin, but with accountability, we are aware of our shortcomings and failings.

As a church we embrace accountability in a large number of ways. First and foremost, your elders and pastors are accountable to the other elders and pastors in our denomination. Last week I was at our Presbytery meeting—the regional gathering of our denomination. We examined 4 different pastors who were seeking to get ordained in our Presbytery. We dealt with a situation involving a pastor who had a mental breakdown. And we talked about how we can help churches who are transitioning from one pastor to another. Your pastors and elders are not lone rangers; we are accountable to the other pastors and elders in our denomination. They shine a light on us and reveal what is really going on. They protect you, the members of our church, from abuses of the power that you have entrusted to your elders and pastors.

We also practice accountability in other ways. Right now, our staff are going through their regular performance evaluations which look not only at what we have done, but our culture of humility, hunger and relational smarts. Our staff are also participating in an annual survey of our staff health, which will inform our Session as to how our staff are really doing. And, did you know, that every week the preacher sends their sermon script to a team of around a dozen people who give input and thoughts on the sermon before it is preached. As a church

we embrace accountability. Why? Because it helps us to see the things we don't see ourselves.

So, why do we embrace accountability? Because it sheds light on things that are in the darkness. It reveals to us our sin and shortcomings, which are often hidden from view. That's why. Next is how. So how do we embrace accountability?

How do we embrace accountability?

Accountability cannot be embraced outside of fellowship. We cannot embrace accountability unless we are in relationship with others who know us and love us. Take a look again at verse 7 from the verses I read earlier. It says:

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."  
(1 John 1:7 ESV)

If we walk in the light, that is, if we embrace accountability, it means we will be in fellowship with one another. You can't walk in the light without being in fellowship with other believers. You can't embrace accountability outside of relationship. Our hearts are deceptive and without the light that others shed on our lives, we will deceive ourselves. We cannot embrace accountability outside of community. And yet, relationships alone, aren't enough.

When I was in college, I attended a college men's accountability small group. Every week we would meet and fill out a survey and share our answers with each other. The survey asked questions like: How often did you read your Bible this week? How many minutes did you pray? Did you view any questionable material online? What did you spend your money on? And a few others. It was pretty intense. But there was one moment from the whole year that stands out to me. Towards the end of the year, we met together, did the survey and began to share our answers. And one young man, who had been a part of the group for several months, shared that in one particular area he had completely given up. He said, "I have just resolved that I am never going to be free of this sin. It will always be a part of my life."

We can't be accountable without community, but relationships alone aren't enough. This young man had community providing him with accountability, but he was still lacking something. If we want to change and be free of a particular area of sin, fellowship with others alone isn't enough. We need Jesus. It is only when we combine together fellowship with others and the work of Jesus that we see true transformation. And, honestly, although that accountability group was a church group, there wasn't a lot of ministering Jesus to one another; it was mainly telling each other to pick ourselves up by our bootstraps.

As John writes in the verse I just read: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7 ESV) Embracing accountability requires both fellowship with others and the power of Jesus' blood. We must allow ourselves to be cleansed from our sin through the blood of Jesus.

Jesus, the Son of God, who never sinned, took upon himself the consequences of the sin of the whole world. Paul says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." On the cross the great exchange took place: our sin and its consequences were born by Jesus, and in its place, we received his righteousness and its consequences. He substituted himself for us, and bore the death that we deserved. And in exchange we receive the life that he alone deserves.

Our sin was fully paid for on the cross. Jesus triumphed over it, and proved that the payment was sufficient by rising again three days later. And that same Spirit that raised Christ Jesus from the dead lives in us. And by the power of that Spirit, we can be set free from any sin that continues to hold us back. Through reliance on the Holy Spirit, and fellowship with one another, we can find freedom. There is nothing that Christ cannot free you from.

And if you are in a desperate place with something in your life right now, can I encourage you that there is hope. You don't need to be like that young man who had given up. There is more for you in Christ, and I believe if you are bold enough to take a step out and ask for

help you will find it. And one of the best places to do that here at Chapel Hill is at Celebrate Recovery. It is a safe community where people who have hurts, habits and hang-ups can seek freedom in Christ through fellowship with others. It's every Wednesday at 6pm right here in the Sanctuary. And this Wednesday I have the privilege of speaking at Celebrate Recovery. So come and join me, and experience the freedom that so many have found through that ministry.

So why do we embrace accountability? Because it sheds light on our lives. How do we embrace accountability? Through fellowship with others and the cleansing power of Jesus' blood. Why, how, and what. What do we do to embrace accountability?

What do we do to embrace accountability?

My close friend, who I spoke about earlier, and I got together for lunch a few weeks ago. In the course of our conversation, he asked me a question that has stuck with me. (If you hadn't guessed by now, this friend is kind of good at asking hard questions of me!) He said, "Ellis, how many people do you have in your life, with whom you can share anything?"

I wonder this morning if you might ask yourself the same question: "How many people do you have in your life, with whom you can share anything?" Without those people, we cannot embrace accountability. So, I wonder, who are those people for you? And if you can't name anyone, can I encourage you to think about someone who might be that person? Someone who isn't yet that person. And can I encourage you to reach out to them and set up a time to get together? And in that time together, perhaps you could share with them that you were asked this question at church on Sunday and you realized you couldn't name anyone, and that needs to change. And then ask that person if they might be willing to be that sort of friend for you? A friend with whom you can share anything. I hope you'll be surprised at their answer and how quickly and eagerly they will want that too.

And if you do have someone in your life with whom you can share anything, can I invite you to take that relationship a step further? A few years back, I had a conversation with a couple of close friends, where I said to them, "I want you to know that you are free to ask me any question you want, about anything in my life. In fact, I'd like you to ask me in particular about my marriage, and my relationship with God, and what I've been looking at online, and how my relationship is with my kids." And my friends each said, "Of course. I'd love to do that." And over the last several years we've had many a conversation where they have asked those questions.

And I wonder if you might need to give one person in your life the permission to do the same? A person with whom you already feel comfortable sharing everything, and a person who is going to push you closer to Jesus. Maybe you could reach out to them today and set up a time to meet and have that conversation.

We cannot embrace accountability outside of deep relationship; outside of relationships where we can share everything that we are going through with the other person. If you don't have that kind of relationship, ask someone if they'd be up for it. And if you already have that kind of relationship, give them permission and encouragement to check in with you on certain things—to hold you accountable.

But in all this, remember that relationship alone isn't enough. Embracing accountability comes both through relationship with others and through relationship to Jesus. We can only find freedom from our shortcomings in and through the power of Jesus' Spirit living in us. And as we close our message together, I want us to take a moment to invite the Lord to reveal to us any areas we have been hiding in the darkness; to shine his light on those parts of our lives. And then to send his Spirit of power to come and further his work of transformation in us. To change us from the inside out, that we might truly live in the freedom that Christ has won for us. Let's pray.