

4th SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
January 28, 2018

Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Theme: Accountable

I know of three women who meet for lunch every Friday afternoon – and they have been doing so for over ten years. And the reason they meet is simple: They are young Christian women who want to build a deeper, more meaningful friendship with people who will encourage them in their walk with God. During lunch, these women support one another in prayer and intentionally hold each other accountable.

What does that mean? We know what it means to be held accountable in our jobs every time we have a performance review. Children know what it means every time report cards are posted or when they start applying to colleges and receive acceptance letters (or not). We hold each other accountable in our relationships but especially when our commitment is legally binding.

But for these three women it is different. Because of their trust in one another, they have very intimate conversations and freely share and confess what their sins are and where their temptations lie. And with the encouragement they receive from each other, they understand better how to restrain themselves from actually engaging in sinful behavior.

But they would be quick to say that the whole point behind their desire to hold each other accountable is not just to talk about sin and temptation, but it is a time to build each other up. They remind each other of God's goodness and grace. They identify themselves in relationship to Christ: completely accepted and forgiven. It is a time for them to express a genuine love for one another and to bear the burdens of the other in prayer.

It is an incredible gift to have such Christian friends. I marvel at the depth of their relationship but when I see that word *accountable* in Deuteronomy 18:19 the sentiment is much more ominous and scary as the Lord says –

Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I will hold accountable.

Just looking at that one verse alone it is easy to picture God looming over us (watching our every step) and ready to pounce on us for what we do and fail to do, for what we say and fail to say. God holds us accountable. We are to listen to the words of the prophet who speaks in the name of the Lord (or else). But before we become paralyzed in fear, we should look to see what exactly the prophet said:

To answer that question I had to start from the beginning. I had to go all the way back to the first chapter of Deuteronomy. And (as is often the case when we read Scripture) putting this into a broader context made this accountability thing not so bad after all. It can be positive and healthy and it can build us up.

In Deuteronomy 1 the Lord told his people to resume their journey. It was time for them to take possession of the land that God promised to them through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And Moses chose leaders to help (individuals who were wise, discerning, and reputable). Plans were made and executed. As they stood on the cusp of the Promised Land, the people knew there were consequences for their sinful behavior but God was also opening a door for them to move forward.

And it was amazing how just this one chapter alone mirrored in my mind our annual meeting for next week. When we come together, I do not want us to be business as usual. We are not only accountable to each other when we gather but we are accountable to God. And I believe God is talking to us on the cusp of a New Year:

Resume your journey here at Redeemer.

Choose leaders to help –

Individuals who are wise, discerning, and reputable

Make your plans and execute them

And do not waver from your trust in God

God offers us his blessing to move forward. We are to choose our leaders carefully. Our plans must align with the will of God. This is positive and healthy. This builds up the body of Christ.

But there is more: Moses continues to give the people this long and exhaustive list of statutes and ordinances to obey (a list that he presented once before). I will highlight for you those laws that are relevant to what we are doing today but do not let that stop you from going home and reading all 34 Chapters of Deuteronomy!

We are to learn and diligently observe the *Ten Commandments*. We are to recite them to our children. We are to talk about them when we are at home and when we are away. We are to bind them as a sign on our hand, fix them as an emblem on our foreheads and write them on the doorposts of our homes.

We are to do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord. We are to be in awe of God and walk in his ways. We are to love God and serve the Lord with all of our hearts and souls as we continue to keep his commandments. We are to set apart a tithe (10% of all that we yield) and give from the first fruits of our abundance. We are not to be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward our needy neighbor. Rather we are to open our hand and willingly give enough to meet their needs, whatever it may be. We are to give liberally and ungrudgingly. And (finally) we are to remain completely loyal to the Lord our God.

This is what we are to do to be accountable to God. It is a daunting list but it is how we can show our love to him – in how we treat our neighbors, in how we worship, in how we give back what God has so graciously given to us.

At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses summoned the people of Israel. He recalled for them all that the Lord had done in the land of Egypt. He reminded them how he led them for forty years in the wilderness. The clothes on their backs never wore out and they were fed and they were cared for on a daily basis. And then he ended his sermon with an invitation to enter anew into a covenant with the Lord.

And so ends my sermon today. As the people of Israel were to make a commitment to God before they entered the Promised Land, so I invite you to make a similar commitment as we head into our annual meeting. As our journey resumes, as our leadership is chosen, as plans are made and executed, as we look at the list placed in our bulletins today – we make ourselves accountable to each other and to God. As I reviewed everything on this list: the financial pledge and the search for leaders in worship, education, social concerns, creative ministries that benefit those in need, and the miscellaneous – they all reflect in our context the list from Deuteronomy.

Our churches mirror what God intended us to be as a community of faith. We worship. We hold classes for both children and adults to teach them about the God who has revealed himself to us in Scripture. We set aside our financial resources to be the open hands that help those in need. We give liberally because we are a generous and grateful people.

Please complete this form prayerfully and faithfully so that we can do the work we have been called to do here at Redeemer. But also know this is a commitment that we make with God. I say that because our leaders are not looking at this piece of paper as a performance review or as some kind of report card ... and it is not legally binding.

It goes much deeper: It is a covenant that is made faithfully and can change when our circumstances change. As the three women so eloquently stated it is our reminder of God's goodness and grace. It helps us understand our relationship with Christ. It allows us to express a genuine love for one another and to bear the burdens of the other. It lets us build up the body of Christ. Amen