



Can You Believe What He Said?

Editor's note: Today's article is the first in a series about "fine line" areas of our lives. Areas where we struggle to discern truth from sin. Areas we prefer not to deal with so that we can continue living on the edge, where the "fine line" is.

Part 1: A Fine Line: Judging Versus Accountability

"Oh, look over there. She is dressed like a prostitute again. Can someone please tell her that we do not want to see her bellybutton anymore? Oh and there is Mr. Jones with some new woman and her kids. I think he must have a different woman each week. I don't think that is right with God. Where have all the bulletins gone? That church secretary is no good. We need to fire her. What did you say, Pastor? We need to pray for whom, the Smith family again? Shoot, all we do is pray for their finances. Maybe they would get off their duffs and get a job and stop asking the church for help all the time."

Does any of this sound familiar? I know I have thought and said similar things a few times in my life. In the south, where I live, we have a way of getting into people's business and call it concern. We say we are praying for them to others but really we are just spreading gossip. We want to hold them accountable in truth but end up judging them in lies. Don't get me wrong, there are some folks that are concerned and do care. But I have found that there is this "fine line" between judging people and holding them accountable. I think most people get them confused. I think most people say they are holding someone accountable, giving them approval by God when in fact they are making a judgment. A judgment without enough information, without truth, and without love.

So how do you know the difference? How do we know as Christians when we are judging someone or simply holding someone accountable?

Let's first establish what accountability is:

Accountability is something God established to help us grow in Him. If done correctly by others, the results should be evident by our attitude, our walk with God, our faithfulness, and the awareness of our sin. We will become more humble, more teachable, and we will want to change.

We are all accountable to God. As we spend time in the word, serve, tithe, pray, have a great attitude, etc. we are storing up good things. Out of a good walk comes a good witness.

Matthew 12:35-36

The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.



We are accountable to those we serve under. God has placed those over you to teach and guide you. Even if this means some of them are not Christians. We are still accountable to our bosses, government, police, our parents, etc. They are being held accountable by God in how they hold you accountable.

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

We are accountable to each other. It's one thing to be held accountable by God and by those in authority over you... but another believer? Boy, that can be hard. So many of us won't hold each other accountable because we don't want to come across as judgmental. We don't want to come across like we don't have our own junk. God commands us to do this, but he has given us instruction on how to do it so that it isn't judgment.

Romans 15:14

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

1. Look at yourself and make sure your heart is in the right place before you hold anyone else accountable for sin. It's not that you won't have your own sin, but are you aware of it? Are you working on it? Holding someone else accountable is usually when they aren't aware they are sinning or how their sin is affecting others. Accountability brings awareness. If people know you are a humble person, they are more likely to receive your guidance.

Psalms 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

2. Before you can hold anyone accountable, you must have a relationship with that person based on trust. That is why our accountability can sometimes come across as gossip or judgment. When there is no relationship, no trust, people have a hard time taking direction from others. If we don't have a relationship, we have no idea what might be going on in someone's life, so we make assumptions. These assumptions start in our minds and quickly become verbal. Once airborne they can spread like a virus causing major damage.

We must be willing to listen, understanding as much as we can about a person's life. Maybe the lady in church dresses so provocatively because she has had a horrible upbringing. Maybe she has never had anyone come beside her and be her friend. Maybe the man who came to church each week with a different family is really ministering to them. Maybe they are his neighbors, his family or people from a local shelter. But how would you know without knowing that person?



Grace alert: Don't ever forget where you were when God found you, where he saved you, where he poured into you (and still does).

James 1:19-20

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

3. Hold others accountable in love. You want to know where the fine line is between judgment and accountability? It's in love. When you love someone, when you see his or her sin, it should break your heart. It should make you sad because you hurt for them. You see where their sin is taking them because you have been there. You want to help them not hurt them. You want them to break free from the sin. You want them to experience freedom and victory. Judging someone is more about being self-focused. It's more about your heart. It's easier to judge someone else than deal with our own mess. Holding someone account requires us to deal with our own junk first.

1 John 4:21

And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

4. Hold others accountable in keeping with God's spirit. We must approach the person gently, praying the entire time that God will have them receive what you say. First, encourage and give praise on what they are doing for the Lord and how they are making a difference. Let them know how much you care about them. After you share with them your thoughts, encourage them to hold you accountable as well. This will encourage an open relationship of trust.

Galatians 5:25-6:2

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Romans 15:1-2

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

5. Judgment is reserved for God. Only God knows man's heart to the core. Only God's know what man has said to him. So we have to be careful that our comments, our thoughts, and our actions do not appear to be judging someone. Until we take the time to get to know someone, to build a relationship with him or her, to build up trust so they are more likely to accept your advice, it will always come across as judgment.



Matthew 7:1-2

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

So how do you know when to hold someone accountable? When do we need to step in and say something? Should we discuss it with others first?

I pray about it first. If someone's sin or negative action is affecting your ministry, your church, your community, your family, etc. you will have to, at some point, deal with it. If you are not sure, you can involve your pastor or other trusted counselor - but be careful with whom you discuss it. Not every battle in life is yours to fight. Sometimes I don't feel led to be the one to approach that person. I instead leave it for God to deal with. God may have someone else in mind that might be better equipped. But I can continue to pray for that person.

Remember, accountability in life is not only about becoming a better person, a stronger Christian and follower of Jesus. It's also about building up the body of Christ so that we are stronger against the enemy.

So when someone comes along your way (in love and sometimes not in love) and holds you accountable, bite your tongue, listen, pray and discern if it's something you need to deal with or change, and ask for forgiveness.

1 Corinthians 16:13-16

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love. You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it.

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TheSinglesNetwork.org Ministries helps churches, pastors and single adult leaders evaluate, develop and support their single adult ministries through high-energy speaking engagements, results-oriented consulting and training and leadership development conferences and seminars. Click here to request a FREE "How to Start a Single Adult Ministry" guide.

FromHisHands.com Ministries is Kris' speaking ministry. If you've ever heard her speak, you know that Kris is the kind of speaker who keeps the crowd captivated, shares great information and motivates people to make a difference in the lives of those around them! She speaks to all church audiences on everything from "first impression" ministry to women's topics to singles and young adults. She can speak on a Sunday morning, at a woman's retreat or for a single adults conference. Bring Kris to your church today!