Spiritual Disciplines

Lesson 15: Wednesday January 12th, 2022

Scott Waterman

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Spiritual Discipline: Accountability**

# Introduction

Good evening, Disciples Church.

I pray you’re all well in the Lord. I’m hopeful that you made it through the Christmas season and New Year without too much stress. It was great to get to worship our King throughout the holidays. This is always a special season where we truly get to ponder the hypostatic union and the mystery of the Godman. Praise God for Jesus Christ – the lowborn king who took on flesh to ransom His people.

On a personal note, in this season I have decidedly taken on less. And in that, I’ve missed teaching and being up on stage and serving in those more public capacities. However, I’ve also enjoyed sitting under the teaching of the Word from our preaching elder, Joshua Kirstine. Our journey through the letters of John has been convicting and helpful.

I’ve also enjoyed our music ministry from the congregation, it’s always a special treat to sing with the saints instead of being on stage to help with worship. I believe this year was the first time since I’ve been on the worship team where I didn’t play during advent. And while I certainly missed serving alongside my fellow teammates, there is a sweetness knowing that it’s not about me. It’s not about my skill. It’s not about what I bring to the team, rather it’s about what God is doing in and through this church. It’s been a sweet blessing to worship alongside you all in this season of respite. It is evident that God has blessed us at Disciples Church.

With that, I’d like to pray and get into our lesson.

# What is accountability?

Tonight, we’re going to discuss a discipline that is central to our progressive sanctification and our Christian walk in general. At the core of many disciplines in life is the fundamental idea that we’re unable to accomplish what we want to accomplish *if* left to our own desires.

Let me start off with a few examples. In sports you have a coach. In music, you have a band director or a conductor. In education, you have a teacher. As children, you have parents. What is the role of the coach, director, conductor, teacher, or parent? Not only are they all teachers, meaning that they provide some meaningful instruction and guidance, but they also provide a means of accountability.

To help give us some further insight, let us turn to the Webster’s Dictionary of 1828.

The definition for accountability is:

ACCOUNTABIL'ITY, noun: The state of being liable to answer for one's conduct; liability to give account, and to receive reward or punishment for actions.

And here is the definition of account:

ACCOUNT', noun: A sum stated on paper; a registry of a debt or credit; of debts and credits, or charges; an entry in a book or on paper of things bought or sold, of payments, services etc., including the names of the parties to the transaction, date, and price or value of the thing.

And finally, the definition of account as an intransitive verb:

ACCOUNT', verb intransitive: 1. To render an account or relation of particulars. An officer must account with or to the Treasurer for money received.

2. To give reasons; to assign the causes; to explain;

3. To render reasons; to answer for in a responsible character.

So, if we take these definitions and compile them into a single idea, we understand that accountability employs a lot of accounting terms. It’s about keeping track of something. When you’re entrusted with your boss’s money, you need to keep track of it, and you must justify your actions with it so that they understand that you’ve made good and prudent decisions. They’re entrusting you with something and you must give an account for your actions. In this instance, you’re being accountable to this other party. That is the act of accountability.

Accountability is also a state of willingness to give reasons for our actions, clarity into our thoughts, motives, and heart. It is to be responsible for our character as Christians. However, accountability is also a state of being receptive to another party with whom we are accountable to.

For instance, in sport we must be willing to give reasons to our coach for why we do this or that. But we also must be willing to be accountable to our coaches’ commands. Why? Because accountability is about stewardship. The coach is entrusting you with something and you must 1) be submissive to your coach’s command and instruction and 2) be willing to explain why you’re making the decisions you’re making.

The reality is that in our flesh, we are no different than Adam and Eve. We blame others for our own sin. We doubt, we lie, we deceive. We seek to find a way to skirt authority, to skirt discipline, etc. We all know this to be true. The flesh is a beast, and its desire is death.

Scripture backs this up:

* Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
* Gen 8:21 “… the LORD said in his heart, … for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.”

But tonight’s lesson isn’t primarily about being accountable to a coach or parent, it’s primarily about something more fundamental. We must start at the beginning of what we really must be accountable to. We must put our first things first. We are to be accountable to God. God’s word makes this abundantly clear.

Tonight, we will focus on the following points:

* What does it mean to be accountable to God?
* What does it mean to be accountable to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?
* What are the hallmarks of an accountable Christian?
* Accountability as a means for progressive sanctification.

With that, open with me to Matthew 25:14-30. This is the Parable of the Talents. We will begin by reading the entire passage.

Matt 25:14 “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. Matt 25:15 To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. Matt 25:16 He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. Matt 25:17 So also he who had the two talents made two talents more.

Matt 25:18 But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Matt 25:19 Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. Matt 25:20 And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ Matt 25:21 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’ Matt 25:22 And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ Matt 25:23 His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

Matt 25:24 He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a ***hard man***, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, Matt 25:25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’

Matt 25:26 But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Matt 25:27 Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. Matt 25:28 So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. Matt 25:29 For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. Matt 25:30 And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

With this passage fresh in our minds, let us ponder the following question:

# What does it mean to be accountable to God?

In our study of theology, we come to understand some basic truths. There exists the creator-creature distinction between man and God. The creation is not the creator. And the Creator is not the creation. We must consider this primarily before we discuss God’s commands upon man. We are not to judge God precisely *because* He is not the creation. He sets the terms because he is God. God’s ways are not our ways.

It is clear from Jesus’ parable that man cannot escape the reality that we must give an account before God. A quick search on such texts in scripture will yield many passages. We are not able to read to the Word of God and simply reject that we will not stand before Him in the age to come to give an account for our sin.

Here are a few examples for us to consider:

* Rom 14:12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.
* Heb 4:13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.
* Rom 14:10b … For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God

Rage against that truth all you want, but you have to come to terms with it. That is one of the subtexts to our passage on the talents. Jesus is teaching us that we will be given something by God. In this context it is a talent. This would have been a portion of money or precious metal. However, this is a parable. What Christ is detailing here is that all men and women will be given *something* by God. It’s our duty to steward it for His purposes. All of life on earth for every person is a tail of stewardship. We cannot deny it. We are all called to steward this life for God by obeying His commandments. That command is upon all people.

Eccl 12:13 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Some of us will be given much and some will be given little. Regardless, we all are given a portion. Even more, we are all given life on this earth…and all the elect given new life with Christ. Much to be accountable for. You can interpret this parable not just as a parable on stewardship, but rather you can interpret it in seeing that we’re all liable to the command of the master. The Christian, the one who has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, *will* steward what God has apportioned to Him in a net positive way. The unregenerate man will not. The reprobate will succumb to His innate flesh and not steward his portion for God.

The temptation when approaching this text is to think that Christ is teaching a type of works-based or merit-based salvation, but this is not so. Remember, we have clear teachings in scripture that detail that our salvation is by grace through faith. We’ve covered that in depth before, so I won’t reteach that tonight. Salvation is wholly the work and will of God. We do not will or participate in our salvation.

At the core of this parable is a master who is requiring a task of his servants. We are to make efforts to steward what God has given us unto His pleasure. He commands all men everywhere to repent and trust wholly in the work of Christ, to turn from their sin and live committed lives for Christ. This is *our* task. We must ask – how does one please God? Simply put - we cannot please God from our fallen flesh. Without Christ, no one can please God. But by faith we have been covered by the sanctifying blood of Christ. Only Christ, by His work in us, can please God. And because of Christ and His great sacrifice, God does not condemn us for our sin guilt, but rather He sees Christ’s meritorious righteous work when he looks upon us.

However, for those who reject God, by God’s decree and by their inherent sin, it is clear that they will attempt to glorify themselves and receive the due penalty for their sin. It is a stark reality that the man who squandered his talents will be condemned in “outer darkness.”

The servants who doubled their investments are characterized as faithful and good. Thus, they will enter into God’s joy with Him. The 3rd servant however has a false belief that the master (God) is a hard man. At the core of disbelief is the belief that God is an evil task master. At the core of right belief is the truth that God is truly righteous, merciful and good.

John Gill says of this wicked servant: “he calls him "Lord", though he had not served him, and pretends he knew him; but if he had, he would have had a true affection for him, faith in him, and would have observed his commands; and he would also have appeared altogether lovely to him, and of an amiable character, and not in such a light as he represents him; which makes it a clear case, that he was ignorant of him, or he would never have said, that he was an hard, severe, or austere man; one very difficult of being pleased, cruel and uncompassionate to his servants, unjustly withholding from them what was due unto them, and rigorously exacting service that could not be performed by them: all which is the reverse of Christ's true character; who accepts of the meanest (smallest) services of his people: and takes what is done, though ever so little, as even a cup of cold water, given to the least of his disciples, as done to himself; is merciful and compassionate, both to the bodies and souls of men; and is not unrighteous to forget any labour of love, shown to him or his; and makes his strength perfect in the weakness of his servants, and his grace always to be sufficient for them”

The men who doubled their master’s investments were set free by the gospel and as such, they were *able* (by the work of the Spirit) to work *for* God. They loved their master; their desire was to be with Him and work diligently for Him! However, the unregenerate man, it is clear that by His own work, he desired not to please God.

The two righteous servants understood their responsibility. They clearly knew what needed to be done. They took action to make sure that they fulfilled what their master had asked. And they clearly understood that if they were to fail in their task, there would be consequences. This is a clear picture of an accountable Christian.

The wicked man had no such clarity and desire. He knew what need to be done, but lacked the respect, love, and care for his master to even attempt the most minimal appreciation of the wealth entrusted to him. He could have given the wealth to the bankers to gather interest and that would have been preferable to doing nothing. But he did not do that and rather cast aspersions toward his master as a cruel and hard man.

Jesus presents this parable in the context of a journey. As we discuss accountability tonight, keep this in mind. Accountability is necessary because of our inherent failures and indwelling sin. Thus, this topic can be hard for us at times because we (like many Christians) often fail.

Is not the Christian life a journey? The famous book “The Pilgrim’s Progress” is all about Christian’s journey to the Celestial City. He followed a meandering path that took many twists and turns until he finally came face to face with God. I want to draw our attention to this tonight as a means of encouragement. There is great temptation to sinfully heap grief on our souls in an attempt to punish ourselves for our missteps. Like many of you, I’ve walked through some dark valleys in my Christian life. It is the Christian’s job to encourage other Christians with love, patience, grace, and truth.

*May our gentle demeaner, saturated in God’s love and truth be a means to gently aid in blowing the ember of faith back to a full flame.*

The Word is the truth and at times it will cut deep, and we desperately need it to do that. *W*e must deliver this blow in such a way that we see the beauty of Christ through the circumstantial pain.

Life is a journey. Jesus clearly understood this. Our journey will take many unexpected turns. Be patient with yourself as your Lord is patient with you. Pray to God to give you the strength to continue the race, keep going unto glory.

To those struggling tonight, do you see the sovereign hand of God on your life and on your circumstances as a good thing or do you see it as something bad? If it’s the later, I implore you to reconsider this truth. Repent of your sin. Turn from it. See and savor the Gospel of Christ. It is wicked to cast aspersions toward God for there is no fault in Him. Turn back from that false belief and see Him as right and good.

# What does it mean to be accountable to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?

We ***need*** our brothers & sisters to help us be accountable. This is one of the great points of working through this parable. Put yourself in the position of one of the servants who doubled their talents. These were regular people, like you and me. They would have had struggles! They would have had ups and downs. And – even though this passage clearly teaches us that we will give an account to God for what God has entrusted to us, those who are Christians must be helped and help others along the way.

Look with me at Galatians 6:1-3:

Gal 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Gal 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Gal 6:3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

This passage details for us crucially how we need our Christian brothers and sisters to help us on our journey. We all, hopefully, aim to run the race well. And to do so, we need to use the help that God is giving us along the way. The Church is that help. The Body of Christ is that help.

While we’re not given a front row seat to every detail of the righteous servants who pleased their master, it is clear from the outcome of the parable that they kept watch over themselves. They fulfilled the law of Christ. They, unlike the wicked servant, did not think highly of themselves. They understood their standing as a saved saint.

Hear me tonight – to know this, and I mean truly know it, that we are nothing, to slay our pride, is NOT an endeavor we can embark on alone. We must be encouraged by those around us. The reality is you will be caught in many transgressions in your Christian life. There is no way around that.

1 John 1:8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

So, what do you do when that happens? How are you to be accountable? As our Galatians passage details, there needs to be a symbiotic relationship between believers. It is a two-way road. If a Christian is caught in a transgression, you who are more mature should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. The mature should seek to help the less mature. And the less mature should not seek to be prideful in their conduct, rather – they are to set aside pride and accept the rebuke and help. Look to verse 3: Gal 6:3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

To bear one another’s burdens implies this two-way street.

# What are the hallmarks of an accountable Christian?

The hallmarks of the accountable Christian are most notably summed up by looking at the fruit of the spirit.

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control

However, I want to draw out some depth in a few of these attributes as well as add a few additional ideas based on Scripture.

In my dealings with fellow Christians, one of the most difficult situations is when someone is not teachable.

Prov 3:7 ​​​​​​​​Be not wise in your own eyes; ​​​​​​​fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. ​​​

Realistically the opposite of being teachable is a lack of humility. It is pride. If we’re called as Christians to help people who are in the body of Christ, then we must *all* have an attitude of humility. One of the things that I’ve consistently realized in my own Christian life is that my sin goes deeper and is more insidious than I truly understand. When I think I’ve mastered something, I get lax and lazy and then the roots that I thought were dead have come back to choke me out. Before I know it, I am the sinner caught in the transgression. I believe this is what happens to many Christians. And, like the servants in the Parable of the Talents who *did* double their investments, they too would have had to lean on other believers so that *they could* run the race effectively and for God’s glory.

To be teachable means that you realize that you’re far from having exhaustive knowledge about all things. Only God has exhaustive knowledge about all things, and like I detailed earlier, we are not Him. We are the creature. So, we must come to the table with other Christians with an understanding that perhaps we’re seeing the situation incorrectly. We are often blinded by our own ignorance, and we need our brothers and sisters to help us see clearly and think clearly about these situations.

Secondly, let us strive to be gracious. Stop and think about what that word really means. God, the son took on flesh and condescended into His creation to be subjected to death by sinful men. He did this to bring ultimate glory to God and restore God’s chosen people to fellowship with Him. The restoration of undeserving sinners by no merit of their own is the greatest example of what grace really is. We weren’t asking to be saved. Clearly from the testimony of scripture we see that. Man is wicked through and through. And yet, the resolve of God is firm. Jesus would not turn back from the task set before him.

So, when we ponder being gracious, we do so with this theological framework. Christian: do you understand the price that was paid for your soul? Do you understand the reality of these things on your behalf?

The accountable Christian is to be gracious. We are to understand the cost of our salvation and have that reality truly radiate through our responses when we’re being held accountable OR when we’re trying to lovingly help a brother or sister caught in a transgression.

Thirdly, let us strive to be honest/authentic/transparent. There are times when we’re tempted to hide things. And this is typically a sure-fire symptom of sin. Do not hide. Darkness grows in the dark. Bring the light into the situation and receive the help you need.

This is a good work for us church. Strive to be present with others in our body. God has ordained that we would journey together in accountability.

Finally, tonight, I want to draw our attention to this point.

Let us consider:

# **Accountability as a means for progressive sanctification.**

What is progressive sanctification? Let us look to the Word of Truth Catechism:

Q97. What is progressive sanctification? Progressive sanctification is growing in holiness through obedience to the Lordship of Jesus and His word from a right heart. By grace, it is a lifelong process powered by the Holy Spirit to change us to become more like Christ.

At the heart of the discussion on accountability is the end goal of our accountability: to be conformed to image of Christ. At final glorification, we will be made righteous, we will be made like Christ. However, while living here, we must persevere unto death.

If you have been born again, you are now “partakers of his nature” according to Charles Spurgeon. However, we must handle this conforming to Christ’s nature with some caution and care.

Spurgeon says the following, “It is not possible for us to be divine, yet it is written that we are made "partakers of the divine nature." We cannot be precisely as God is, yet as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly, whatever that image may be.”

We are as the reformer Matthew Poole said, “to be conformed to him in holiness and sufferings here, and in glory hereafter.”

So, while we run this race together, let us strive to be conformed to the holiness of Christ. The 1689 Confession of Faith says that Christians will endure “many storms and floods [that] arise and beat against them, yet [these trials] shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon; notwithstanding, through unbelief and the temptations of Satan, the sensible sight of the light and love of God may for a time be clouded and obscured from them, yet He is still the same, and they shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation, where they shall enjoy their purchased possession, they being engraven upon the palm of His hands, and their names having been written in the book of life from all eternity.”

How beautiful this is… this is the grand story of our lives as saved saints. But church, we must endure through these trials!

As Colossians reminds us: Col 3:9 … seeing that you have ***put off the old self with its practices Col 3:10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.***

We are to strive to put off the old self with its practices. What are those practices? They are sin and any idea, thought or action that is opposed to God’s holiness.

Church, we should all aspire to echo the word of Paul in 2nd Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Even though we’re saved by grace through faith, we are still called to work. We are not working unto saving faith, we are working *from* saving faith. We are working for God and the advancement of His kingdom.

We are called to put away sin and put on righteousness. We are called to persevere until the day that the good Lord takes us home.

This is the heart of Christian accountability – that we would encourage others so that they may run well and that we would be encouraged that we may run well. That we would embrace the truth of iron sharpening iron.

Let us run together.

Let’s pray.