

*“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.” (Heb. 13:17 NIV)*

Do any of us really want to be a burden for the elders who shepherd us? If not, we *all* must be accountable to *ourselves* for our actions before God. The Christian who is accountable to God because he is accountable to *himself* will likely be a strong and dedicated Christian. We mentioned earlier that we have learned over the years that one of the most important elements to teach a new Christian is *personal* accountability to God rather than accountability to whomever might have been his or her mentor in the faith. The Christian who develops a strong personal accountability is not easily corrupted or led astray since his own accountability will lead to study and prayer and a close personal relationship with God rather than allowing his faith to hinge on a close personal relationship with those who may move away or let him down in some way.

Jesus taught that every person will be held accountable for *himself*.

*“...For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’ So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.” (Romans 14:11-12 NIV)*

There’s nothing in the Scriptures that implies excuses such as “no one called me when I didn’t attend worship on Sunday, so I quit going” — or — “If that guy’s a Christian, I don’t want anything to do with the church” — or — “the man who baptized me into the faith died and so I just drifted away after that” — or — any other statement that implies accountability for *me* was the responsibility of anyone *other* than me!

So in these last three articles, we’ve seen that there has to be an acknowledgment of one’s lost condition before there can be any desire to accept the Biblical treatment *for* that condition. But even when the acknowledgment and treatment is accepted, accountability must follow if it is to carry one through for a lifetime. We stated in a previous issue that a member of AA could not go to one meeting and complete one step and expect the treatment to result in full recovery. It’s the same with Christians — without any *personal* accountability, the treatment — although it may be successful for a while — may *not* be successful for a lifetime. Someone once asked Daniel Webster; “Mr. Webster, what do you consider the most serious thought that has ever entered your mind?” “The most solemn thought that has ever entered my mind is my accountability to my maker,” he replied.

*“...it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, (Hebrews 9:27 NASB)*

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# DILIGENCE

*“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11*

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## Accountability

In the last two issues of *Diligence* we noted that — whether speaking of one who is lost in sin or one who is controlled by an addiction — the first step that must be taken to overcome either of those problems is the *acknowledgment* that help is needed from a source beyond ones self. It is only after such an acknowledgment is made that steps toward resolving — or treating — the problem can begin.

Acknowledging that help is needed from a source outside of one’s self however, doesn’t apply *only* to addictions and the consequences of sin. Countless numbers of us *acknowledge* our inability to control certain behaviors in our lives, yet our acknowledgement alone is not enough to move us away from the particular destructive lifestyle in which we find ourselves involved. An example of this might be our inability to loose unwanted pounds. Some of us have perhaps acknowledged such a need and have even sought methods from sources beyond ourselves to “treat” the problem. One of the ways we might have done that was to join with others who experience the same problem in an effort to have support and learn effective ways to address it. A couple of organizations that exist specifically for such purposes are Weight Watchers and Jenny Craig. Weight control groups are of course not the only support groups that exist for specific purposes. There are depression support groups, bipolar support groups, eating disorder groups, and on and on. There’s a support group for just about any problem or disorder one can think of. Joining one of these groups can be a good start toward addressing a problem or addiction. But — it is just that — a good *start*. So far so good, but it is at this point that things get tough. After initially joining some such group, it then becomes necessary to discipline one’s self enough to follow through with the elements involved in the treatment or the recommendations of the group. So simply acknowledging the problem and then seeking a treatment for the problem is just the beginning of solving it. This is also — if not especially — true of one who is attempting to overcome the consequences of sin by seeking the Biblical “treatment” to gain eternal salvation. Actually *solving* the problem — whether it be an addiction, an unacceptable behavior, or the need for a Savior — requires *accountability* — and that is the focus for this issue.

Since we already mentioned it anyway, let’s continue with the example that might effect some of us who are reading this. We — along with many Americans, struggle to keep our weight in check. Regardless of our *acknowledgment* of the

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need to maintain a certain weight as well as all of the treatments and programs that are available to assist us in doing so, *olving* the problem will not happen until *we* become accountable enough to *ourselves* to *follow through* and *act* on whatever elements are required to *solve* the problem. The temptation to *not* be accountable however, has obviously dominated the situation since we are both still overweight.

So what is the magic element — if there is one — that might motivate those of us who are overweight to become accountable? There could be several possibilities that might include —

- The lack of our ability to participate in certain activities we once enjoyed
- Health issues that could begin to create a concern
- Pressure from family or society in general
- Dissatisfaction with self
- Development of health issues that would leave us no choice

Relating this now to mankind's spiritual need — the central focus of Scripture is that all of mankind is in need of a Savior.

*“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23 NIV)*

Everyone needs reconciliation with God. Obviously though, not everyone will acknowledge that fact. And even if they would, doing nothing more than *acknowledging* that need would accomplish *nothing* without *acting* on that acknowledgment and becoming motivated to accept the treatment for the condition. Acknowledging that we are lost does no more toward reconciling us to God than does acknowledging that we are overweight, make us thinner. There *has* to be a motivation to *act* — and acting on the acknowledgment requires *accountability*.

Lets go back to our original discussion concerning an individual who is addicted to alcohol. We stated that part of the AA program consists of having a sponsor as well as attending meetings on a regular basis. It is a fact that the sponsor can *not force* another individual — against his will — to attend even one AA meeting, much less the hundreds that must follow, probably for the rest of his life. Neither can the sponsor *force* the alcoholic to phone him when there is the temptation to slip back into the addiction. The alcoholic must be accountable enough to *himself* to continue meeting with the support group and to call the sponsor when temptation is threatening to take control of him again. It's true that the sponsor can pressure the alcoholic to attend meeting and insist that he be called before the alcoholic takes a drink — but the sponsor can't *make* that happen. The alcoholic *has* to first be accountable to *himself* — *before* he can be accountable to his sponsor. If the alcoholic is not accountable to himself enough to *call* the sponsor the sponsor will be of no benefit to him. The outside help *can not* help him unless he is motivated to discipline *himself* enough to follow through with the elements involved in the treatment. And that requires *personal* accountability.

Let's look at this from the view of a real life application — one that was recently in many of the tabloids. In December of 2004, the actress Kirsti Alley (of *Cheers*

fame) became a spokesperson for the Jenny Craig weight loss program. In less than a year she had lost 50 pounds and by June of 2006 had lost a total of 75 pounds. In December of 2007, her contract with the Jenny Craig organization expired so she was no longer a spokesperson for them. This past April 30<sup>th</sup>, she appeared on the *CBS Early Show* and announced that she had “let everybody down” because she has gained back 85 pounds. Why did that happen? Perhaps Ms. Alley's accountability during those three years she was on the program was *only* to the publicity generated by the Jenny Craig program rather than to herself. As soon as the pressure from the outside force was gone, there was no longer any reason to remain on the diet — she had apparently been accountable *only* to the outside force. As soon as that force was gone, the accountability was gone.

What do we learn then by taking notice of this? That there is an important key element concerning accountability that has to be recognized. If accountability is to — and *only* to — a force outside of one's self, when the force is removed, accountability may very well leave with it. Accountability *must* come from within ourselves if we want it to carry us through for a lifetime.

Relating this again to the spiritual side of this discussion — when a lost soul has *acknowledged* his sins and has accepted the *treatment* — i.e. being buried with Christ in the watery grave of baptism for remission of sins — that's not the end of the work to be done. That's the beginning. Without accountability to *himself* to live in a manner pleasing to God, the “treatment” is likely to eventually fail.

In our many years of working with numerous individuals who reached the point of acknowledging and then accepting treatment for their lost condition, we have learned that one of the most important elements to be taught to a new Christian is *personal accountability* — *not* accountability to whomever was his mentor in leading him to Christ, but his *own* personal accountability to God.

We aren't saying that a Christian is never accountable to others for his actions. That is *not* the case (see 1 John 3:17; Gal. 6:2; Titus 1:9; 1 Tim. 1:3-4 and 4:16; II Tim. 4:2; Matt. 18:15-16; etc.) nor the focus of this article. What we are saying is that when a Christian is accountable to God because of accountability to *himself* — rather than pressure from others, he is far more likely to be the kind of Christian that God expects him to be. A Christian who is accountable to God *because* he is accountable to *himself* will not likely be a burden for the elders of the congregation in which he is a member. A Christian who is accountable *only* to a source outside of himself will be in need of *constant* care and encouragement from everyone around him in order to keep him on the narrow road to salvation (Matt. 7:14). Remember — as soon as the outside force is gone, the accountability may also leave with it. So a Christian who is accountable only to the elders (or other Christian mentors) may very likely turn out to be a Christian who needs *constant and continual* shepherding. The Scriptures tell us —