



Media Use

Dealing with Online Temptations and Thoughts on Accountability

The NRC Synodical Modern Media Committee

Biblical accountability

There is a need for man to ever be aware of his accountability to a higher power. One should always be mindful of this as Joseph expressed in Genesis 39:9, “How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” Our first accountability is to God. Ultimately, the best accountability filter is to have a Spirit-wrought faith in exercise. Even David as king fell into sin when his faith was not in exercise. To this end, God was pleased to provide us with a Book of His revealed will. To promote a continuous awareness of this, Joshua was divinely exhorted to “meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein” (Joshua 1:8). We also read in Psalm 1:2 of the blessedness of the man whose “delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law doth he meditate day and night.” This reference to “the law” includes the entire Bible. For example, Jesus said unto the Jews in John 10:34, “Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?” This is written in Psalm 82:6, not in the books of Moses regarding the law.

There is a biblical structure of human accountability. For example, children are accountable to their parents and teachers, employees are accountable to their employers for the work they are hired to do, and citizens are accountable to civil authorities. We are also accountable to our families, friends, and communities because our sin also affects them. It especially affects our spouse when we sin in being unfaithful to them through the viewing of pornography. Regarding one’s personal life, an awareness of accountability must be maintained—thus the exhortations of Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2 referenced earlier. One should live in a manner that avoids the appearance of evil and minimizes temptation. “Abstain from all appearances of evil,” (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Each adult should decide for himself if accountability to another person would be helpful; those with a particular weakness should seriously consider some type of interpersonal accountability. Also, parents may want to use accountability to give oversight and guidance to their children.

We should promote continual reading of God’s Word, seeking the “one thing needful,” seeking always to be kept by the Lord from sin and uncleanness, and being mindful of “what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11b). As we can see from the above scriptural references, man must be reminded of these things. We must also be reminded of the evil of modern temptations. It is possible that a person might not see the evil and addicting nature of various sinful activities because these things have become commonplace and generally tolerated or accepted in society. Therefore, periodic

warnings from the pulpit and those given in church publications are desirable and necessary.

Practical thoughts relating to online accountability

It is possible to use technology as a means for online accountability. There are many mobile device apps and accountability programs that can be used to provide reports to an accountability partner. Here are some thoughts to consider:

- What are accountability programs? Accountability programs monitor online activity and provide reports of this activity to a chosen accountability partner or partners.
- Why use accountability programs? Accountability programs, by themselves, will not prevent access to, or protect a person from accessing inappropriate content online. Their purpose is to help provide additional motivation to resist sinful inclinations in the moment of temptation. Social scientists have found a phenomenon called “online disinhibition effect.” This term refers to people saying and doing things online that they would not say or do in real life. In the past it was much more difficult to purchase sinful magazines or pictures, and it typically could only be done in a public place. Accountability programs similarly force the online equivalent of these sinful actions out into the open. God’s common grace can still give us a speaking conscience and a sense of shame should these sins become known to one’s accountability partner.
- Like all Internet filters and accountability programs, a person intent on bypassing or disabling them can do so with some effort. The intent is to make this process difficult and cause a person to think twice about his decision to circumvent Internet filtering-accountability tools.
- Accountability is a personal choice. The person and his partner must be both willing and committed to the process. It may be useful for some but not feasible for others. It is only one means or tool among others that can be used to help us in fighting against sin.
- In general, using accountability is not a long-term solution for guarding against access to inappropriate Internet content. It is probably not realistic to have an accountability partner review your activity for five or ten years in succession. “Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbor’s house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee” (Proverbs 25:17).

- An accountability partner needs to:
 - Be willing to spend the time each week to actually look at accountability reports.
 - Have a strong enough relationship with you that he/she is willing to confront you on questionable content.
 - Be someone who can not only confront you when necessary but also encourage you.
 - Be willing to have face-to-face conversations periodically.
 - Have a clear understanding of what is expected of him/her (i.e. what content category/categories or issue(s) should be discussed with you).
 - Be someone with whom you are comfortable having view your online activities.
- If you should fall into temptation and your accountability partner fails to confront you, do not use your accountability partner as a scapegoat and blame him. You are the one responsible for your actions.
- Make sure you understand why you are motivated to use accountability; explain your reasons to your accountability partner.
- Explain to your accountability partner how best to contact and challenge you, should that become necessary (e.g. a phone call, an email message, a conversation in person, etc.).
- Do not expect or require your spouse to be an accountability partner; give him/her the choice. Having a spouse as an accountability partner may give a sense of openness and honesty in a marriage. Sometimes it is just too

difficult for a spouse to review a weekly accountability report as it may cause a great amount of anxiety thinking about every temptation that his or her spouse might have faced that week. For many couples this can become an unhealthy strain on their marriage as a spouse may not want to be the sole person one's marriage partner depends on for help.

- If your spouse is acting as your accountability partner, it is recommended that you send your reports to at least one other person of your own gender.
- If you are interested in accountability reporting software, Covenant Eyes and Qustodio are software applications that have been tested and are in use by members of the modern media committees formed in several of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations. These packages handle filtering as well as accountability and work well.

Conclusion

There are different means we can use to fight against temptations in the digital media environment that surrounds us today. Accountability, like many of the other tools used to restrict access to sinful Internet content, must be properly understood regarding its benefits and limitations. We must realize that implementing personal Internet accountability requires the blessing of the Lord to be effective and useful. As stated earlier, the best media filter is to truly feel our accountability to God and seek His grace so that we might be made obedient unto His will as it is revealed in the Scriptures. ◻