

The Silent Killers of Faith –Sample

Copyright 2003

Dr. Stephen R. Crosby

No portion of this excerpt may be copied, duplicated or distributed, by any means without permission.

Please contact us at stephcros9@aol.com

Once a dominant ethos is established in a church culture, it is often cultivated, consciously or not, by behavioral rules, expectations, and accountability programs. Rather than being considered legalism, the accountability ethos of the group is viewed as those reasonable behavioral expectations that maintain core values and identify individuals as members of the group. We don't _____ or we do _____ because . . . (You can fill in the blanks!) For instance, a group whose emphasis is Christian maturity or integrity can succumb to behavior codes and accountability believed necessary to maintain corporate and individual integrity. Likewise, a group whose emphasis is compassion will develop a church culture that rewards behaviors consistent with the core value and discourages those that seem opposed to it.

External accountability is like driving with the sheriff in the backseat of your car. As long as the sheriff is there, no one is going to speed! Remove the external presence of authority and a speeder is reborn! It is a mistake to think that persisting in accountability long enough will produce a change of nature. Rather, a change of nature will produce accountability.

Accountability only enables performance-based religion. It is the self-aware, self-monitoring Adamic counterfeit of biblical discipleship. It is like a zookeeper who expects the cage to change a tiger into a pussycat. The bars only *restrain* the tiger. Take away the bars and what do you have? Tiger, and lots of it! However, if the tiger's nature was somehow changed, the bars would no longer be necessary. This is exactly what *should* experientially happen for believers: Rebels are supposed to have been made into obedient children. A new nature is supposed to have been imparted at salvation.

Sometimes our conversion and sanctification experience have all the spiritual vitality of a freeze-dried TV dinner. Because we are weak, the Church often embraces accountability as a means of keeping the unregenerate Adamic nature in check! We try to sanctify people who have not experienced a genuine change of nature, or who are experientially out of touch with their new nature. This is particularly true for second and third generation children who have grown up in the church. Sure, our children may have said the sinner's prayer when they were six years old, but somewhere along the way, the experiential reality of regeneration is lost. Rather, they have figured out, embraced, and conformed to the church culture and its expectations.

The Silent Killers of Faith –Sample

Copyright 2003

Dr. Stephen R. Crosby

No portion of this excerpt may be copied, duplicated or distributed, by any means without permission.

Please contact us at stephcros9@aol.com

Our churches are full of frustrated tigers and exhausted zookeepers who resort to the whip of legalism and accountability (most of the time unconsciously) as the only thing they know to keep the tiger in check! Eventually the cage and whip will destroy the animal's essential nature. It will just lay in the back of the cage in a lethargic stupor. Its outward presence says animal, but its inward essence has been destroyed. Often the zookeeper no longer uses the whip to *restrain* wild behavior; now he has to use it to get *any* response from the animal.

Spiritual sons and daughters who become exhausted from fighting against the external restraints of legal accountability eventually just give up. Their essential nature is so crushed that they simply collapse into the church culture and its accountability system. "Fine, whatever it is that you want, I will give it to you. Just lay off the whip, will you?" Passivity and withdrawal set in.

In a spiritual climate where passivity has taken root, it is futile to try to get production from lethargic believers. You can bark motivational slogans like a Marine drill sergeant all day long with little result. The unenlightened drill sergeants will not understand why their accountability partners or protégés lay motionless in the back of their spiritual cages, or merely yawn at the proposition of actually moving forward. *They do not realize that the essential nature has been destroyed!* The whip of accountability and the mantras of the high calling cannot awaken an exhausted son or daughter—only a healed identity can.

All restraints, codes, and principles of accountability are impotent to change the nature of the one in the cage. In fact, the tiger will resent the cage because it conflicts with his essentially wild nature. He may obediently pace the perimeter of the cage, staying within its boundaries, but he is really checking for weakness because the artificial environment does not suit his wild and free nature. Likewise, the bars of accountability on a Spirit-son of the New Covenant will ultimately lead either to resentment toward the bars and the one who put them there, or to disengaged passivity. ***Obedience gained on the altar of conformity to church culture is a legal abomination.***

Now, of course, a caged tiger is better than a loose one prowling the neighborhood! Likewise, accountability is better than unbridled sin, but the manifestation of the life of the Son is *much* better than policed accountability. Being accountable does indeed restrain the carnal nature, but it takes constant diligence and effort to see that the cage is properly maintained. Any detected weakness must immediately be reinforced by more bars, more rules. A patrolling zookeeper is required to inspect the condition of the cage and the behavior of the animal.

To some people, the "zookeeper and tiger-in-the-cage scenario" is biblical accountability, but I call it bondage. I am through with the zoo. I returned my zookeeper's union card.