

Greetings church,

We're on chapter 3, "Harm in the Public Square; or, Accountable to Whom?"

Let's start here; what's the why? After all the public call outs and the advent of so-called "cancel culture" many of you might be wondering why we even have to try to address public harm in a public way. Especially after all of the divisiveness that has been caused by it. Here's why; public accountability is for the *care* of the victim(s). In Hebrew tradition the Mishneh Torah claims that this accountability "is for *the victim's emotional and mental well-being*".<sup>1</sup> Here's what Maimonides says; "the one sinned against should not remain in silent hate against the sinner".<sup>2</sup> When we internalize things, when we keep things bottled up inside, that doesn't make for peace or shalom. It slowly but surely builds resentment leading to feelings of anger and hate which then leads to far more grievous consequences when people act upon those same feelings. So if someone makes an anti-Semitic comment or action on live TV or in a social media post, or a racist statement or social media post, or a misogynist comment on a hot mic or social media post, or a an anti-queer statement or social media post, then that must be addressed in the same public setting for the benefit of those harmed. "If someone harms you, you must tell them, so that you don't nurse the grudge or feel consumed by resentment. It is, in fact, a significant statement of care for the person who has been harmed - the focus is not on the perpetrator's spiritual development, but on the victim's emotional health."<sup>3</sup>

This does NOT mean that every grievance should be addressed in the public square however. Grievances perpetrated in the public square should be handled in the public square as discussed in the previous paragraph. But if someone mistakenly, or intentionally, harms you in a non-public way it is not appropriate to "put them on blast" in the public square. In these instances public shaming is of no value as it builds resentment leading to feelings of anger and hate in the opposite direction of before. The perpetrator towards the aggrieved! And that is certainly not the point of accountability; not further separation and isolation. Again, that is the opposite of peace, of shalom. So, in every instance we can, we seek redress in a private way.

There are further important distinctions to be drawn between public and private harm and the why behind public harm being addressed publicly. "Our responses to public acts of harm are statements about what kind of *society we want to live in* (emphasis added). When we call to the work of repentance those harm-doers whose actions have broad cultural impact, we are acting as allies to those who have been harmed."<sup>4</sup> Damage done in the public has far wider impact and far broader repercussions; thus the redress must rise to the same degree. Harm done in the public square, if not held accountable, endorses that harm and further perpetuates it! Thus, if we do not want to live in a hate-filled society, then we must call out hateful comments and actions when they are perpetrated. Why? Rutenberg quotes Gwen Snyder:

"In public relationships, justice calls on us to model the world we wish to live in, and demand the same of others. That means demanding that the person who committed the sin and [who then] self-isolated participate in accountability and perform the

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<sup>1</sup> Rutenberg, Danya. On Repentance and Repair: Making Amends in an Unapologetic World. Beacon Press, Boston, MA; 2022. p.80.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

bulk of the labor of repair . . . Sin is something we can forgive in private relationship. In public relationship, we can only justly address sin by using accountability practices to heal and repair what was broken as best we can.”<sup>5</sup>

We have to hold people’s feet to the fire in the interest of creating the kind of just society we want to see; the just society that God envisions for us and that Jesus lives out for us. We are not invited to wait patiently for the arrival of God’s kingdom, we are told to always be ready, to be prepared, for its sudden arrival. What better way to be prepared than to be doing the work of creating the kingdom of God here on earth while we wait for its sudden appearance?

In Christ’s Service,  
Pastor Eddie

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<sup>5</sup> Ruttenberg, Danya. On Repentance and Repair: Making Amends in an Unapologetic World. Beacon Press, Boston, MA; 2022. p. 87.