



~ James 1:13-17

Blaming God

Pointing out the sins of others has been a favorite sport among the faithful. It is no great trick to get a group of saints together to fix blame for the ever present ills of society on the other guy or girl, as the case may be. So, when the religious Jews were about to "scape-goat" the ills of society (including their own) on the woman "taken in the very act of adultery," Jesus said, "He that is without sin, cast the first stone." The sins of others appear immense to us; yet, how difficult it is for us to see our own sins.

If we insist on blaming, we do have the right to blame ourselves. We do have the power to ask forgiveness for our own sins. The Lord's prayer asks us to do two things regarding sin: The first is to ask forgiveness for our own sins; the second is to be forgiving toward those who sin against us.

However, it doesn't stop there. People are often not satisfied with blaming others; they will commonly take the next step --they will blame God if nothing else explains the conundrum.

So, we are given this important passage in James 1:13,14; "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." These verses take up an important theological question, *the origin of sin in the human race*; where does it come from?

As a preemptive move, James is quick to say, that no one is ever to blame God when he is tempted to do wrong. There have been religious leaders who reasoned that since God permitted man to be in such a circumstance where he would be exposed to the temptation to do wrong, God was in some way responsible for the sin to which those circumstances led. James cautions about such careless speculation. Yet, blaming God is the way we often take care of explaining wrongs. Psalm 88, is only one of many examples of such thought in the scriptures, "You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a thing of horror to them" (Psalm 88:6-8).

We say, "If God had only answered my prayers, all of this evil would not have happened."

We are quick to blame conditions for our wrongdoing. And doesn't a sovereign God have control over conditions? Does he not manage the environment and the heredity that so profoundly affect me? Isn't this what providence is all about? Or is providence a limited sort of thing? Isn't God the cause of all things?

Going all the way back to the first chapters of the Bible, this was the reasoning of our first parents. The woman said, it was the snake here in the environment that tricked me to eat --"If I'd had a perfect environment, this would never have happened." The man said, "The woman who *you gave to be with me*, she gave it to me and I ate." --"If I'd had a perfect environment, this would never have happened." To listen to some people talk, you

would think that all the problems in the world are caused by snakes, and women. Any of you who have ever tried to raise more than one child at a time, know that children do not need to be taught that particular line of thinking. With children it is always the fault of their siblings.

So, people say to God, it must be some weakness that you built into us that is the problem. However, the chance to choose right or wrong is what makes us human --God did not make us as robots. To give up *choice* is to give up humanity. God is not running a puppet show down here. With humans, the characters can take off on their own. God made us that way so that we might have the chance to love. Love is love only because it is a choice. The power of love is that I *choose* you.

I enjoy watching Peter Faulkner in *Colombo*. One of the things I like is the way he is always talking about *Mrs. Colombo*. What he is really saying when he says Mrs. Colombo is, "Did you know that there is a woman who chose me?" Did you know that "There is a Mrs. Colombo." I'm sure that Mrs. Colombo feels the same way. The chance to choose, assumes that there is an entire range of possible choices. It is what makes us human in the first place. Love is nothing if it is not choice. To deprive man of choice, would be to deprive him of everything that is good; yet, it opens him to everything that is bad.

Paul reminded us "So, if you think you are standing, *watch out* that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). The best safeguard against falling is humility. "Pride does always come before a fall."

With humility as our ally we can withstand considerable testing.

If we look at God's hopes for man, then compare that with our world, we can see that man is not what the Creator intended him to be. We are a long way from what we were when we came from the hands of the Creator. Are we to assume then, that man is made of defective material? No! "God created man in his own image ...and God saw everything that he made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:27,31).

Adam could not blame God for a defect in himself, nor could he blame the environment. "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does he tempt anyone" (James 1:13). The poor man cannot blame his dishonesty on poverty. The drunkard cannot blame his drunkenness on the fact that there are grapes or that Christ made the water into wine. Men cannot blame their failures on women. Women cannot blame their failures on snakes. Children cannot blame their failures on parents. Let us never excuse our wrongdoing by blaming the providence of God. We must own our own acts --we must take responsibility for our own doings.

By way of contrast, there is absolutely nothing in the divine nature that responds to evil. God is righteous, therefore he only "leads in paths of righteousness" (Psalm 23:3). Our Lord Jesus Christ proved he could not be tempted to do evil; and Satan calculated wrong when he figured that the *man* Jesus Christ could be tempted to sin. Not one of Satan's offers found a response in Christ. --There is the man who is the pattern for all men.

How, then, did sin enter the human race? James gives a reasonable, two-part answer. Temptation results from both internal and external factors. Sometimes the word translated temptation means temptation, and sometimes it means testing. However, temptation and testing are not the same. With temptation there is an accompanying impulse to yield; however, with testing there does not need to be.

So here are the two components: Temptation may come from *within* when one "is drawn away of his own lusts." The other side is that it may come from outside when he is "enticed." From within it is *lust*, from without it is *lure*. Here we have in the Bible that famous nature vs. nurture debate that continues in sociology and psychology.

Obviously, it turns out to be both as we might have expected. There is trouble on the *inside* and there is trouble on the *outside*. If we could generalize, and we must. In the O.T., with its law, there is an attempt at controlling human conduct by setting up boundaries with surveillance and punishment --there is an attempt to control the environment, so that the inward part of man cannot or may not respond to *lure* in the environment. Both parents and government know the limits of this strategy.

However, in the N.T., the strategy is very different. The vast content of the N.T. is directed at changing the *inward*, so that there is little or nothing with which to respond to the *outward*. The N.T. is directed at "becoming a new creature in Christ." Jesus said, "In the world, you will have tests, but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world." The contrast is: in the one, you have people who are controlled; in the other, you have people who are different.

Generally, it has been the mission of the church to make people different, and the role of government and parents to control people. If we fail inside, no amount of social, environmental control will stop people from sin if that's what they want to do. Of course the ultimate environmental control is force and the ultimate force is death. When we get to that point we have probably already failed. The point is this: Christ goes after the heart. What power has sin if you don't like it?

Not all persons have the same evil desires. A thing which may attract one person may be repulsive to another. We are often critical of others who have desires which are repulsive to us, forgetting that we have desires which may be repulsive to them. One may be sensuous and like sex, another may be greedy and like money. Either may cross the line in fulfilling his or her desire.

When we come to the N.T., especially, we are not only responsible for our outward actions; we are also responsible for our inward thoughts. We are not just Christians outwardly; we are, first of all, Christians inwardly. So, Jesus said, "Whoever looks on a woman to lust after her commits adultery in his heart." "Whoever hates his brother has committed murder." We are not to just keep the outside whitewashed, as Jesus said, but to keep the inside pure, and honest, and gentle, and kind, full of good will and good intentions.

A fifth column operates from within, while the enemy solicits from without. That is why our Lord said, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). What is human sin but the abuse of human appetites, of human passions, of human faculties, in themselves all innocent?

Paul Hovey wrote, "Sin has four characteristics: self-sufficiency instead of faith, self-will instead of submission to God, self-seeking instead of benevolence, self-righteousness instead of humility." Sin starts inside; Paul wrote, "But those who *want to be rich* fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich (to get it) some have wandered away from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains" (1 Timothy 6:9).

If we do not have the desire within, then it is not likely that slick talk, shaky propositions, easy money, will have much affect on us.

Look at Jesus, "He was tested in all points, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus was solicited to sin. The tempter may break through the defenses of a fallen sinner, but he could not break the defenses of our perfect Savior. The *lure* from without will do no good if there is no *lust* within. If your idea for combating overeating is to get rid of grocery stores --good luck. At one time in this country we tried to get rid of our alcohol problems by getting rid of the liquor store. Not only did we fail to get rid of our alcohol problems, but we also generated an accompanying crime syndicate that included many of our neighbors. One of the deacons in my Washington State church used his fishing boat to run alcohol in prohibition --it paid good money. Many people just made their own booze. If we "hunger and thirst after righteousness," there is a good bet that is what we will find, no matter what else is out there --and it is out there ready to be abused.

It is the sinner, therefore, who needs help, and this is right where he can get it. We need to be like Christ. "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things are passed away, all things *are becoming new*." If the heart must be stronger, then we need these new hearts that God gives.

Yet, we do sin; and when we do, we don't look to him for sympathy, we look to him for forgiveness.

Sin is a serious problem in our world; it brings ruin, hurt, harm, and sorrow. It bring death, "and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death" (James 1:15). Death follows sin as a natural law. We have seen that law in operation on every part of the earth, and in every age. "Where do wars come from? Do they not come from the lust in your heart?" Yet, some have the idea that they can cast restraint to the wind, do as they please, and expect everything to turn our well. To them James says, "Do not err, my beloved brethren" (James 1:16).

We cannot get rid of the bad in the world. God's offer is to get rid of the bad in our hearts. God is not to be blamed for the bad in the world; rather, he is to receive credit for the good. "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (James 1:17,18). There is a second creation; it is the church.

You want good in your life? You want to accomplish good? Then go after the source of all good. Change the heart. Go after Christ, the "Word of Truth" who gave us birth in the first place. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Jesus has what we need. We can't change the whole world into a nice place, but Jesus can change our hearts into nice places. The *lure* has no power when the *lust* is defused. God isn't going to take this world to heaven, he's going to take us to heaven. Whatever else the church may take an interest in, it had better make sure its first priority is the human heart. That is the beginning of everything. If you're seeking the cure, then the heart is the source of the disease. Martin Luther said, "The recognition of sin is the beginning of salvation."

The perfect gift we all need comes from above. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." To whatever extent sin is pushed back in this world has always been the result of good seeds planted in hearts, so that evil is overcome by hearts full of good --hearts full of God. God is not the blame for sin; God is the cure for sin.