

It's Not My Fault!

Isaiah 53:4-6, I John 1:5-10, II Corinthians 5:14-21

The old preacher picked up his Bible and began reading the words of Genesis 3:8-13—the passage describing what happened right after Adam and Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: *And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked." And the Lord God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I told you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman...gave me the fruit, and I ate it." Then God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman answered, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate it."* Then the preacher closed his Bible, paused a moment, and then began his sermon: "I think I see a pattern here," he said. "The man blamed the woman. The woman blamed the snake. *And the snake didn't have a leg to stand on...!*"

From the dawn of creation right up until now, we've been trying to pass the buck, haven't we? Modern Americans have become experts at shifting the blame. We're experts at figuring out how to prove that someone else is responsible for whatever has gone wrong with our lives. The most coveted qualification in America today is the status of *victim*. If I'm ignorant or addicted or poor or unsuccessful, I can probably come up with some way to convince myself that it's all because of what somebody else did, and I'm just an innocent bystander.

We're all looking for a scapegoat, aren't we? And if we can't think of anybody else to blame, we'll just blame God. Maybe you've noticed how often, when something good happens, we'll think, *"I really was lucky that time!"*—or maybe we'll pat ourselves on the back and say, *"I guess I must be doing something right!"* [*The Sound of Music!* *"I must have done something good!"*] But then, when something bad happens, we usually ask, *"Why did God do this to me?"* Or at the very least, we'll ask, *"Why did God let this happen to me?"* If we've been influenced by modern psychology, we might say, *"It's all because my mother didn't love me. It's all because I didn't have a normal, happy childhood."* On the other hand, if we've been exposed to a certain kind of religion, we might even say, *"The Devil made me do it."*

We really do know how to play the blame game, don't we? Sometimes I think we should change our national motto from *"In God We Trust"* to *"It's Not My Fault."* No matter how big a mess we've made of things, if anybody says something that sounds at all judgmental about something that we've done, we know how to silence our critics: *"Don't try to lay a guilt trip on me!"* we tell them, *"It's not my fault!"*

Sometimes advertisers in the mass media reinforce our sense of injured innocence, because they have learned that helping us to shift the blame to someone else is a good way to make us feel good about ourselves—which, in turn, is a good way to get us to buy whatever it is that they're selling. Just last week I saw two commercials on TV—one for a company that promises to help people who have tax problems and are being hounded by the IRS, and another for people who want to *"get rid of that ugly cellulite"*—and both of those commercials included the punch line, *"And it's not your fault."*

But all our frantic attempts to shift the blame to someone else only help to ensure that things aren't going to change. The first step in making things better, after all, is to recognize that you've got a problem. If you're sick, the worst mistake you can make is to talk yourself into believing that you're in perfectly good health and that the only one with a problem is, well... *somebody else*. But the truth is that if I want to know who's at fault for what is wrong in my life, the first thing I need to do is to look in the mirror.

As Pogo said, *We have met the enemy, and he is us...*

If we'll just open our eyes—and dare to be honest with ourselves—we can't help suspecting that Pogo is right. The problem is not just with the other guy. Who's messed up here? Who has made such a heartache, such a tragedy, of my life? It's not just him, or her, or them... It's me. That's the truth—and somewhere deep inside, we know it... But we have mastered the fine art of evading responsibility for what has gone wrong in our lives...because if we can just shift the blame to the other guy, well, then, maybe we won't have to take a hard look—a painful look—at the truth about ourselves. So for thousands of generations, people have gone around reciting the creed of the blameless: *"It's not my fault."*

Then a funny thing happened. The Word was made flesh and came to dwell among us. Jesus came into this world of ours, and finally there was someone who could honestly say, *"It's not my fault."* But when the totally sinless one—the absolutely faultless one—heard you and me protesting that it was all somebody else's fault, he said to us, in effect, *"All right, then. But if it has to be someone's fault, let it be mine."* And that's when *"The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53.6).

In amazing love, he who was sinless took our sin upon himself. In amazing grace, he who was faultless took our fault upon himself. And he's here again tonight, speaking to your heart and mine, and here's what he is saying:

"If you don't want to take the blame, then give it to me.

"If it's not your fault, let it be mine.

"If you will simply trust me,

- *"I'll take your sin...and give you my holiness.*
- *"I'll take your guilt...and give you my innocence.*
- *"I'll take your shame...and give you my joy.*
- *"I'll take your fault...and give you my freedom.*
- *"I'll take your death...and give you my eternal life."*

That's his offer—that's his promise—to you right now. Jesus stands ready to take all the fault, all the blame, all the guilt that has scarred your life and left you living in fear.

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ—the Good News for you right now—comes down to this: His mercy, his forgiveness, his holiness, his blamelessness is all yours for the asking...and it's only a prayer away.