

Genesis 3, James 1
“It’s not our fault”

When we were in Italy the school at the orphanage where we worked had a chapel every day that I led, and it was one of my favorite parts of the day. We had about 200 elementary kids and they learned songs and Bible verses. When Rachel was less than 2 she used to wander in and out of their lines during chapel. She had free reign and all the kids knew her.

Once the assembly was over she would follow the 3 and 4 year olds into the pre-k for a few minutes while I touched bases with the secretary and then I would pick her up. One day after the assembly I was talking with the secretary and I heard her crying so I rushed to the classroom, because she’s a tough kid and she doesn’t cry easily.

Rachel was sitting on the floor crying and all the kids were gathered in a circle around her, I asked what happened and almost as if on cue each child pointed to someone else, denied they did anything wrong and blamed somebody else. A classic scene, but one that we could apply just as easily into the adult world as well.

Placing the blame, and denying responsibility is almost part of human nature today. We even find it reflected in Scripture time after time. From the very beginning in Scripture we have even godly people throwing the blame around. In our first reading we start with Adam who blames both God and that woman for making him eat the apple. We have Aaron who blames both Moses and God for abandoning him with the people so that he just had to build that golden calf. Saul blames God for being too slow to give him guidance and so launches into an ill-advised battle which he loses. Judas blames Jesus on his betrayal because Jesus was really wasting money when he allowed that woman to break that expensive jar of perfume on his feet.

In all of these situations each person blames God, at least they go to the top, for whatever predicament they find themselves in, or for whatever mess they have created and realize they can’t get themselves out of it. We are really good at blaming our failures on others, and on God, and not willing to take the responsibilities that we need to take.

What James tells us today is that at the root of sin is our own desire. This lent as we saw suffering as a test with through which we can grow, doubt as that which we should triumph over and not wallow in and then last week a stewardship sermon which allowed every aspect of our lives to be grounded in Christ, all of these themes dealing

with discipline in one way or another, today we bring to the light the cause of our temptation which leads to sin, and it is not our Savior, but rather our own desire.

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Let me read you a quote from a commentator on James that I read from 1957, the issues that society wrestled with back then were so very different from today, but this is what the author states: “Some people say – it is not my fault. If God made me this way, why should I be held responsible for acting according to my nature?” This was 1957 when questions of how people are wired genetically never even entered people’s mind. A case for determinism was being made by culture, which today has been embraced by the church and by many in our denomination.

The argument goes we don’t choose our parents, we don’t choose the color of our skin, we don’t choose our gender, and we don’t choose our sexuality, so it is God that has wired us a certain way and we celebrate that wiring in all aspects of how we were created. It is God’s fault how we are created, so we live in that light completely fulfilled when we embrace how God created us. This is the popular approach in culture and has become the driving force to creating an understanding in the mainstream church of today.

But historically that which the voices of culture whisper to us often touch upon deep seated desires that at times we didn’t even know we had. Eve and Adam in our first Scripture were tempted in a way that their desires to be more like God, desires they didn’t even know they had until Satan in the form of the serpent told them they had, could be fulfilled and at the time justified by an appeal to a new normal. I know what God told you, I know what he said, but it is not true. God doesn’t want you to be like him. It’s his fault you don’t have what you want.

Finally, when they are confronted by God they confess and say, God, you made things in such a way, we were wired at birth with this desire to be like, you made the woman, you made the serpent, it is your fault. It is still happening today, our ability to drown out God’s voice with arguments about wiring and nature.

At men’s breakfast we were able to find a distinction between being tested and being tempted. See if this works in your own life. Verse 12 begins with a beatitude for those who have withstood the testing and any who have endured temptation. Does God test us? Yes, Job tells us that he does, that the whole premise of Job, test him and you’ll

see that he will never turn his back on me. Abraham in our first Sunday of Lent tells us that he does. And we discovered that these testings refine us and lead us to a faith that we never would have known without having stood through that test.

But verse 13 tells us that when we are tempted we should never say we are tempted by God. So what's the difference between tested and tempted? When we are tested we have experiences before us that we would never wish on anyone. A test comes as a result of normally something bad or tragic that we face.

A temptation has what at its root? Vs. 14 and of course Adam and Eve, we are tempted by our own desires. Temptation has at its root a desire after which we crave or yearn, and not always are we aware of that desire. God is never the author of evil or sin, our desire is.

You know, like all things, desire is not bad in and of itself. We desire food and water and it keeps our bodies healthy. We desire to work hard and it provides us with a way in which to make a living. We desire sexual fulfillment and that's a good thing so we find a husband or a wife and that desire is able to be fulfilled in God's plan. But what Jesus tells us is things go wrong when that desire is pursued outside of God's plan, whatever it may be the, vs. 15 tells us, that desire when conceived, when it is put into action, gives birth to sin and that sin ultimately leads to death.

When we follow our natural inclinations to blame others then our sin manifests itself. The parent who refuses to take responsibility for their child and solely relies upon medical diagnosis and medication says it's not my fault, I can't control him or her, so I'm not going to try, let the medication and the doctors do that. The spouse who feels ignored and affection is at the minimum does not blame himself or herself for the affair, because if the other one had been more open and loving then this wouldn't have happened. The student who struggles in school doesn't like their teacher or the principal, their failing grades aren't their fault, it's the school. The embezzler or the slacker at work doesn't feel like they get paid enough so this makes up for what they don't pay me. The pastor who doesn't visit as often as he should says that they are working me to death anyway, it's not my fault, there are deacons anyway. We all have the ability to pass the blame for our responsibilities and yes, even our sins to others, and thereby avoiding any growth that we could have.

David Hume a secular philosopher said the following: “Either God is not all good or he is not all powerful, otherwise he would have rid the world of evil.” Not pursuing our desires outside of God’s framework is a challenge, we have all been born with a penchant for sin. We have all been wired at birth with the propensity for sin, we all have a sin gene in some ways. We can’t blame God for that and say since God made me this way then it must be okay.

It’s not easy being a follower of Jesus Christ. Our dispositions and our desires do not disappear once we become a disciple. Paul struggled with his sin and it drove him nuts that he couldn’t just will himself to act as Jesus acted. Listen to what he says in Romans 7:18 and following: “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.” I call this the Frank Sinatra verse. But Paul never says this is the way that I was born, God you made me this way, no he turns the blame and the responsibility, and the lack of discipline on himself.

We know what God wants for it is clearly laid out in Scripture but it must be wrong or interpreted differently because that’s not how I was born. We were all born with the desire to turn from God. So how do we turn to God in the midst of all this? How do we refrain from blaming God or others for our sin and our failings? If we got to Matthew 26:41 we find our Savior giving us a hint for how to start to overcome this. He speaks to his disciples who had failed and had fallen to temptation and he tells them: “Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial or temptation. The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Stay awake and pray. The author of James so wants us to be able to overcome temptation and receive that crown of life. He calls us his beloved, Jesus’ brother knows us fundamentally and know how easy it is to be deceived. The church is being deceived today by Satan who whispers to us, it isn’t sinful to desire to live in comfort while nations around you starve. It isn’t sinful to live out your calling as a gay Christian because God wired you that way. Do not be deceived, God calls us to not lay the blame but to live out our calling removed from those desires that would take us away from his Word. Amen.