

## Shifting the Blame

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**Exodus 5:16** There is no straw given unto thy servants, and they say to us, Make brick: and, behold, thy servants *are* beaten; but the fault *is* in thine own people.

To begin this message I want to clearly define what is meant by shifting the blame. We can find some great illustrations to help by looking at certain things in our own culture. For instance, how many of you have ever heard that famous old line that was popularized by Flip Wilson playing the character called Geraldine Jones. That line was, “The devil made me do it!” This sentence personifies shifting the blame. Then, when we look at our American lifestyle in general, we see acts of shifting the blame all around, like people blaming the real estate industry for them overspending and losing their homes to foreclosure. Or, like we see a lot in cases where people blame other motorists for their car accidents. We even see TV shows that are based on a plot where the whole show revolves around someone blaming another for something they did. All these social and cultural illustrations we live in and around are great examples of shifting the blame.

Essentially, what I mean by “shifting the blame” is when a person is responsible for something, but doesn’t want to be identified as the one responsible, so he/she points to something or someone else as being responsible. Usually, this is a case where something negative or unpleasant is the issue.

The text verse we are using gives us insight into a case where the Egyptian taskmasters demanded that the Israelites make more brick, even after they stopped providing them with straw to make them. What we see in this verse is the result of shifting the blame. The Egyptians are blaming the Jews for the reduction in brick production, and are beating the overseers, but the Egyptian taskmasters are actually to blame for the lack of brick production. But actually, when we look into this incident, we will understand that the fault actually lies with Pharaoh himself. However, what he has done was by design as a kind of punishment against the Jews because he resented the fact that they had asked to go into the wilderness and worship God. We sometimes see that small-minded rulers and small-minded public servants put into positions of leadership by the people are guilty of shifting the blame when they are the guilty party themselves. We here in the U.S. have first-hand experience with this.

The first thing I noticed when I began to try to develop this message was that scripture was very sparse in any accounts of someone who was definitely identified

as a believer engaging in shifting the blame. The one clear and classical account that I found involved Adam in the Garden of Eden. Now, I don't believe that every other believer living in the bible age escaped the temptation of shifting the blame. In fact, we may have an opportunity to look at some others in this message. So, you and I know that being human, there are no doubt some saved people who do this. In fact, if we are honest with ourselves, we may have to admit that we do this very thing some of the time. So, doesn't that raise a question in your mind about why there are so few examples of faithful believers in the bible where the Lord revealed that they shifted the blame for something they were guilty of? It does (raise a question in my mind) for me. But, I think I have the answer. I think there is such a lack like that in there because the Lord did not want to leave a record of believers shirking the business of assuming responsibility for their deeds. Which becomes a message from the Lord not to do it! This is what we want to look at today. Believers assuming responsibility for their own deeds and avoiding shifting the blame.

We will look at some bible examples of people shifting the blame and as we do, we will want to draw a spiritual lesson from what we read. May the Holy Spirit help us to get a personal lesson for ourselves so that we may grow by learning.

**I. Genesis 3:12** And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest *to be* with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

- ❖ As Adam shifts the blame here, notice that he is blaming his closest associate...his wife
- ❖ Without intending to, we all are tempted to shift blame for our own mis-steps to our spouse. It is a common, very human, (just like our federal head, Adam) thing to do. Why?"
- ❖ Because the closer people are to us, the easier it becomes to find fault with them
  - This is the same thing we see among siblings in a household.
    - How many times have your children or grandchildren blamed a brother or sister for something that you were pretty sure was their fault?
    - I have watched dogs and coyotes grouped together get into competition and snarling, nipping, etc. and finally two of them would get into a vicious fight. As soon as the fight was over, many times one or the other of the animals who had been fighting would attack the first other dog that came near them. This is a kind of shifting the blame (taking it out on someone else).
- ❖ Adam certainly did not feel comfortable about what he and Eve had just done, and Eve had, in fact, encouraged Adam to eat the fruit. But when we look at this event, we must realize that Adam was totally autonomous about what decision he would make about it. And he chose to eat the fruit of his own volition. Let Adam teach us a lesson about shifting the blame. That lesson?

We always have options and one of them is to take responsibility for our own actions even when somebody in our lives seems to be pushing us in the direction of choosing the wrong option.

- ❖ But when it came time to take the responsibility Adam shifted the blame. By this he set the precedent and the habit pattern for all mankind about shifting the blame. Let's learn something else from Adam: it is our most natural reaction in times of guilt to look for someone beside ourselves to blame for what we have done or are doing. But, remember, our actions are our own.
- ❖ We should be able to see that Adam probably shifted the blame because he was driven by shame
  - Failing God...or even failing people we love is a strong force that tempts us to this weakness
- ❖ Let's close this look at Adam shifting the blame by saying that his act gained nothing one way or another. It undoubtedly hurt his relationship with Eve.

II. **Genesis 4:9** And the LORD said unto Cain, Where *is* Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: *Am* I my brother's keeper?

- ❖ We could start this examination by saying that Cain began this shifting of the blame by telling a flat lie (I know not)
- ❖ But we want to look at his **shifting of the blame**. If you are thinking, you will see it in his next remark, "Am I my brother's keeper?"
- ❖ The first, and most preposterous thing we see about this shift is that it is a direct challenge to God. Cain is as much as saying, "blame somebody else for not taking care of Abel." It is preposterous because it is said to One who knows and sees everything.
- ❖ And he is challenging God with it; he is **challenging his responsibility** to God or anybody else. This is truly a perfect profile of shifting the blame and that motive Cain is being moved by is really and truly at the heart of every act like this by every human being. That is, **shifting of blame is actually an act of denying that we have any responsibility** in the matter at hand.
- ❖ This shift of blame does not name or point to a person to whom the blame is to be shifted. This represents the **human tendency to shrug off responsibility without actually naming someone who should be responsible**. Although we may not realize it, this may be a very common type of shifting the blame.
  - Illustrate: a bunch of kids playing in a room; parents or overseers are out of the room; one of the kids knocks a lamp off and breaks it; they continue playing. Later an adult comes in and says, "Who broke that lamp?" At least some of those kids will say, "I don't know" when they actually do know. What are they doing?
  - They are shifting the blame off themselves, but not implicating any of the other kids.

- “I didn’t do it” is a favorite phrase of people shifting the blame for something they did without pointing to anybody else.

❖ This brings us to our next biblical example of shifting the blame:

III. **Exodus 32:22** And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest **the people, that they are set on mischief.**

- Pointing to other people as the ones responsible – “I was forced by my peer group”
- This kind is what I call shifting the blame by generalizing. Regardless, the entire construct of this is to shift the blame without really pinpointing how the blame needs to be placed.
- This kind avoids targeting a given person, but pointing at people nevertheless – “It was those people down there at...” – somebody else was at fault for what Aaron did, according to his excuse
- This kind ascribes some base attitude or purpose by the people blamed as the motivating cause. (they are set on mischief) “You know how they are.”

❖ **Exodus 32:23** For they said unto me, **Make us gods**, which shall go before us: for *as for* this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

- This kind may employ a justification that seems to make sense – I had to because **they** needed for me to do it”

❖ **Exodus 32:24** And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break *it* off. **So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.**

- This kind **blames unknown, unknowable, and uncontrollable forces/results** of one’s otherwise normal actions.

IV. **1Samuel 13:9** And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.

**1Samuel 13:10** And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him.

**1Samuel 13:11** And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, **Because I saw that the people were scattered from me**, and *that* thou camest not within the days appointed, and *that* the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash;

**1Samuel 13:12** Therefore said I, **The Philistines will come down now upon me** to Gilgal, and **I have not made supplication unto the LORD**: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.

- ❖ This kind blames **deteriorating circumstances** (the people were scattered from me)

- ❖ Blames **other people for not keeping their end of the bargain** (thou camest not within the days appointed)
- ❖ Blames **overpowering forces** that were mounting against him (the Philistines gathered themselves together...The Philistines will come down now upon me)
- ❖ Blames **inability to get things done** that needed to be done (this shift still does not constitute taking on the responsibility personally)

V. Last point: don't confuse reproving, rebuking, exhorting with shifting the blame. When we learn to take responsibility for our own actions and learn and grow from that we will be able to identify when we are being tempted to shift the blame. You will notice in every one of the cases we looked at, the person shifting the blame was talking to someone who was calling them to account and they were pointing to a circumstance or another person or group of people on whom they were trying to shift the responsibility.

- ❖ Closing scriptural admonition about shouldering responsibility:
  - **Gal. 6:3-5** For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. 4 But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. 5 For every man shall bear his own burden.
  - **Luke 12:47-48** And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. 48 But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.
  - **Matt. 12:37** For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.
  - **Ezekiel 33:2-4** Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: 3 If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; 4 Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.