

BLAME SHIFTING IS NOT REPENTANCE!

“And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, where art thou? And he said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat? And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.” [Gen. 3:9-13]

There is the story of a man who invited guests to a banquet. He had prepared a heavy meal which his wife assured him would be more than enough for the expected group of five persons. Two of the guests arrived earlier than the rest. Since the others were getting late, the kind host asked the early comers to take their share and leave the rest for their colleagues. However, a few minutes later, his servants came to inform him that the first two guests had consumed the whole food. Surprised, the host turned to them for a plausible explanation. The first man said that he could not say because his colleague had consumed the whole food before he could even grab a seat. The second man, feigning surprise, complained that the bowl was already empty by the time his colleague passed it to him!

It is a common habit among people to find excuses for their failure. When there is a success story, we like to take all the credit. The student with an ‘A’ score in an exam will say, ‘I made an A.’ However, the one with a low score will say, ‘they gave me a D.’ That is why, as a popular saying puts it, success has a hundred fathers, failure is an orphan! So, when there is failure, we tend to shift the blame to others. For example, underprivileged people blame their circumstances on social injustice while the rich blame social unrest [which threatens their hold on to wealth] on the radicals. People of other faiths blame Christians for their inferiority complex while Christians blame Satan and his agents for their setbacks.

Why do most (if not all) of us specialize in blame shifting? Does it exonerate us from guilt? Is it the same thing as repentance? If we do it to human beings that we can see, how are we sure that that is not what we do to invisible God when we profess to be confessing our sins? After all, the Pharisee stood up in the temple and prayed to God thus, “I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican” [Lk 18:11]. Before we claim that we don’t do it, only others do, let us seek to understand the phenomenon better in today’s lesson.

1. Ways by which we shift blame to others

Blame shifting can be quite a subtle thing, and we may do it before we can even think about it. Here are some of the numerous ways that it can happen:

a) *'I didn't do it, others did'*

In this case, we deny completely our complicity and shift the blame to others. In the example that we cited above, both guests refused to accept responsibility for eating the food meant for five persons. Since the whole food had been consumed by only two of them, either one or both of them had lied! Another example, the average person charged to court for an offence against the state or somebody else *invariably* begins with pleading not guilty.

God commanded Saul to “go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass” [1 Sam. 15:3]. He went with his troops, defeated the Amalekites, but spared their king, Agag, “and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them” [v. 9]. When prophet Samuel asked him why he had disobeyed God’s instructions, hear his response:

Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and I have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed [vv. 20-21].

In other words, Saul is saying that he did not disobey. It is his troops that did! He shifted blame to others.

b) *'Even if I did it, others made me do it'*

Sometimes, it may be too obvious that we did it. Yet, we still have a way of shifting blame to extenuating circumstances.

When God caught Adam red-handed [thanks to his new awareness of and shame about his nakedness], he admitted his guilt as follows: “The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” The woman herself said, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” [Gen. 3:12-13]. Here, both of them pleaded guilty but shifted the blame for their offence to others.

c) *By diverting attention from the culprit*

Another method by which we shift blame is to ensure that the offence cannot directly be traced to us. For example, we can feign innocence by

creating a diversion to another source. People who take or give bribes hardly get directly involved. They use proxies!

Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. Then, they took his coat of many colours and dipped it in the blood of animals. On arrival home, they gave it to their father saying, "this have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no." Even worse, as the old man wept over the supposed death of his favourite son, "all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him" [Gen. 37: 27-35]!

We may also try to divert the attention from ourselves by hiring others to do our evil bidding. For example, the chief priests who were anxious to get at Jesus gladly accepted to pay Judas Iscariot 30 pieces of silver to show them where to get Him [Matt. 26:14-15]. Later, after Jesus had been arrested, Judas rushed back to those who had hired him "saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Their reply was very blunt: "What is that to us? See thou to that" [Matt. 27:4]. In other words, "don't link us with your offence!"

Another way that we divert attention from ourselves is to only see other people's faults and never ours. The Pharisee did not see his own hypocrisy. Instead, he always pointed to the shortcomings of the publicans (tax collectors) [Lk 18:10-11]. That is why Jesus has asked us to first remove the log from our eyes so that we can see the speck in other people's eyes [Matt. 7:5].

2. Why we shift blame

There may be several reasons, but the following should be noted:

a) *Fear*

We get scared about the possible punishment that could be meted to us for committing the offence. How could Joseph's brothers face their father with the truth that they had sold his favourite son into slavery? How could Adam face God after the stern warning that He had given him that "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" [Gen. 2:17]?

b) *To rope in accomplices*

Most of us do not want to go down alone. Instead, we would like to bring down with us all those who have contributed to our predicament. Adam had to rope in his wife, Eve. She in turn had to drag in Satan!

Saul implicated his troops for partially obeying God's command to destroy the Amalekites and all that they had. When Samuel then revealed to the king that God regarded his sin of disobedience as rebellion, Saul even

tightened his allegation against his troops thus: “I feared the people and obeyed their voice” [1 Sam. 15: 22-24]!

It was Aaron who made the molten calf in deference to the people’s clamour, and he led them to worship it. But, when Moses came back and chastised him for acquiescing to such a sinful act, he roped in his accomplices by pleading “let not the anger of my lord wax hot: *thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief*” [Ex. 32: 1-5; 21-23]!

c) *Plain mischief or wickedness*

In the movie, *Holy Man*, Eddie Murphy plays the role of a spiritually gifted cleric who uses his powers to help a young TV marketer that had shown him kindness. A young man in a rival TV station then hired a young woman (with her children) to allege on network television that the holy man was the father of her children. Of course, that was not true. The aim was to discredit the holy man and harm the marketing advantage of the rival TV station. Against all expectations, the holy man accepted responsibility also on network television. But, that pricked the conscience of the young woman who turned the camera’s attention to the young man in the audience that was behind the whole hoax!

Many innocent people have been sent to jail or executed on the false evidence of the real culprits. Emperor Nero burnt Rome and accused the Christians of doing it. On that basis, he went on to carry out one of the bitterest persecutions of Christians in history.

The men who wanted to stone to death the woman caught in adultery were not about to uphold God’s law but to merely perpetuate the mischief of male chauvinism. That is why when Jesus asked the innocent among them to cast the first stone, they all walked away in shame [Jn 8:1-9]!

3. The dangers of blame shifting

God severely punishes blame shifting, as the following cases illustrate:

a) *Adam and Eve*

Both of them accepted that they did eat the forbidden fruit. However, instead of regretting their action, they blamed others for it [Gen. 3:12-13]. For that, the following penalties were meted to them:

- ✓ *They became subject to physical [Gen. 3:19] and spiritual death [v.23-24]*
- ✓ *The woman was made subject to the man’s control [v. 16]*
- ✓ *The punishment was with hard labour: hard work for the man and painful child labour for the woman [vv. 16-19].*

God's mercy was also revealed. He promised the Messiah [v. 15], while providing for the immediate needs of Adam and his wife [v. 21]. I wonder what the Lord would have done for them if they had confessed their sins and repented that day.

b) *King Saul*

At the point that Saul told the prophet Samuel, "I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words," it was the plea of an accused who had been found guilty after a tedious trial. Therefore, asking Samuel "I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord" fell on deaf ears [1 Sam. 15:26].

In the sight of God, Saul's disobedience was *rebellion*, which "is as the sin of witchcraft", and *stubbornness* which "is as *iniquity* and *idolatry*" [v.23]. The Bible makes it clear that sorcerers and idolaters "shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" [Rev. 21:8]. As a result of his action,

- ✓ *Saul lost the throne which was passed on to David [1 Sam. 16:12-14].*
- ✓ *God laid down the principle that "obedience is better than sacrifice" [1 Sam. 15:22].*

Again, God's mercy was revealed here. Instead of extinguishing the kingship system in Israel, which He had opposed from the beginning [1 Sam. 8:1-9], God made it possible for it to last for ever when His Son, Jesus Christ, was made heir to the throne of David [2 Sam. 7: 13; Lk 1:32-33; Matt. 19:28].

We learn from both cases that blame shifting is no substitute for repentance and that God heavily punishes it. Therefore, we need to deal with.

4. Overcoming blame shifting

a) *Learn to share success with others*

This is a mark of humility and it can win us sympathy and support when we fail. When the 72 disciples sent out by Jesus returned, they rejoiced that demons were subject to their control, but Jesus assured them that that target was too low to celebrate! Rather, they should rejoice, "because your names are written in heaven" [Lk 10: 17-20]. When Daniel was promoted chief over all the wise men of Babylon, he also requested the king to promote his prayer partners, Shadrach, Meshac and Abednego, as provincial rulers [Dan. 2: 46-49].

b) *Accept full responsibility and confess your wrong*

God already knows that we are too weak to fight with Satan. That is why He sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross for us and give us total victory. Therefore, when we try to shift blame, we only make God angry with us. David accepted full responsibility over Bathsheba and her husband and asked for God's forgiveness [2 Sam. 12:13; Ps. 51]. When Jonah discovered that running away from God was futile, he told the owners of the ship that was being tossed to destruction by a tempest, "take me up and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you; *for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you*" [Jon. 1:12].

c) *Put yourself at God's mercy always*

Only God can forgive and forget totally. Human beings can also do so *but not always*. Therefore, it is better to fall into God's hands. For conducting a census of the people of Israel against God's will, God sent prophet Gad to ask David to choose one from three punishments: seven years of famine, three months of enemy attacks or three months of pestilence. In making his choice, David said, "let us fall into the hands of the Lord; *for His mercies are great*; and let me not fall into the hand of man" [2 Sam. 24: 10-14]. At the point of death, the Good Thief threw himself at the mercy of Jesus, and he was saved at the nick of time [Lk 23:39-43]!

5. Conclusion

On the question of offence, Jesus taught His disciples, "it is impossible but that offences will come; *but woe unto him, through whom they come!*" [Lk 17:1-2]. Blame shifting is one such source of offences. It is a habit that we have learnt in order to cope with the vagaries of a world system dominated by Satan and his wicked forces. Now that we are born-again, we should unlearn the habit by acquiring the mind of Christ [1 Cor. 2:16]. This week's lesson should help us in that direction.