

Do you know what “The Blame Game” is? You should, we’ve all played it plenty of times. It’s a game of deflection. It involves blaming others for the problems in our lives.

We love “The Blame Game.” In fact, it might be one of the oldest games people play. When God confronted Adam in the Garden of Eden and asked him if he had eaten from the tree he wasn’t supposed to eat from, what was this brave husband's response? Without hesitation, he blamed his God and his lovely wife: *“The woman you put here with me, she gave me some fruit and I ate it.”* Eve, the quick study she was, immediately blamed the snake, *“The serpent deceived me and I ate it.”*

Following Adam and Eve’s lead, the people of Israel also played “The Blame Game” in our OT lesson. They, along with Ezekiel, God’s prophet, were living in Babylon, in captivity. They claimed they hadn’t done anything to deserve this. It was all their parents’ fault.

As we look into today’s lesson, God has this perspective on their complaint: *1) You can blame others for the consequences of your sins, but I will hold every one of you accountable for your choices.* And yet, in love, *2) He offers a solution in his gracious promises.* In case you’re wondering ... no, God does not play “The Blame Game.”

(1)

Does anyone really want to admit that they’re responsible, that they’re at fault ... for their financial problems? ... for the bumpy ride their marriage is taking? ... for the issues their having with their kids? ... for the medical challenges they’re facing? We don't. That’s why we play “The Blame Game.” We’d rather blame someone or something, rather than ourselves.

- Financial problems: we blame the government, or a recession, rather than ourselves for spending too much, or not being a good manager of the resources God has given to us.

- Marriage problems: we blame our spouse and what they did, rather than seeing we’re a big part of the problem.
- Child problems: we blame our kids, rather than our poor parenting skills for not being a good example for them. To a child, actions speak much louder than anything we say.
- Health issues: this one is harder to blame on someone else if we haven’t been taking care of ourselves.

Ezekiel lets us know that God’s OT people were not happy. They had been deported and were living in a foreign country with a different culture. Who did they blame? They blamed everyone and anyone, except themselves. They played “The Blame Game.” It was their ancestors, parents and leaders who were responsible for their exile in Babylon. It was those groups who followed idols and offered children as human sacrifices to false gods. They had nothing to do with it, or so they thought.

Listen to what Ezekiel had to say to them: **The word of the Lord came to me: “What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: “The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”?**

That old Israelite proverb: **“The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge,”** what does it mean? *“Lord it was our parents, not us! We didn’t cause this trouble. They did! Our parents ate the sour grapes. It’s not fair we’ve got this sour and bitter taste in our mouths.”*

God immediately steps in to respond to their objection: **“As surely as I live,” declares the Sovereign Lord, “you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel.”** *“Enough with the excuses. You don’t get to play “The Blame Game” with me. Everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. “I know exactly what’s going on. I created every parent and child. Everyone is responsible to me and will have to answer to me for their way of life. I know exactly who’s to blame. I’m going to make this really simple for everyone: “The one who sins is the one who will die.”*

Those words are a splash of cold water and reality on their faces. The one who spoke these words identifies himself as the **Sovereign Lord**. Notice the word “*reign*” in his title? That makes him the Creator and Ruler of everything and everyone. “*Sovereign*” would be the OT equivalent to NT title of: “*King of kings and Lord of lords.*”

“Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways,” declares the Sovereign LORD. The problems and troubles that Israel, that you and I experience were not the consequences of someone else’s sins. The **Sovereign Lord** will judge Israel, will judge you, will judge me for each of our sins. He won’t punish any of us for someone else’s sins.

From personal experience we’ve learned we can’t hide sin or blame it on someone else. The **Sovereign Lord** of all, knows all. Don’t play “The Blame Game” with him! Listen to what he’s got to say to the people of Israel and to us.

(2)

“Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed.” The **Sovereign Lord** is still speaking. This time, let’s focus on the second name. Besides being **Sovereign**, the Creator and Ruler of all, he also calls himself the **Lord**, “*the God of free and faithful grace.*” He always has what’s best for us on his mind.

Did you catch God’s solution to “The Blame Game”? **“Repent!”** That one word is powerful! It is sin-releasing, guilt-freeing and life-giving! It means “*to turn around.*” We could call “*repent*” a spiritual U-turn from our current wrong direction, to heading back in the right direction. That happens when we own up to our mistakes and stop blaming others.

Through God’s call to, “**Repent,**” he offers his gracious promises: **a new heart and a new spirit.**” Later, in the book of Ezekiel, the Lord tells us how one acquires this new heart and spirit: **“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you.”**

The Holy Spirit’s call to repentance brings about a change of thinking on the inside and a change of doing on the outside. We admit our sins and we turn from them to the only source of forgiveness, the **Sovereign Lord**, the God of free and faithful grace.

He does this through his Word. The same Word he used to create this world from nothing in 6 days, is the same Word he uses to create repentance, and transform stone-cold unbelieving hearts into believing hearts warmed and softened by his gospel message.

The last thing God wants to see is someone cut off from his blessings: **Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!**” He wanted them to live. He wants you to live. That’s why God’s Son took responsibility for all the times you failed to take responsibility for your own sins. God’s Son was innocent and yet he stepped in and begged: “*Father, I’m guilty. Punish me not them.*”

And he did on a cross, on Calvary, on a Friday. And when the Father accepted his Son’s death as payment for our sins he pronounced us forgiven. That changes everything. It changes the way we think, speak and act. Each day has so many opportunities to love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength; while also loving others as much as we love ourselves. No, of course it’s not to earn God’s favor, or get a better seat at the heavenly banquet table. It’s our way of expressing our appreciation and gratitude for the heavenly banquet he’s prepared for us and invited us to attend.

Yes, each day is hard. Yes, each day is a battle. But thank God we don’t have to battle alone. When we stumble and fall, and we know that we will, our Lord is right there to pick us up again, and encourage us to: **“Repent and Live,**” again.

No, we don’t play “The Blame Game.” God wants us to take responsibility for our sins. That’s why after our opening hymn we confess our sins together. And then we hear our **Sovereign Lord** graciously and personally pardon us and forgive each one of us.