

God teaches us how to handle guilt

I. Not by blaming

II. But with repentance

Lady Gaga is an up and rising pop singer, controversial and edgy, always making headlines wherever she goes and with every new song that hits the top of the charts. One of her most recent songs is entitled, “Baby I was born this way.” It’s a catchy tune, until you start paying attention to the lyrics. “I’m beautiful in my way, ‘Cause God makes no mistakes. I’m on the right track, baby I was born this way. Don’t hide yourself in regret, Just love yourself and you’re set, I’m on the right track, baby, Rejoice and love yourself today ‘cause baby you were born this way, No matter gay, straight, or bi, Lesbian, transgendered life, I’m on the right track baby, I was born to survive.”

Even though she claims to be on “the edge of glory”, Lady Gaga misses the point. She’s right, God doesn’t make mistakes. But we do. God created us to serve him, not ourselves. God created us to live according to his laws, because they are good for us, not to live according to our rules. In the Garden, God created us to be perfect, but we messed it all up with our sin and rebellion. We can try to blame God. We can try to blame our natural condition. But does it remove our sin and put us in a right relationship with God?

I. Not with blaming

This was the problem the people of Israel were having in the days of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel served as a pastor to the people of Israel. But his parish was not in Jerusalem. They were living in Babylon. In 586BC the Babylonians attacked and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, burned Solomon’s temple to the ground, and deported most of the Jews. There they sat in exile for years and years. The people were blaming their punishment on their ancestors, quoting this proverb, “**The fathers eat sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge** (or have become dull).” (vs3) When you eat sour grapes, the mouth twists and contorts as the taste buds react, causing the teeth to grind. They were saying that God should punish sin, but they felt he was punishing the wrong people. They felt they were being punished for the sins of their parents, and they implied that God was not just in treating them this way.

This was not injustice—no, the injustice is that Man who was made for perfection sinned again and again against his God. God shows just how just he is: he will judge each individual soul, and hold them accountable for their own actions and words. He said to them, “**The soul that sins is the one that will die.**” (vs4) They cannot blame God. They cannot blame anyone else. They have only themselves to blame.

It began in the Garden of Eden, “This woman here that you made for me, she gave me the fruit and I ate. This talking snake, he deceived me and I ate the fruit.” Ever since then sinners have been blaming each other. A favorite line spoken by politicians, “I’m struggling with my current term because of what the previous guy or gal left me.” A parent asks the child, “Why isn’t your homework done?” “Brother or sister was distracting me. The TV was distracting me.” “Why did you buy that when you can’t afford it?” “Well, the salesman was very

persuasive and it was a good deal!” Did someone put a gun to your head? Did they twist your arm? No! You were the one who made the poor choice. Why not take responsibility for your actions instead of blaming someone else? As human beings we do not want to take responsibility for our actions. The sinful heart is filled with pride. The sinful heart is unwilling to confess and admit guilt. The sinful heart is unwilling to repent.

This morning God speaks to us about repentance. Vs27 **“If a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life.”** Repentance is a turning; a turning away from wickedness, and turning to God. Ezekiel identified this as a problem the Israelites were having. He also identified it as our problem. In vs26 Ezekiel talks about the righteous man who turns from his righteous ways and commits sin. It’s not too difficult to look back on this morning or yesterday and think about how many times I have done that – turned away from Godly Christian living. The difficulty for me is in repentance - turning away from that wickedness. It’s hard to walk away from sin! It’s a struggle!

In the morning I pray, “I am a baptized child of God, and Lord, I thank you for that! My sins have been drowned in the waters of baptism. My life has been covered by the blood of Christ! Help to live that way today! May I live in such a way that I do not repeat my sins from yesterday.”

I want to be a better manager of my time, spend more time immersing myself in God’s Word, more time in prayer. I want to be a better husband to my wife, a better father to my children, a better pastor to my people. I wish to be more patient, more understanding, and more willing to forgive. I want to keep myself from my pet sins. All of these attitudes are God pleasing, are they not? Yet tonight when I say my prayers, I will look back on the day, and lament with a sorrowful heart, “I did the same thing again today!” Like the Apostle Paul I cry out, **“What a wretched man I am!”** I hate this. I don’t do what I want to do. The evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing! (Romans 7) Then I must begin the next morning with repentance all over again. It’s frustrating!

The problem comes in when I stop hating my habitual sins, when I stop fighting, when I stop repenting and asking for help. Satan wants me to be nonchalant about it. He wants me to blame someone else. My friends made me do it! Everyone else does it! It feels right and it feels good, so it must be ok. I’m too busy to pray about it, too busy to study God’s Word to give me the strength to conquer it. It’s one way to handle your sin - blaming other people or even blaming God. God says that if we do not acknowledge our sins and repent, then sin will be our **downfall** (vs30).

Literally in Vs30 Ezekiel writes, “Sin will be become a stumbling block; something that trips you up.” There’s a popular country song out that says, “It’s always your favorite sins that do you in.” (“You and Tequila” by Kenny Chesney). How true that is! If I don’t get a grip on my sins, I will lose my faith. If I lose my faith in Christ as my Savior, God tells me in vs4 **“The soul who sins is the one who will die.”** The LORD emphasizes the word “soul” in this section of Scripture - pointing us to the sobering reality that this death is one that we don’t want to have to deal with - the eternal separation of our souls from God’s grace.

II. But with repentance

God, because of his love for us, doesn't want this to happen. In vs32 he says, **"I take no pleasure in the death of anyone," declares the Sovereign LORD.** I want you to live. He says, **"Repent and live!"**

For those of you with military background, when your drill Sergeant commanded you, "About face!" you turned on your heel to march the other way. Repentance is just that – a turning away from your sins. But repentance is not just about outward actions and words. Repentance is a whole attitude adjustment. The LORD said, **"Get a new heart and a new spirit."** Repentance begins in the heart, actions and words will follow. Repentance begins with a new heart and new spirit, which God the Holy Spirit created in you at your baptism. Your new heart and new spirit wants to walk away from wickedness and to walk in righteousness every day.

Each day is a gift of God's grace to us, a day to serve him, rather than ourselves. Our new attitude recognizes the fact that we have not lived each day for God. The new attitude acknowledges that we have walked away from righteousness and have walked in wickedness. The new attitude confesses those sins to God. The new attitude is sincerely sorry for those sins, sincerely sorry that we have sinned against our God.

Repentance is turning away from sins, turning to God to acknowledge those sins and then our new hearts and spirits must also turn and go to the cross and know and believe that Christ died for me.

It's sad that the people of Israel had accused God of being unjust. God is quite the opposite. God demonstrated that he is a just God who hates sin, and at the same time a loving God. He showed his justice at the cross, declaring to the world, "Instead of throwing all of your sins in your face and throwing you out of my presence forever, I threw your sins on my Son. I blamed him instead of you, for your sins of habit and sins of choice, for selfish pride, for the evil you have done and the good you have failed to do. There on the cross I turned away from him, so I would not turn my back on you forever. And I kept my promise, 'The soul who sins is the one who will die', because my Son died for you."

Having been forgiven, Jesus then turns to us says to us as he said to the woman who had been caught in sin, "Go and sin no more." In true repentance then, after we have been comforted with God's declaration that our sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ, we then say, "Help me, Lord, to walk away from sin, because I was born in you for this way - to walk in righteousness, to walk in godly living. Help me and give me the strength, because I cannot do this on my own." Every morning we will rise with repentance. Every evening we will lay our heads on our pillows with repentance.

When my conscience prods and pokes me, nags me about my sins, and my failures, when Satan tempts me and the sinful world pulls me away from my walk with Christ, when I try to deal with guilt on my own by blaming others, then I will instead go to the cross, and see that there the Son took my blame. When I try to deal with my guilt I will go again to the baptismal font – there the Son of God washed my sins away. When I try to deal with my guilt, I will go again to the altar – here Christ gives me his body and blood for the forgiveness of my sins.

When I am saddened by the droves of human beings who are being lured away from the truth of God's Word by a catchy pop songs, I pray that God the Holy Spirit would use me and you to bring his Word to them, so that they repent and not die, but live. We pray that God would teach them, as he has taught us this morning, how to handle guilt. Not by blaming, but with repentance. Amen.