It is the nature of sin that it consistently denies responsibility for what it has done. I call it the Blame Game. It started thousands of years ago at the dawn of human history in the Garden of Eden. In that garden, you will recall, God planted all sorts of trees, beautiful and bountiful. He told Adam that he could eat of the fruit of any of those trees but one -- the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. To eat of the fruit of that tree would be sin, and would lead to calamity, and ultimately to spiritual death, separation from God.

Then God created woman, a helpmate for Adam, a wife, and her name was Eve. Now Satan took the form of a crafty serpent in the garden. And he lied to Eve, deceiving her into doubting the word of God. As a result she took of the forbidden fruit and ate it. Then she got Adam to eat some of that forbidden fruit also. When they ate that forbidden fruit they committed the first sin.

Notice what happened immediately after that. God visited Eve and Adam in the garden, well aware, of course, of what they had done. When He confronted Adam, Adam said (Genesis 3.12),

"The woman You put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate."

And when God confronted Eve, Eve said (Genesis 3.13b),

"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

There it is: the blame game. "It's not my fault. It's her fault. It's not my fault. It's the serpent's fault." It is the nature of sin that it consistently denies responsibility for what it has done.

That hasn't changed one bit, has it? We still sin, and we still have a basic unwillingness to assume responsibility for what we have done. It's always something or somebody else's fault! I heard about one boy and his brother who got into an awful fight. When Mom finally broke them apart, she asked: "Who started it?" Jimmy answered, "Johnny started it when he hit me back!" Somebody else's fault! The blame game!
Whenever we sin, or slip, or fail, or fall short, it's always something or somebody else's fault. We blame it on our heredity, our genes, our temperament; or we blame it on our environment, how and when and where we were reared; or we blame it on our potty training; or we blame it on the fact that we were reared in a dysfunctional family (as if there were ever a perfectly functional family); or we blame it on our parents ("If I had only had different parents, better parents").

Or we blame our sin, faults, failures, problems on the government; or on the social, cultural, economic system; or on the educational system and the schools and educators. I read about one young man who sued his school, faculty, and Board of Education because he had failed to make an acceptable score on his SAT. He sued them, he said, because they had failed to educate him! Somebody else's fault! The blame game!

Some people like to blame the church for much of the social and spiritual deterioration so characteristic in our world today. "If only our pastors and church leaders were more like Moses and Amos and Hosea and Paul and A.B. Simpson and Dwight L. Moody and Billy Graham!" One woman sued a pastor for malpractice because she and her husband came for marital counseling and their marriage wasn't saved! Somebody else's fault! The blame game!

Surely you've read about the family of someone who died with lung cancer? They sued a tobacco company, because she smoked their products at the rate of two packs a day for 20 years! Somebody else's fault! The blame game!

Let me get "up close and personal." I've used this excuse (and I've heard many other persons use it, too): "I can't do that essential thing because I'm so busy having to do something else, perhaps not as essential, but something I really need or want to do!" Or how about this one? "If only we had a better pastor, or lay leaders, or teachers, or workers, or members, or parking, or facilities, or more money, then we could be the church God calls us to be and do what His calling challenges us to do!"

The blame game. Just like in the Garden of Eden! "God, if You hadn't given me the woman! If You hadn't created that serpent! If You hadn't forbidden that most enticing fruit! If You hadn't made me the way I am, with my genes and heredity, with my parents and family, with my neighborhood and school and church and friends! Yes, I was unfaithful in
my marriage, but it's not my fault. After all, it was God who gave me such a strong sex urge! Yes, I cheated, stole, embezzled money, but it's not my fault! After all, it was God who gave me such a strong desire for money and things that required more money than I could earn honestly! Yes, I've lied, cheated, manipulated, abused people to get to the top. But it's not my fault. God is the One who gave me such a strong desire for power and position and prestige. Yes, I compromised my values and principles and covenants and commitments. But after all, God is the One who gave me this overwhelming urge to be popular, to be happy no matter who it may hurt or whatever it may cost!" It's always something or somebody else's fault! The blame game!

Sisters and brothers, the blame game is symptomatic of the deception of sin and its pervasive power over us. Listen to me! We play the blame game because we have been deceived by sin and are still under its power. Everything that is evil and bad, wrong and warped, not as it should be or we want it to be, is always something or somebody else's fault! The blame game!

There are two errors in this way of thinking and living. One error is that we underestimate the power of our own choices and decisions. Turn please to Deuteronomy 30.19:

“This day I call heaven and earth to witness against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life....”

It is a dangerous delusion when we begin to think that everything in life is predetermined and totally controlled by our past and present circumstances. Hear me now: I know that we live in a world where the circumstances of our heredity, our environment, our family, our upbringing, our culture, our education do have a profound affect upon our lives. Believe me, I do know that! All of us are strongly affected by the circumstances that touch and influence and surround our lives. But the mistake we make is that we put so much credence on that that we all begin to think of ourselves as victims -- victims of circumstances and forces completely beyond our control. I've met several criminals, been the pastor of a few. I've never met a guilty criminal. What I mean by this is that it was always society's fault, or their parent’s fault, or the school's fault, or a friend's fault, or the people they run-around-with’s fault, or the justice system’s fault. The blame game!
Dear friends, we live in an age and culture where it is so easy to use negative circumstances as a cop-out, an excuse, having been deceived into believing the lie of Satan that we are totally under the control of circumstances. "I am the way I am, I do what I do, because I had the kinds of parents, educators, teachers, friends I had; or because I went to that school, that church, lived in that neighborhood, have that job, worked for that boss, etc."

That's such an easy cop-out, a convenient and easy way to evade our responsibility. The blame game!

What we need to remember when we are tempted to play the blame game is that we must not disregard the important part our responses, our choices, and our decisions play in the determination of our life. To be sure, factors of heredity, environment, circumstances do touch and affect our lives. But none of us are ever completely under the control of that. The error is that we can come to the place where we are deceived into thinking that our response to our circumstances, our personal and collective choices and decisions, have little or no affect. Sisters and brothers, that is not true! Our responses, choices, and decisions do have an effect, a profound effect!

God says He sets before each and every person a choice between life and death, blessing and curse, right and wrong, light and darkness, good and evil. He has given each and everyone of us the right and power and opportunity to choose, to make our choices, to decide how we will respond to our circumstances. Don't you see? We are not just victims! We must not succumb to the error of underestimating the power of our own choices and decisions.

The second error is that we underestimate the power of the gospel. Turn in your Bibles, please, to Romans 1.16:

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it (the gospel) is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes…”

The gospel carries within it the very power of God to do whatever needs to be done to save us, save us from what we are and have been to what God wants to make us to be!

Look please at I John 1.7 (the last part of that verse):

… and the blood of Jesus, His Son,

purifies us from all sin."
Good News! Good News! Good News! In and through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, God has provided a way for us to be purified, cleansed from sin, set free from the bondage and power of sin. Jesus sets us free from playing the blame game, living under the power and control of the circumstances that have shaped our lives because we underestimate the power of the gospel to transform our lives. Look please at II Corinthians 5.17:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation…"

Watch this now:

"…the old has gone, the new has come."

Here's what that means: it means that all that heredity, all those genes and traits, the circumstances of our birth, our family, our upbringing, our environment, our education, our neighborhood, our friends, our church, our teachers, our work may have affected and had strong control and influence over us before we invited Jesus into our lives, and began to live in Him, and allow Him to live in us. But now, in Christ, all those "old things" are gone, passed away, and therefore have no control or power over us anymore! And instead, new things -- God's grace, the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ, the enabling power of the Holy Spirit -- have come and taken their place!

A Christian was speaking at an evening meeting at a rescue mission. Before him were a company of men, many of whom were derelicts; men who, temporarily at least, were "down and out." Hoping to bring them some inspiration, the speaker sought to appeal to the will and determination of his audience by reciting the familiar poem, "If," by Rudyard Kipling. It's the one that begins: "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs…" and ends with the following lines:

"If you can fill the unforgiving minute
with sixty seconds worth of distance run,
then you can be a man, my son."

When he had finished a man in the back of the hall called out, "But what if you can't?"

"But what if you can't?" The good news of the gospel is that it (the gospel) is the power of God unto salvation. The gospel is the good news that God does not expect us to make ourselves new. He knows we cannot do that, no matter how much we may want to, nor how hard we may try. The good news of the gospel is that in and through Jesus Christ God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He cleanses us, purifies us, sets us free from all...
that we have been, and makes us all over again. I remember talking with a man who, because of an accumulation of sinful habits was broken, his life wretchedly stained and marred with shame. I said to him: "If you could see Jesus face-to-face, and talk with Him, what would you ask Him to do for you?" He replied without hesitation: "I would ask Him to make me all over again." Dear friends, that's exactly what our wonderful Savior proposes to do in any life that is open to Him.

Dr. Lyman Abbott puts it so well: "Christianity is not a new philosophy that Jesus came to teach. Christianity is a new life that Jesus came to impart. (John 1.12).

"Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, (to them) He gave the power to become children of God."

I wonder if there is someone here this morning who is still under the bondage and power of sin, chained by all the old things that have been robbing your life of peace and joy and freedom; and who would like to be set free, free from sin, free from shame, free from guilt, free from the bondage and power that sin has had over you, free from your past, free from the control of your circumstances, free to enter into the new and victorious and abundant and eternal life that Jesus gives? Good News! Good News! Good News! God gives you the freedom and opportunity to choose that. And your choice can make a life transforming difference when you make the most important and consequential choice any person is free to make: the choice to say "yes" to the gospel, to say "yes" to real life, as you say "yes" to Jesus Christ, inviting Him by faith to come into your life as your personal Savior, and to live in your life as your sovereign Lord.