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Blame [John]

Peter Hiatt @ The Sanctuary Downtown
October 2, 2010

An elderly woman stood on a busy street corner, hesitant to cross because there was no traffic signal. As she waited, a gentleman came up beside her and asked, "May I cross over with you?" Relieved, she thanked him and took his arm.

The path they took was anything but safe. The man seemed to be confused as they dodged traffic and walked in a zigzag pattern across the street. "You almost got us killed!" the woman exclaimed in anger when they finally reached the curb. "You walk like you're blind!" "I am," he replied. "That's why I asked if I could cross with you."

Let that story be a lesson: Blind people are dangerous.
And in our increasingly tolerant society, it just needs to be stated plainly:

Blindness is not OK.

Jesus warned against "Blind Guides" and "Blind leading the Blind."

Recent studies verify this point:

- Blind people are significantly lacking in the hand-eye coordination necessary to operate heavy machinery and power tools in a safe fashion.
- When it comes to operating motorized vehicles, the blind are significantly inferior to the sighted.
- Just disco dancing with a blind person significantly increases the odds of serious bodily injury.

And now some of you are thinking: "Hey, we should have compassion on the blind." Well, I'm a father, and I don't want my children to grow up thinking, "Hey, it's normal... it's ok to be blind." And that's why we need to stop enabling blind people.
We need to enact legislation against blindness, increase jail time for the blind...
Because blindness is NOT OK.

Well, I'm glad some of you are smiling. You know I'm messing with you.
We're not into punishing blind people for blindness.

But is blindness OK?

Well ... no.

It's not OK.

But we don't blame the blind.

We have compassion on the blind, because no one chooses to be blind.

Do they?

Remember in *The Christmas Story* movie, Ralphie accidentally says "The mother of all swear words," and his mom washes his mouth out with soap. Do you remember his fantasy?

[Movie clip – *The Christmas Story*]

He fantasizes about going blind, and blaming his parents. (Well, actually he did learn the mother of all swear words from his dad.) He fantasizes about going blind, so he wouldn't be blamed... and so he'd get some compassion.

Well, people don't choose to be blind ... or do they?

Helen Keller wrote, "There is blindness far worse than mine – those who can see and choose not to see."

At the turn of the century, Maria Von Sinding studied the lives of 66 patients who were blind from birth, and received cataract surgery, which had been newly perfected at that time. Suddenly, these adults could see – and it was a crisis. (*Krisis* in Greek ... "a judgment")

Virtually all of them were thrown into a crisis. One distraught woman cried out in the middle of her training, "How is it that I now find myself less happy than before? Everything I see causes me a disagreeable emotion. Oh, I was much more at ease in my blindness." Eventually – to her great joy – she went blind again.

Each patient had to deal with shocking new realities, and yet each lacked the mental categories with which to do so: depth, distance, and perspective. Instead of perceiving a person walking toward them, they would see a person growing before their eyes. People had said the sun was bigger than the earth, but clearly it was the size of a dime. One patient walked right off a balcony and was killed.

Seeing was a crisis. So some longed for blindness ... and returned to the dark. Yet some had faith that the light was good, died to their old perception, and chose to live in the light.

I heard that doctors had no idea why Ray Charles went blind. They just know that when he was a boy, he watched his brother drown as he stood frozen in ear on the side of a lake. And ever since that day, he couldn't see.

One day, about 27 years ago, I drove over some railroad tracks with Susan. Out of nowhere, she said, "A train hit a man's car in this spot. I was the first to find Him. I gave him mouth-to-mouth

resuscitation for a long time. He died.” I said, “Honey, when was that?” She said, “About 6 months ago, I guess.” “Why didn’t you tell me?” And she said, “Well, I just remembered.”

You see, she had chosen to forget.

So ... would you blame Susan for going blind?
How about Ray Charles or the people with cataract surgery?
Or even Ralphie in the Christmas story?

If you choose to go blind, you choose to not see the light. And you choose not to see the light because you don’t see that the light is good. All you see is death, guilt, confusion, and injustice... So your strategy is to close your eyes. Your strategy is to save yourself with blindness.

John 3:19 – *“And this is the crisis (the crisis) – The Judgment: The Light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the Light...”*

Jesus is the Light.
They didn’t want the Light; for they didn’t see that the light was good.

Susan saw death,
 Ray Charles saw his failure,
 the cataract patients saw confusion,
 Ralphie saw injustice.

It’s like they saw Good Friday, and shut their eyes before they saw Easter.
 They saw death but not resurrection.
 They saw failure but not forgiveness.
 They saw confusion but not the reason.
 They saw injustice but not God’s justice.

If we choose to be blind, perhaps it’s because we have not yet seen that the Light is good.
We have no faith in the Light.

Ephesians 1:18 – “Faith is like the eyes of the heart.”
Romans 14:23 – “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”

Sin is blindness of the heart. Whenever we commit sin, it is because we do not see that the truth is good; that the light is good; that Jesus is good and beautiful, and to be desired.
Sinfulness is faithlessness, which is blindness of the heart.

There’s blindness of our eyes, and blindness of the eyes of our hearts.
There’s blindness, and there’s choosing blindness, which is an even greater blindness, called sin.
It is an inability to see that the light is good.

In John 8, Jesus says, “I AM the light of the world.”
They see but they don’t perceive.

They know but they don't know.
And so they reject Him.
Their hearts are blind.
They are blind.
And can we blame them?

As Paul writes: "They are by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."
Did you choose your nature? No. They were born blind.

John 8:58 – *"Before Abraham was, I AM."* So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple." **[Chapter 9]** As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

That is, "Who should we blame?"
It's actually a rather obvious question, for it's clear that sin can result in some very bad things. The very first sin resulted in all the death, failure, confusion, injustice, and blindness in this world.

Adam and Eve sinned, but can we blame them?
I mean, it was their choice, but could they have chosen otherwise?
Could they have chosen the good?
Well, how could they have chosen the good if they had no knowledge of the good?
Isn't that why they took the fruit – to get the knowledge of the good?

God had spoken His word – "Do not take."
But how would they know His word was good ... unless they took?
It was a profoundly bad choice. But can we blame them for that choice?
"They knew not what they did."
They could not choose the good – they hadn't know the good.
When they ate from the tree, they knew not what they did.

Well, the disciples want to know, "Who's to blame?"
They want to judge – they want the knowledge of good and evil.

In verse 34, the Pharisees (self-proclaimed guardians of the knowledge of good and evil) find this man and accuse him of being "born in utter sin."
Maybe he was born in utter sin. Romans 5 ... is anyone not born in sin?
Maybe he was born in utter sin. But is he to blame?
Who's to blame?

"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."

Well, who is it that is interested in displaying the works of God? Jesus.
It's like Jesus is saying,
"You want to blame someone? Blame me! That's right! Come nail me to a tree."

Who's to blame? The one who arranges things to reveal the works of God.

Well, that would be God, and the Word with which He creates....

Who planted the tree of knowledge and tree of life in the middle of the Garden?

Who left a half-naked woman alone with an evil talking snake?

Who subjected the world to futility?

Who's to blame?

It seems like Jesus is saying God and His Word.

Well, God's not the author of evil... and yet He is the author of us ... born blind – a pretty high price – in order that the works of God might be revealed.

The works of God had better be good.

[verse 3]

"... that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

We'll talk about that spit next week. But everyone is amazed that this guy is healed. The neighbors grab him and take him to the Pharisees. The Pharisees question his parents, and then him, and when they don't like his answers, they blame him and cast him out. And that's where Jesus finds him.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"

The eyes in his head were open, and the eyes in his heart were just beginning to open.

Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

"*Proskuneo*" ... it implies he fell before Jesus and began kissing his feet. And no one told him he should. He had a new nature.

Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no hamartia." (in Greek, "no sin.")

Hamartia literally means "miss the mark." So Jesus says, "If you were blind, you would not be 'missing the mark.' But now that you say, 'we see,' you 'miss the mark' – your sin remains.

Do you get what he's saying?

“This blind man knew he was blind, and so he sees. But you Pharisees are blind to your own blindness. When you say ‘we see,’ you lie, and you are blind to the lie.”

Sin is believing a lie. It’s a lie about lies – it’s bondage to lies. Jesus just said it: “He who commits sin is a slave to sin.” Slaves have no choice. They’re not free.

These Pharisees are blind. Did they choose to be blind? And if they chose to be blind, doesn’t it show that their hearts were already blind to the light? So should we blame them? Was it their fault or their parents’ fault? Or was it so that the works of God would be manifest in them?

Jesus called them blind guides – the blind leading the blind.
Why are they blind?

Jesus is using the vocabulary of Isaiah 6, and will soon quote Isaiah 6. Isaiah 6 is quoted in all the gospels and in the book of Acts. God says to Isaiah, “Blind their eyes, lest they see with their eyes... and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed.” According to Mark and Luke, that’s why Jesus spoke in parables – so people wouldn’t understand.

In Matthew and Acts, Jesus and Paul quote Isaiah as saying, “The people closed their own eyes.” But in John, Jesus quotes Isaiah even more precisely (John 12:40), saying, “God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they see with their eyes and understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.”

“Isaiah said these things because he saw my glory.” Isn’t that wild?

That must mean the Pharisees chose blindness, because God chose them to choose blindness. So they have no choice but blindness... like they were born blind.
So should we blame them ... or have compassion on them?

Now, this is shocking, but it appears that Jesus doesn’t really blame them. Did you notice it in the last chapter? He asks, “Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot (not *would* not) ... cannot bear to hear my word... You are of your father, the devil.”

We read it with anger ... and he it’s stated in the text as a matter of fact.

I mean, he’s not disappointed in the Pharisees...

They’re doing exactly what he expected from the foundation of the world.

He’s not disillusioned by the Pharisees...

For he never had any illusions about them in the first place.

Do you think God is disappointed in you or disillusioned with you? How could He be?

Jesus just points to the problem:

“You’re dead, blind, and preparing to kill me because your father is the devil, and yes ... that sucks.”

BUT he doesn’t say:

“How could you? I’m so disappointed! You should’ve known better!”

It's not like He's blaming them or accusing them... but more like He's diagnosing them and a dread disease. And what is the disease? The desire to blame ... the desire to accuse. That's what "devil" means ... accuser. It is their nature.

So, should we blame them, or have compassion on them?

Last time, we said: "Lack of compassion for the lost is the surest sign that a person is lost. So the Pharisees were deeply lost."

Do you have compassion for Pharisees?

If not, then you are lost, and you are a Pharisee.

Praise God that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

Maybe you should have compassion for yourself.

Did Jesus have compassion on the Pharisees?

Did Jesus have compassion for Judas, whom He called "friend?"

Did Jesus blame Judas? Well, he said it was fore-ordained.

Did Jesus have compassion on Paul, to whom He appeared as light on the Damascus Road and blinded, so Paul could see?

Did He blame Paul? Well, Paul was chosen to display God's grace, because he was the worst sinner in the world. (I Timothy 1:16) He was the worst sinner, and yet (I Tim 1:13) he acted in ignorance. He "knew not what he did." The worst sinner in the world knew not what he did. He was blind – and born blind – and even more, God blinded him. (Isaiah 6:10 and John 12:40) "No choice but blindness ... No choice but sin."

Modern American Christians absolutely hate Isaiah Chapter 6 and John Chapter 12. We hate the doctrine of "pre-destination" and "total depravity." We say, "No choice but sin" means that there is no sin." It can only be sin if you can choose to sin, or choose not to sin.

That's why American Christians spend so much time arguing whether or not homosexuality is a choice or a person's nature... whether or not alcoholism is a choice or a nature... like if it's a choice, we can blame and accuse – for then it's a sin. But if it's not a choice, we ought to have compassion... because it's only sin if you have a choice to sin or not to sin.

Well, Jesus just doesn't talk that way. He doesn't have such a high opinion of our ability to choose. In fact, He calls us "slaves," for sin has become our nature, and we were destined to sin. And so, apart from Him, we literally have no choice but sin... and yet, it **really is sin**. And that's why Jesus is so offensive to liberals and conservatives.

He's offensive to conservatives, for He teaches "your choice can't save you... in fact, it's already damned you." So you, yourself, can only control sin with more sin – only control adultery with pride, only control greed with arrogance. Even though you call it responsibility, it's sin. "No choice but sin." And yet, it really, really, really is sin.

That's why He's offensive to liberals. It really, really is sin. And sin is absolutely not OK. Blindness is not a choice, but that doesn't mean blindness is OK. So we still pass laws against blind people driving cars and operating machinery.

Sin is not a choice that we can simply choose not to choose. And sin is not OK. It's profoundly not OK... it's evil. Jesus offends conservatives, liberals, and everybody – we're all born blind, and “know not what we do.”

There's a remarkable parallel between the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane. Adam and Eve could not choose the good, because they had not yet taken the fruit from the tree. It was evil that they took the fruit, and yet having taken the fruit, they saw the good and they saw that they were evil.

The Pharisees could not choose the good, because they had not yet seen the good. It was evil that they took His life on the tree, and yet having taken it, they saw the good, and they saw that they were evil.

It's like Jesus said: “When they admit that they're blind, they begin to see.”

And what do they see? They see “Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

They begin to see Grace.

They see that God bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

God is Love and God is **not** the Accuser.

He is the Judgment, but He is not the Accuser.

“Now is the judgment of this world,” said Jesus. “When I be lifted up.”

Do you remember the first thing He said when He was high and lifted up, shining in the light of His glory? He said, “Father, forgive them.”

So does He blame us?

Well, yes. If by that, you mean that we sinned. If we didn't sin, there's nothing to forgive.

Look at His hands. Look at His feet. We did that.

With every sin, we crucify Jesus, the Truth.

With every sin, we choose blindness and crucify the Light.

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

So does He blame us?

Well, no. If by that, you mean that we chose evil when we could've chosen the good.

You know, for most of my life, I thought Jesus messed up His lines on the cross.

He should've said, “Father forgive them, because they know what they're doing...”

Did they know what they were doing?

If anybody would've known what they were doing, it would've been them – the Jews, the Pharisees. They had 1500 years of the Law under their belts... 1500 years of “the knowledge of good and evil” ... 1500 years of descriptions of love and prophecies of His coming... and when He comes, they crucify Him.

Perhaps they knew I their heads, but not in their hearts.
Perhaps their eyes were open, but the eyes in their hearts were blind.

Recently, someone wrote me an angry e-mail.
They said, "Salvation is free, but only to those who believe and ask for it."
If so, we're all stuck in hell. We can only ask for forgiveness because Jesus has already forgiven.

God spoke first – His Word, from the cross, while we were dead:
"Father, forgive ... for they do not know. They don't know what they're doing. They don't know enough to even ask. Father, forgive... for they are all blind.
They were born blind."

You know, if we really got that – that all humanity was born blind, and so is enslaved to sin – I think we would:

1. Condemn no one, and
2. Have compassion on everyone.

We'd condemn no one. We would point out sin, but only if it helped people surrender sin, and no longer sin. That's compassion. But we wouldn't blame people for their sin.

Years ago, I had a profound spiritual encounter with God, in which He exposed to me my sin. When He did, I wept uncontrollably for about an hour. He exposed my sin. He judged my sin. And yet, it wasn't blame... it was compassion; as if He was weeping for me and through me and on behalf of me.

I actually heard Him say, "Peter, you don't love my bride very much, do you?" I saw it was a horrific sin – I hated His bride. Yet when He said it, I didn't feel a drop of blame... only an ocean of compassion.

Good news, Ralphie – your Father is an ocean of Love. If we really saw it, we'd condemn no one, and have compassion on everyone.

So the whole world has been born blind ... but who's to blame?
We were born not knowing good and evil ... and who's to blame?
For death, failure, confusion, and injustice ... who's to blame?

Jesus said, "It was not that this man sinned or his parents."
Perhaps you're not to blame, and your relatives aren't to blame.
"It was not this man or his parents,"
said Jesus ...

"But that the works of God might be displayed."

Is God to blame?

Well, God can do no evil. And yet, He can make space or evil – a void... a garden, a man, a woman, a tree, and a snake ... but why would He do that?

Well, listen to Isaiah 6 – John tells us that Isaiah saw Christ’s glory.

God says to Isaiah:

“Go and say to this people:

‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand;

Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

*Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes;
Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed.”*

Then I said, “How long, O Lord?”

And He said:

*“Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people,
and the land is a desolate waste, and the LORD removes people from far away,
and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.*

*And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again,
like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.”*

The holy seed is its stump.

The Holy Seed... that is the Seed of Abraham... The Promised Seed ... The Eternal Seed...

That’s Jesus! ... Who just said, “Before Abraham was, I AM.”

God will burn away all our sin – all our bad choices – until one choice remains:

His choice ... His Word ... His Judgment – Jesus.

God will burn away everything, until all we can see is Jesus. In the words of Karl Barth, “God will burn us right down to faith.”

So perhaps this world is not about achieving something. All our achievements get burned away. Perhaps this world is not about achieving something... this world is all about seeing something with the eyes of our hearts. It’s all about faith through grace. It’s all about seeing something, and once we see that something, we receive everything with that something. And that something is Jesus.

In the words of Paul (Romans 11:32) – “God has consigned all men to disobedience.”

Did you get that?

“God has consigned all men to blindness, to disobedience, to sin...”

WHY?

“God has consigned all men to disobedience **so that** He may have mercy on all.”

So that He may have **Jesus** on all.

So that He may have the “Works of God” in all, and be all in all.

Jesus said, “This is the work of God – Faith in the One He has sent.”

Faith in grace... Faith in Jesus ... Faith in the heart of our Father.

Jesus said, “This man was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in Him.”

So... Jesus opened the man’s eyes. The man saw Jesus and he chose Jesus.

He knew the good and He chose the good.

He fell at His feet and worshipped in ecstasy.

It was the work of God in him – Faith by grace in him.

So was he blind because he failed? No.

He was blind in order to see God’s victory – Jesus.

Was he blind because God didn’t love him? No.

He was blind so he could see how much God loved Him – Jesus.

Was he blind because God would not save? No.

He was blind so that God could save – Jesus.

Why all the darkness in your world?

So that you might see the light shining in the darkness – Jesus.

Why all the disobedience, sin, failure, and blindness?

So that you might see His mercy in you – Jesus in you.

Why all the pain of this world? Why this fallen world?

Maybe it’s because folks don’t get crucified in heaven, and God wants you to see that He chooses to be crucified for you.

And maybe seeing that, believing that, and knowing that is an eternal treasure into which angels long to look – an eternal treasure that is you, created in the image of God – Jesus.

Why the blindness?

So that you can see the glory of God, shining in the face of Christ,
and enjoy Him forever.

A group of visitors at a summer resort had watched the sunset from the gallery of the hotel. A fat, unromantic-looking man had lingered until the last glow faded, and had seemed thrilled through and through by the beauty of it all. One guest, more observant than the rest, wondered about this; and so at supper she said to this man, who sat next to her, “You certainly did enjoy the sunset. Are you an artist?” “No, madam, I’m a plumber,” he responded with a slow grin. “But I was blind for five years.”

Perhaps you were born blind because you are highly favored.

Perhaps you were born blind so that you could see the glory of the Son, and the glory of the Son in you ... and thus enjoy Him for all eternity.

Perhaps all humanity was born blind, so that all could see and enjoy our Lord “high and lifted up ... shining in the light of his glory.” The slaughtered Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world, standing on the throne of God, giving light and meaning and grace and beauty to all things.

Perhaps if we believed that, we’d condemn no one, have compassion on everyone, and no longer curse the darkness, but eagerly await the dawn.

For on the darkest of all nights, the Light of the world took bread, and He broke it, saying, “This is my body, given to you. Take and eat.”
Do you see it now?

And in the same manner, after supper, He took the cup, and He said, “This is the New Covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, and do it in remembrance of me.”

And in the morning, we all crucified Him.

So even though He had done no evil, we all blamed Him.
We nailed Him to the Tree of Law, and He cried,
“Father forgive them. They know not what they do.”
You see, we all blame Him, and He refuses to blame us.
And that’s the judgment of God.

When you see it, you will fall at His feet and worship Him in ecstasy forevermore.
When you see it, you will be finished in the image of God, and to His glory.

So come to the table. Bring your darkness, and ingest the Light... the Love of God, poured out for you.

So close your eyes, and listen.

In the beginning, the Lord God said, “Let us make... Let **us** make...” I think the Father was talking to Jesus, the Beautiful One. He said, “Let us make ...” and then, hear **your** name. In the beginning, the Lord God said, “Let us make Peter. Let us make Pam. Let us make Barry. Let us make Peter in our own image and likeness.”

And I’m here this morning to tell you that I don’t believe God fails. He makes you in His image and His likeness with His Word, and His Word is Jesus. He makes you in His image and His likeness with His own body and blood, and He does not fail.

He’s making you in His image right now. But you do not help Him with blame. He’s the Creator, you’re not the Creator. You do not help the process with blame... by blaming others... and saying, “See God? Look, look! I’m better than her... I’m better than them!”

Or by blaming yourself. 'Cause that's what we do: we get a glimpse of the light for just a second, then we shut our eyes and start cursing ourselves: "I'm so bad. I'm worthless. I'm nothing. I hate myself." Those curses come from hell. They are the words of the devil.

You are being created in God's image, but you do not help the process by blaming others or blaming yourself. You help the process by walking in the light as He is in the light. And He makes you in His own image and likeness: Jesus the Christ.

In His name, believe the Gospel, and live.

Now, before you go, real quick ... people are always like, "Hey, that was too esoteric... what the heck does that mean?" So, I was thinking of this little quote from Brother Lawrence. This is, I think ... how God wants us to deal with our sin. What it looks like when we are created in His image.

This excerpt is taken from the introduction to Brother Lawrence's book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

Brother Lawrence was aware of his sins and was not at all surprised by them. "That is my nature," he would say, "the only thing I know how to do." He simply confessed his sins to God, without pleading with Him or making excuses. After this, he was able to peacefully resume his regular activity of love and adoration. If Brother Lawrence didn't sin, he thanked God for it, because only God's grace could keep him from sinning.

And so all the glory goes to whom?

The slaughtered Lamb on the throne, and Brother Lawrence is free, in the image of God, to love in freedom.

In the name of Jesus, believe the Gospel, and live.
Amen.