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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

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**Ahab, Elijah and Blame-Shifting**

**1 Kings 18:1-17**

**Prayer:** *Father God, I do thank you for the gift of your grace, for the gift of your son. I thank you for the -- again as we've said again and again, the privilege that we have of gathering together corporately to offer up worship to you in spoken word, in prayer and in song. And Lord, today as we enter into that part of worship in which we open up your book and we look into it, we ask for the presence of your Holy Spirit to understand what it is you've given to us, we pray for the presence of your Spirit, we pray that you would give us the ability to hear the words that you've given to us and that you would enable them to become a permanent part of our lives, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we have been looking at the life of Elijah and we have been focused in on one of the minor characters who pops up in the story and that was the story last time that we did about Obadiah.

Obadiah was wicked King Ahab's chief of staff, he's the one who secretly fed and housed hundreds of God's prophets, and these prophets of God had been undergoing wholesale slaughter at the

hands of Jezebel and the wicked King Ahab who had plunged Israel into the worship of Baal. So God in response lays down a severe punishment on Israel for abandoning his ways and for taking up the worship of idol, and so Israel would undergo a severe and a total drought. And now it's been years since Elijah has first confronted Ahab and the nation of Israel by saying this in *1 Kings 17:1*, he said this, he said: *"As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."*

Well, Israel is now reeling under this drought. Not a single drop of rain had fallen, and King Ahab is desperately looking for Elijah. He wants to kill him. He wants to find him when Obadiah and Elijah have this meeting. And let me just pick up at this meeting in *1 Kings 18:7*, and this is what it says, it says: *And as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him. And Obadiah recognized him and fell on his face and said, "Is it you, my lord Elijah?" And he answered him, "It is I. Go, tell your lord, 'Behold, Elijah is here.'*" And he said, *"How have I sinned, that you would give your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. And when they would say, 'He is not here,' he would take an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you. And now you say, 'Go tell your lord, "Behold,*

*Elijah is here.'" And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth."*

Obadiah has just refused to announce Elijah's arrival without Elijah actually being there, because in Ahab's eyes, Elijah was public enemy number one, and letting him slip through his fingers would have spelled doom for Obadiah. And so we pick up the scripture with Elijah's response to Obadiah's refusal. Elijah says this: *"As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today."* So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him. And Ahab went to meet Elijah. When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, *"Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"* And he answered, *"I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals."*

I want to park here for a little bit. I want to spend some time looking at some depth at this dialogue, because it's really an iceberg sort of a thing. There's a tiny bit that we see above the surface and it reveals only a hint of what's taking place below. And what I want to do is look at this conversation between Ahab and Elijah and look at this whole idea that has come to be known today

as the notion of "blame shifting." Ahab has already told us a great deal about himself and about the responsibility that he's taking for Israel's terrible condition. You know, all of the -- all of the crop failure, all of the death, all of the drought in the nation of Israel and Ahab is convinced that he knows precisely who to blame for it. In verse 17 he says: *When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"* Elijah had shut up the heavens. Elijah had shut up the heavens? Elijah public enemy number one? Well, nevermind that Israel itself had abandoned the God who had led them out of Egypt, nevermind that Israel had fully embraced the worship of Baal and was now actively slaughtering God's prophets. Nevermind the fact that Elijah had come directly into Ahab and Jezebel's throne to announce the very terms of the drought that they were now under. You see, when push came to shove, Ahab had already convinced himself that the blame really rested on Elijah. It was literally the oldest trick in the book. That book being the Bible. You see, the very first time that we see blame shifting is with our very first parents, Adam and Eve. It is the cool of the evening. Adam and Eve have just committed cosmic treason by doing the one thing that God had forbidden them to do. God said everything in the garden is for you, it's for your pleasure, it's for your use with but one exception: Do not eat the forbidden fruit. *Genesis 3:6-13* picks up on what took place next. It says: *So when the woman saw that*

*the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave me to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate."*

You know what Adam is essentially telling God here is if you're looking for someone to blame in this, well it's either you or the woman that you gave me. Verse 13 says: *Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."* So here we have Eve taking the blame that Adam has shifted onto her and then she shifts it right onto the serpent. This is the pattern of blame shifting we see time and time again in the scripture. Like I say, it goes all the

way back to Adam and Eve and Ahab and David and Moses and Abraham and all the others in scripture including you and me. This is what we do when we are confronted by the Holy Spirit with our sin. We blame shift. We blame shift with the best of them. You know, David's problem was not his adultery with Bathsheba, in fact it was after all her husband Uriah's stubborn loyalty. Moses' problem wasn't with his anger and frustration with God and the Jewish people, in fact it was this stupid rock that wouldn't bring forth the water fast enough. Abraham's problem wasn't with his trust in God's plan for his offspring, it was with the nagging of his wife Sarah. We see this pattern again and again and again. Instead of simply acknowledging our sin, we blame shift. And the effects can be devastating. You see, God's forgiveness is available to us for any sin whatsoever, but there's a catch. Listen to what *1 John 1:9* says. It says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Did you get the catch in that? Did you hear the catch? The catch is this two-letter word that begins the sentence. It's that word that we translate "if." You know, what that means is that what follows is a conditional clause. That is to say there are certain conditions that we have to meet in order to claim what is being offered. The conditions could not be simpler. The conditions are if we confess our sins.

So we need to look at this word "confess." We need to look at what God is saying with that particular Greek word. And that word "confess," it's really a Greek word that consists of two different Greek words. The word is "homologeō." And the one word "homo" means "same." The other word "logeō" means "to speak." And you put them together and it means "to same speak." And what God is saying is if we are willing to speak the same language that God's Holy Spirit is speaking, if we agree with God when he's speaking about our sin, then God will forgive us. In other words, if we same speak with God about our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That sounds so simple. It's so easy to do. God's Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, we acknowledge our sin and we ask God for forgiveness. And so based on the fact that Jesus Christ has already gone to the cross, he's already paid the price of the sin, God then both faithfully and justly forgives us. Simple enough, you might think. Would that it be so simple. Because often times this is the very last thing that we are willing to do. You know, when you look at the scripture that I just said, it's very interesting to note that the offer that God gives us to forgive any sin that we might have before him, that offer is bracketed on both sides with statements that point to our unwillingness to do just that. You know, I quoted to you *1 John 1:9* but if you go back one verse to *1 John 1:8*, it introduces the thought by saying: *If we*

*say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. And then if he we jump one verse ahead of 1 John 1:9 to 1 John 1:10, it completes the thought by saying: If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. Just listen to the entire statement as God lays it out in 1 John 1:8-10, he says this, he says: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

Now you look at that passage and you wonder why is it that the simple act of seeking God's forgiveness, why is it preceded by a statement pointing out how often we claim we don't even have a sin problem. I mean, verse 8 says: *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,* and then the very statement is preceded by a statement saying that we really don't think we have a sin problem. Verse 10 says: *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.* Apparently we have a problem with recognizing our sin. Same speaking with God's Holy Spirit is not as easy as it seems. What is easy and what we see happening so often in the pages of scripture from Adam through Ahab is blame shifting. Here's why it's so desperately dangerous. Jesus once made a statement in Matthew 12 that was repeated in Mark and Luke



as well, and it's been hotly debated for thousands and thousands of years. Listen to what he said in *Matthew 12:31*. Jesus said:

*"Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."* Now, many, many folks have tortured themselves by thinking that a thought or a word that they may have uttered in years past could possibly put them out of the scope of God's forgiveness. They think that God was saying that uttering a blasphemy even against himself was imminently forgivable but any blasphemy against the Holy Spirit ended any hope you had of obtaining forgiveness. Well, just think about that for a second. Just think about it on its surface it makes no sense. I mean, God -- is God saying that the Holy Spirit is far, far higher than the Father and Son? And the Father and Son can be blasphemed against, can be insulted but if you blaspheme and insult the Holy Spirit, you're done? That's not what Christ was getting at at all. In order to understand what it is that Christ was getting at, we first have to get ahold of what Christ is saying the ministry of the Holy Spirit is in the first place. And Jesus made that clear in *John 14:15*. This is what Jesus said, he said: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the*

*Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."*

This is what God is saying about this idea of the Holy Spirit. God says the world knows nothing, nothing at all of the Holy Spirit because A, it can't receive him; B, it doesn't see him; and C, it doesn't even know him. Well not so for those who are in Christ. Jesus says that he will send the Spirit of truth to dwell in every single person who is one of his own. So if you know Jesus, well you know then that his Holy Spirit dwells within you. *Romans 8:9* says: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.* So this is what Jesus is telling us. Jesus is telling us that blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven because to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to continuously refuse his efforts to convict you of sin. And you do that when you don't see him, you don't know him, and you don't receive him. And because the Holy Spirit is the only one who is capable of convicting us of sin, refusing to see him, to know him, or receive him is refusing to ever enter into that first condition of having our sins forgiven. And that's to agree with God that sin is sin. Remember *1 John 1:9: If, if we confess our sins.* So to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit is to refuse to ever

same speak with God about our sin. I think most folks think that has to be some type of huge cosmic sin to warrant being labeled blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, but the fact is any sin will do. And the reason why blaspheming the Holy Spirit is the one unforgivable sin is because it's the one sin that cuts off any possibility of having our sins forgiven. And it's not something that you do once; it's something you do continuously. On the surface it couldn't be simpler, I just need to agree with God that my sin is sin. What stops us from seeking God's forgiveness is not the Holy Spirit's conviction that sin is sin but rather the world's conviction that sin is not the problem, it's the conviction that is. I've told this story many, many times but it bears repeating because it illustrates well why we don't hear the Holy Spirit. Excuse me if it's familiar. You know, a guy saves all of his money to buy his favorite car and he goes out and he buys a used Mercedes. And he loves the car and he loves driving it around but one day the oil light comes on. So he takes it to a mechanic and the mechanic fixes it only to have it come popping back on a week later. So he seeks out and he finds another mechanic and that mechanic fixes it, exact same result, after a few weeks the light comes back on again. So he's getting very frustrated at this point. Finally he finds a mechanic who fixes his oil light so it doesn't come on after a few weeks and after a full year he's thoroughly delighted and he comes back to the mechanic for a tune

up. And he asks him how he was able to keep the oil light from coming on when all the other mechanics had failed. And the mechanic said, "It was easy, I just unscrewed the bulb." Okay. The oil light is the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. Unscrewing the bulb guarantees that it's never going to blink. That is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. See we can choose attention to pay -- choose to pay attention to the red light that's telling us that something is not right or we can ignore it when it blinks, or we can choose to unscrew the bulb.

Blame shifting doesn't unscrew the bulb but it does something almost as bad. What blame shifting does is it identifies the blinking light itself as the source of the problem. You see, Elijah was the red blinking light telling Ahab and Jezebel that their idol worship and their murder of God's prophets was going to exact a heavy toll on the nation of Israel. And Ahab's response to the drought was to go right at the blinking light. He went right at the blinking light and he identified it rather than his own behavior as the source of the problem. Again, verse 17: *When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"* Elijah wouldn't have it. He very promptly identified who and what the problem was. In verse 18, he said: *And he answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the*

*Baals."* You see, Ahab wouldn't see himself as the source of the problem, and so eventually he couldn't see himself that way. You see, blame shifting puts you where Ahab was, on the pathway to blaspheming the Holy Spirit. You see, none of us stays static, and the more you reject the hearing of the voice of conviction of the Holy Spirit, the less your ability to see your own spiritual deterioration. Again, God made that clear. This is what he said in *Mark 4:23*, he said this: *"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."* And he said to them, *"Pay attention to what you hear: With the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."* What he's saying, practically speaking, is the more you ignore the Holy Spirit's conviction, the more you refuse to same speak with him about the sin in your life, the less obvious that sin is going to become and eventually, like Ahab, you're going to look to every other excuse for your guilt except the one that really matters, and that is yourself. Again: *"For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."* In other words once you've unscrewed the bulb, you are no longer capable of seeing that blinking light at all any more.

Let me give you a practical illustration of how dangerous this is. Let me just kind of bring it down to what we in the church are

dealing with on kind of a daily basis. I would say probably the single greatest conflict the church is dealing with today just in terms of press, just in terms of the culture is the conflict with homosexuality and with gay marriage. And I would say in the last -- in the last decade, the evangelical church has seen an unprecedented number of books and studies and papers all purporting to show that the understanding that the church has had for the last 2,000 years, that homosexuality was inherently sinful, that that notion was in fact mistaken. And so folks who in the past struggled with same sex attraction now have an additional issue that they have to struggle with, and that is the people who now insist that homosexuality is not and never was at its root a sin issue. You know what these folks are doing? They are actively engaged in unscrewing the light bulb. What is so terrifically awful about this approach is that it takes an ordinary sin, homosexuality, and it attempts to transform it, unknowingly perhaps, into an unforgivable sin. You see, there's only one way that the sin of homosexuality can become unforgivable and that is when those who are under the conviction of the Holy Spirit are convinced either by the world or the flesh or the devil that their problem is not a matter of dealing with their sin but instead it's a matter of dealing with unloving people telling them that they're sinners. Now, my heart goes out to those who are struggling with same sex attraction. They have it tough and they have it even

tougher today because today they're surrounded by a chorus of people shouting that the conviction of the Holy Spirit is instead a product of unloving Pharisees forcing a hopelessly misguided fundamentalist understanding of the Bible on them. I know people who have been caught up in that sin who have found themselves surrounded by people who are only too happy to tell them that the reason why they feel any guilt or shame is not because the Holy Spirit is convicting them of sin but because the evangelical culture is now oppressing them. I can have the same conversation with these folks that Ahab had with Elijah. You know, they would say that our fundamentalist approach of the scripture is the great troubler of the gay community. And I would say like Elijah, we're not the troublers of the gay community, but you yourself are because you've abandoned the commandments of the Lord. That's what Elijah said in 1 Kings 18:18. You see, the net effect of blame shifting from the sin itself to the response to that sin is exactly what unscrewing the light bulb is all about. If God sends conviction of guilt through his Holy Spirit, instead of moving towards God by same speaking and confessing that sin, we instead identify the conviction itself as the problem, well then we never really confess those sins and they essentially remain unforgiven. Do it repeatedly and it becomes a habit. Repeat the habit and it becomes a lifestyle. Continue in the life-style and you make any sin whatsoever into an unforgivable sin not because God refuses to

forgive but because you now refuse to seek his forgiveness because you think you no longer need it.

Let me repeat to you *Matthew 12:31*: "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." You see, it all goes back to the original conditional clause that forgiveness is based on: "If." *If we confess our sins.* Well, we say why is that so difficult? Again, let me give you another example based on my own experience. I remember when we were first married, we owned a series of cars that routinely blew up and broke down, probably because I was the mechanic that handled most of the mechanical work there, and Janice who I might add was a pretty decent mechanic in her own right, she had one incredibly annoying habit. She was very adept at picking up any new noise or knock or something that was going on as we're driving along. And she's say, "Wait, stop, stop! I think I hear a new noise," and I'd always tell her to turn the radio up or to look out the window or just do something to avoid this, and the reason why is because I knew if I started listening to those noises, I'd start having to deal with where they came from. I didn't want to deal with it. So Janice in effect was just the audible version of



the red blinking light. And you know, that's really how the conviction of the Holy Spirit works, and the reason why it's often times so hard to simply same speak with God is because the moment we acknowledge sin is the moment we then know that we have to deal with it. Far better we think to just let the conviction play itself out in the background.

Let me give you another practical example. Let's say you're watching TV and a show comes on and you know in your mind that that show is really kind of questionable and it starts veering into areas that you know are no longer questionable and it starts going places that you know you should not go. This is usually the place where the Holy Spirit begins convicting. And so if you ignore that conviction, if you just kind of pretend that it's not really there, well then if I do that, I can continue doing what I want rather than what God is directing me towards. And at some point you feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit telling you to turn off the channel and he's beginning to convict you at that moment, and almost nobody at that point kind of stands up and turns to the Spirit and says, "Spirit, I'm not going to do that. I want to watch this show so just leave me alone." We don't do that. That's way too confrontational for us. What we do do is we ignore the conviction of the Holy Spirit or we pretend we're not experiencing it. So next week, same time, same show, same conflict, and again

God's Holy Spirit is going to press you until you reach the point where you begin to agree with God about what he's pressing you on, where you begin to same speak with God about your convictions, then you become convicted by God's Holy Spirit that watching that show is, for you, sinful. Now you have to do something. Now you have to turn it off. And until you reach that point, you're going to be just traveling down that same path over and over again and each time you travel down that path without responding to the Holy Spirit's conviction, you're going to be less sensitive to it than you were before. See, to acknowledge sin as sin means you have to deal with it. And the reason why it's so hard to confess our sins is because it takes them from the back burner and it places them right up front where we know we have to deal with them.

Let me also give you a caution here, too. The devil loves to imitate the conviction of the Holy Spirit as well. I just want to point out to you the difference between a genuine conviction of the Holy Spirit and the kind of conviction that the enemy of our souls, the one who's also known as the accuser, the one that he loves to send. You see, the conviction of the enemy is never designed to grow or improve us. It is always designed to beat us down, to accuse us, and to convince us that we are outside of the love of God. The conviction of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is our heavenly Father telling us you need to do something here. I've

said this before but the conviction of the enemy is always vague, it's always non specific and it consists in him telling you that you're evil, you're wicked, you are useless, and what you've done is outside the scope of God's forgiveness. Remember, his name is the accuser. And we have a record in scripture of his accusations flung at Job, flung at Joshua and God himself says in *Revelation 12:10*: *For the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.* That's the way that he works. The conviction of the Holy Spirit is the exact opposite. The conviction of the Holy Spirit is specific, it is directed and it is edifying. In *John 16:8* Jesus says: *"And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."*

I've used this before, this kind of a vignette of how the Holy Spirit does it. You know, if you get in a fight with your wife, the enemy's conviction might be that you're just a lousy husband and a sad excuse for a human being. Well, the conviction of the Holy Spirit might be along the lines of telling you last Tuesday night, that argument that you had with your wife, you belittled her, you made her feel small, you need to apologize to her. Do you see the difference in those two types of convictions? I mean, I can tell you right now when the Holy Spirit is convicting you, you know exactly what he's getting at. It's not some vague generic

"you stink." It's designed to grow you. It's designed to bless you. But one of the strongest urges you're going to ever feel when you get convicted by the Holy Spirit is the urge to blame shift, you know, I may have done A or B but she did C, D, E, F, and G and you and I both know, God, it's her fault. Ahab became so adept at blame shifting that he completely bought into the notion that he was innocent and it was Elijah who was guilty, and that the blame for Israel's trouble rested fully on Elijah. I mean, he so thoroughly believed that that he readily accepted Elijah's challenge to see who really was the real troubler of Israel. We won't start looking at that until next week. But make no mistake about it, Ahab was a blame shifter. So are most of the saints in the scripture. But you know, no one was more of a blame shifter than Jesus Christ. He just did it the opposite way we do. You see, we take the blame off of ourselves and then we frantically look around for someone or something to put it on. He took the blame that never once belonged to him and he embraced it and he owned it, and he paid for it with his blood. Jesus left heaven itself and he lived a life that was so blameless that he once made a challenge to his critics. He said this in *John 8:46*, he said: "*Which one of you convicts me of sin?*" Just imagine yourself doing that, imagine challenging someone, anybody, find a sin in my life. Well, Jesus was the only one who could make that challenge because he's the only one in which there was none. Jesus lived a life that

was absolutely flawless, and then he went to the cross to absorb the flaws and the guilt and the blame of every one of his sheep. And he did it so that by faith in him, we, too, could be blameless. *1 John 4:19: We love because he first loved us.*

So let me conclude this morning with a question. Simple question. Are you a blame shifter? Do you find the way out from under God's convicting Holy Spirit is to find someone or something else to blame? You see, we blame shift when we're afraid to own our sin and shortcomings, and yet we're the only people who worship a God who is willing to own them as well. So the next time you're tempted to blame shift -- and for most of us it's going to be within a matter of hours -- realize first of all where the conviction is coming from. I mean, ask yourself, is it vague, is it generic, is it condemning? That's not from God, that's not from the Holy Spirit. That's from the pit. That's from the accuser. Like I said, the conviction of the Holy Spirit is its exact opposite, it is specific, it is directed, it is edifying. Let me tell you something else about the Holy Spirit's conviction and what he knows about you and me. It's perhaps the most important part for us to grasp, and that is he knows everything. Everything there is to know about you and me and our sin, he knows. From before the foundation of the world were even laid, he knew everything there is to know about you. And 2,000 years ago Jesus Christ hung on a

cross paying for the very sins you're going to commit ten years from now, if you live that long. I mean, your worst sin and your last sin he's already seen and he's already paid for it. So there's nothing that you and I could ever do that will ever, ever catch him by surprise. You see, God saw you and he loved you when you were at your very worst. And so any and all conviction that he brings to you is never, never to point out to him the failures that he already knows we have. I mean, we blame shift to get out from under God's conviction because we doubt that God could really love somebody as real as who we know we are. Well, this is where the love of God transforms us. This is where God says in *Romans 5:8: God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* See, God's conviction, the conviction of the Holy Spirit is to grow you. It's to shape and mold you into the very image of his Son. See, that was his plan from the very beginning. That's why he decided to rescue you and me. Because of Jesus Christ, we stand holy and blameless before God, and we do so not because we are sinless and blameless but because he is. And he's already paid the price of our sins. And because he's paid the price of our sins, we have nothing but great news. We no longer have to blame shift when he convicts us because we're already blameless before him. As Tim Keller puts it, "You are more sinful than you could ever dare imagine, and you are more loved and accepted than you could ever dare hope -- at the same time." See,

when you truly buy and own the understanding that God's love for you has already seen you at your worst, then you're ready to accept the blame instead of shifting it when his Holy Spirit convicts you. *Ephesians 1:4* says: *He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.* Because we're now blameless before him, we see his conviction as giving us the opportunity to allow his Holy Spirit to grow us into the image of his Son so that we who are the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory (*Eph 1:12*). Let's pray.

*Father, we do thank you that the solution to blame shifting is understanding the blame shifting that you undertook on our behalf. You who had no blame whatsoever, you who were flawless and faultless took all of the blame, all of our sin, every bit of it, Lord, you took on the cross so we can stand before you blameless and understand, Lord, that when you bring conviction, we don't have to shift the blame to something or someone else, we already know that we are known as much as we can be by your Holy Spirit. Your Spirit is there to grow us into the image of your Son, not to condemn us. Give us the ability, Lord, when we sense that we're blame shifting to understand what it is we're doing and to understand that we are now blameless in you. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*