
Editorials

SOMEBODY MADE ME DO IT! – OR DID THEY?

Several decades ago, popular comedian Flip Wilson created a character named Geraldine. Wilson received a lot of laughs as Geraldine would always excuse her bad behavior and misdeeds with the quip, “The devil made me do it.” The devil would make her buy flashy dresses and most anything else she wanted to buy. The audience would roar with laughter seeing through Geraldine’s ploy. Maybe they were actually laughing at themselves and their own ploys as well.

Geraldine’s evasions live on and they are no laughing matter. One could say that, next to disputing the Word of God and its authority (Genesis 3:1), blame-shifting is the oldest ploy in the Book (“Then the man said, ‘The *woman* whom *You* gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate’” Genesis 3:12, emphasis added).

With our sinful nature comes the inner tendency to try to evade personal responsibility and to scapegoat — just as Adam and Eve tried when they first fell into sin. *Somebody made them do it* — according to them. However, the Lord was not buying it, not even a little.

So who makes us do what we do? We may say others, but in reality others only trigger in us what is already there. It has been often said of a drunk who spews vulgar and angry remarks, “That’s just the alcohol

talking.” But the truth is the alcohol is only a lubricant to expose what’s already in the heart. We sin because we want to and because we, for multiple complex reasons, give in to temptation. We often respond sinfully out of habit. We are most vulnerable when there is availability of sin without accountability.

James reminds us that in the act of sinning, it is our own lust and our own desire that gives birth to sin (James 1:14-15). Just as a magnet attracts and draws metal, temptation pulls at the old shards of our sinful nature. It lures us because of what is in us. When we run or even slowly meander to the pull of sin, we only have ourselves to blame. Regretfully, we often let ourselves go, thinking it will be easy to simply repent later.

That gets us back to who makes us do what we do. One of the most common scapegoats is our parents. It is easy to blame them, especially if they are dead and unable to defend themselves. Counselors often hear stories of all the bad things parents made the counselee do. However, when sitting a counselee and parents down together and listening to their life stories, there are often contradictory accounts. The counselees who seek to scapegoat often embellish or fabricate memories.

A larger issue in this whole discussion is the question: Do our parents’ sins and failures define and determine us? Are their faults and failures determinative or are they only able to influence us? Are we fatalistically
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determined like some kind of robots just because of what parents did or did not do? A study of all the Old Testament kings with offspring who turned out the opposite of their parents seems to provide proof that parental behavior patterns are not determinative. The kings of the Old Testament in particular show that God's grace even offsets parental influence. It shows a mix of good kids from bad parents and vice versa. Some children of kings willingly followed the example of their parents, whether good or bad.

Ezekiel 18 sets the record straight. God will judge each individual based on their own sins and not the sins of their parents. God will hold parents accountable for their bad behavior and hold children responsible for their bad responses to that behavior. Jesus did not have perfect parents, but He showed that one can still increase in wisdom and stature in favor with God and man with imperfect parents (Luke 2:52).

Someone may say, "Well, I was abandoned or not loved by my parents." Join the club! This writer grew up in a broken home with divorced parents and a derelict and drunken father. Home life was a nightmare. After my conversion, God in His grace, goodness, and providence allowed me to find Psalm 27. For me it put all the past to rest as far as ever being a place to focus on. The psalmist extols God as being his light and salvation. He focuses on God as his strength. He exalts the beauty of God and knows God is his hiding place. Whatever his father or mother may have done or not done, the psalmist is confident in his perfect heavenly Father and proclaims, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take care of me" (v. 10). This one psalm could save countless minds and countless dollars spent on a psychologist or psychiatrist who wants to spend years doing archaeological research into our past so that we can continue to scrape our insides. It is true, after all, that we become what we focus on. In the end our pocketbooks are lighter, but not our spirits.

The old Helen Griggs chorus says: "Gone, gone, gone, gone! Yes, my sins are gone. Now my soul is free and in my heart's a song; Buried in the deepest sea. Yes, that's good enough for me; I shall live eternally, Praise God! My sins are gone!"

We could put the word "past" in the place of sins in that chorus. "Praise God! My past is gone!" Psalm 27 (mentioned above) focuses on both the present and the future and the psalmist prays, "Teach me Your way, O LORD" (v. 11).

Someone may ask me, "Have you forgiven your father?" Only God can forgive and that is not my prerogative or responsibility. My responsibilities are to not carry any bitterness or hold or nurse grudges and to extend mercy and pity. I am to obey Philippians 3:13-14,

"forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Paul did not want to do any mental rehearsing that did not encourage his spiritual life. This kind of biblical understanding and approach would put all the confusion of what is called generational curses and deliverance through various forms of exorcism "ministries" out of business!

Unless the Word of God rules us, we will live selfishly looking for excuses. We excuse our own sins, faults, failures, and bitterness, but lack any mercy toward our scapegoats. We require perfection of the living and the dead, but not of ourselves. A Galilean carpenter once said something about planks in our own eyes and how they come first as far as our attention and removal is concerned (Matthew 7:3-5).

Much of our spiritual and mental health is dependent upon our focus. We are to focus on Jesus and His will for us according to Philippians 4:8-9, Colossians 3:1, and Hebrews 12:2 (look them up). We are to focus on the great grace of Jesus and not on an ugly past or parents who were broken. Pity them. Reread Psalm 1 as far as our proper focus. Our minds and spirits depend on it. And in so doing we can say, "Bye-bye, Geraldine."

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

male members in the house were involved in sexual relationships with [Tyler] Deaton, one saying it was part of a 'religious experience.'"

Because Deaton was seeing a therapist, Tyler as well as other members of the group feared that she would divulge how she was being repeatedly sexually assaulted. Tyler then ordered Micah Moore, a 23-year-old member living in the home, "to kill Bethany Deaton because he knew Moore had it in him to do it," the *Associated Press* stated. The *AP* report further revealed, "Moore told police that he had placed a bag over Bethany Deaton's head and held it there until her body shook."

It was Moore who detailed to police the bizarre episodes and confessed to the murder, causing authorities to abandon the suicide theory. On Nov. 9, three days after the funeral for Deaton, Moore showed up at a Kansas City police station to disclose the sordid series of events leading to her killing. At an earlier time he had told Shelley Hundley, a minister and member of the executive team at IHOP, about the specifics surrounding the homicide.

Police charged Moore with first-degree murder, and *The Star* indicated that according to prosecutors, "[Tyler] Deaton and others in the group are under investigation."