

The Excuses of Sinners - 2

We're looking at the interesting topic of the excuses sinners make. We're going through the Bible to see what excuses people use to account for their sin. Last week we examined why us sinners make excuses. We saw it's because of our pride. We hate the idea of God's spotlight falling upon us, and being exposed as deliberate, calculating, selfish rebels. No! I'm not that bad! I'm not so terrible. It's really the fault of others that I sin.

We saw why it's important to rid ourselves of excuses. When we make excuses, we do two things. Firstly, we justify ourselves, and condemn God. By doing so, we are not in a state to be cleansed. We are saying, God, it's ultimately your fault, I refuse responsibility for my sin – it's your fault. Such a heart is obviously not in a state to be cleansed, for it is unrepentant. We saw also that excuses prevent us from changing. Because our excuses act as a kind of spiritual anaesthetic to the real pain and horror of outright rebellion, we never really feel the urgency to change. We give ourselves hundreds of excuses, we re-name our sins, we re-paint them as mistakes or as ignorance, and so they become problems, but not the awful rebellion that Scripture calls it. And so we never feel the need to change, as long as we take refuge in our excuses.

The reason we do this is pride. We cannot accept how bad and rebellious we are. We flatter ourselves. Humility though accepts how bad we are and takes refuge not in excuses but in God's grace. What God wants is the words, "Yes, Lord, I deliberately disobeyed you. Forgive me, please".

We saw three of the six excuses people make last week. We saw from the garden of Eden the excuse – it's not my fault. It's the woman you gave me. We saw that the little bit of truth in there is that we are tempted. But the lie is that the temptation made us sin. The reality is that we deliberately choose in favour of ourselves in defiance of God when we sin.

The second excuse we saw was from Genesis 3 and Genesis 20 where Abraham lied to save his skin. That excuse is, "I was scared". We saw the lie behind this is that fear causes sin. The reality is that selfishness causes sin, and our self-protective love of self causes us to deliberately choose in favour of self rather than God.

The third excuse we saw from Genesis 34 where Jacob's sons revenged themselves. The excuse there is 'They deserved it' So much of our sin we excuse this way. So and so provoked me. They deserved it. Or conversely, they didn't deserve kindness or forgiveness. The lie here is that we are authorized to judge people according to our standards and then give them the penalty of their deeds. God says, vengeance is mine. He commands us to be gracious to others, as He is with us.

Well, we still have three more excuses to look at from Scripture

Excuse # 4- It just happened Exodus 32:21-25

This is perhaps my favourite excuse in the Bible. Aaron makes the golden calf, and Moses asks him why. Gee Moses, the people (there's excuse#1!) told me to make them gods. So, I asked for gold, cast it into this fire – and out came this golden calf! How about

that! It's the fire's fault. What a magic fire – pour gold in, get a ready-made golden calf out. I'm sure Aaron didn't spend time crafting, beating the gold, shaping it. No, it was the fire. It just happened. Pour more gold in, you'd get a golden lion out. It's really the fire's fault, after all.

Why'd you have an affair with your secretary? I don't know – it just happened. How did you end up in a corruption scandal? It just happened! How did you end up addicted to Internet pornography? I don't know – it just happened. Why are your thoughts filled with ungodly things – I don't know – they just pop in there!

Here's the **skin of truth** – sin gets out of control very quickly. It surprises you with its speed and strength. You can go from temptation to sin to consequence in a blindingly quick amount of time. The **lie** is that you were passive. Nothing really caused it, it was the environment. Something impersonal – and it caught me by surprise. The **reality** is that you were tempted. You didn't flee from the temptation. You deliberately disobeyed God, saying yes, to the sin. The speed of it surprised you, but it was you that sinned.

James 1:13-15 “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: ¹⁴But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. ¹⁵Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

See, Aaron was surprised by how quickly this all happened, but the truth is, he deliberately, and meticulously beat that gold into the shape of a golden calf. He chose sin. That affair at the office didn't just happen. There were thoughts. Thoughts which you chose to think on, in violation of the Bible. There were words, glances, conversations that you pursued. It happened alright, but not by itself. Sin doesn't happen to you – you happen to sin.

Excuse #5- I had no choice I Samuel 13;11-13

Well, here Saul waits for Samuel to arrive to present the sacrifice. But Samuel is late. The people are getting restless, and leaving. So Saul says, well, I'll just be a priest for a day. Notice Saul's reasoning, first excuse#1 – it's your fault Samuel, for being late, the people were getting scattered, the Philistines are gathering – ***so I forced myself***. I had to. Disobeying was the only option left to me. Didn't like it, but I had to. Samuel doesn't think much of his excuse.

Why did you pay that traffic cop the R20 bribe. I had to! He would have charged me R300 otherwise! Why did you steal? I had to! My family is suffering! Why did you commit a sin of the body? I had to – my body's desires are too strong!

The **skin of truth** in this excuse is that we often feel cornered by life's circumstances. The **lie** is that because of the circumstances, obedience is removed from us as an option. Obeying God becomes impossible. **The reality**: You always have choices, they are sometimes simply very hard ones. The options aren't pleasant, so you choose the one that is least threatening to yourself. You love yourself so much that you deliberately reject obeying God in favour of disobedience, which seems to be a better deal for yourself.

No Saul, you had the option of waiting for Samuel, even when things seemed to be getting worse. But you feared your position as king, your control over the people, and that seemed more important to you than obeying God. See, if the option of obeying God

was truly removed from you, could God be just in judging you? How could God command you to do something if it was in fact impossible?

Excuse #6 – My Motives Made my Disobedience Obedience. I Samuel 15:20

Once again, our friend Saul. He's told to go and utterly destroy the Amalekites, leaving nothing alive and taking no spoil. Well, off he goes, disobeys, and leaves the king alive as well as a lot of choice animals. Samuel confronts him and here's the excuse: (v15) – yes, I did obey, but the people (there's the blaming) took some animals – for a very spiritual reason! To sacrifice to God. So we didn't disobey, we improved on God's command. Samuel rebukes him, and he repeats the excuse in verse 20. Samuel's classic response in verses 21-22 takes his breath away.

Why did you covet your neighbour's good? I didn't – I just admired it. It's not disobedience in my eyes. Why have you produced such ungodly music? We haven't, we're praising God – so it's ok! Why do hang around with friends who blaspheme God? Are you ashamed of Christ? No, I'm just trying to win their friendship so I can witness to them later. Why did you commit fornication with your girlfriend? Well, we didn't go all the way, so it wasn't fornication! God knows we wanted to wait, so it's OK, it's not sin. See, for me, it's not sin. My situation is unique. My motives make it all OK.

The **skin of truth** is God's commands can have a lot of applications. The **lie** is that I am authorized to change His commands, violate some of them if I think the end justifies the means. My situation is unique. **Reality:** God's words are settled in heaven. If there was an exception, He would have mentioned it. The truth is, you love yourself so much, you think you can obey God on your own terms. In fact, you are not obeying, you are simply acting in your own interest, riding on the appearance of obeying God. Even if your motive is great, it does not make up for a bad method.

Saul, you did not bring them back to sacrifice. You brought them back because you thought God's commands could be set aside according to your own wisdom. You loved yourself and lusted after some juicy meat, and God's commands didn't seem practical to you at the time. God seemed small in your eyes, compared to your view of yourself, and so you deliberately disobeyed God, acting in your own interest.

That then is six excuses we use to make our sin seem less, to make ourselves seem less sinful and thus less in need of drastic change. Compare that to the reaction of godly men who were confronted with their sin. David – who said –I have sinned against the Lord. He went on to write Psalm 51 and 52 – beautiful expressions of a heart that has faced the ugliness of sin and pleaded with God for mercy. Or consider Paul who cried out in Romans 7:25 “O wretched man that I am? Who will deliver me from the body of this death?” Consider James advice to us as he describes the reaction of one who stops making excuses James 4:8-9 “Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double minded. ⁹Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness” Why? Because when we face our sin, it causes us grief. It causes us pain, horror and shame. But it is the path to cleansing and repentance. It is the path to spiritual growth.

Those who find refuge in their excuses will drift through life with mediocre Christian lives, mediocre fruit and mediocre experience of God. Those who will find refuge in the mercy of God will find abundant grace, and a path of growth.

The key- Humble yourselves sin the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. Humility. Pride is the fuel behind the excuses. Humility is the fuel behind claiming ownership for your sins, and saying those dreaded words – Yes, Lord, I deliberately disobeyed you.

I didn't say this to dance on your grave, or to taunt you with your failures or your excuses. I am also not claiming that obedience is easy, or that fleeing temptation is simple. I have not said that. My aim today is to teach you to be brutally honest with yourself. That brutal honesty will force you to see that the choice to obey or disobey is always before you. That brutal honesty will make your sin that much more odious to yourself – a deeper, darker stench in your nostrils. When you will face each sin with the thought – to do this would be deliberate disobedience to God – you are truly at a fork in the road. Harden your heart – raise your fist to God, or soften, and submit. The choices are always there, and ultimately we would choose God, but our excuses muddy the water with our reasoning, logic and selfishness. Strip away the excuses, and it's just you and God. And it's either Yes, Lord or No, I won't.