Who is at Fault?

1. There is a common problem among Christians and it is this. We tend to blame the devil for almost every problem we have. When we have troubles or trials, we say things like, “The devil is really attacking me this week.” Or when circumstances don’t go our way, we blame spiritual warfare.
   a. I heard a fellow the other day say to me, “A lot of people I know are really under attack right now…God must be getting ready to do something really big because the opposition is so great!” So I asked him, “what kinds of attacks are they experiencing?” And he replied, “well, you know, financial problems, car breakdowns, family crisis, bosses getting on their case, troubling temptations and bad thoughts.”
   b. His reply troubled me, because it contained several errors that could affect his life.
      i. But understand that spiritual warfare is real and Christians can and are attacked by satanic forces every day around the globe. But we need to use discernment otherwise we can fall into one of several traps:
   c. The first thing is that the focus is upon what the devil is doing instead of what God is doing.
      i. We should never be giving the devil more credit or attention than God. When we do so, we are focused upon the wrong thing. (remember last week’s sermon on focus?)
      ii. When our attention is upon God, we gain the capacity to rise above our troubles and our focus us no longer on the trouble but upon the One who has promised to be with us THROUGH the troubles. Imagine him saying instead, “I know some people who are really struggling right now, but we are praying and trusting God for a breakthrough.” Can you see the difference between that and focusing upon the “attack?”
      iii. Jesus told his disciples (that’s you and me if we are his followers) "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)
         1. When you read the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles, you don’t find Paul blaming his troubles on the devil. When he was shipwrecked, he simply told the crew “God has told me we will survive” and when he was bitten by the serpent, he simply shook it off into the fire. He didn’t complain about the opposition, knowing it was part of our life together in Christ as we advance the KOG.
   d. I don’t know if you heard about the Christian who prayed to get green lights as he drove down Route 20 in Mentor. He was praising God for each green one he got, but then began to get depressed when he caught a red light. He thought he was being blessed when he got green lights, but never thought that someone else might be praying for a green light and that he might have to catch a red one so that person’s prayer might be answered. (I’m joking). The truth is, if you are getting a green light, that means someone else is getting a red one, so if you are getting blessed what does that say about the person who is getting a red one?
      i. Was the devil behind you getting the red lights and being late to your job interview? Or was it your lack of time management?
   e. The second error is in assigning direct blame to the devil for most of, or all of your troubles.
      i. Satan is more often than not, the INDIRECT cause for the troubles we have in life, but our choices and the choices of others are the DIRECT cause. Most of our troubles are circumstantial, that is, they exist simply because there are other people in this world, and that the world is fallen because of sin’s existence in it.
      ii. Who are you going to blame for your brake lines rusting through on your car? I am going to probably bet that it is the process of oxidation upon metal, something called “rust” that
causes metals to break down over time. You and I are not immune to the ravages of the laws of our world.

iii. Who are you going to blame for your lack of funds to fix your car, when last week you chose to go on a shopping binge instead of saving your surplus for the inevitable costs of automobile maintenance?

2. Do you see some of the flaws in our thinking when it comes to rationalizing and dealing with the things of life that come against us? Many times we are battling the surface things instead of dealing with the root causes.
   a. When you go to the doctor, you want to have your symptoms treated...if you have a cough, or a fever, you want relief! But the doctor is really interested in getting at the root of the problem and not just the symptoms.
   b. What kinds of symptoms are going on in your life? Are you facing anxiety, anger, conflict in marriage, financial chaos, or fear? Most of us want them stopped because they cause us pain, discomfort and interrupt what we believe is our pursuit of happiness. But they all have a common source. We can blame the devil or we can get to the heart of our problems and get answers that change lives, including ours.
      i. “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?” Jeremiah 17:9 (NLT)
      ii. We have a HEART PROBLEM.
          1. Our hearts are sick because sin has separated us from God.
          2. Our sin (not just sins) but our alienation from God is at the root of our struggle. Our hearts are far from God. Even for those who come to Christ, there are still parts of their hearts that are still attached to other things.
      iii. Jesus tells us that The greatest battle lies within us not just outside of us.
      iv. “Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. “All of you listen,” he said, “and try to understand. It’s not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart... For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.”” Mark 7:14-15, 21-23 (NLT)
          1. It is all the stuff that is in us...that alienates us from one another and from God. It is what is inside of us, not outside of us that is at the root of the problem. We can try blaming temptation, the world, the devil and even other people for our problems, but the truth is, the problem lies within each of us.
   c. You can try to deal with the symptoms by trying to put band aids on the problem. Maybe try harder to deal with your temptations, make bigger resolutions, make bigger promises to God. We can try to get rid of the television so we aren’t stimulated by the imagery of food or drink or other temptations. While it may help, it won’t deal with the real source of our problem.
      i. A man named Thomas Merton was struggling with sinful thoughts and feelings and decided the best place to avoid the temptations was to enter a Trappist Monastery where silence was the rule (except in worship) and the entire day would be spent in study and prayer. He wrote in his biography “The Seven Story Mountain” that the temptations and evil thoughts only grew worse! He realized then that the problem lay within himself, in his own desperate heart that was living apart from the grace of God. Instead of trying to repent only of the sinful feelings and thoughts, he repented of his independence from God and was born again. That began a marvelous journey into God’s love and grace.
Perhaps you have been journeying toward God and wonder if you will ever get free of the thoughts and feelings and sin that seems to plague you? If you haven’t surrendered to the goodness and grace of God, that is the first step you can take in the experience of freedom. You can do that now, today! (Let’s bow and pray).

3. On this journey toward freedom, we have a part to play, and God has a part to play.
   a. God did all the work at the cross; He secured our forgiveness, He paid for our sins, He reconciled us to Himself, He regenerated us in our spirit, He purchased our healing and met the demands of perfect justice and holiness. God’s work is done.
   b. What is our part? Our part is to receive His work by faith, to lay claim to what God has done, and then walk it out.
   c. The first step is something we talked about last week briefly, and deals with renewing our minds. While God has done the work at the cross, He expects us to live out our role in belief. Placing our faith in what He has done.
      i. **Belief requires truth for faith to work.** You can place your faith in something that is not true, and it will be useless. Believe as hard as you want, but if you place your belief in something that is not true, it will do you no good.
         1. I can believe that a light switch will turn on when I flip it, but if it isn’t connected to the electricity grid, my belief is useless, no matter how “strong” my faith is!

4. We are going to examine three scriptures today: Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 4:8-9, and Hebrews 3:1.
   a. All three of these scriptures say YOU must renew your mind. **None say, “pray that God will renew your mind.”**
   b. If you are to pray, "Oh God, renew my mind," you are acting much like a child that says, "Mom, do my homework for me." Most responsible parents would say, "No!"
   c. When it comes to renewing your mind, God will do His part, but not your part.
      i. **Jesus told us that “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.”** (John 16:13).
      ii. That is, God will provide the truth for you, He will even lead you into the truth, but unless you believe it and apply it and dispose of the untruths in your mind, that truth will do you very little good.
      iii. You have heard the saying, “You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him drink?” There is a spiritual version of that as well: “you can lead a person to truth but you can’t make him believe it.”
      iv. What is holding you back?

5. Our Part
   a. When it comes to renewing your mind-God has already done His part. And it is clear that He will not do your part.
   b. First, you must accept responsibility for renewing your mind. After all, it is your mind! **What does it mean to renew your mind? It means we learn to think like God thinks.** We need to CHALLENGE of our sinful attitudes, our negative, critical ways of thinking, our selfish thoughts.
      i. **“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”** (2 Cor 10:3-5)
1. Notice that the primary weapon of this passage is the truth! That is the weapon we fight with!

c. How do you do renew your mind?
   i. Accept responsibility for your thoughts. You have the ability to exercise control over your thoughts. God warned Cain to focus his mind on the right things, but Cain chose to think about the wrong things - anger and jealousy - which led to his murderous actions. What are you feeding your mind? Much of what we think about is directly connected to what we are feeding into our mind. We need to guard our mind and not fill it with garbage. This includes what we watch on TV, what we read, and the music we listen to.

   ii. Recognize that your thoughts/beliefs control your feelings.

      1. If you are depressed, sad, burdened, it has a lot to do with what you believe about yourself and your circumstances. Put the engine of belief back in charge of running the train instead of letting the caboose (feelings) run it. "Right thinking" leads to "right actions," which leads to "right feelings." The priority is critical. If feelings are at the front, they will drive you wherever they feel like going. You've heard it said, "If it feels this good, it must be the right thing to do." What a trap! Your emotions can take you into all kinds of confusion.

      2. An emotion, negative or positive, is the result of a belief. ("I’m happy because I just got a raise") That isn’t really true. You probably feel happy because you were recognized for your value to the company, which is expressed monetarily in your raise. You may feel happy because you now have more money to do with what you want. Your belief about the event is what controls your feelings about it.

   iii. Test your thoughts against the truth. You have the mind of Christ, and you have the word of God at your fingertips. Does your thinking line up with what God says about you or your circumstances?

   iv. Vocally declare the truth you are claiming. (Romans 10:10) ‘For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” Your lips speak and you hear the truth again. It changes your mind (and what you believe). We declare truth in songs! We declare the WOG.

   v. Think on these things: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." Philippians 4:8-9 (NIV)

   vi. 1 Corinthians 2:1. "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.”

      1. "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body." Ephesians 4:22-25 (NIV)

   2. Renewing your mind is a process, not a one time achievement.

   d. A key issue here is-what do you want to think about? Learning to think like Jesus means that you must continually make decisions in your mind. Your decisions! Your mind! God won't decide for you. You must want to change the way you think.
e. **Speak God's truth to the evil thoughts that come to you.** This is how Jesus did combat with Satan in the time of temptation early in His ministry. See Matthew chapter 4. Jesus did not ignore the temptation-He faced it. And He quoted scripture to respond to each temptation. When evil thoughts come into your mind, don't try to run from them-attack them! Use the tools God has given you. Once you have exposed what you are battling, then begin to focus on the positive things God speaks of in Philippians 4:8. Bring God into the battle.

f. **Fix your thoughts on Jesus:** Hebrews 3:1. "Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess." (NIV)

6. What will you do with the truth? Will you stop blaming the devil and begin to take ownership of the process of renewing your mind? Will you apply these five steps to your life and watch it be transformed?