"The man (Adam) said, 'The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it……the woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate'" (Genesis 3:12-13).

One of the patterns in human interactions, especially when something goes wrong, is to blame someone else and to justify oneself. As a Marriage and Family Therapist and in counseling people as a pastor I have seen this happen time and time again. A married couple having difficulties come in for counseling. The husband will tell me what's wrong with his wife, and the wife will give me a detailed description of everything her husband is doing to ruin their marriage. Or in family counseling, parents will try to convince me why their child needs help, and the son or daughter will blame the parents for their family dysfunction.

In the counseling session I will allow the clients to do this for a while. If I let them, they would spend the whole session doing this. But after a while I stop them, and tell them they are wasting their time – and in some cases, their money. To blame the other and praise myself is simply unproductive.

This way of operating in our relationships is not a new or recent development! We see it way back in the Bible, in the story of Adam and Eve. You remember, God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, told them to enjoy everything – except, one prohibition: don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (No, it wasn't an apple or an apple tree!). And, of course, they did what God said not to do. And when God confronted them, how did they respond? Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the serpent.

The story of Adam and Eve is your story and my story. The word Adam means "man". Adam represents all of humankind. And the "blame the other-justify myself" scenario gets played out again and again.

What's the alternative? How can differences be settled, and people live in harmony rather than conflict? One of the keys is this: for each person in the relationship to take responsibility for what they contribute to the problem, and not blame the other. And in taking responsibility, also being willing to change!

Think what a difference this would make in our family life, our community life, the political realm, even the world community! Imagine a husband and wife no longer pointing a condemning finger at the other, but saying, "This is what I'm doing to mess up our marriage, and I am going to do things differently." What a difference it would make if kids would stop blaming their parents and parents would stop blaming their kids and each related to the other in a more responsible, healthy way. And can we even begin to fathom what it would be like in Washington and in our state capitols if the Republicans would quit blaming the Democrats and the Democrats would quit blaming the Republicans, and the members of each party would clean up their own act!

It's such a simple concept, yet it can improve and heal our relationships with others. Stop blaming the other person and justifying ourselves, but take responsibility for both the positives and the negatives that we bring to a relationship, and change where we need to change.

Just do it! And when we find it hard or impossible to do, ask God to help us, and He will.