

In previous chapters of Genesis, we've seen God's original plan and design for all that He created, how man subsequently sinned against God, and the resulting judgment that was placed on all of creation and mankind. Genesis 4 presents us with life now, as it were, in a fallen world. Sin has sadly now become a fact of human nature, and we find wrongdoing arising within the depths of the human heart – there is no longer a need for an external tempter. Though clearly an example of one who chooses to turn his back on God, the story of Cain also presents us with a picture of how the unbelieving world views Christ and His Gospel. With Cain came a number of firsts: he was the first person 'born' into the world, the first with first siblings, etc. Cain is, however, also the first unbeliever, and subsequently commits the first murder. The Bible presents him as the prototype of the doomed person. Jude 11, in describing 'godless men', says "Woe to them... they have gone the way of Cain." There is also at the same time in this chapter the remarkable account of a conversation between the Creator and the sinner – a conversation that clearly demonstrates the loving mercy of God as He extends the offer of forgiveness to Cain, even 'pleading' with him to repent of his ways and turn back to the Lord.

Think back to a time recently when you were tempted or enticed to do something you know is wrong? Perhaps it was to cheat on a homework assignment, or exaggerate your resume 'just a little'? In what ways do temptations to sin try to enter and take hold of your life day to day? Why is it vitally important for Christians to reject sin completely and have nothing to do with evil? What are some things that are important in enabling you to overcome temptation, and to 'flee from evil' (2 Tim 2:22)?

Read Genesis 4

1. What were the differences in the offering given by Cain and Abel? Why do you think God looked upon Abel's offering with favor, but not Cain's offering? (see also Deut 26:1-4)
 - Cain brought "some of the fruits of the soil..." while Abel brought "fat portions from some of the first-born of his flock"; the fat portion was considered the most valuable part of an animal
 - First-fruits symbolizes the giving the very best to God; giving the first to God showed that honoring Him was at the forefront of your mind
 - Cain did not do what was right in God's eyes, so not only was his offering not accepted, he himself wasn't accepted
 - If Cain had been trusting God with faith, he would have accepted that God's way was other than he had supposed; rather, he gets angry
 - The issue is the willingness to bring in faith and gratitude what little bits and pieces we have to offer so that they can be taken and made into something more; that faith and gratitude includes the willingness to learn when we have gotten it wrong, so that we may change
 - MacArthur says that Cain should have known that what was required was an animal sacrifice; Cain brought fruits of the soil, which were his accomplishments, his achievements

There is some thought that Cain's offering was displeasing to the Lord because it was 'fruits of the soil', which symbolized Cain's own accomplishments rather than a sacrificed animal, which symbolized that an offering of atonement. How might Cain & Abel have known what sort of offering the Lord required of them? (Think back again to our discussion last time on Genesis 3:21)

- When God provided covering for Adam & Eve – the sacrifice and shedding of blood was needed in order to clothe them

2. What is Cain's response (v. 5-6)? In spite of his attitude, how does God extend mercy to Cain in v. 6-7? What can we learn about the nature of sin, and how believers must deal with and conquer sin? (c.f. 1 Peter 5:8, James 4:7)

- V.6-7 → God 'reasons' with Cain to repent of his ways, and worship God acceptably; God is telling Cain that things do not have to be this way, if he would only do what is right, God would forgive him and accept both Cain and his offering
- Doing what is right is the way that we can 'master' sin, i.e. not let sin rule over us
- Sin is active, and seeks after prey – it 'crouches' at the door, as if waiting to pounce on its victim; it 'desires' after its victim, and wants to rule over him/her; 1 Pet 5:8 → "...Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."
- Doing what is right means submitting ourselves to God; James 4:7 → "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

3. What does Scripture say was the motivation behind Abel's gift (Heb 11:4)? What was this motivation based in? What does this tell us about proper and acceptable worship of God? (see also Psalm 51:16-17)

- FAITH was the motivation behind his gift; "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead." – Heb 11:4
- His faith was in God's promise and command; Abel approached God with an offering that demonstrated his acknowledgement of his own sinfulness, and the need for an atonement → he had an attitude of contrition
- Psalm 51:16-17 → "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

4. Contrast Abel with Cain's motivations. What do verses 6-7 tell us about the attitude with which Cain approached God with his offering? What does Cain's reaction to God show about the state of his heart? What ultimately did Cain's thoughts and attitude drive him to do (v.8; see also 1 John 3:11-12)?

- Cain took worship into his own hands and brought whatever so pleased him; not his very best, and perhaps not even the right kind of offering
- The fact that he became angry perhaps suggest that he also approached God with pride – in himself, and in what he had to offer; the fact that he murders Abel showed the jealousy of his heart
- Cain's thoughts and attitude led him to plot and kill his brother in the most deceptive way possible
- "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous... Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him." – 1 John 3:11-12, 15

5. How does the Lord confront Cain in verse 9? What is Cain's response, and why was this response of particularly great offense? What further about the state of Cain's heart does this response show us? In what way does Cain's response confirm what God says about sin and its effects in verse 7?

- God asks Cain where his brother Abel is, and Cain responds with an insulting, defiant reply to God
- Cain was conscious that God was speaking to him, yet he dared lie directly to God and shoot back an insulting question
- Cain shows he does not feel the need to be accountable to God for his actions
- His calloused, flippant, mocking response to God shows just how hard sin had hardened his heart – because Cain had not done what was right, sin was already mastering / ruling over him

Are we indeed our brother's keeper? What would be some ways that Scripture says we are to be our

brother's keeper (e.g. Mark 9:42, Mark 12:31; Gal 6:1-5, Heb 3:13)? Does this negate the need for personal accountability of each person to God (Matt 12:36, Rom 14:11-12)

In some ways, most definitely we are, e.g.

- Mark 9:42 → Not causing other believers to sin
- Mark 12:31 → Love your neighbor as yourself
- Gal 6:1-5 → We are to help restore fellow believers who sin, and in doing so to 'carry each other's burdens'
- Heb 3:13 → We are to encourage one another in fellowship so that our hearts would not be hardened by sin

This does not negate the need for personal accountability to God, e.g.

- Matt 12:26 → All men will give an account to God for every word they've uttered
- Rom 14:11-12 → Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God

6. What was God's judgment on Cain for what he did (v.10-12)? Given Cain's particular vocation (v.2) how was this judgment particularly demonstrative of God's attitude towards sin, and the sinner?

- God, as if to 'avenge' the wrong that has been done to Abel, curses Cain directly and drives him from the ground – both in terms of the fruit of his work, and his belonging: he himself would be a restless wanderer on the earth
- God pronounces judgment on the very thing that Cain relied on heaviest for his sustenance – working the ground

7. Even after Cain's horrific crime of murder, how does God again extend mercy to Cain, in the midst of judgment (v.15-17)?

- Cain is shown mercy and his life is spared and protected, if only for a while
- God even blesses him with offspring, and productivity with his hands (albeit now in building a city, and not working the ground)

8. The account of Lamech is an interesting one in that it shows just how destructive sin is. In what ways does Lamech's life demonstrate how swiftly sin had progressed only in 5 generations (v. 19-24)? What does Lamech's comment to his wives in verses 23-24 indicate about the state of his heart compared with Cain's response in his situation in verses 13-14?

- Lamech engaged in polygamy – where God had said very clearly that marriage was between one man and one woman
- Whereas Cain at least showed remorse and fear to some extent in reaction to God's judgment, Lamech's responses seems more like a taunt; Lamech seems to exult in his sin; as opposed to God being the one who seals Cain with declaration of mercy, Lamech takes it upon himself to bestow mercy on himself.

9. From the following passages, what further lessons can we learn about gravity and destructiveness of sin, and caution we need to heed in not allowing our hearts to be hardened by sin? What happens when man hardens his heart against God? (Prov 28:14; Rom 1:21, 24, 26, 28; Eph 4:17-18; Heb 3:13)

- Prov 28:14 → "Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble."
- Rom 1 → God gives them over to their sin and to a depraved mind
- Eph 4:17-18 → "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts."
- Heb 3:13 → But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

Taking every thought captive...

Whether men acknowledge it or not, all people worship one thing or another, because God created us to be

worshippers. However, as we've seen in today's study, there are only two forms of worship in God's sight: worship that is acceptable and pleasing to Him, and that which is not. Worship that God accepts must be offered on the basis of what He commands – on the terms that He has laid out for us in His Word. Like Cain, many in the world today offer their worship in ways that God rejects; some worship mute idols that have no power to save, while other worship things of the world like money or status. There are those, however, who would claim to worship the God of the Bible, and yet do so according to their own terms, and with wrong attitudes. This type of false worship was ultimately the entry through which Cain allowed sin to enter his life and to take mastery over his heart. Far from accepting the Lord's rebuke and correction and 'doing what was right', Cain despised the mercy that God extended to him and in so doing hardened his heart in sin, against God. We must not allow sin to have a hold of our lives. If you are not a Christian today, the only way you can escape the power and grip of sin is by placing your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, acknowledging that He died for your sins. If you are a believer, be careful at every moment to walk by faith and in gratitude to the Lord, heeding His Word closely, worshiping Him in the way He commands, and receiving His rebuke and correction when we sin, because "the Lord disciplines those he loves." (Proverbs 3:11-12)