

STUDY ON THE FIRST FAMILY

“God’s Portrait For The Home”

Genesis 4:6-15

STUDY (10)



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“Unchecked Heart” (Genesis 4:6-15)

This story unfolds what a heart of anger can lead to in a person’s life. When the cancer of sin is unchecked it invades a man’s thoughts, words, and deeds. The Lord Jesus warned that terrible sinful actions proceed from the heart,

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness (Mark 7:21-22)

The greatest danger within a man is his heart. From there, all kinds of wickedness can result. The sin of murder is rooted in the devil, “*a murderer from the beginning*” (John 8:44). It was because Cain was “*of that wicked one*” (1 John 3:12) that he slew Abel. God is love but the devil is hatred.

Probably the most important power over man is religion. He will die for religious faith. Some will even blow themselves in bombs in the name of religion. The self-righteous religious man hates the light of saving grace being shined on him. It results in him being angry with God, the Bible, and those who obey the Bible. The carnal mind hates to be in the convicting presence of a sanctified life.

There is a great warning of how rapidly sin can manifest. How quickly did the seed of the serpent reveal its hostility to the seed of the woman. One moment a man can be offering up worship to the Lord and the next he can be murdering his own brother. I am sure that Cain did not come to worship that morning with the intention of murdering his own brother. He may even have rejected the idea as unthinkable. Like Hazael, he may have argued, “*is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?*” (2 Kings 8:13). It is a solemn warning to the latent dangers lurking in our own thought life. The way of Cain begins in the heart. One man observed, “There is a little Cain in all of us and a lot of Cain in most of us.”

And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. (v6-7)

God had the absolute right to strike down Cain dead in judgment for offering up false worship to Him. However, in grace and compassion the Lord reasons and pleads with this rebellious man to truly repent and check the anger in his heart. It is a very personal conversation, which reveals the Lord’s loving concern for Cain. He begins by asking two rhetorical questions, “*Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?*” God is not asking for information by these questions, as He is omniscient. What He is doing is seeking to get Cain to repent, as the angry sinner contemplates the questions. The same questions we all need to ask ourselves today when we feel anger rising in their hearts. Is the anger justified? Is it rooted in pride because God has rejected our acts of disobedience? Is the anger covering over an area of sin in my life?

Rather than just pointing out Cain’s sin, the Lord also points him to the solution. He is promised through another question, “*If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?*” In other words “*doest well*” means that if Cain humbly submits and offers the right sacrifice from the right heart, he will be accepted by God also. We must also note the wisdom of God’s rebuke here. He doesn’t compare Cain to Abel directly which would probably have inflamed the jealous heart of the older sibling more, but He points Cain to the right standard of sacrifice. If Cain obeys God way, his fallen countenance can be turned into the joy of salvation. Cain did not need to speak to

a psychiatrist or go on an anger management course. He just needed to repent. There is a way back. God's offer is genuine. It is not too late.

The Lord, however, warns of the dreadful consequences in Cain's life if he doesn't turn back, "*and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.*" This idiom "*sin lieth at the door*" pictures sin like a wild animal waiting to pounce on its prey. Sin is a monster that if it is not dealt with will take control of a person. This echoes the NT writing, "*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*" (James 1:14-15). The path of sin is always downhill. It is never static. No man ever got a clearer personal warning than Cain did.

The Lord closes out by saying, "*And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.*" This statement is difficult to interpret. Many believe it means that sin's desire is to rule over Cain but Cain must get the mastery by ruling over the sin. Now, Scripture reveals that the unsaved man cannot master this sin by his own efforts. Self-reformation cannot work, as the leopard cannot change its spots! But through Christ pictured by the shed blood sacrifice, Cain can rule over the power of sin that is seeking to master him. This is what it means by "*If thou doest well*" by offering up the right sacrifice. Cain must master through Christ's indwelling power this internal monster of sin or it will master him.

The same principle is true today. Sinners must repent and trust Christ's power of deliverance or they will be mastered by sin. The power of sin will devour their lives. The Psalmist reminds us of the weakness of the flesh to deal with sin, "*Iniquities prevail against me*" but he points to the hope in God, "*as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away*" (Psa. 65:3).

And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. (v8)

This angry man is now on the brink of the abyss. One more step will unleash these terrible forces within. Cain ominously does not say anything to God's words. There is no gratitude in his heart for God's gracious intervention. His next actions reveal he refused to heed the gracious pleading of the Lord. He wants his sin more than he wants salvation from the monster crouching within.

Suddenly the terrible consequences of the lurking unchecked sin erupt, "*Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.*" Now, there has been no example of a murder of another human before this point. Maybe Cain thought he could butcher Abel the way he had seen his brother slay the sacrificial animal. This was not manslaughter but first-degree murder. Doubtless, he had to do this subtly as Abel would also have been a physically strong man.

The mention of spilt blood in the subsequent verses implies a brutal and bloody assault on Abel. In 1 John 3:12 we read, "*Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother.*" Now, the Greek word here that is translated "*slew*" has the idea of butchering an animal for sacrifice. It's as if Cain in his anger and hatred for God's demand for a shed blood sacrifice, defies God by casting the body of Abel down as a shed blood sacrifice. The first murder is also the first martyrdom. Although anger and hatred may be projected on others, invariably the hateful person is at odds with God.

And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? (v9)

The Lord begins the second court trial with this time Cain as the defendant. There is a parallel between how the Lord deals with Adam and Eve in chapter three and how He now deals with Cain. God could have cut Cain down immediately for the wanton act of fratricide (from the Latin words *frater* “brother” and *cida* “killer”). But in grace the Lord questions him, “*Where is Abel thy brother?*” The defiant rebel refuses to acknowledge his guilt. Even though he is talking to his Creator who is omniscient, Cain has no regard for God. Depravity deludes a man into thinking he can hide his sin from God. But the Lord keeps a careful inventory of the whereabouts of His saints, “*For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil*” (1 Peter 3:12).

The murderer then adds lies to his other sins, “*I know not.*” His heart is already hardened in his sin. Murder and lying are twin brothers. Cain demonstrates he is truly a seed of the serpent by his murder and lies, “*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it*” (John 8:44).

Cain then follows his lies with a callous and insolent riposte, “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*” It is as if he is saying, “Am I the shepherd’s shepherd?” Responsibility for the welfare of others, especially family members, is not part of Cain’s thinking. He only lives for Cain. There is no interest in living for the second table of the Ten Commandments. This man is thoroughly depraved. He has no care for God or his fellow man. We must note how quickly sins of the heart multiply into awful actions. A heart of pride and anger led to murder and even lying to God. People do not just fall into gross public sins. Their fall begins with a process beginning in the heart some time preceding the actual action.

And He said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. (v10-12)

We must see the downward spiral of depravity in the first family. After the initial Fall, Adam and Eve are ashamed of their sinful actions. They seek to cover up and hide themselves from God. After initially trying to shift the blame for their sin, they eventually admit they ate the fruit. Cain makes no such admission of guilt. Indeed, he brazenly flaunts his impenitence before the Lord. His conscience is seared. The life of Cain aptly illustrates the truth of Romans 2:4-5,

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;

After Cain’s unrepentant defiance, the Lord pronounces the guilty verdict, “*the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.*” The damning evidence is in the red bloodstains on the earth. These bloodstains were linked to Cain’s act of murder, “*which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand.*” No forensic evidence can be hidden from God. The sentence of judgment immediately follows, “*And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her*

strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.” Sinners may seek to cover over their sin and deny it but God will always expose it and judge it.

God links the punishment to the place of the sin and where Cain prides himself as being his greatest strength. A twofold curse comes upon Cain from the soil that he spilt his brother’s blood on. The earth will never again be fruitful for him, which as a farmer by profession will doom him to a difficult existence. It will be an intensification of the general curse of Genesis 3:19. The land that he was so proud concerning his ability to cultivate would now be his persistent enemy. Secondly, he will never be able to settle upon a piece of land to work. He will be a roaming, restless nomad. No longer will he have a place to call home. In v16 we are told that he goes into the land of “Nod” which means wandering.

Cain will be left to a haunted life of frustration and fear. This will invariably bring him a life of perpetual discontentment, *“There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked”* (Isa. 48:22). Cain will get a foretaste of hell. This is the same for sinners today who live unsatisfied and discontented lives. Nothing they involve themselves in brings any permanent satisfaction or eternal significance. The liberal philosopher, Edmund Burke famously summed up this state, *“What shadows we are, what shadows we pursue.”*

This punishment on Cain must have multiplied the grief of Adam and Eve. They have just lost Abel and now have effectively lost Cain. The family unit that promised so much has fallen apart because of sin. These two boys will not be around to bring comfort in their old age. All their dreams are shattered. Again, we are reminded that sin brings misery and not joy. It brings sorrow to the perpetrator and those directly affected by his sinful actions.

And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. (v13-14)

There is not even the tinge of remorse or repentance in Cain’s reaction for his sin or his evil character. The only regret is in his punishment as a perennial pariah. The hunter fears that he will now become the hunted, *“and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.”* As only Adam’s direct family members inhabited the earth at this point, Cain knew he would be a marked man. The love and trust he once enjoyed with his family have now gone forever.

Cain’s just punishment would have been instant death but God’s grace spares his life. Yet despite the fact that he got far less than he deserved, the hardened apostate refuses to accept his gracious and just punishment, *“My punishment is greater than I can bear.”* This self-centred man sees himself as the victim! Barnhouse observes,

One of the consequences of sin is that it makes the sinner pity himself instead of causing him to turn to God. One of the first signs of new life is that the individual takes sides with God against himself.

The way of Cain is not a pleasant road to walk. Truly, *“the way of transgressors is hard”* (Prov. 13:15).

And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. (v15)

We can only but marvel at the grace of God to this undeserving sinner. No thunder and lightning fall down from heaven on this wretched soul. Even at the height of defiance and impenitence, God extends grace by a mark of protection. I think it is fair to say that no one ever had more spiritual privileges than Cain. The Lord had spoken to him lovingly, clearly, and personally and he still went out and murdered his brother. Even then the Lord gives him time to repent with a series of convicting questions. Finally, the Lord protects his life from any vigilante seeking vengeance.

God has seen fit to spare his life and not invoke the death penalty. That is God's sovereign right as the Ruler of this earth. He did the same with David when he murdered Uriah. No man can complain that God spared Cain's life, as all of us deserve to die for our sin at any time. Perhaps the Lord wanted Cain alive as a warning of the impenitence of the rebellious sinner and an example of the infinite grace of God.

This mark will protect him from vengeance. It will give Cain the time to repent from his sin, turn to God, and seek forgiveness. Tragically, he will refuse the open door of mercy. He is not a figure to be envied but pitied. Learn a lesson from his sad example. The great English poet, John Trapp rightly observed,

To prosper in sin is the greatest tragedy that can befall a man this side of hell. Envy not such a one his pomp any more than you would a corpse his flowers."

Never walk in the way of Cain, but emulate the righteous Abel even if it costs you life itself. These two men represent the two seeds of Genesis 3:15. These seeds have different values, different worship, different ambitions, and different eternal destinations. The line of these two seeds divides continents, nations, cities, towns, churches, and families today. The family of the Cainites and the family of the Abelites co-exist side by side. We may not be able to distinguish always who is in what family line but God can discern perfectly.

The ultimate irony is that although Abel is physically dead his life still speaks eternally, "*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh*" (Heb. 11:4). Cain may have silenced Abel's physical voice but he cannot silence his testimony. It may appear that Cain got away with his sin, but that is not the final chapter on his life. Cain may live much longer than Abel on this planet but that is no indicator of God's approval. God's final judgment was hell for Cain and everlasting life for Abel.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the great danger in sins of the heart?

2. What other examples in the Bible of serious sinful actions began with just a sinful thought?

3. What do we learn about God's longsuffering and grace in this section?

4. How have you been challenged by this passage?
