

CAIN REJECTS GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Genesis 4:1-5:32

Lesson 4b

Key Verse: 4:7

"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Sin's beginning was very small. Man broke one seemingly insignificant command of God. But by his act of disobedience, he joined Satan's rebellion and brought God's curse to the world. His fellowship with God was broken, his mission swallowed up in a struggle for survival. He also lost access to the tree of life and was condemned to die. Chapter 4 shows how sin spread; how it turned man against his brother and brought unspeakable tragedy; how it infected human culture. But in these dark chapters God put a candle light of hope in the world.

1. Abel and Cain and their offerings (1-7)

Cain was Adam's oldest son; Abel was his second. Cain was a farmer and Abel, a shepherd and herdsman. Each of them brought an offering to God. God, who sees men's hearts, accepted Abel's offering, but did not accept Cain's. Cain's offering was just "some of the fruits of the soil," while Abel brought "fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock." He brought the first and the best. This reveals his heart. He came humbly, hoping that God would receive his offering, even though it was offered by a sinful man. Hebrews 11:4 says: "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."

Verses 4b,5 say, "...The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor, so Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast." Cain's angry reaction reveals his mind and heart. He offered God some of the fruit of the soil as if he were doing God a favor; he thought God should be glad to get anything he brought. But God is the Sovereign Lord and Creator. He is the Giver of the harvest. All things belong to him. Cain's offering should be an expression of praise and honor and worship and thanksgiving. God could not look with favor on Cain's proud heart and condescending offering. Romans 1:21 tells us that not thanking God or honoring him as God is the root of sin. Ingratitude and pride make men's hearts dark and futile.

2. Sin's desire

God is loving and merciful. He came to Cain with a gentle rebuke and words of wise counsel. The almighty God lowered himself to give his precious word to Cain. Read verse 7. "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." God's word to Cain was a word of life and peace. It gave Cain the opportunity to see himself as he was; it was his opportunity to

turn from the way of destruction and death to the way of life. Let's look more closely at God's word to Cain.

First, God told Cain that his offering was not accepted because Cain did not do what is right. This was Cain's opportunity to examine his own heart. It was his chance to think about himself and think about what is right. He should ask himself, "What have I done to displease God? How can I do what is right? This word could have given direction and light to his life. But Cain did not acknowledge God as God. He began to live according to his natural feelings. He became a slave of angry passion. A man who lives according to the desires, according to the thoughts of his sinful nature cannot please God. Cain's downcast face exposed his proud and rebellious heart. God rebuked him, but he did not listen. **Second**, God told him to master sinful desire. Man was created in God's image. He was originally good. But because of Adam's sin, evil came into man's heart. So man's nature is a mixture of good and evil. If we do not actively fight evil and push it aside to do good positively, evil overcomes us. Some people believe that they can live without a positive commitment, doing neither good nor evil. They mind their own business and are careful not to bother or burden anyone else. They are satisfied with themselves. But such indifferent, unconcerned people are the ones who are defeated by evil and become slaves of Satan. When we are not actively engaged in doing right, sin crouches at the door, awaiting an opportunity to spring on us like a lion on its prey. 1Peter 5:8,9a says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him..." Cain was like a man walking through the jungle with no thought of the lion. God spoke to him, "Sin is lying in ambush at the door and its desire is for you; but you must master it." The desire to commit sin had come into his heart. It coexisted with the desire to do good. But these two desires cannot coexist for long. A man must master the desire to sin or be swallowed up by it.

How can a man master the desire to sin? The burning fire of passion only can be mastered when God's righteous and loving reign in one's life and heart is humbly welcomed. Cain could not master sin's desire by his own strength, but with God's word in his heart and a decision of faith to obey God and not his own feelings, he could have drawn on God's strength and mastered it. Then he could see himself and others in the light of God's will. So, in order to master the desire to sin: **First**, he must receive God's word and God's sovereign rule into his heart. We must bend our ears to hear God's word. The Psalmist said, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (119:11) Because sin has come into the world, men have become slaves of their human passions and feelings. Men who are slaves of passion must receive God's word in their hearts. **Second**, he must strive to live according to God's word. We must seek to do positive good. When we strive to live according to God's word, we become engaged in a powerful spiritual conflict. If we are defeated in this spiritual conflict, we become slaves of sin. Cain should have received God's word and put to death his own feelings. Romans 8:6,7 says, "The mind of sinful man is death...the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."

Cain did not acknowledge God's sovereignty and he did not receive God's word in his heart. So he could not control the smoldering fire of jealousy toward his brother. It burst into raging flame. "What right does my younger brother have to be accepted by God while I, the elder, am not? Why did God discriminate against me just because I had no lamb to bring?"
3. Cain murders his brother (8-10)

Cain did not receive God's word. Instead he called his brother out into the field and killed him. The terrible deed was done in a moment, but Cain had the rest of his life to pay for it. The Lord did not abandon the murderer Cain; he came to Cain again. "Cain, where is your brother Abel?" (9) The Lord was not asking for information; he knew already. He was giving Cain a chance to confess his sin and repent. But how did Cain answer? "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" He dodged responsibility. His words, "Am I my brother's keeper?" reflect the rebellion in one's heart toward God, and the resulting irresponsibility for one's fellow man. Many people in this fallen world have echoed Cain's words, "Am I my brother's keeper?" in order to avoid responsibility. Of course, we cannot be our brother's keeper--we must be our brother's brother and friend and shepherd.

4. Punishment (11-16)

Cain yielded to sin's desire. He stepped across a line of irrevocable action when he murdered his brother. Then he went one step further. By his rebellious and unrepentant answer, Cain cut himself off from God's forgiveness and help. Read verses 10-12. "What have you done? Listen, your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." He rejected God's love and mercy and became a restless wanderer on the earth. He would have no roots, no fruit; he would be like the chaff which the wind blows away. (Ps 1:4) He would have no spiritual life, for he must live without God in the world under curse. He was full of fear and anxiety.

Read verse 13. Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence. I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." Some people glamorize the life of Cain. He seems to have the ultimate freedom. But Cain himself realized that this was not a glamorous free life, but a life full of fear, a life without meaning. A life without God is a life under a curse. Because he cried out to God in fear, God put a mark on him. It was a sign of God's love and mercy, for it protected his life. But because Cain did not accept God's love and mercy in his heart, the mark became the mark of a murderer. Cain was a marked man. He would not be killed, because men feared God, but he would be despised and shunned wherever he went.

His real suffering was not physical--it was the tortured condition of his inner life. He revealed the fear and insecurity of his inner mind when he said, "I will be hidden from your presence...whoever finds me will kill me." His fear was fear of death. He must live out his days in fear, in the shadow of death.

Satan tells us that sin is simple and easy. He makes us feel proud and brave. But he doesn't ever tell us about the punishment that follows. But sin is always followed by consequences. The punishment of sin is not just the guilt feelings or the fear. There is God's judgment and eternal punishment. The flood of Noah's time is a picture of God's judgment.

5. Cain's descendants (17-24)

Verse 17 says, "Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch." Cain built a city. It was a monument to his pride, named for his son. This was his effort to find roots and meaning

without repentance and without God. His descendants built a godless human culture. At first glance, they seem to have made great achievements.

But if we take a closer look at this godless culture, we find that it was full of corruption and violence. Lamech was a polygamist, so already the place of women had degenerated. Violence and a spirit of revenge were abroad in the earth. Lamech killed a young man who had injured him and excused himself by twisting the promise of protection which God had given to Cain. He made use of God's word for his own selfish purpose. (23,24)

6. Men who called on the name of the Lord (4:25-5:32)

God granted Adam another son, Seth. He was made in the image of his father Adam, who was made in the image of God. The descendants of Seth called on the name of the Lord. (4:25b) This means that there were a remnant of men among Seth's descendants who sought God, and put their trust in him. Enoch, who walked with God, and Noah, who brought comfort and hope to his father even in a world under curse, are among them. The slender thread of God's life in man was not broken; it continued amid ever increasing violence and corruption to the time of Noah.