

Genesis 4.1-15 / COB / 09.27.15

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** Have you ever thought about what kind of person you *want* to be? The big turning point in my life came when I realized I *wasn't* who I wanted to be or who I had dreamed I would be.
- In any moment, you either are on the top line, submitting to God and depending on God, or you are on the bottom line, doing your own thing in your own ways; you are walking in the light with God or slinking with your sin into the shadows; you are following Christ or following Satan.
 - Those moment by moment choices add up to the person you experientially are. But what kind of person do you *want* to be? Listen, we all struggle with sin, none of us can be perfect. But how badly do you want that top line walk with God?
 - Some people choose the bottom line, determined to get away with whatever they can, unconcerned with shame or knowing God. I trust none of you have made that choice.
 - Yet I expect all of us could have more passion for God and his way of life. As I watched the end of the movie *War Room*, I yearned for a deeper experience with God, I yearned to be partnered with others in the church who were consistently walking with God, and my conviction grew that I could be praying far more fervently for this to happen.
 - Many of us are lukewarm. We love God, sure we do, and we gather to sing praises and hear sermons, and we serve monthly or even weekly, but serving is not our ambition, we don't move from hearing to proclaiming, our singing is not heartfelt, and our love is not passionate.
 - Here's one problem: our choice in life is as stark as black and white, top line or bottom line, but we want both. We want the best of God and the best of the world. So we in effect hedge our bets. Just like someone who prays but also carries a rabbit's foot or consults a horoscope, we look for God's blessings, but invest most of our effort in blessing ourselves with worldly stuff.
 - And the thing is, if we try to straddle the fence between the top line and the bottom line, between the kingdom of God and the world run by Satan, we will fail to remain on the top line. For starters, trying to straddle the fence is itself a bottom line behavior; but also the fence is not a flat 4x4 beam, it is slanted toward the world, because we have a corrupted human nature, and as we have seen in this study, we are easily deceived and tempted. If you want to walk with God, you have to make conscious decision to do so.
- † Open your Bible to Genesis 4 [p.6 in the pew Bible]. Adam and Eve were banished from the garden of Eden, they corrupted their nature, and they lost control of the world to Satan and his demons. But they still had a relationship with God, purpose as God's image bearers, and the opportunity to build a family who would walk with God. Let's see what happens and how it relates to us.

[Slide 2: 4.1] Genesis 4.1 NET: Now the man had marital relations with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. Then she said, "I have created a man just as the LORD [Yahweh] did!"

- † When God created Adam and Eve in his own image, God had four purposes for people, do you remember those purposes? They were to reflect God's character, represent God in all situations, multiply the image of God throughout the Earth, and rule over creation in God's name.

- † The term for flocks [צֹאן] usually refers to sheep or goats. Why would Abel take care of flocks?
 - Remember, they did not eat animals. So Abel must have kept flocks for clothing or for sacrifice or both. We saw in Genesis 3.21 that God brought about the first animal deaths, in part to cover their nakedness, but they were clothed already with leaves.
 - We saw that God wanted to cover their sin also. The human method of hiding from God and dressing in leaves was insufficient, so God brought them to confession and animal sacrifice.
 - There is no mention of required offerings or sacrifices before Adam and Eve sinned. But after they sinned, God sacrificed the first animals to cover their nakedness and cover their sin, and now they had to offer regular sacrifices to appease God's wrath until the promised savior came. That would be consistent with how God dealt with his people throughout Old Testament history.

- † Cain was farming crops. Was this wrong? No, he was doing the work of his father, Adam, the work God specified Adam and his descendants would do. And they had to eat. So both brothers had valid work to do, and their work complemented what the other was doing, providing for different needs.

[Slide 5: 4.3-5] Genesis 4.3-5: At the designated time Cain brought some of the fruit of the ground for an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought some of the firstborn of his flock— even the fattest of them. And the LORD was pleased with Abel and his offering, but with Cain and his offering he was not pleased. So Cain became very angry, and his expression was downcast.

- † The Old Testament does not explain why one offering was acceptable and the other was not.
 - One theory is that Abel went out of his way to bring the best of what he had, while Cain did not. The text notes that Abel brought some of the firstborn of his flock, and either the fattest of them or the fatty part of them [the Hebrew could go either way].
 - On the other hand, while the text never says Cain did *not* bring his best or first, it never says he *did* either. Later, the law code for Israel would require first fruits for an offering, meaning the first of the grains to ripen.

- † **[Slide 6: Hebrews]** In the New Testament, **Hebrews 11.4 NET: By faith Abel offered God a greater sacrifice than Cain, and through his faith he was commended as righteous, because God commended him for his offerings.**
 - But why was Abel's sacrifice greater? How was it an expression of faith when Cain's was not? Both brought offerings of their work, but only Abel's was acceptable.
 - Another theory is that Cain had no faith, that he was religious and did make a valid offering, but he was just going through the motions.
 - Yet both were openly talking with God; and we shall see in the ensuing dialogue that God points Cain toward doing what is right. The point is that Abel acted on his faith, he somehow took the top line of submission and dependence, while Cain somehow took the bottom line in rebellion.

- † **[Slide 7: 1 John]** **1 John 3.12 NET: [Cain's] deeds were evil, but his brother's were righteous.**
 - Now this is before Cain attacks his brother; John gives this as a reason why Cain attacked Abel. But what was evil about Cain's deeds up until then? We only know of two deeds before the attack: Cain was farming crops, which was fine; and Cain offered a sacrifice of grain. Even if Cain's sacrifice was inadequate, why would making this sacrifice have been *evil* in God's sight?

- † The one answer that makes sense is that God had mandated animal sacrifice to cover sin. We believe the first death of animals was not just about covering nakedness with stylish clothing, but to cover sin in a way that would temporarily appease God’s wrath. Later in the Bible, we consistently see God implement this process for his people.
 - Furthermore, it is a foreshadowing model of the most important sacrifice, the one which truly paid our penalty for sin and permanently appeased God’s wrath, the sacrifice on the cross of the promised savior seed of the woman, the New Adam, whom we know as the Messiah, the Christ.
 - All that being the case, it makes sense that Abel was keeping flocks not just for clothing, but for the family to make regular sacrifices to God in the way God had specified; the text mentions a designated time for the offering; it is reasonable to assume there was a designated method.
- † **[Slide 8: sacrifice]** So Abel acted righteously [1 John 3] by offering a greater sacrifice of an animal [Genesis 3], because he was acting in faith [Hebrews 11] in the promise of a savior and in the animal sacrifices as a symbolic and temporary solution for God’s wrath about sin until that savior came.
 - Listen! before Jesus came, everyone needed to sacrifice. To trust and obey God is the top line way of righteousness, but after the corruption of our natures, we all struggle with obeying, even Abel, and that is why the only way to righteousness before God is to trust in his promise of grace, to trust in his promise to save us.
 - Cain did not act in faith on the promise, in that he did not offer an animal sacrifice. Thus he did not show submission or dependence, and so he was unrighteous in God’s sight.

[Slide 9: 4.6-7] Genesis 4.6-7: Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why is your expression downcast? Is it not true that if you do what is right, you will be fine? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you, but you must subdue it.”

- † This is a great memory verse, Genesis 4.7; look at the contrast: Walk with God on the top line and you will be fine, but understand that a personified “sin” is working against you, trying to lure you through deception and temptation to the bottom line.
 - This sinful force could be evil, a demon, but usually it is our own corrupted flesh and the influence of our culture [our collective corrupted flesh]. Either way, if you dally with the dark side – if you even try to straddle the fence! – sin is crouching in wait, ready to dominate you.
 - We face this battle every day, moment by moment, but we can be victorious, we can subdue sin, if we yield to the Holy Spirit, if we consecrate ourselves to Christ, if we trust and obey.
 - God commanded this to Cain: he must subdue the sinful urge. We all have those urges and we must subdue them; we have no excuses for sin! Cain had a choice, it was his responsibility to choose. We have that same responsibility; and you do have to choose to end up on the top line.

[Slide 10: 4.8-9] Genesis 4.8-9: Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” And he replied, “I don’t know! Am I my brother’s guardian?”

- † Our beliefs dictate our actions. Cain failed in his ethics because his theology was bad. He had a weak and unresponsive faith, so he acted with anger, violence, selfishness, and arrogance.

- God offered an opportunity for repentant confession, by asking the question, but Cain refrained.
- † **[Slide 11: 1 John]** The Hebrew text implies this is premeditated murder. This is Cain’s answer to God’s questions. He turns to the bottom line, the flesh and sin, instead of trusting and obeying God.
- **1 John 3.11 NASB: For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother.**
 - We know Cain was physically born to Adam and Eve, but he was “of” or “from” the evil one, just as Jesus said to those who failed to believe in him in **John 8.44 NET: “You people are from your father the devil, and you want to do what your father desires.”**
 - When we see heinous crimes, we might think, “How could anyone do that?!” We have our answer through this example. Two brothers – no difference in upbringing or advantages; no social pressure or corrupting influences – and one kills the other, simply because the other did the right thing and was commended, while the one did not and was not. Our sin is *evil*.
- † What is our reaction when someone else is blessed and we are not? Many of you have children, I do not; I own two houses, many of you own none. How do we handle this, are we jealous?
- How do we handle *that*? Do we get angry at God, jealously angry at the other person? or do we focus on regaining contentment, knowing overall we are blessed abundantly, trusting that God’s decisions are correct, remembering we should do the right thing no matter what?
 - If we react on the bottom line, we are being self-righteous and following Cain’s example, and disaster will come to our soul and our life.
- † **[Slide 12: 1 John 3.13]** Cain’s attack on Abel in a sense is the first religious war: Cain, who will walk without God, killed the faithful believer simply because he *did* walk with God. At odds with God himself, Cain attacked the image bearer of God.
- Do you remember that God prophesied about this? He said there would be enmity between the seed of Satan and the image bearing seed of the woman.
 - Israel would be warned by this revelation, that they could expect hostility from the godless people they would encounter in Canaan.
 - The church also should hear this warning. After contrasting the attitude of Cain with that of the believer, John said in **1 John 3.13 NET: Therefore do not be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.**
 - Scholar Alan Ross notes that both kinds of people were in Adam’s family; and both kinds of people were in covenant Israel; therefore we might find both in the church today. We might face hostility not only from the secular world, but also from those who call themselves Christians, but do not seek to walk the top line of faith and obedience.
- † In all the godly families of Genesis, we see a sick form of rivalry, as evidence of the corrupted nature in all of us. In Genesis 3, we saw this corruption would mean families would suffer division instead of unity, guardedness instead of openness; now we have the extreme of murder.
- It also is worth notice that if we say we are not our brother’s keeper, we are paraphrasing Cain, not the best example for top-line attitudes. The Bible teaches that we *are* our brother’s keeper, that we should be giving and receiving the “one-another” commands in our fellowship.

[Slide 13: 4.10-12] Genesis 4.10-12: But the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! So now, you are banished from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you try to cultivate the ground it will no longer yield its best for you. You will be a homeless wanderer on the earth.”

- † What is gained by the sinful bottom line approach? Cain has eliminated his rival, his brother, but he still must contend with God.
 - Cain sinned by offering the wrong sacrifice and by killing his brother. His punishment also was two-fold: he would have to leave his family and their land where he had shed blood, and he would no longer find success as a farmer.

[Slide 14: 4.13-15] Genesis 4.13-15: Then Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is too great to endure! Look! You are driving me off the land today, and I must hide from your presence. I will be a homeless wanderer on the earth; whoever finds me will kill me.” But the LORD said to him, “All right then, if anyone kills Cain, Cain will be avenged seven times as much.” Then the LORD put a special mark on Cain so that no one who found him would strike him down.

- † Is Cain’s response repentance? No; self-pity. We saw Adam play the victim card by shifting blame; now his son plays a different victim card, that his punishment is too severe.
 - Cain sees a four part punishment: cut off from the land, from God, from family, and destined to wander about in danger. It is ironic that he fears being killed, he who is the first murderer.
 - Cain would now walk without God, but this was his choice: he walked away from God onto the bottom line, insisting on his own will for sacrifice, then by murder to resolve his anger, then refusing the opportunity to repent, and now going his own way spiritually altogether.
- † God still showed him mercy, protecting his life from his parents, his sisters, the multiple generations which would develop over time. God prevented Cain from becoming a victim of violence, reflecting God’s attitude toward vengeance which would be coded into law for Israel.
 - Judgement and revenge are God’s prerogatives, not ours. God might allow a nation to carry out his will for justice, but he does not want people to sin to try to right a wrong. You hear me? God never tells us to sin, to take the bottom line, to accomplish something good or to right a wrong.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 15: summary]** Sometimes when you study a narrative in pieces, as we are forced to do, it can be easy to lose the thread of the theme or plot. So let me summarize.
 - The one eternal and all powerful God plans to establish a representative people here, who will reflect his character and represent him in all situations. Thus people must pursue faith and obedience, depending on God and submitting to him.
 - Adam and Eve screwed up, introducing sin into the world and corruption into our nature. But the image plan did not change. God still wants people to reflect his character, represent him in all situations, multiply his image throughout the earth, and – even if we cannot rule at this time – to be good stewards of creation, acting in God’s name.

- † **[Slide 16: 3 parts]** In response to the crisis of sin and evil coming into the world, and of God's people being corrupted in their rebellion, God reacted with judgment and grace. There would be real repercussions for sin, but God provided a way for Adam and Eve to continue being his people and for an ultimate solution to the problem of sin, death, and evil.
- Part one of that plan was repentant confession. When we slip into sin, onto the bottom line, we need to get right with God by confessing our error and repenting, which means to turn back to walking with God on the top line.
 - Part two of that plan was animal sacrifice. The shed blood of the animal would symbolically represent the punishment people deserved for sin, and would temporarily appease God's wrath, so that people could remain in fellowship with him.
 - Part three of that plan was the promise to send a savior, a seed of the woman who would defeat Satan and evil, and somehow put all things right in creation, especially between God and people.
 - The savior's sacrifice would offer permanent atonement, that is it really would pay the penalty for our sins, and thus permanently appease God's wrath, and thus make permanent peace between God and his people. That is why we call Christ's sacrifice a substitutionary atonement: he took our punishment to make peace for us with God.
- † Starting with Adam, Eve, and their family, God required both faith and obedience for righteousness. But from the start, obedience proved impossible. That is why God offers grace. Grace is unmerited favor; none of us can deserve it, none of us can earn it, but God gives it as a gift. Grace says even though we are corrupted and we sin, we can be righteous in God's sight if we at least have faith.
- The content of faith grew as God revealed more over centuries. When God judged in Eden, all Adam and Eve knew about God's promise was they could confess when they screwed up, they could appease God's wrath with animal sacrifices, and someday would come a savior, the seed of the woman, who would set things right forever. That is what they had to believe.
 - Abel did believe this, Cain did not; or at least we can say that Abel believed enough to act on it, Cain did not. The biblical text is concise, sharing just what we need to know; here it says Abel offered the required animal and God saw his faith and judged him righteous; not so with Cain.
 - Today, we know a lot more about the savior, even who he is! The divine Son of God came to earth to be born miraculously by a virgin girl, thus becoming the prophesied seed of the woman, both man and God, so that he could represent us and bear all God the Father's wrath for our sin.
 - In daily life, do we believe enough to act on what we know about Jesus? We say taking the top line is to trust and obey. In the graphic, obedience is symbolized first, but the reality is that you will not step onto that top line by obeying unless you already trust God's promise, unless you trust that God will deliver salvation and the other spiritual blessings explained in scripture, and you trust that God's judgment about what physical blessings you should receive is for the best.
 - If you consistently are on the bottom line, willfully sinning, then I expect it is because you do not have true faith, you do not believe yet in God's promises or you are not content yet to accept God's judgement about blessings in this life. Think on that; start praying; then repent.
 - We no longer sacrifice animals, because the Savior is our sacrifice, but we trust in his sacrifice and we continue to repentantly confess our sins, so we can get back on the top line and walk with God. For people of faith, that is the only desirable place; we want to be like Abel, not Cain.