

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." ² And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. ³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. ⁶ The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

⁸ Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. ¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." ¹³ Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. ¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. ¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

(Pastor prays)

What we've just read is only four chapters into the Bible and in this fourth chapter we find one of the most sinister and tragic family stories in all of scripture. It's the story of Cain, the firstborn killing his baby brother Abel and doing so in cold blood. Proverbs 17:17 tells us that a friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity, to be there in the time of need. Not so with Cain and Abel. What happened to the first family? What happened between the first pair of brothers? Remember that in the narrative we are not that far removed from paradise in the Garden of Eden. Think of this: in the first family we have the first homicide and the first fratricide. The focus of

this story is Cain. Abel is a passing figure. Even his name, Abel or Havel means “vapor” or “vanishing.” It’s the same word that Solomon uses in Ecclesiastes when he says, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

So, from the very beginning we have some foreshadowing that Abel is not going to last. Moses, who wrote Genesis, draws our attention to Cain, a man whose life spirals completely out of control, a man who hurts the ones he loves and shames those who love him, a man who, at the end of this story, finds himself alive and cursed, living away from God and living a life of wandering.

How do we do it? How do we avoid this type of ending? How can you keep from wasting your life holding onto bitterness, hatred, jealousy and resentment? Because it is ungodly and if some of you don’t get a handle on it, it’s going to smother your joy, steal your peace and eventually wreck your usefulness. As New Testament people, we’ve got to learn from this Old Testament man. We can learn from Cain.

If You Don’t Conquer Sin, You Can’t Honor God

How do we avoid Cain’s life?

Decide What You’re Going to Care About Most

Let’s get right to the text. You know the story. In verse 1 they are born and in verse 2 they are fully grown men and have jobs. *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.”* ² *And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.*

Abel was a keeper of the sheep and Cain was a worker of the ground, a farmer, just like his father. Both of them have good and noble professions. By the time we get to verse 3, we are introduced to the two men’s worship practices. So, when we read verses 3 and 4, see the contrast and notice the difference between the two offerings. *In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering.*

And you see how the Lord received the offerings. Now let’s talk about that for a moment. Over the years, many have argued that the Lord didn’t receive Cain’s offering

because it wasn't a blood sacrifice whereas Abel's was. While I believe fully in the penal substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross for sinners, shedding His own blood, I think there is more than that going on here.

The apostle John thought the same thing. Remember what he said about Cain in 1 John 3:12? John said, *We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.*

Back in Genesis 4:3-4, there is more going on than appears on the surface. Look at the comparison. You read verse 3 and you get the sense that Cain's offering was an afterthought, some tokenism. *In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground...* Offering the fruit of the ground or whatever is convenient at hand, an obligation and a heartless ritual. And how many people live their lives attending a service but never worshipping God?

Abel, on the other hand, look how his offering is described - *and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering.* The "first-born and fat portion" indicates he gave the very best. We call it lordship. Sin must be conquered and Christ must be Lord. What do *you* care about the most?

Don't Ignore God

When you read verses 6-7 together, you see the absolute grace of God. God gives Cain a warning. God spoke to him. God told Cain what would happen. *The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."*

These verses stand as a great testimony of the Lord's faithfulness and a great testament to our ability to ignore Him. To just ignore God's warning signs, we do it all the time. Very few of us are *accidental* sinners. What makes us guilty is not just the fact of our sinful natures or bad choices; we willfully, rebelliously do what is wrong. It's hurtful and destructive and we do it often with the full knowledge of consequences.

There are always warning signs. For instance, the fact that you get sleepy at night is a warning sign that you are going to die one day. A sovereign and gracious God gives us promptings and pains so that we might turn our hearts to Him. I don't want to read too

much into this passage but verses 6 and 7 seem to indicate that Cain had a chance *not* to sin. Isn't that what Christ taught us to pray? "Lead us not into temptation"?

In the text, God spoke, God warned Cain, Cain ignored. Just like each one of us here. Cain had a sinful nature *inside* and an opportunity *outside*. Don't kid yourself. You aren't nearly as strong as you think you are. We don't need the Devil to make us sin. A sinful nature plus opportunity are enough. There is enough evil inside each of us. Some of you, God has brought you here and what if this is your last warning? Put Christ first. Don't ignore God prompting you. For those of you who are believers...

Don't Give Up, Every Day is New

You can't let your sinful nature win. By the power of Christ, don't quit mastering that which is not honoring to God. Cain was warned that he was headed for terrible trouble. He didn't respond. He didn't fight. Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, said in 1 Corinthians 9:27 *But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

Don't give up the fight on some besetting sin or student pressure. Dads, lead your families and provide. Be faithful and good examples. Ephesians 6:12 says, *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

Listen to the language in Genesis 4:7: *"If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."* There's been some discussion on what it means to have sin "crouching at your door." It could mean like a wildcat, coiled up and ready to jump as you walk through the door. Some translators think it means that sin is sort of relaxing at your door, smoking a cigarette and just patiently waiting on you to step out.

Either way, it's not good. We've been commanded by God to maintain this daily struggle with our sin. There is no doubt that there are some of you here this morning who feel like giving up or you just don't care anymore. Cain did and it ruined him. Don't give up the fight. Put Christ first. Don't ignore God's promptings.

Always Accept Responsibility for Your Sin

Cain learned this trick from his Mom and Dad. He gave an outright, high-handed denial. *Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"* You've got to realize you are a sinner and not just in

broad terms, in particular terms, *own* your individual sins. Cain had committed the first murder--the first brother-on-brother death-- and tried to deny it. That leads me to the next point...

Never Forget How Much God Hates Our Sin & Learn To Do The Same

Verse 10. This is a haunting verse to me. Abel never speaks in the story, but his blood does. *And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.* The word "crying" is that of a desperate cry of people in anguish, a cry for vengeance. This gives us a picture of how much God hates your sin. You need to make the tempting sin in your life your enemy. Quit letting it dominate you by the power of the Holy Spirit and the blood of Christ.

As loud as Abel's blood was, the writer of Hebrews 12:24 says, *and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.* Abel's blood calls for vengeance and punishment. The blood of Jesus Christ calls for mercy and forgiveness. He hated your sin so much that He crucified His son in the place of sinners to satisfy justice. He shed His blood to give mercy to sinners. The wrath of God is subsided and mercy has come.

(Pastor shares the Gospel and prays)