

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

Dr. George O. Wood

We're looking at the first sixteen verses of Genesis 4—the story of Cain and Abel. Again we'll just read the Scriptures in sequence. This is the second sin in the Bible. We find the first sin in Genesis 3, which we have spent some time on already.

I. Two important questions

It's fascinating to see how the Lord calls our attention to our sins. In Genesis 3:9, the question is “Where are you?” In Genesis 4:9, the question is “Where is your brother?” Where are you?—The first sin is in reference to God. Where is your brother?—The second sin is sin against man. How profound these questions are, because really in these two questions—Genesis 3:9 and 4:9—are the seed plot of all of the Scriptures, the seed plot in reference to sin, God's judgment, and His mercy. All of sin revolves under one of those two headings: Where are you? Where is your brother? We find it in the Decalogue in Exodus 20. The first four commandments relate to the question “Where are you?”—Where is your relationship to God? And the last six commandments ask us “Where is your brother?—What about your relationship to him? We find those two questions again when we look at the teaching of Jesus in Mark 12:28–34. In the last week of Christ's ministry, a young scribe comes to Him and asks what the greatest commandment is. Jesus responds, “Ye shall love God and ye shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The tragedy of human experience happens when one cannot really answer the questions “Where are you?” or “Where is your brother?” That is eloquently seen in Romans 1:18 through 3:20. In this passage, Paul traces the reason why there is such tension in the world between men. God,

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

who has been revealed in creation and in conscience, has been ignored and shoved aside. As a result, God has given man up. He's given him up to his own pursuits and desires so that brothers are against brothers. Sexual relationships are all fouled up. One kind of evil after another comes out of the heart of man. We see all this in the seed questions: "Where are you? Where is your brother?"

What is wrong with the human scene today? There is tension between brother and brother in the world. If we spent as much time helping people as we do defending ourselves from people, there would be no starvation or poverty in the world. Instead, there would be an ability among everyone in the world to get along. But we have to spend far more time defending ourselves. From where do we get that condition? The Bible is laying it out for us in these early chapters of Genesis.

II. Another sequence takes place.

Adam and Eve have been expelled from the Garden. Now, in the first two verses of chapter 4, we see them beginning with a new kind of hope.

"Adam lay with ["knew," KJV] his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil" (Genesis 4:1–2, NIV). In the King James Version, the word "know" is deeper than simply learning something intellectually—where you get a set of facts together. To know is also to experience. The word is used in reference to the physical relationship between Adam and Eve. He knew his wife in an experiential way; they were related to each other. The Bible also uses the terms "knowledge" or to "know God" in this experiential way. It's not something simply to know about God but to know God by means of experience.

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

Eve conceived and bore Cain. When she brings this first son into the world after the Fall, she gives him a very good name. The root meaning for “Cain” really is “to get” or “begotten” or “I have gotten a man by the help of the Lord.” Even though this child has been born with great pain, Eve sees a positive thrust toward him. Even as Adam named his wife Eve—“the mother of all things living”—rather than “the mother of all things dying,” so now Cain has a good name. Perhaps in naming him, Eve thought that this first son born after the Fall was her answer to the curse that was placed upon the serpent. At the end of Genesis 3:15 she was promised that from her seed would come someone who would bruise the serpent’s head. Maybe Cain was the Christ. Maybe this child would be instrumental in reversing the condition of the Fall and overcoming evil.

How positively we think of our children when they’re born! When a new child comes into our family or our church or our world, we say, “There is so much promise for this child.” We hope that this child won’t go through the experiences we’ve been through. We hope this child will be protected from some of the adversity and failure and sin that we have experienced as individuals. We look at the child and we say, as Eve said of Cain, “I’ve gotten a child with the help of the Lord. May this child do well. May this child grow up full and complete.”

One of the bitter realities of life is to note that sin is in existence and will eventually come in to try to seek and destroy that which has begun so beautifully—namely, your children. Cain holds great promise for Eve.

When the second child is born, he evidently does not have quite as healthy a beginning as Cain, for his name actually means “vanity” or “breath.” It connotes perhaps an element of weakness. Maybe that name is attached to him prophetically because his life is to be rather short; his life is

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

as a breath. Or maybe the child was born rather sickly and weak. Therefore, that term may be applied to him.

But even in the naming of children, there is perhaps a preferential treatment toward their children on the part of the first man and woman. The seeds of arrogance in Cain that later blossom forth in this story may already be being sown by his parents who put that kind of “elder brother over younger son” approach into him. I’m just guessing. But knowing again how children can often get off to a wrong start in families with a preferential treatment toward one child, it is not too much to try to read into this account. This may indeed have been a part of the first family.

Nothing is said about the boys’ lives growing up. The Scriptures don’t tell us a lot of things we’d like to know. Instead, the Scriptures are anxious to rush in to the main reason why they’re being introduced here in the biblical text. The next time we see them, they are all the way through their childhood, right to their maturity. One has chosen to become a tiller of the soil; the other has chosen to become a shepherd.

This passage indicates that in his earliest development, man was not a caveman kind of person who did not have use of tools or was unable to organize. In Genesis 2, we see a very articulate man—a man who is able to name the animals, for example. We find here in this text men who have the use of implements—a tiller of the soil and a man who is able to organize and take care of domesticated animals. It may be that the cave hunter kind of an image came down years later from fallen man—when sin becomes so deeply engrained in the human consciousness that the depravity of man is seen in the kinds of habits he pursues. He doesn’t know how to relate to the soil, and he doesn’t know how to relate to animals. Therefore, his life is reduced to the most abject poverty and ignorance. But in the beginning, Scriptures show us a man and woman who are articulate and able to handle the environment in which they have been placed.

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

As we come to the end of Genesis 4:2, we almost see the idea of sin being checked—that it is not going deeper into the human consciousness. There appears to be profitable employment that is going on here. Then sin rears its ugly head.

III. This time sin comes, not in the guise of a serpent but in the guise of religious worship.

How subtle Satan is to attack us through indirect means at the very moment when we should be receiving the blessings of life. At what time do we feel better toward God than when we come to worship Him? Yet even in the first worship recorded after the Fall, there is the presence of evil that turns Cain's attention in worship from God to himself. Because of that turning aside, a grievous sin will be committed.

Genesis 4:3–7 records what begins happening with Cain's experience: "In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. 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. Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 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'" (NIV).

We see here the rejection of Cain's offering when he and Abel come to worship. Evidently by this time in the record of Genesis, men are already being taught that it is appropriate to bring an offering to God. It appears at this moment to be a voluntary offering. It's not a regular institution of sacrifice like you find later in the Old Testament. There appears to be a regular place and a regular time for which the offering could be brought on a voluntary basis.

Thus Cain and Abel come. Some have suggested that the reason why Cain's offering was not accepted is because it was not a blood offering. It was an offering of the fruit of the ground.

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

There is, of course, an attractiveness to this view in light of later teaching in the Scriptures. For example, in Leviticus 17:11 we learn that there is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood. At the end of Genesis 3, God himself provided a substitute for the nakedness of Adam through the taking of an animal's life. In the New Testament, Christ becomes the sacrifice for us. Certainly from their parents—and probably given the fact that God allowed an animal to be slain to cover Adam and Eve—Cain and Abel probably had learned what animal sacrifice was about. Yet that may be reading too much into the text at this point. There appears to be something else at work in Cain other than the idea that he did not have a blood sacrifice. Perhaps this idea can be noted in the text. Abel brought the firstlings of his flock and their fat portions, whereas nothing is said about the quality of Cain's offering. The firstlings of a flock naturally were the first animals to be born. The fat portions were always to be used in sacrifice, particularly in the system taught in Leviticus. Fat is pleasing to the Lord. It's a special delicacy reserved in burning for Him. Of course, we know this was very wise in terms of medical health for the Children of Israel, because there's perhaps more potential for diseases through eating that part of the animal.

But Cain appears to have taken no deep thought as to the quality of his offering. In fact, the Lord reminds him that if he did well, he would be accepted. The Lord doesn't say at this point, "Bring an animal sacrifice," because Cain was a tiller of the soil. What we have in this story is not so much the idea that farmers are rejected and shepherders are accepted. Instead, there appears to be on Cain's part a stinginess regarding what he gives to the Lord. A second best. A getting by. The beginning of worship as ritual. Put in an appearance. Do my thing. Get it over with and hope it meets the same kind of response that my brother's gift brings.

Cain shows a grievous attitude within his own spirit the minute the Lord rejects his offering. In the text we're not told how the Lord made his rejection known. Perhaps over a course of time

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

Abel's flocks began to prosper and Cain's farming did not. We don't know how God made known to them that one was accepted and the other was not. But there appears to be within Cain a wrong kind of spirit.

When you worship the Lord with the wrong spirit, then that which you offer is not acceptable. Cain becomes angry because he is rejected. He shows the motivation with which he had come—just get it over with. When he is turned aside, he becomes mad. He's angry and his countenance falls.

What does he do as a result of being rejected? Evidently, he blames his rejection on his brother who brought the more acceptable offering. He doesn't say, "I was wrong to be stingy with God. I was wrong in seeing worship as something that was simply perfunctory. I'll take the responsibility and be chastised because for it. I won't do this again." Instead, he pushes it off and says, "If Abel hadn't brought such an excellent sacrifice, then I wouldn't have been rejected." Instead of bringing himself up, he brings the other person down. Blame becomes a major factor in his sin, even as it had been in the sin of his mother and father. When confronted with sin, the temptation is always to pass off the responsibility to someone else.

What Cain does is very spiritually subtle. He blames his own lack of spirituality on someone else and tries to scapegoat his responsibility. As we noted last week, isn't blame a temptation within all of us?

The Lord says, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (Genesis 4:6–7, NIV). The word "accepted" here means "to be lifted up." It's a very beautiful play on words, because his face is turned down. The Lord is saying, "Your face can be turned up. You can be accepted. But if you don't do well, then sin is crouching at the door."

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

Here's a different way of looking at sin. No longer is it the direct contact of the serpent in the Garden. This time Satan approaches in a subtle form. Sin is crouching at the door. Sin, like a wild beast, is hiding behind a door. When you open the door just enough, it's ready to leap inside and master you. Its desire is for you.

Genesis 4:7 contains the first mention of the word "sin" in the Scriptures. We've had the idea of sin, but now we see the word "sin," or falling short. It's a perpetual approach to us. It's there waiting to master us.

Cain does not take the advice of the Lord in settling his problem. He does not bring another sacrifice that is acceptable to the Lord. How gracious of the Lord, by the way, to give him a chance to right his problem. There is no injustice with God in reference to his dealings with Cain, even as there is never an injustice with God in dealing with us. He gives us time to come to repentance.

IV. Genesis 4:8 sets the stage for the first murder in the Bible—the first death of a human being.

"Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him" (NIV).

Later, perhaps in commentary on this very facet of Scripture, Jesus talks about the sin of murder. He says there are some things that are the backdrop for the sin of murder. Indeed, they are as grievous as the sin of murder. Jesus says, "If you are angry with your brother, or if you say to him, "Raca," or if you call him fool, you have in effect murdered him" (Matthew 5:22).

What is the significance of the words "If you are angry with your brother"? There are two words in the Greek for the word "angry." One word stands for a deep-standing rage. The other is a white-hot kind of an anger where you get ticked off and your emotions spurt up and then quickly

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

spurt down. The kind of anger Jesus talks about in the Scriptures as being equal to murder in God's eyes is the deep-standing rage against another person—a rage that seeks to even the score. It's the kind of thing Cain has here. It's not the sudden, quick-tempered, hot anger that quickly rises but then falls away. It's the plotting kind, which Cain does. He's angry with his brother and his anger stays within. He'll not be released from it. He will carry the anger into the next day and the next.

Jesus used another term—*Raca*—that is equivalent to murder in God's eyes. *Raca* is an epithet. Its use is similar to a racial expletive in modern times. It serves to insult someone.

Finally, Jesus speaks of calling a person a fool. In ancient times, this word referred to attacking another person's reputation. The word "fool" has something to do with a person's morals. If you needed to attack his reputation, you used that word. In that way you lessened his stature among others. Jesus said all these are ways of getting at murder.

Within us as human beings we have all known the kind of feelings associated with murder at some point: the deep-standing rage, the insults, the character assassinations. All of these are a part of murder waiting to be committed. Here in Genesis 4, the act is done and sealed. The second sin has come to pass—a continuation of man against man.

In Genesis 4:9–16, God is again seen as the questioner. In Genesis 4:6, when Cain's offering was unacceptable, the Lord questioned, "Why are you angry?" On the conscience level, the Lord now asks Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" (verse 9, NIV).

I want to pause for a moment to pick up a word Paul spoke to Timothy. He says, "By rejecting conscience, some of you have made a shipwreck of your faith" (1 Timothy 1:18–19). How does conscience come to us? It comes to us by the Holy Spirit raising questions in our mind as to the course of action that we have taken. If we keep turning aside those questions in negative ways, as

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

Cain turned aside the questions from God, we gradually begin putting conscience down by going our own way instead of the Lord's way. Finally we come to the kind of thing that is manifested here in Cain: a shipwreck of faith and a total inner emotional deterioration. Cain doesn't think anything of taking the life of his brother—the one he had been the closest to. They'd grown up together and played together.

Certainly as a child, Cain would have never thought he'd be capable of this. But sin is crouching at the door, as the Lord told him, and its desire is to master you. There is something fundamentally important here on a brother-to-brother level. If, at the beginning of the human race, there can be murder between two people who are that close, then what is the human race going to be like when people aren't close? If you have a murder among brothers, what can you expect in society?

You find a terrible commentary later on in Genesis 4:23. Lamech, a descendant of Cain, comes along and boasts to his two wives: "I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me." Here is the first mention in the Bible of senseless killing. He wounded me; he struck me. So what did I do? I killed him. That kind of scene has been repeated throughout the decades and centuries of human experience. Terrible, senseless slaughter. Genesis 4 is a tip-off. If there is murder among brothers, what can you expect in society?

V. God speaks to the situation in judgment and mercy.

The Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And Cain's response is a lie and also insolent. "I don't know," he says. Then he asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9, NIV). In other words, "Should I be looking out for him?"

The Lord is still questioning, forcing him to admit what he has done. If he won't admit what he has done, then God will spell it out for Him. He asks, "What have you done? Listen! Your

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

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" (Genesis 4:10–12, NIV).

We should immediately see here the mercy of God. As in the case of Adam and Eve, God chooses not to annihilate a person for his sin. He doesn't zap him. He doesn't zap you after you've sinned. God's pattern of judgment is not like the one He imposed on Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.

Why doesn't God move to judge us immediately after we sin? Second Peter 3:9 provides the answer: "God is forbearing, full of long-suffering, not willing that any should perish but that we all should come to repentance." This is His loving attitude toward us.

The Lord had grounds for taking Cain's life because Cain had committed murder. In the Law, which is developed in the Pentateuch, murder is a capital offense. Capital punishment could have been imposed. Instead, God does something else. He takes the things that gave Cain the most pride—his association with the ground as a farmer and his excellence of working with crops—and He says, "The ground is going to be cursed from you. No longer are you going to be able to stay in the same place and till the ground. Instead, you're going to be a wanderer and a fugitive. You're going to move continually, and no longer will the soil yield for you. I am going to curse the very thing you took the most pride in."

There's a lesson in this for what we're going through in our society today. What has America taken the most pride in? There you'll find the potential areas of God's judgment against us for rejecting Him. We've taken pride in our cities—the great urban accomplishments in America. Yet that has turned against us, and the most grievous kinds of conditions exist in American cities.

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

More recently we've taken pride in our suburbs. Yet even in the suburbs we're experiencing great problems. We have prided ourselves in our freedom, yet our freedom is being carried to a point in which it becomes dangerously close to anarchy. The areas we took the most pride in become those from which we experience the most cursing.

This happens here with Cain. He took pride in the soil and the soil is turned against him. This happens in our own individual lives in any number of ways. If we ever exercise the option to turn away from Him, God speaks to us in mercy. Yet He must also speak to us in judgment, hoping by that judgment to gain our attention.

Cain says to the Lord in Genesis 4:13–14: “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” (NIV). Notice in Cain's response there is no repentance toward God. There is no saying, “I'm sorry.” Instead there is a lamentable complaint.

There is also the insertion of two punishments that God did not pronounce but that Cain fancied God had pronounced. For example, verse 14: “From Thy face I shall be hidden.” God had said nothing about that. Cain is determining in his own heart that this sin is such in his own life that he chooses not to return to God. God did not say that; Cain said it. In addition, Cain adds another word that God has not said. Notice at the end of verse 14: “Whoever finds me will slay me.” His own fear comes to him.

The Lord responds: “Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden” (verses 15–16, NIV). “Nod” means “wandering.” He dwells in the land of wandering.

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

It's impossible to know what the mark of Cain was. Someone has suggested it was a pitiable look and that all who came upon Cain felt sorry for him. I'll leave it to you as to what the mark of Cain may have been. But again, it was an aspect of God's mercy upon him. God's mercy allowed him to continue in his life, hoping that through that continuation Cain might restore his relationship.

It's fascinating to note as you go into verse 17 and following that it is the wanderer who created the world's culture. In the last paragraph of chapter 4 we have the beginning of culture in the world. How picturesque to see that much of contemporary culture springs from a soul that is wandering away from God.

In Genesis 4:10, God speaks of the blood of Abel crying to Him from the ground. What is the implication here? God is saying, in essence, that Abel's blood is crying out for vengeance.

Crying out for Him to do something about evil and wrong. Crying out for Him to take action.

A modern quote describes this cry for vengeance. Several years ago Eldridge Cleaver—the Black Panther—wrote the following: “The world is hemophiliac. Look at it! When did the world ever stop bleeding? It never has for a moment ceased to bleed. It's bleeding somewhere right this very minute; right now as we sit here talking, someone is taking careful aim at someone else. At an enemy. Someone is thrusting with a blade at an enemy. In Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, and right here in the good old USA, blood is flowing. Go listen to the radio or TV right now. The first news you catch will be of blood, a counting of the bodies. Pick up a newspaper or magazine and it will be dripping with blood. Blood flows from the TV screen. Yes, the world is bleeding. It's bleeding to death.”

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

Abel's blood cries from the ground. There's a phrase in Hebrews that talks about another kind of blood that cries. Hebrews 12:24 says, "You have come to Jesus, to the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel."

Christ's blood calls not for vengeance, but for grace and forgiveness. Abel's blood poured out cries for God to do something about the problem of injustice and punishment of the guilty.

Christ's blood poured out calls for God to do something to help the guilty and the condemned.

His blood, therefore, speaks more graciously than that of Abel's.

The world has a choice between identifying with the blood of Abel or the blood of Christ. Abel's blood calls out for man to do something about the problem of evil. The blood of Christ says God has intervened and given himself that we, the guilty, might go away cleansed and kept by Him.

The terrible stages of sin unfold to us in Genesis. Yet we learn that even as God has provided a covering for the first sin by promising to the man and to the woman that from their seed would come one who would bruise the serpent's head, so, in reference to the second sin, God also provides mercy through the blood of Christ.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we particularly examine our relationship with others because the Scriptures call upon us to do that—to see where we're heading. It also calls upon us to really examine the motivations that lead to our worship. Do we, like Cain, do things from ritual and observance? Or do we, like Abel, offer in faith a more excellent sacrifice?

We pray, Lord Jesus, that the Scriptures will instruct us to be generous, forgiving, and loving.

We pray also that through the Scriptures we would be taught to accept responsibility in life.

When all is said and done, it is we who are responsible for where we are and for what we have done. Through the Cross You have the means to lift us out of our sin, out of our wrong, and put

THE SECOND SIN

Genesis 4:1–16

us in right relationship with You. Already through these chapters of Genesis, You have been speaking to us of mercy. Mercy after sin. Mercy after murder.

So again this morning, Your Spirit speaks to us with mercy. “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18, KJV). You’re inviting us to come to that place where You display Your mercy, to the cross of Christ where You invite us to obtain forgiveness from You. Help us, Lord, to relate to one another as You relate to us. In wrath remembering mercy. Always filled with loving-kindness and long-suffering. Show us the way we should go, and having been shown we vow to walk in it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.