

**“Sin Makes Progress”**  
**Genesis 4:1-16**  
**May 2, 2010**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

This morning’s passage begins the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15, where God curses the serpent. **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”** There will be ongoing conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, or Satan. To whom do these two categories refer? In a physical sense, of course, every human being belongs to the seed of the woman. But as the story of the Bible develops, it becomes clear that these two categories are to be interpreted in a spiritual sense. The seed of the woman refers to those who remain faithful to God, while the seed of the serpent refers to those who follow Satan in his rebellion. Jesus clearly viewed it in this way, as he told a group of Jewish religious leaders that they belonged to their father, the devil (John 8:44).

So Genesis 3:15 prepares us for a conflict between human beings who will follow God and those who will follow Satan. It is not surprising, then, to read in Genesis 4 of a conflict between two of the sons of Adam and Eve. As Cain grows up, it eventually becomes clear that he belongs to the seed of the serpent, while his younger brother, Abel, is in the line of the woman’s offspring. The presence of conflict between these two brothers is not unexpected, but the victor in this initial conflict is a complete surprise. God had said that the seed of the woman would prevail, but the opposite happens in Genesis 4. The conflict begins, but by the end of the story, the good guy, Abel, lies dead in a pool of his own blood.

Genesis 4 is the story of things getting worse before they get better. Before looking at this chapter more carefully, let me say one quick word about the nature of this account. The Bible is intended to be the story of redemption, not the history of the human race. Genesis is an historical account, but it selects the events it relates with the purpose of telling the story of redemption. Its concern is with the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent, and it follows that line throughout the whole book. It doesn’t answer questions like, “Where did Cain get his wife?” The answer, of course, is that Adam and Eve, during their 930 years of life (5:3-4) had other children besides Cain, Abel and Seth (4:25). Cain married one of these. But answering such questions is not the purpose of this chapter. Instead, its purpose is to describe the beginning of this conflict and the ensuing history of redemption flowing out of it. So let’s look at the early progress of sin in this passage.

**I. The Root of Sin’s Progress**

The conflict started in the context of worship. These two brothers bring an offering to God from the fruit of their labor. Cain is a farmer, and he brings an offering from what he has grown. Abel is a shepherd, and he brings an offering from the flock. God accepted Abel and his offering, but rejected Cain and his offering. We're not told the exact expression of God's acceptance and rejection of these offerings, but it was clearly known by both Cain and Abel.

Why did God accept Abel's offering, but not Cain's? Some have said that it was because Cain's lacked any blood. But I don't think that had anything to do with it. God would later spell out the laws about various kinds of offerings, and he would make it clear then that grain offerings were permitted (Lev. 2:14). The text gives us a couple of hints about the deficiency of Cain's offering. First, it says that **"for Cain and his offering he had no regard"** (v. 5). It was because of something within Cain that his offering was not accepted. Second, it seems that Cain was presenting a token offering, not a true offering. Abel brought of the **"firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions"** (v. 4). The firstborn and the fat portions describe the best. Regarding Cain's offering, on the other hand, it simply says that **"Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground"** (v. 3). It doesn't say that he brought the firstfruits, which would have been the best. A true offering is a concrete demonstration of the attitude of one's heart. When a worshiper makes an offering, he pours it out and gives it fully to God. This is designed to represent a life that is poured out to God. The offering is to be taken from the best of what one possesses.

Let me say this differently. Abel gave his entire self to the Lord while Cain did not. In effect Cain was asking, "What can I give to the Lord so as to secure his blessing, but something that won't be too costly to me?" He was like the man I read of several years ago who made some money fraudulently and then gave some of it to the church. Such hypocrisy says, "I don't want to submit to God's rule in my life, but I do want to buy him off so as to secure his favor." A true offering is one that comes from a heart that has been transformed by God's grace so as to freely and joyfully give all to the Lord. This is what Hebrews 11:4 means when it says, **"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain."** Abel had faith in the gospel promise of God to defeat the serpent and the evil he brought into the world.

It is significant that the root of evil was found here in the area of worship. Cain's life ended up in failure, as part of the seed of the serpent, because it went wrong in this area of worship. He failed in life because he failed in worship. Ethical failure has its roots in theological failure. It is the same today. The Cains of today are still trying to buy God's favor, while the Abels of today joyfully give all to the Lord out of humble gratitude that the Lord has fully and graciously given his favor. This can often be seen in our offerings, too. The heart transformed by grace will give a joyful offering to the Lord, while the

heart that has not been changed by God's grace will give a token gift like Cain's or no gift at all.

## II. The Fruit of Sin's Progress

Sin begins with faulty worship, but the chapter goes on to describe its flowering in many different ways. It begins to destroy Cain's life in different ways. Notice his initial response after the rejection of his offering. **"Cain was very angry, and his face fell"** (v. 5). Sin had an effect on his emotional life, beginning with anger against God. But it went further and resulted in depression. When the text says that his face fell, it is a literal description of what happens when we get sad. The corners of the mouth fall, and the entire face droops. When we don't respond to our sin with humble repentance, it is still the case that we get angry at God and we get sad.

The next step of sin in Cain's life is to grow hard against the warnings of God. Verse 7 contains a clear warning. **"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 for you, but you must rule over it."** Sin is here portrayed as a ferocious animal lying in wait to destroy its prey. Notice a few things about this image. First, sin attempts to hide itself from us. Like a stalking predator, it is crouching, trying to avoid detection until it strikes. This is a sobering truth. Even now, there are sins attempting to hide themselves from us, just so they can destroy us. We can allow ourselves to be deceived by our sin until we are destroyed by our sin. So in our own minds we're not materialistic, we are just prudent. We don't gossip about others; we just have the courage to tell it like it is. We don't have an anger problem; we are being unfairly treated by others.

I notice about this warning that the result of sin in our lives is nothing short of our destruction. The animal is close, it is ferocious, and its desire is to destroy. If you believed that there was such an animal just outside your door, I dare say that you would treat it very seriously. You would want to know how to fight such an animal so as to protect yourself from its designs to make you its next meal. You would not grow comfortable in its presence. Yet we often do precisely this with our sin, calming our guilty consciences with the thought that no one's perfect. The deceptive logic is that since sin is so common, it must not be so harmful. God unmask to Cain the destructive purpose of sin, warning him of the powerful, destructive forces it unleashes in his life.

That is exactly what happens with Cain. He hardens his heart against God's warning, with the result that the wild beast is unleashed in his life. The anger has continued to build in his heart, until one day when he is walking with his brother in the field, he raises his hand against him and strikes him down. Note the hardness in his response to God's question, **"Where is Abel your brother?"** God always asks questions to help us, not to get information

for himself. But Cain refuses to be helped by God, replying defiantly with a now famous question of his own, **“Am I my brother’s keeper?”** Cain will not confess his sin, but resists God at every turn. There is only one thing to be done for the one who resists God, and that is what God does next. He lets Cain suffer the consequences of the beast of sin that has been unleashed upon him. Cain would rid the world of others who make him feel bad, so he will become a wanderer on the earth, living an isolated life. This is often called the law of sowing and reaping, after the text in Gal. 6:7 – **“whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”** So the person who lives by the sword will die by the sword. The gossip will be gossiped about. The materialistic person will never be content.

The destruction brought by Cain’s sin doesn’t end with Cain’s personal tragedy. There is also an institutional component to his sin. The end of the chapter describes Cain’s work to establish the first city, which he named after his son, Enoch. We see the development of the city under Cain and his offspring, in keeping with God’s command to fill the earth and subdue it. We read of the development of different careers, as some of Cain’s descendents become shepherds, others become musicians and still others metalworkers. These are good things, indications of God’s common grace extended even to those who renounce him. But notice that this development takes a dark turn, seen in the first musical lyrics recorded from a human being. It is a song from Lamech, and its content is focused on revenge. The sin that is unleashed in Cain’s life has led to a using of God’s gift of music for a sinful purpose.

Is there sin crouching at the door desiring to destroy you? If you let it remain there, it will destroy you. God told Cain that he must rule over this sin, with the implied promise that he would be able to avoid its destruction if he would do so. But how can we rule over sin? That brings us to our final point.

### **III. The End of Sin’s Progress**

Though this opening conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent doesn’t end well for the woman’s offspring, it is not the end. God does not abandon his determination to fight sin until the battle is won. We can see that even in his gracious response to Cain. As we saw God coming to Adam and Eve after their sin with questions rather than thundering forth in judicial punishment, so we see the same here. God comes to Cain with questions, inviting him to receive the grace of God, which would completely transform his life if he were to accept it. Like a good counselor, God is filled with questions that are an attempt to lead Cain to insight and to repentance.

There is also hope at the end of the chapter, a chapter that has described the rapid progress of sin throughout society. But the last verses report simply, **“And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, ‘God has appointed for me another offspring instead of**

**Abel, for Cain killed him.’ To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord.”** God will preserve the seed of the woman until the promised champion can come forth to achieve his purpose of salvation.

There is an amazing verse in the New Testament that looks back to the murder of Abel to speak powerfully of the grace of God. Hebrews 12:24 refers to the blood of Jesus as **“the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”** It is referring to verse 10 of our text, where we read, **“The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.”** The blood was calling for judgment, and it would be impossible for God to ignore this call. Jesus’ blood also cries out, but its voice calls for forgiveness, and this voice is impossible for God to ignore. Jesus is the fulfillment of the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. He is the innocent Abel, being the only truly innocent man ever to live. The rest of us are Cains who have called for his blood. In the case of Jesus, as also in Genesis 4, it seemed like the good guys lost and evil won. But the truth is that Jesus won by losing his life, satisfying the demands of justice that we might go free by his shed blood.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Let me close with two applications. First and ironically, this passage which features the good guys losing gives us great reason for optimism. God may lose many battles, but he will win the war. The hymnwriter says it so well. “This is my Father’s world, O let me ne’er forget that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet. This is my Father’s world: the battle is not done; Jesus who died shall be satisfied, and earth and heaven be one.” At the end of the Bible, we read of a city, the New Jerusalem. Cain’s city, dedicated to opposing God, has long ago passed away. But God’s city, where all God’s gifts to mankind will flourish, will last eternally. This city shall be the perfect blend of all that’s best in the city and in the country. It has within it the chief feature from the Garden of Eden, the tree of life (Rev. 22:2). There is an unbelieving pessimism among too many Christians today. I was talking with a Christian from another part of the country a few weeks ago who told me of his habit of watching Fox News each night and just getting angry. I suggested to this brother in Christ that maybe he should stop watching that. As Christians, we are called to optimism, even when things look bleak, because God has promised by his grace to defeat the serpent. He has already finished Stage 1 of this in the cross of Christ, and will some day complete this work. So instead of being angry, serve God with joy and optimism.

The second application is to receive in your heart the grace of God. It was Cain’s failure to do so that led to the progress of sin in his life. It is our trust in God’s grace through Christ that will lead us out of sin. We do so as we put our confidence in the blood of Jesus, which speaks a better word than Abel’s blood.