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SIN CROUCHING AT THE DOOR

Genesis 4:1-15

By

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Genesis Lesson 11

Sin Crouching At The Door Genesis 4:1-15

Several years ago California farmers were threatened with a potential disaster in the Mediterranean fruit fly. It probably entered the state with someone who lied about not having any fruit when they crossed the border. Then the larvae hatched and multiplied quickly. It took a rapid, all-out effort to save California's fruit crop.

As you may know, the larvae of fruit flies and other insects do not eat their way into the fruit from the outside. Rather, the insect lays the egg in the blossom. The fruit grows around it; sometime later the worm hatches inside the fruit and eats its way out.

Sin is like that. It begins in the human heart and, if unchecked, works its way out in thoughts, words, and deeds. As with the Medfly, it takes quick, vigorous action to deal with it and root it out. If you let it go, it gets the upper hand, resulting in terrible destruction.

We see the terrible effects of unchecked sin in the story of Cain and Abel. Because of the sin of his parents, Cain was the first person born in sin, as all since then have been. His tragic murder of his brother was even more tragic because of the high hopes connected with his birth. Imagine the joy and hope of that first couple as they looked into Cain's tiny face and reflected on God's promise to send a deliverer through the seed of the woman. Many Bible scholars think that Adam and Eve mistakenly thought Cain was the promised deliverer (Gen 3:15). His name means "acquired." In light of God's promise, it probably means, "I've gotten him!" Genesis 4:1 may be translated, "I have gotten a man with the Lord"; or, "I have gotten a man, the Lord." She thought that Cain was the deliverer. And yet, as we know, she had not given birth to Christ, but to a murderer.

That's the frightening possibility that every parent since Adam and Eve faces. We all have high hopes for our children. We want them to grow up to live productive, happy lives. But since the fall, there is a worm in the fruit. Sin resides in the heart of every newborn, and it is only a matter of time until it eats its way out. If a

child grows up without trusting in Christ and learning how to check the power of sin within his heart, it will result in great ruin in his own life and in the lives of others. The story of Cain and Abel tells us that ...

Unchecked sin stemming from within
leads to devastation without.

1. Sin stems from within.

Adam's sin was imputed to the entire human race so that each person is born in sin (Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:3). David, whom God called a man after His own heart, lamented, "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). Jeremiah groaned, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9, NKJV). The Apostle Paul sums up the human condition: "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.... For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10-12, 23). This is the doctrine of total depravity.

Total depravity does not mean that every person is as bad as he can be, nor that sinful people are incapable of good deeds. Rather, it means that there is nothing in the human heart capable of earning God's favor. The human heart, by nature, is hostile toward God and unable to please God (Rom. 8:7-8). You can give a pig a bath and dress it in a tuxedo, but unless you change its nature, it will go back to wallowing in the mud. As sinners we can dress up in good deeds and look good on the outside, but unless God gives us a new nature, our hearts are corrupt. We sin because we are sinners by nature.

Jesus taught the same thing when He said, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these things proceed from within and defile the man" (Mark 7:20-23). Sin stems from within.

That was Cain's problem. We read that when the brothers brought their respective offerings, the Lord had regard for Abel's sacrifice, but not for Cain's (4:2-4). Some commentators argue that the type of sacrifice had nothing to do with God's acceptance of Abel and rejection of Cain. Rather, they say, it was the heart condition of each man. Abel's heart was right before God, whereas Cain's was not.

That is true, but not the full truth. The Lord always desires obedience rather than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22). Cain's wrong offering reflected his rebellious heart. But I believe God had given clear instruction about the type of sacrifice that He would accept. He had given Adam and Eve a graphic object lesson by clothing them with the skins of slaughtered animals, showing them that their fig leaves were not an adequate covering for their sin. Surely Adam and Eve had taught their sons what God had shown them about the proper way to approach Him. The young men had not just dreamed up on their own this idea of sacrifice. God had given them adequate instruction, either through their parents or directly.

This fact is confirmed by the author of Hebrews who writes, "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous..." (Heb. 11:4). Faith takes God at His word and acts upon it. Abel could not have offered his sacrifice in faith unless God had clearly revealed to that first family that He required a sacrifice which involved blood through the death of a substitute. God declared that the penalty for sin was death. But God had shown that He would accept the death of a proper substitute in place of the death of the sinner. Those animals pointed forward to the death of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would come to take away the sin of the world. Cain and Abel both knew what God required. But only Abel came in the obedience of faith with his offering. Cain came with the fruit of his own labor, but it was in defiance of what God had specified.

Why did Cain do that? Beneath his wrong offering was a root of pride that lurks in every fallen heart. Pride tells us that we have something in ourselves that will commend us to God. Pride whispers, "You're a pretty good person. Sure, you've got your faults, but nothing so bad as to send you to hell. Do your best, be sincere,

and you'll get into heaven. After all, if God is good, He wouldn't condemn a decent person like you!" Such prideful thinking is at the root of every human religion, but it is totally opposed to biblical Christianity which plainly declares that we are all sinners by nature and by deed and that no sinner can save himself from God's judgment. If we can offer God anything for our salvation, then Christ did not need to die as the substitute for sinners, thus satisfying God's holy justice.

God didn't accept Abel's offering out of arbitrary unfairness. Nor did he accept it because it was Abel's best effort. Abel was, by nature, just as much a sinner as Cain was. God accepted it because Abel offered it in faith in response to God's word. It had nothing to do with Cain's efforts or Abel's efforts. It had everything to do with God's just requirement for a blood sacrifice to be the only means of approaching Him.

Let's suppose that you are a football fan, and you really wanted to go to the recent Superbowl. You went down to Sun Devil Stadium and started to walk through the turnstile. The ticket attendant says, "Where's your ticket?" You say, "Oh, I don't have one of those silly pieces of paper. But I want you to know that I am a committed football fan. I watch every game. I know the statistics on every player. There is no more dedicated fan than I." He will say, "I don't care; you need a ticket to get into the Superbowl."

So you leave the stadium and go find an artist. You have him draw a ticket with a picture of a football player on it. He writes on it in neat letters, "Superbowl Ticket." You go back to the stadium and hand that ticket to the man. He looks at it and says, "What's this?" You say, "That's my ticket. You said I needed a ticket to get into the game."

You could argue with him all day that your ticket is prettier than those printed tickets everyone else is giving him. You're probably right. But it won't do you a bit of good. You can tell him how much effort and expense you went to in order to have that ticket made. He won't care. The only way to gain entrance to the game is to present the ticket issued by the proper authority. It has nothing to do with your character. It has nothing to do with your dedication as a fan. It has nothing to do with the effort or expense you went to in order to produce your own version of it. It has eve-

rything to do with it being the ticket required by the management for entrance.

God has said that the only ticket into heaven is perfect righteousness. No one has it. No one can achieve it. But in His grace, God offers it as a free gift through the death of His Son, the only acceptable Substitute. Coming to God with that ticket robs us of all pride in our own goodness and good works. But it is the only ticket acceptable at heaven's gate.

Cain didn't like that. His pride in his own efforts made him angry when his ticket was rejected. He was angry at God, but also at his brother, who got in by showing the right ticket. His anger led him into depression--his countenance fell (4:5). He grew jealous. It all stemmed from his pride which tried to come God on his own terms. Sin stems from within.

2. Sin needs to be checked.

God could have struck Cain dead at this point for offering this improper sacrifice. But He graciously comes to Cain with a warning, to give him a chance to repent before it is too late.

A. God graciously warned Cain to check his sin.

The Lord asks Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?" Remember, God doesn't ask questions because He lacks information. He asks questions to get the hearer to think rightly about matters. He was telling Cain, "Your anger and foul mood should tell you something about yourself. The reason you're angry and depressed is that you weren't willing to submit to My way and you didn't get your way. And then you saw that I accepted your brother and his sacrifice and you grew jealous. It all stems from your pride, Cain."

If you struggle with anger, ask yourself the question God asked Cain: Why are you angry? You'll probably learn that you're a lot more selfish than you care to admit. You may discover that your anger is a cover for some other area of disobedience in your life. It may be due to your wrong perception that God is dealing with you unfairly. "I'm as good a Christian as so-and-so. But look how God has blessed him. But all I get is suffering and problems. It's not fair!" Never ask God to deal fairly with you! If He deals fairly, we

all would go to hell! The only way to approach God is as an undeserving sinner seeking grace.

God's warning tells Cain what he needs to do: "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it" (4:7). In this context, "doing well" means, "Go back and offer the right sacrifice and you will be accepted and your anger and depression will go away. Everything will be right between you and Me." God is giving Cain the opportunity to repent.

There is an important principle here: *By doing well, you will feel well.* Cain was angry and depressed because of his sin. God didn't put him in therapy and ask him about his childhood. Rather He said, "Act right and you will feel right." If you will obey God and judge sinful feelings, your feelings will come around, and you will find yourself feeling good. But if you follow your feelings and disobey God, you will be plunged into guilt and depression. God doesn't tell us to live by feelings, but by faith and obedience to His Word. Do well and you will feel well.

If you don't do well, sin is crouching at the door. God pictures sin as a wild animal ready to pounce. It has a desire for you; it thirsts for your blood. It is your mortal enemy. But you must master it. Just as man was to have dominion over the beasts, so he must now gain dominion over the beast crouching within-indwelling sin.

God is saying, "Deal with your sin. Don't let it go on, or you will soon find yourself in the grip of a monster you can't control." Sin *always* begins with wrong thoughts. If you let those wrong thoughts go on, they lead to wrong feelings. Wrong feelings lead to wrong words, wrong words to wrong actions, wrong actions to wrong habits. Sin is like an acorn from an oak tree that falls in the forest. If you pick it up immediately, it is easy; even a child can do it. If it has just sprouted, it is still relatively easy to root out. But if you let it alone for very long, it sends down deep roots and grows into a strong tree that requires a lot of work to take out. If unchecked sin gets a hold in your life, it is a major operation to root it out. So God is saying, "Deal with your sin now, while it is still in the mental stage. If you let it go on, it will destroy you."

Some of you may be thinking, "What can I do? I've already allowed some sins to take deep root in my life. They're far past the thought stage; they're deep-rooted habits. To tear them out now would be as difficult as yanking a tree out of my yard."

I don't have time to answer that question fully in this message. But, briefly, there are two sides to dealing with deep-rooted sin: God's part and your part. God's part is to take away the penalty of your sin when you trust in Christ and to give you the Holy Spirit and the Word to produce holiness within you (Ps. 119:11; Rom. 8:1-4). Your part is to walk in dependence on the Holy Spirit and to deal radically with sin--yank out your eye; cut off your hand that makes you stumble (Matt. 5:29-30)! Jesus wasn't suggesting that maiming yourself would solve your sin problem. Rather, He was saying that you need to get radical in dealing with your sin. Do whatever it takes to cut sin out of your life. Don't flirt with it, don't dabble with it, not even in your thought life. Throw the bum out! Otherwise, it moves in and takes over, making you its slave. But in spite of God's gracious warning we see that ...

B. Cain willfully disobeyed God's warning.

Cain refused to humble himself and bring the proper offering. Instead, "he told Abel his brother" (NASB, 4:8). We don't know what he told him. It probably means that Cain invited Abel to go into the field with him. The sense is that he talked nicely to him. Abel didn't suspect the treachery; and so Cain killed him without warning. The Greek word used to describe the murder in 1 John 3:12 is a word meaning to slaughter a victim for sacrifice, to slit the throat. Perhaps Cain thought angrily, "All right, God, if You want blood sacrifice, I'll give it to You." And he ruthlessly slaughtered his own brother in cold blood.

Cain's sin shows the hardening process that has set into the human race in one generation of sin. It began in the context of worship, thus showing how sinful man trifles with the most sacred things. Eve had to be talked into her sin; Cain could not be talked out of it, even by God Himself. The victim was his own brother, guilty of no wrong toward Cain. While Adam and Eve tried to pass the buck, at least they told the truth and owned up to their sin. But Cain lies about it and never admits his sin. When God asks, "Where is your brother?" Cain replies with the insolent words, "I

don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" The arrogant insinuation is, "Can't You keep track of Your own creation, God?" There is not one word of repentance.

So sin begins within, in the heart. If it is not checked, it moves into wrong emotions and wrong actions. Finally,

3. Unchecked sin leads to outward devastation.

Abel, a righteous man, was murdered. Adam and Eve were undoubtedly overwhelmed with grief. Their high hopes for their son the deliverer were dashed. He fled into a distant land, estranged from his parents. His descendents, as we will see, learned his arrogant and violent ways (4:23-24). But let's focus briefly on the devastation in Cain's life.

First, God curses Cain in the area of his greatest strength. He was a farmer; God says that the ground will no longer yield its strength to him. Farmers generally are tied to the land, to one location. God decrees that Cain will be a vagrant and wanderer. The wonder is that God didn't execute Cain on the spot. God later gave to man the power of capital punishment for murder (Gen. 9:6). The only reason I know why God didn't execute Cain was His great mercy. Cain got far less than he deserved.

And yet he complained that his punishment was too harsh (4:13)! Isn't that just like sinful man! We sin and God sends some sort of judgment on us. And we complain and say, "God's not fair" (Prov. 19:3). Cain is filled with self-pity and fear that he would get the same treatment he gave his brother (4:14). "'There is no peace for the wicked,' says the Lord" (Isa. 48:22).

God graciously appointed a sign or mark for Cain, as a warning that if anyone killed Cain, vengeance would be taken on him sevenfold. We don't know whether this was a physical mark or some sort of confirming sign. But it was a mark of grace, by which God signified that His protective hand was on Cain in spite of his great sin. God, in His mercy, was giving Cain every chance to repent. But we read that "Cain went out from the presence of the Lord" (4:16).

What devastation sin brings into human lives! A man of great promise ends up as an estranged, hardened, fearful, guilt-ridden vagabond. Seventeenth century English poet, John Trapp, wrote,

“To prosper in sin is the greatest tragedy that can befall a man this side of hell. Envy not such a one his pomp any more than you would a corpse his flowers.”

Conclusion

What are you doing with the sin crouching at the door of your heart? Either it will master you or by trusting in Christ and warring against it, you will master it. Have you come to Christ as a guilty sinner seeking mercy? Are you on guard against the beast that still dwells within? Are you dealing radically with it? Or are you dallying with it? There's no middle ground! If God is speaking to you about your sin, don't shut the door on God. Come in repentance to Him, and by His power, slam the door shut on your sin!

Discussion Questions

1. What would you say to someone who said, “God is not fair in imputing Adam's sin to the whole human race”?
2. Why is the doctrine of total depravity essential to the gospel?
3. Is all anger sin? How can we tell the difference between sinful anger and righteous anger? How should we deal with our anger?
4. Is all depression sin? Is some depression sin? How does God want us to deal with our depression?
5. Is it possible for a Christian to live without sinning? Can a Christian experience consistent victory over sin? How?

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