

## “Matchless Mercy to Even the Serpent’s Seed”

2020-11-15 Sermon Gen 4.1-16 GCC KMM

Why did God write the Old Testament? Why not just start with Matthew? Why give all of these stories of different people and prophets and kings and villains? There are many ways to answer this question, but let me answer it from Rom 15:4. This verse helps us to know how to read our Old Testament. Rom. 15:4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. So why did God inspire Moses to record the historical account of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4? One of the reasons is for our instruction: to warn us, to guard us, and to guide us.

The underlying assumption is that there is a Cain-like tendency that lives inside of us. If we are not careful, we will find ourselves in the way of Cain: not loving our brothers, but hating them, and then experiencing the judgment this brings. We do see in this passage a man who is filled with hate and envy toward his brother. But we also see a gracious God who calls hate-filled people to repentance and faith in him, so that they might live out God’s love towards others. Please turn with me to **Genesis 4** in your Bibles on page 3.

As we read, I want you to notice the contrast between character of God and the Character of Cain. 4:1 ¶ 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.  
[pray]

We have three points today:

- 1. 1-7 The Warning of Token Worship**
- 2. 8-12 The Warning of Envy**
- 3. 13-16 The Warning of Worldly Sorrow Before a Gracious God**

### **1. The Warning of Token Worship (4:1-7)**

Lets remember where we are in Genesis. The first man and woman disobeyed God in the garden of Eden when the woman listened to the serpent and ate of the forbidden fruit. So God cursed the serpent, He cursed the ground and drove the man and woman out of the garden. But in His kindness God makes a promise in **Genesis 3:15** that the whole Bible is built upon. Go ahead and turn with me there. God is speaking to the serpent when he says in **Gen. 3:15** "I [God] will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring;"

Offspring means children or descendants. There are two offsprings spoken of here, and God promises enmity—division, or hostility, or strife—between the serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring But this is not a snake versus people battle. What we find out through scripture is that the offspring of the serpent and the woman are both referring to human beings: those who belong to the serpent, or those who belong to God.

We'll see this in our passage today. We also see the second part of God's promise in **the middle of Genesis 3:15**: "he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." A singular male offspring of the woman will give the deathblow to the head of the serpent, the one who brought about the fall of man in the first place. So the promise of this one male offspring hangs over this entire chapter: who will it be?

From Adam and Eve's perspective, could it be Cain? Cain is the firstborn, and his name is explained at **end of verse 1** because it sounds like the word for "gotten". Could this man that Eve had gotten be the promised one? We do read that Eve also bore his brother Abel. There's no commentary on Abel's name, but the word means "breath"<sup>1</sup> or "vanity"—and this is the same word that is used all throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. Abel was a shepherd, Cain was a farmer.

After some time when Cain and Abel are adults, they bring an offering to the Lord. Notice the difference between the two offerings in **verses 3 and 4**: Cain brings a generic "offering of the fruit of the ground," And Abel brings "the firstborn of his flock, and of their fat portions".<sup>2</sup> God had regard one and not the other.<sup>3</sup>

Why is this?<sup>4</sup>

The answer lies in the attitude of each worshipper which then manifests in their offering. Notice in **verse 4** how God has regard for Abel *and* his offering—both the person and the person's offering.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R. Albertz, "קַיִן," *TLOT*, 1:351.

<sup>2</sup> The Israelite who was familiar with the Pentateuch would see clearly why the Lord had regard for Abel's sacrifice and not for Cain's sacrifice. Note that "fat" can be used as an adjective to describe the best produce of a land (Gen 45:18), or the best of a specific type of produce (Deut 32:14; Ps 147:14). Thus, the fact that this adjective is not used to describe Cain's sacrifice when it is explicitly mentioned in Abel's sacrifice indicates that Cain did not offer the best of his produce. Moreover, firstfruits are commanded to be brought to God (Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Lev 2:14). The fact that there is no mention of firstfruits in relation to Cain's offering further affirms that Cain is not giving the Lord his best.

<sup>3</sup> The text gives no clue about how this "regard" of God was communicated, but perhaps God burned up Abel's offering, and he did not burn up Cain's offering (cf. 1 Kings 18:38). Whatever the case, Cain clearly knew his offering had not been accepted.

<sup>4</sup> I am confounded by the number of scholars who claim that God's acceptance of Abel and his sacrifice over Cain and his sacrifice is somehow inexplicable or an indication of "the grave theological problem of God's capriciousness" (Angela Y. Kim, "Cain and Abel in the Light of Envy: A Study in the History of the Interpretation of Envy in Genesis 4.1-16," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 12, no. 1 [2001]: 84). Don't they understand that the nature of narrative is to *show*, rather than to *tell*? See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Rev. & Updated ed (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 146-47.

<sup>5</sup> I first saw this insight through Sidney Greidanus, "Preaching Christ from the Cain and Abel Narrative," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (December 2004): 391.

Abel brought to God the best of the best of what he had, the fat portions of the firstborn. Why? It's because Abel recognized the worthiness of God. Abel's internal disposition is confirmed in the New Testament by Heb. 11:4, "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts."

What did Abel have faith in? He had faith in the character of God who is worthy of extravagant worship and who rewards his people. Abel believed that there was more reward to be gained in giving God his best than there was in keeping it for himself. Again, we see this theme in Hebrews 11:6 "And without faith it is impossible to please [God], for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

Cain, on the other hand, gave a token gift to check the box. He recognizes God should be worshipped, but he gives him the leftovers, as it were: He did not give the best of his crop.<sup>6</sup> He gives an *ordinary gift* because he believes in an *ordinary God*. Cain lacked faith in the character of God and how he rewards those who seek Him. And what's amazing is that God does not accept either Cain or his gift!

And here is where Cain's example is a warning to us. God does not have regard for our spiritual activities—our giving, our church-going, our spiritual disciplines, and our love for others—if all of these are mechanically checking a box while our hearts are far from God.

Children, listen closely here. You have likely the greater temptation here. There is some expectation in your parents that you will go to church, pray and read your Bible. But God does not want you to do this to fulfill the expectation of your parents, He wants you to do this because he knows that you will find more joy in Him than in any earthly thing! He wants your heart. And the picture of Cain is someone whose heart does not love God.

When God does not accept him or his offering, Cain now becomes very angry in the middle of verse 4. He may be angry at God for not accepting his offering. In the very least, he is angry at his brother. Cain reveals here that his heart is full of envy, which is a thankless and sinful desire for the blessings of others.<sup>7</sup>

Now how do we know that Cain is envious of his brother? It's because Cain's murder arises out of the fact of Cain seeing God favor Abel over him. God has blessed Abel by accepting Abel's sacrifice, and the fact that Abel has something that Cain does not makes Cain exceedingly angry—and this envy. Envy flows from a secret rivalry that exists in the human heart that will not be satisfied until I have matched or surpassed what another has. Cain shows us his true colors.

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<sup>6</sup> Some people think that Cain wasn't accepted because he didn't give a blood sacrifice. But in verse 7 God admonishes Cain not on the type of offering, but on his internal disposition. Moreover, later in the Pentateuch God accepts produce sacrifices (e.g. Ex. 23:19; Lev 2:1, 12; 23:10, 17, 20; Num. 18:12; 28:26; Deut. 18:4) so the issue here is not blood versus non-blood sacrifices.

<sup>7</sup> One can desire the blessing of others in a godly way, and the key component is love—a love that rejoices at God's blessing to another person (see Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor 13:4–6). If an older woman has higher spiritual attainments than a younger woman, then that younger woman can desire those very same spiritual attainments in a godly way by thanking God for how he has gifted this older woman, and by asking God to give herself as a young woman those very same attainments. The younger woman may even seek to imitate the older woman to achieve these attainments with God's help, and this is certainly not envy when it is coupled with love.

The topic of envy is quite complex, and it even has varying degrees of sinfulness. For example, a person who envies the sin of someone else is both sinfully envying a person and envying a sinful reality, as when a young man envies the playboy lifestyle of a mob boss. A person who desires a good trait (bible knowledge, for example) to the point of envy is still sinning, but the object is better. The former example is more sinful than the latter.

Though *physically* descended from Eve, Cain is being revealed here as an offspring of the serpent: with serpentine priorities and serpentine actions. The NT confirms this very thing in 1John 3:12a when it speaks of, “...Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother.” To say that Cain “was of the evil one” is another way of saying that Cain was an offspring of the serpent. And what we see here is the beginning of a theme throughout all of scripture, where the seed of the serpent envies the blessing on the seed of the woman even to the point of murder. Pay attention if you want to understand your Old Testament better. The seed of the serpent feels jealous of the blessings of God on His own people, even to the point of murder.<sup>8</sup> Consider:

- Cain is envious of Abel’s blessing and so he kills him (Gen 4:5);
- Laban treats Jacob as a slave because he is envious over Jacob’s prosperity (Gen 30:27, 35; 31:12, 29, 41–42);
- Joseph’s brothers are envious of Joseph’s favor with their father and they almost kill him (Gen. 37:20, Acts 7:9);
- Saul is envious of David’s accomplishments and tries to kill him (1 Sam 18:8, 9);
- King Herod feels threatened by Jesus’s kingship and tries to kill him (Matt 2:3, 6, 16);
- Jewish Leaders are envious of people leaving them to follow Jesus (John 12, 11, 19), and so they kill him.<sup>9</sup>

In light of this, we ought not be surprised if certain non-Christians have an irrational envy or hatred for us. We ought expect that the seed of the serpent would persecute the seed of the woman in this world.

But as we consider ourselves, we are tempted to treat envy too lightly. Gal. 5:21 tells us that those who live their lives envying others “will not inherit the kingdom of God.” The more we envy others, the more serpent-like we become. Do you envy another person’s looks, their social skills, their power, their family, their friends, their spouse, their job, their house, their number of children, or vacation experiences? Envy is the enemy of love. How can you truly love someone if you’re in competition with them?

I remember how early in college I would often compare my godliness to other Christians in my mind. I was deeply bothered by those who I perceived were more godly than I was. Cain filled my heart even as I was the most involved church member you could find.

But what is the antidote to Envy? The death of envy is contentment, and love for others. Another name for contentment is really faith in the character of God. It may never be that God gives you the looks or the body or the wealth that he has or what she has, but you can trust that God He is working for your good nevertheless on the basis of promises like Romans 8:28 and Psalms 84:11. If this is a major struggle for you, a helpful book is called *Chasing Contentment*: by Erik Raymond

The flip side of this is a love for others that is glad to rejoice in their blessings, even if you don’t have them yourself. “Rejoice with those who rejoice” (Rom. 12:15)! In fact, when we are able to rejoice in God’s

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<sup>8</sup> Every instance of jealousy in the Bible is not indicative that a person is the seed of the serpent, but rather, a person’s continued perseverance in this sin is a sure sign. So, for example, Aaron and Miriam were jealous of Moses, but they did not persist in this once they were rebuked by the Lord in Numb 12:10–15. At the very least there is no record of them complaining about Moses’ authority again, and they continue to live in the covenant community. In addition, Peter seems to be jealous of “the beloved disciple” who had a privileged position with Jesus (John 21:21), and yet he receives Jesus’s rebuke (John 21:22) and shows himself the seed of the woman.

<sup>9</sup> Beyond these examples, Korah is envious over Moses’s position with God and thus tries to lead a coup against him (Numb 16); opponents in Nehemiah are envious of the Jerusalem rebuilders and thus try to kill them (note the same words used to describe Cain in Gen 4:4, ““very angry” are also used in Neh 4:7); and Jewish leaders in Thessalonica are envious of all the people who came to believe the gospel that the apostle Paul preached, and thus they stir up mob violence against him (Acts 17:5, 13).

goodness to another, that frees us to desire what they have without crossing the line into envy. When you are able to thank God that such and such knows the Bible better than you, than this frees you up to imitate them in a godly way. Thanksgiving suffocates envy, because you are now no longer in competition with that individual, you are glad in their blessing. And if this seems impossible, communicate this to God, and ask him to give you the spiritual strength. This is what Cain ought have done. But he didn't.

But even in the midst of Cain's sin, God takes initiative and speaks to him. Look with me at verse 6, and see how gracious this is of God, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted?"

The implied answer is Yes! 'Cain, if you do well, I will accept you.'

But look at the middle of verse 7, "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." Note the nature of sin here. The word for "crouching" here is used elsewhere in scripture to describe lions<sup>10</sup>.

So here's the picture. Imagine you are at you are at the door of your house, and the doorbell rings. You look outside, and you see a big lion. But the lion is not standing there; it is crouching down, waiting to pounce should you open that door an inch. What's the implication? *Don't open the door, Cain!*

The idea here is that Cain has a choice. If he relates to God by faith: trusting in God's character and living in light of this, then he will be accepted by God. The door will remain shut to sin. But if Cain continues in his low view of God, and if he continues stewing in sinful anger and envy, then he is opening the door wide open for sin to pounce inside and do its damage.

Near the end of verse 7 says, "[Sin's] desire is contrary to [or for] you," This is the same phrase used in Genesis 3:16 to describe how wives will be tempted to control and domineer their husbands in after the Fall. Sin's desire is for control over Cain's thoughts and actions. And sin has not changed in its fundamental disposition towards people. Hear God's word to Cain as a word for you today at the end of verse 7. "but you must rule over it."

God is essentially saying. Slam the door. Trust me by faith. Recognize my character. Friend, God would have you close the door to any and all known sin in your life. If sin is crouching at the door, ready to pounce, then all it needs is for you to give in a little bit in order to get a foot in the door. And the way to slam the door to sin is to live a life of confession, repentance, and faith in God. Deal with your sin. It's no accident that Ephesians 4:26 links anger and a foothold of sin. "Eph. 4:26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, Eph. 4:27 and give no opportunity to the devil." Sin is not to be your master. Sadly, Cain has no response, and his further actions indicate that Cain ignores his very Creator.

## 2. The Warning of Envy (4:8-12)

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<sup>10</sup> See Gen 49:9; Ps 104:22; Ezek 19:2.

Cain speaks to his brother Abel, likely to invite him into a field,<sup>11</sup> and while in this secluded place Cain kills Abel. And let's pause here to note the significance. This is the first human death in all of history.<sup>12</sup> And it was not between enemies, but brothers—the word is used seven times to show the gravity.<sup>13</sup> Not only was it a death, but it was a bloody death, because Abel's blood went into the ground. And the fact that God had already warned Cain of this, and the fact that Cain did this in a field where there would be no witnesses points to the pre-meditated nature of this murder.<sup>14</sup>

As one person describes:<sup>15</sup>

*The first man was kill't / The first blood was spill't  
The first ground tasted / Of first blood wasted.  
The first brother died, And the first blood-cried.*

This is the new world order when sin pounces: an order of violence, of injustice, and hidden murders. But God knows. And note the first thing God says to Cain after his sin, "Where is your brother?" As an aside, when confronting sin, it's a wise practice to lead with questions, even if you already know the answer like God did. Questions have the tendency to reveal what is in a person's heart. And when a person is confronted with a question about major sin, in that split second of silence they are teetering on the edge of a continental divide. How they answer will set them on a journey towards eternal blessing or eternal curse.

Cain chose the curse. He speaks a lie to the one who sees all truth. "I do not know."<sup>16</sup> Again, Cain is showing that he is an offspring of the serpent. Jesus alludes to Cain when he criticizes the Jewish leaders in John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." How was the devil a liar and specifically a murderer from the beginning? Through Cain, his offspring. The actions of the offspring are attributed to the father.

What's amazing here is that when we compare Cain with Adam, we see the compounding sinfulness of humanity.<sup>17</sup> Adam is honest when God asks him questions, even if he is slightly evasive. But Cain lies.

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<sup>11</sup> The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint/LXX), the Latin Translation of the Old Testament (the Vulgate), and the Syriac version of the Old Testament all include the phrase "Let us go out to the field" in this verse, which may be the original reading that the Hebrew text does not contain.

<sup>12</sup> We know this is the first human death because of Matt. 23:35 so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

<sup>13</sup> See Gen. 4:2, 8 (2x), 9 (2x), 10, 11.

<sup>14</sup> "In the law the circumstance that a crime is committed "in the field," i.e., out of range of help, is proof of premeditation; cf. Deut 22:25-27" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC 1; [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987], 106). Deut 22:25-27 reads, "25 But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. 26 But you shall do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no offense punishable by death. For this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor, 27 because he met her in the open country, and though the betrothed young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her."

<sup>15</sup> This is my verse.

<sup>16</sup> It's worth noting that one strategy of sin is to claim a lack of knowledge although one actually has knowledge. In courtroom settings (among others), many sin in this regard when they claim a lack of memory or lack of knowledge when in fact they do have this memory or knowledge.

<sup>17</sup> See more of the parallels in Alan J. Hauser, "Linguistic and Thematic Links Between Genesis 4:1-16 and Genesis 2-3," *JETS* 23, no. 4 (December 1980): 297-305. However, Hauser does not draw out their theological significance.

but he does what so many people do when they want to avoid personal responsibility for their sin: he goes on the offensive. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Wow. This is such a high-handed sin!

God told Adam in Gen 2:15 to “work ...and keep [the garden]”—which is the same word Cain uses here for “keeper”. The truth is, we *are* our brothers’ keeper. We have a responsibility of love and regard for our fellow man. Jesus affirms this in Mark 12:31 when he tells us that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves, despite how unfavorable our neighbor might be to our cultural sensibilities. But how can Cain obey the second commandment when he hasn’t obeyed the first?

The Lord speaks to Cain again with another question in verse 10, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out from the ground.” Now this is remarkable. Abel’s blood flowed out of his body into the earth that man was first formed from. But the blood of Abel knew that it was spilled unjustly. And so Abel’s blood cried out because it was not supposed to be soaking into the soil! ...Because it was not supposed to be going into the mouth of the ground that received it.

A person cries out because they need something that they cannot effect: help in the case of a crime, or defense in the case of attack. Abel’s blood here cries out to God “justice”, for a price to be paid for the unjust shedding of the blood of the offspring of the woman. And in fact, unjustly shed blood has been crying out throughout human history—so often we see the language of God avenging someone’s *blood*.<sup>18</sup> Why? Because the blood cries for justice. Through the centuries the whole world has been saturated full with unjustly shed blood, and all of these voices together cry out loudly together for God to bring justice! The blood of Abel, of little Hebrew babies in Egypt under pharaoh, the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, the blood of the Hebrew children in Bethlehem, the blood of John the Baptist, the blood from the killing fields of Cambodia, the blood from the concentration camps of Germany, the blood from little babies in abortion clinics—their blood all cries out to God: “Justice, justice, justice!”

And in this deafening cry of blood throughout world history, one blood speaks a better word: “*Mercy!*” At the climax of human history, unjust blood dripped down a roman cross and soaked into the ground, but this blood speaks a better and louder word:

*Mercy* for guilty sinners!  
*Mercy* for murders!  
*Mercy* for Envious  
*Mercy* for those not accepted by God!  
*Mercy* for those who are far from God.

Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant, and his “sprinkled blood...speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” in Heb 12:24. You see, the gospel message is that all of us have sinned against God, whether we have murdered, or envied, or even not treated God in the place of worthiness that belongs to him. And the just punishment that we deserve is death for our sin. We deserve justice. But the gospel is that Jesus came as the true offspring of the woman. He perfectly loved God and neighbor, and on the cross his blood was spilled in order to grant forgiveness and mercy and new life to all who look to Him in faith. God poured out his wrath for sin on Jesus, so that we might not have to experience that wrath ourselves. Rather, we can be covered by Jesus’ blood. But Jesus’s blood does not cry out “mercy!” to all people, but to those who look to him in faith and follow him, repenting of their sins.

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<sup>18</sup> Note the logic of Matt. 23:35, “so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.” See also 2 Kings 9:7; Hos. 1:4; 1 Kings 2:28–34; Num 35:33–34.

Friend, if you have not believed in Jesus Christ, then the cry of “justice!” hangs over your life, and not in your favor. God would have you turn. He says to you: “if you do well, will you not be accepted?” He would have you trust in his son and turn away from your sin. And he would have you experience the joy and blessing of relationship with him, even though it comes with persecution. The amazing thing is that the gospel transforms those who are seeds of the serpent into the offspring of God, and this can be true of you today if you trust in him by faith. But Cain rejected God’s character of forgiveness, and he is judged for it.

Look with me at God’s judgment in 4:11–12, Gen. 4:11 “...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.” The only other person who has been directly cursed in the bible up to this point is the serpent in Genesis 3:14, and the connection is no accident. This curse manifests itself in his primary role as farmer: the ground will no longer yield harvest for Cain, and so Cain will have to wander elsewhere even just in order to get food. What’s remarkable here is that Cain withheld the best of his harvest from God, and it resulted in him losing almost all of his harvest.<sup>19</sup> It’s a strange irony of human existence that the very things that we withhold from God are taken away from us, and the very things we offer to Him are multiplied to us. So God judges Cain as a wanderer on the earth away from His presence. But we note something of God’s character even here in our final point.

### **3. The Warning of Worldly Sorrow Before a Gracious God (13–16)**

In 4:13 We see Cain’s response. This is the response of a person who is not repentant, and we ought learn about the nature of true repentance here. A truly repentant person is sorrowful that he has sinned and offended a holy God. An unrepentant person may be sorrowful, but the sorrow is at the consequence of their punishment, and not at the sin against God itself.

We see this with Cain. He shows no remorse for killing his brother, no remorse for disobeying God’s counsel. He is full of pity for himself at the greatness of his punishment. And then ironically, at the end of verse 14 Cain is concerned that someone will come find him and kill him. Why is this? Well, we read in the Pentateuch (Numb 35; Deut 19) that if someone killed another person, that there would be an avenger of blood who would pursue the killer to repay the blood that was spilled. This is likely Cain’s concern: that someone Adam and Eve’s family might seek out Cain to kill him.

And what we see next is really incredible. In 4:15 God spares Cain’s life, but He also puts a mark on Cain to keep him from being killed by others. The text is not super clear on what the mark is, but whether the case it is a gracious means of God protecting Cain’s life. Don’t miss this. Cain deserves death, Life for life. There is blood crying out of the ground for God to bring justice. And out of the abundance of his character, God delays Cain judgment for the span of Cain’s life. We’ll see later in the chapter that God blesses Cain with the common grace joys of marriage, children, and even a family line that continues.

There are many people who will never believe in God, and yet God still causes the warm sun to rise and the nourishing rain to fall on them (Matt 5:45). There’s no indication in the text that Cain ever repented of his sin, but you just wonder, how can someone receive so much kindness of God and still turn away from Him? Many unbelievers reject God because they don’t know him. What’s ironic is that even one’s ability to reason and articulate sentences expressing a rejection of God can only be done while operating in the

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<sup>19</sup> This insight was pointed out to me by my brother and friend, Wes Reed.

blessing of God's common grace. The God who gives to all mankind life and breath and everything does not need to sustain the beating hearts and the inhaling lungs of those who oppose him. But he does.

Now, God's kindness has a limit, and there will be no mercy for those who reject him in the next life. But note how God's kindness is the very means of bringing someone from an eternity in hell to an eternity with him.

Christian, think of your own life before you were in Christ. Consider God's kindness towards you in sustaining and sparing your life even when you lived in opposition to him. Cain was born as an offspring of the woman, but he became an offspring of the Serpent. What's amazing is that we all, in our sin, are born as offspring of the serpent, being by nature children of wrath, as [Ephesians 2:3](#) says. And yet, God's kindness leads the very offspring of the serpent, his very enemies, to become offspring of promise through His son.

But Cain rejected God, and he left the presence of God, and he becomes a wanderer. "Nod" itself means wandering. And isn't this a picture of humanity far from God's presence? Wandering throughout the world, always seeking, never finding, always going, but never arriving, always craving, but never satisfied?

What we see in [Genesis 4](#) is a warning to us, and yet it is a gracious warning from God for our instruction. This is a warning against hard-hearted unrepentance. It's also an encouragement to not walk in the way of Cain: the way of hatred and envy; but to follow the seed of the woman in the way of love.

This is also a reminder to us that as we seek to speak to those who are offspring of the serpent, that we tell them about the gracious character of God. This is a reminder that God has mercy for even hardened sinners like enviers, God belittlers, and murders. They can receive mercy and pardon and forgiveness from the blood of the Messiah. This is our message and our mission. May God help us to be faithful in it!