

The Gospel Project
Session 4

Sin is _____ toward God, often expressed in hateful actions toward people made in _____

It is a constant war with self. You know what you should do, but the pull toward sin is so very strong. There is a voice, a feeling inside you saying, “You should not do what you are about to do!” Whether it’s sexual sin, gossip, lying, anger, stealing, or something hidden, such as pride, covetousness, or idolatry of the heart, we are all at war with the alluring and enticing power of sin. Knowing we should resist, we do it anyway.

The Bible exposes the _____ of _____, but magnifies the _____ of _____.

In the previous session, we saw how everything good that God created in Genesis 1–2 was affected by the sinful choice of the first human beings. In this session, we will see how sin spread from Adam and Eve to their descendants—Cain and Abel. It could be said that if Genesis 3 represents the fall of humankind, Genesis 4 represents the fall of the family.

1. The spread of sin begins with _____ (Gen. 4:1-7).

¹ Adam was intimate with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. She said, “I have had a male child with the Lord’s help.” ² Then she also gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel became a shepherd of flocks, but Cain worked the ground. ³ In the course of time Cain presented some of the land’s produce as an offering to the Lord. ⁴ And Abel also presented an offering—some of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but He did not have regard for Cain and his offering. Cain was furious, and he looked despondent.

⁶ Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you furious? And why do you look despondent? ⁷ If you do what is right, won’t you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”

Though Genesis 3 ended with the banishment of Adam and Eve for their rebellion, Genesis 4 opens with hope: Eve gives birth to two sons. It is a celebration, an interlude from the sweat and toil of working the land. However, we quickly see that the sin that plagued Adam and Eve could not be contained, but was instead passed on to their children.

Verse 2 tells us that Abel was given the job of shepherding the flocks, while Cain was asked to work in the fields. Both sons offered sacrifices to God from their respective areas of work, but God only accepted the sacrifice of Abel. Why?

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was approved as a righteous man, because God approved his gifts, and even though he is dead, he still speaks through his faith. - Hebrews 4:11

Abel's offering was accepted by God because he offered it in faith. When Cain realized that his offering was rejected, something started brewing in his heart, something dark and consuming that led to hatred, loss of hope, and jealousy.

However, before Cain ever acted on these evil desires, God showed up and spoke truth into his life. Much like the grace offered to us, God's reached out to Cain even before he sinned and offered a way out of the temptation. (Genesis 4:6-7)

God's counsel to Cain was to reject the temptation, to master the sinful desire—Do right by ruling over it! Don't be a slave to sin! Don't obey its command! Resist and don't give in!

Many of us will shake our heads as we consider what Cain is going to do next, even in spite of God's counsel. But, we also are reminded that our story is no different. We, too, fight daily the evil desires that war against us and tempt us to sinful actions. Like Cain, how many times have we been guilty of ignoring the warning of God's counsel? God cares deeply about every act of sin in our lives. And so He speaks truth to us in love. But in our sinfulness, we reject that counsel, and so did Cain.

- Is it important to consider sinful desires, not just sinful actions, in our battle against sin?

Evil _____ give birth to evil _____.

Whoever hates is a murderer. You may not have prepared any poison or committed a crime. You have only hated, and in doing so, you have killed yourself first of all.
- Augustine (354-430)

Always be killing sin or it will be killing you. - John Owen (1616-1683)

2. The spread of sin results in condemnable _____ against _____ (Gen. 4:8-12).

⁸ *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.*

⁹ Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s guardian?”

¹⁰ Then He said, “What have you done? Your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground!

¹¹ So now you are cursed, alienated, from the ground that opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood you have shed. ¹² If you work the ground, it will never again give you its yield. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

In these verses, Cain succumbs to his sinful desire and kills his innocent brother, Abel. In many ways, this parallels the actions of Adam and Eve. God and God alone is the ruler over life and death. Much like Adam and Eve desired to become like God by eating of the tree of knowledge, Cain tried to become “like God” when he took his brother’s life. Additionally, in each case, the sin was birthed by an evil desire rooted in jealousy.

The parallel between these two stories continues in what happens next. Just as God came to counsel Cain before the sin, He came to talk with him after the sin. God was offering Cain the opportunity to repent—“Cain, where is your brother Abel? What have you done?” This should line of questioning should sound familiar.

But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” - Genesis 3:9

Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” - Genesis 3:13

Of course, God knew exactly where Adam was, just as He knew exactly where Abel was. These questions were not offered in order to discover information but as an invitation for Cain to respond with repentance.

The same is true with us. Whenever we sin, God doesn’t come first with fierce accusations but with a gentle invitation to repent. In the moment of temptation, God calls us to resist sin, and in the moment of sin, God gives us the opportunity to repent and turn back to Him. Unfortunately, in Cain’s case, he didn’t respond with repentance but with a lie (“I don’t know”) and a question (“Am I my brother’s guardian?”) that revealed the indifference of his hateful heart.

Although God shows His love, He does not eliminate His justice. In a wonderful display, He shows grace and righteousness at the same time. God’s curse upon Cain penetrated him to the core of his identity. Cain had been a farmer, a cultivator of the ground, but not anymore. From this point forward, whenever Cain attempted to do what he had always done in the past, what he had known and excelled in, his efforts would be profitless.

Our own sin leads to similar consequences. When our hearts are hardened and indifferent toward the God who offers grace and mercy (and toward other people who are made in His image), we soon discover that the things we were meant to do and to find fulfillment in cease to produce life-giving fruit. Whatever we try to base our identity on leaves us empty and hopeless.

3. The spread of sin is overcome only by God's _____ and _____ . (Gen. 4:13-16, 25-26).

¹³ But Cain answered the Lord, "My punishment is too great to bear! ¹⁴ Since You are banishing me today from the soil, and I must hide myself from Your presence and become a restless wanderer on the earth, whoever finds me will kill me."

¹⁵ Then the Lord replied to him, "In that case, whoever kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over." And He placed a mark on Cain so that whoever found him would not kill him.

¹⁶ Then Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

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²⁵ Adam was intimate with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, for she said, "God has given me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." ²⁶ A son was born to Seth also, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of Yahweh.

In this passage, we see Cain crying and expressing sorrow. But the tears of regret are different from tears of repentance. The reason for Cain's sorrow is selfish. It is not found in the blood of his brother or the thought of offending God. Cain's focus is on himself and the consequences of his sin.

Counterfeit repentance may include sorrow, tears, regret, and the promise never to sin this way again, but at the heart of counterfeit repentance is self-absorption. Yet notice how God responded to Cain's self-centered attitude. He enacted justice on behalf of Abel (in banishing Cain) even as He extended a measure of mercy to Cain (by putting a mark on him). God marked Cain in such a way that protected him from facing vengeful violence from others.

There's nothing in the passage that indicates Cain ever repented of his sin and received salvation. But everything in the passage points to a God who, in love, withheld the full extent of His just judgment toward Cain, at least for a time. Just as he does with each of us, God treated Cain better than he deserved.

In the last verses of chapter 4, God gives Adam and Eve another son named Seth. It is through his lineage, thousands of years later, the promised Son of Eve would be born – the one whose heel would strike the head of the serpent. At the cross, blood would be shed once again, but this time the blood of the promised Son would not just be shed by sin; His blood would be shed for sin.

Genesis 4 reminds us that sin begins with evil desires, leading to actions that deserve God's condemnation. However, God offers a merciful promise powerful enough to overcome our sin, and through His grace, we are rescued.