

SESSION 34: AN UNREPENTANT ANGER

Genesis 4:6-8

July 7, 2024

PREFACE

Before we move into our next passage, I'd like to add just a few more thoughts about how v5 ends: "So Cain became very angry, and his countenance fell."

There can be any number of reasons why someone's "face [would] fall" (ESV): sadness, embarrassment, unease, depression, shame. But the text *tells* us why Cain's "face was downcast" (NIVs): "Cain became very angry."

If one is angry at an equal, or especially a subordinate, one will probably glare directly at them, directly into their eyes in an attempt to intimidate. But if one is angry at a *superior*, one will probably try to swallow or hide that anger by staring at the floor. And that's what is going on here: Cain is not sad or humbled; he is *infuriated* with Yahweh for refusing his offering, but even he knows he is impotent against God, so can only stare at the ground.

Read Genesis 4:4-8.

Is it not our habit, when faced with a spiritual or moral dilemma, to instinctively go to the epistles or the words of Christ Jesus in the gospels for the counsel we seek? Do we not naturally assume that the NT will be the best or most relevant—the most "Christian"—source for help with our problem? Who would have guessed that such timely counsel would be found within the earliest chapters of Genesis.

Once in a while a portion of God's word will lift off the page and grab you by the throat. Verses 6 and 7 of this passage did that for me. And I would be so bold as to suggest it should for all of us. But let's back up and come into this. How did we get to this moment of confrontation between the first son of Adam and Eve, and Yahweh?

Cain is the couple's firstborn; Eve may even have thought he was *the* son—her first "seed"—who would "bruise [the serpent] on the head."

When they are old enough Cain and his younger brother Abel do what just about every farmer's sons have done since: they are put to work in the family business, Cain to work the crops and Abel to work the livestock. Regardless their respective areas of work, we have seen that of the two, Abel is the one with a heart more sensitive to and devoted to God. Unlike his older brother, he offered to Yahweh the *best* of what he had.

Yahweh is not fooled. He reads not just the *quality* of each offering, but the condition of each man's heart. Cain's heart is left wanting, and his subsequent behavior when God has "no regard" for his offering—as well as when he is called out by God—reveal his heart's poor condition.

v6

Then Yahweh said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?"

We cannot say with certainty that this scene includes a visible, in-person (as it were) visitation of Yahweh with Cain. Typically the text will make it clear that God is visible to the person, such as earlier in Genesis 3:8, just after the Fall.

Read Genesis 3:8-9.

It is clear from that passage that when Yahweh God hands down his judgment on the three, he is present—in whatever form—in their midst. But we do not have that same assurance in Chapter Four. It could be an audible voice, or even an inaudible communication. In either case it is doubtful that God is physically standing before Cain—even as a vision.

I suppose one can interpret Yahweh's tone in a variety of ways, as He speaks to Cain. Personally, I hear a tone of feigned disbelief in Yahweh's voice—as if he is saying, *This is self-evident; even you should know this, Cain*. I don't hear a scolding tone, but more of a pedagogic voice, surprised that he doesn't grasp this basic tenet of a spiritual life. Here is the voice of Someone who knows the darkness, the anger, the *homicide* that dwells within the man's heart, and this is His attempt to gently steer him into a different direction.

We also hear in these words God’s patience and grace—just as we typically hear from Him when *we* go astray. How many times have we shuddered in abject humiliation, even fear, before Him, knowing we were deserving of His wrath for our willful transgression—only to be answered by His grace, His forgiveness, His love. That same grace is at work here with Cain.

Even so, v6 is also Yahweh’s preamble to making it clear in v7 that the reason for his foul attitude is all on Cain himself. It’s not his brother’s fault, and it certainly isn’t Yahweh’s fault. If there is anger in him, it should be anger at himself. ❏

v7

**“If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?
And if you do not do well, sin is lying at the door; and its
desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”**

At a glance the question that begins this verse is translated differently in our various versions—but not really. The literal Hebrew text is bare bones; reading it as is would be meaningless to us, even in English. The NASB and LSB have, “will not your countenance be lifted up,” while the rest have “will you not be accepted.” The venerable William Wilson (1782-1873) in his classic *Old Testament Word Studies* helps us out.

Wilson: [The Hebrew *seeth* (sey-yet) means] to lift up; to accept the person of any one; to be gracious to him. The expression arises from an Eastern custom of prostrating themselves in making a request, which being granted, the prince orders the supplicant to rise, i.e., to lift up his face.

So with that explanation we see that both translations are essentially the same: to be accepted is to be lifted up; to be physically lifted up is to be accepted. But what does Yahweh mean by “If you do well”? I suggest two answers to this.

1. **Dispensational/Practical Obedience:** To “do well” is to live obediently to the Lord God according to the context of one’s dispensation. That is, under the Law one was to live in accordance to that Law, to keep the commandments, to observe the prescribed feasts and sacrifices. Under the dispensation of Grace, the church age, to “do well” is to live in obedience to Christ and *His* commandments, to obey Him as one’s Lord and Master.

countenance

There is a good reason why the translators of most of our versions have chosen the word “countenance” in these verses. Using “face,” as do the ESV and NIVs, while not inaccurate doesn’t quite capture the full meaning of the Hebrew *paneh*. The word “countenance” includes not just the facial expression, but the entire physical attitude of the person. one’s bearing, how one holds oneself. Cain’s entire physical attitude, his *bearing*, telegraphed to Yahweh anger and a rebellious, self-focused, petulant spirit.

Under the dispensation of the Law, this obedience would sound like Yahweh's word through the prophet Jeremiah.

Read Jeremiah 7:5-7.

Under the dispensation of Grace, like this in the gospel of John from the lips of Christ Himself.

Read John 14:15, 21.

Jesus follows this up in the next chapter with

"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:10-11)

Here we see clearly the picture of when we do well by obeying Christ's commandments we are "accepted" by Him, and are "lifted up" by finding our joy in Him.

2. **By Faith:** Beyond the effort of practical obedience, however, is the giving of oneself over to living by the Spirit, living by faith; to dwelling on things that are good and righteous; to filling one's mind and heart on the things of Christ, rather than the things of this world. This, too, is a form of obedience, but less an action than an attitude; less physical than spiritual.

Read Colossians 3:1-3.

A few pages back, in his letter to the Philippians, the apostle writes,

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your considerate spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is dignified, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, consider these things. (Philippians 4:4-8)

And if you do not do well, sin is lying at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”

Taken as a whole, the picture of evil/Satan in the Bible is of an unrelenting, voracious beast out to claim as many lives as it/he can before its/his predetermined end. ❏ One cannot negotiate with evil, no bargain can be struck; one either gives in to it or runs screaming from it. We’re all familiar with the NT passage that echoes perfectly this OT verse.

Read 1 Peter 5:8-9. ❏

Back to our text, although most of the other modern translations go with “crouching at the door,” which does indeed paint a colorful picture of how we perceive sin and temptation, I agree with the LSB, which reverts back to its King James roots from the NASB, and translates this “lying at the door.” For that is what the word *robes* (rabats) means: “to stretch oneself out in repose; to rest, be at ease.”

If you will permit me, I believe both translations represent essentially the same thing—but using two different word pictures. No explanation is necessary for today’s Christian with the picture of sin as a ravenous beast crouched right outside one’s door, ready to pounce the moment one emerges from the safety of one’s domicile. But consider the other picture, sin as a comfortably reclined beast, perfectly at ease on one’s doorstep. Is that not just as disturbing? just as much a threat? Here is a picture of sin so confident and self-assured within arm’s reach of the believer; he need not crouch in anticipation of ambushing the unwitting Christian. No, he is right at home being so near—even on the believer’s property, just outside “the door.” Like a favored pet reclining in his favorite spot, he has no fear because the owner of the house *knows* he is there—and permits it.

But Yahweh says that we are *not* to permit it. We are to “rule over,” have dominion over, sin. And how does the follower of Christ “rule over” sin? The armor of God.

Read Ephesians 6:10-13.

Interestingly, the 1900 KJV personifies sin in this verse: “and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.”

I stand in awe of the harmony of God’s word. From one of the earliest chapters in the Bible to one of the last; from Moses to the apostle Peter, penned more than one and a half millennia from each other, and it all fits together perfectly.

To this counsel from Yahweh Himself, Cain is silent—which does not surprise. He is not repentant, he is not ashamed. The impression left to the reader is that Cain remains sullen and bitter, and the following verse reveals that he has shed none of his anger and vengeance.

v8

Then Cain spoke to Abel his brother; and it happened when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Here we have the cold consequence of the Fall, his parents' rebellion against their Maker: murder. Sin and evil did not crouch or even lie down outside their door, but looked them square in the face—and they bought it hook, line, and sinker. The result? Creation's first homicide.

It seems pretty obvious to most expositors that *what* Cain said to his brother—not included in our text, but *is* included in the Septuagint—was an invitation to go out into the field:

LXX: "And Cain said to Abel his brother, 'Let us go out into the plain.'"

YLT: "And Cain saith unto Abel his brother, 'Let us go into the field.'" ❏

This verse is similar to 3:22-23, where the words of Yahweh God drift off, moving directly into His subsequent actions rather than finishing what He said.

Note that the writer, Moses, repeats "his brother" in the verse, emphasizing the fratricide that is taking place: not just a murder, but the horrific murder of a *blood brother*.

John in his first epistle informs us that Cain in this act did not just sin, but, like Judas, like the Antichrist in the Eschaton, was "of the evil one"—of Satan. He writes,

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous. (1 John 3:11-12)

And in this heinous act we have a profound irony, which K&D points out. I close with this:

K&D: In [Cain] the seed of the woman had already become the seed of the serpent; and in his deed the real nature of the wicked one, as "a murderer from the beginning," had come openly to light: so that already there had sprung up that contrast of two distinct seeds within the human race, which runs through the entire history of humanity.

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