

Chapter 5: The Offspring of the Serpent

Genesis 4:1–16

By the end of Genesis 3, we might think that the human race is getting off lightly after the rebellion of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve exercised faith in response to the oracles of judgment (Gen. 3:20), and, more importantly, Yahweh graciously preserved his blessings (reproduction and food production) for his people and covered their shame with animal skins. But, if we are tempted toward over-optimism, the narrative of Genesis 4 will quickly correct our thinking. Through this story, we discover a steeper, faster descent into sin, rebellion, and chaos than anyone could have anticipated. The effects of the curse do not slowly creep into the world; they rise up quickly to shed the blood of an innocent man in the very first generation born to Adam and Eve.

The effects of sin are devastating. How will human history play out from here? We read this today with the benefit of thousands of years of human history to contextualize this story. Adam and Eve did not have any idea how their original sin could get out of hand. They woke up one morning in the bliss of perfect communion with Yahweh God in the garden, and, by nightfall, they were forever expelled from Yahweh God's direct presence, with a flaming sword-bearing cherubim guarding the way back. What will life look like on the other side? Will everyone be corrupt, or will some trust in Yahweh for righteousness? What distinguishes the one group of people from the others? In many ways, the story we see played out in the lives (and death) of Cain and Abel becomes a pattern of the struggle of good and evil in this world to this very day. In the first two children born to the woman, we find two fundamentally different categories of human beings: the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent.¹

The Offspring Born to the Woman (Gen. 4:1–7)

To understand life after the Fall, we must return to the original blessing that God bestowed upon the man and the woman in Genesis 1:

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.” (Gen. 1:28–29)

The original blessing contained three features: (1) the man and woman would fruitfully multiply; (2) the man and woman would exercise dominion over the animals; and (3) the man and woman would eat from the plants God had given them. In Genesis 3, the man and the woman failed to exercise dominion over the serpent (2), so Yahweh had delivered judgment that brought pain both into the

woman's conception (1) and the man's work to bring forth food (3). The beginning of the narrative in Genesis 4 revolves around the nature of these three blessings in the wake of the Fall.

Work

With joy, we discover immediately in Genesis 4:1 that Yahweh indeed preserves the grace of childbearing to his people: "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.' And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground" (Gen. 4:1–2). Not only does Eve bear one son, but two, and the emphasis on Eve's *bearing* these sons (rather than Adam's *begetting* these sons) leads us to believe that we are witnessing the birth of the first two offsprings of the *woman* who will bruise the the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Eve's joyful cry, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD" reflects Eve's faith in the goodness of Yahweh's provision as Adam and Eve begin to be fruitful and multiply.² So far, so good.

We do not read, however, about the multitude of sons born to Eve, but primarily about one son in particular: Cain. Since Cain is the firstborn, this perhaps is not surprising. But when we look closely at the text, we find an unusual emphasis on Cain in Genesis 4. The word "Cain" appears fourteen times, while the words "Abel" and "brother" (always a reference to Abel as the "brother" of Cain, and never to Cain as the brother of Abel) both occur seven times.³ Furthermore, while the speech of Cain becomes an important factor in this narrative, Abel never speaks a word.⁴

This emphasis on Cain, however, does not portray him in the way we might expect if he is the true offspring of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. Instead, we discover ominous clues that point to something sinister and *not* salvific in Cain. First, we read that Cain is a "worker of the ground" (Gen. 4:2), a phrase that was bound up in the curse from sin in Genesis 2:5 ("When... there was no man to *work the ground*") and Genesis 3:23 ("therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to *work the ground* from which he was taken"). By itself, this is not much, since working the ground is a legitimate—and vital—occupation for raising food to eat. Still, Cain's occupation is described in starkly post-Fall terminology. In contrast, we read that Abel exercises dominion over the animals as a "keeper of sheep" (Gen. 4:2), just as Adam and Eve were originally called to do *before* the Fall (cf. Gen. 1:28, 30). The occupations of both brothers touch on the original blessings of Genesis 1:28–29, but Abel's work aligns with humanity's pre-Fall vocation, while Cain's work arises as a direct result of the curse. As Allen Ross writes, "The writer is perhaps suggesting—and only suggesting—that Cain was more naturally identified with the curse than was Abel."⁵

Worship

It is not until the two brothers present themselves before Yahweh in worship through sacrifices that we discover the true nature of their identities:

In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of his fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry and his face fell. (Gen. 4:3–5)

More literally, we may translate the phrase "in the course of time" as "Now it was at the end of

days....” Most likely, “the end of days” is a reference to the end of the *week*. Therefore, Cain and Abel are offering worship on the *seventh* day of the week, the day that God rested from his work of creation, blessed, and made holy (cf. Gen. 2:2–3). Sabbath-day worship, then, has been the practice of God’s people since the very beginning.⁶ Nevertheless, a critical difference emerges as Yahweh judges the worshipers who come before him. Yahweh approves of Abel and his offering, but Yahweh does not approve of Cain and his offering. Where did Cain fall short?

Importantly, John Calvin observes that Yahweh’s regard is first for Abel *himself*, and only secondarily for Abel’s offering.⁷ Likewise, we read that it is first for Cain and then for his offering that Yahweh has no regard. The text directs our attention to Yahweh’s evaluation of the *person* before mentioning his evaluation of the person’s *sacrifices* in worship. The issue is not so much that Cain performs poorly, but that Cain’s poor sacrifice reveals something important about his heart. The author of Hebrews makes this point as he contrasts the sacrifices of Abel and Cain: “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” (Heb. 11:4). Abel acts by faith, while Cain does not.

Still, the text of Genesis also tells us that Yahweh’s differentiation between Cain and Abel takes into account more than just the invisible motives of their respective hearts. The sacrifices themselves are qualitatively different. Allen Ross explains that the writer describes Abel’s going “out of his way to bring God...: ‘He brought the fattest of the firstlings of his flock.’”⁸ In contrast, Cain’s sacrifice is a mere “offering of the fruit of the ground.” Again, this difference is not the *source* of Yahweh’s regard or lack of regard for the two brothers, but only a *symptom* of the hearts of the two brothers toward Yahweh. Abel’s sacrifice demonstrates a deep delight to please Yahweh in worship, while Cain’s sacrifice betrays a heart motivated by the drudgery of duty, not joy.

Worship always exposes the true condition of our hearts. When we come before the Lord in worship and find ourselves distracted, unmotivated, unfeeling, or rebellious, the Holy Spirit is revealing some degree of unbelief in our hearts. We may not recognize this unbelief elsewhere, since entering into worship exposes us before the all-knowing, all-seeing God. After Genesis 3 *no one* will be able to worship the Lord with absolute, pure, unmixed devotion until we enter into glory. The critical issue, then, is not *whether* God will reveal imperfections in our worship, but rather *how we will respond* when Yahweh rebukes our imperfections by his word.

Accordingly, the emphasis of this narrative does not fall on the respective sacrifices of the brothers. Instead, the narrator puts the spotlight on Yahweh’s warning to Cain through his word, and on Cain’s subsequent response.⁹

Ruling Over Sin

When Cain realizes that Yahweh has passed over him and his sacrifice, he becomes very angry, and his face falls (Gen. 4:5). Yahweh then addresses Cain, asking, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?” (Gen. 4:6–7a). By asking why Cain should be angry, and by asking the rhetorical question of “If you do well, will you not be accepted?”, Yahweh implies that Cain knows exactly where he fell short and exactly what he must do to be accepted. Yahweh does not give Cain any new instructions or a course of penance to make up for his sins. Instead, he exhorts Cain to begin obeying the instructions that he already knows and understands.

To this encouragement, Yahweh adds a warning: “And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it” (Gen. 4:7b). Yahweh depicts sin as lying in wait to destroy Cain—similarly to the same way that Cain himself will lie in wait to kill his brother Abel. Sin desires to pounce on *Cain*, so Cain must rule over it by subduing sin’s ruinous temptations. Yahweh used this same language in the curse pronounced to the woman: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen. 3:16). By this curse, Yahweh depicted a marriage relationship torn apart as the wife seeks to control her husband, and as the husband rules harshly over her to wrest that control back. This was a far cry from the intimate, one-flesh union of the man and woman who were naked and unashamed in their innocence (Gen. 2:25). Here in Genesis 4, we see that sin ruined far more than the marriage relationship. Sin also seeks to ruin the *offspring* of the marriage by driving Cain to murder his brother.

Downstream from the Fall, the lure toward sin is constant and powerful. Yahweh’s warning to Cain, then, is for us as well. We must seek to rule over our sin ruthlessly, dominating it, controlling it, and putting it to death, lest it exert its desire for control over us. The Apostle Paul pleads this point in his letter to the church at Rome, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions” (Rom. 6:12).

Sin has a way of deceiving us into believing that we are seeking our own good, making our own decisions, and following our own desires, when, in fact, we are voluntarily enslaving ourselves further and further under the power of sin. The first step toward freedom from the tyranny of sin, then, comes in recognizing the treacherous desire of sin to control and dominate us. We cannot rule over a threat that we do not recognize, so we must look upon sin as the devastating and disastrous despot that it is. If we do not, then we, like Cain, will not only rush headlong into the bondage of sin, but we will also rage against Yahweh’s judgments against us, believing ourselves to be righteous in our own eyes.¹⁰ As Derek Kidner writes, “while Eve had been talked into her sin, Cain will not have even God talk him out of it.”¹¹

Exposing the deception of our hearts is one of the most significant practical reasons why God calls us to worship him. We distract, numb, and confuse ourselves to avoid dealing with our alienation from God. When we find ourselves face-to-face with our Creator in worship, however, those tactics do not work. God’s word pierces to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, exposing our thoughts and intentions so that we cannot hide from God’s sight (Heb. 4:12–13). We are left naked and exposed in front of the one to whom we owe an account. For this reason, we must give ourselves to worship in private, in our families, and corporately with our local churches. As we worship, we must watch out for any hard-hearted, self-righteous unbelief that may creep up as we worship. For the sake of our souls, we must root out any rebellion against God’s word as we worship. Such rebellion, left unchecked, will destroy us.

The Offspring of the Serpent (Gen. 4:8–12)

With very few words, the narrative of Genesis 4 records the first horrific act of fratricide in human history: “Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him” (Gen. 4:8). The text tells us that Cain does two things: (1) he “spoke” to Abel, and (2) he rose up against his brother Abel to kill him. The word for “spoke” is notoriously difficult to translate, since this is really the word for “said,” which always introduces

actual speech.¹² Here, the original Hebrew includes no speech, so some versions insert the statement, “Let us go out to the field.” The fact that Cain spoke to his brother before killing him is an important point, and we will return to it later.

The word for “killed” here means “to murder intentionally.” This is a different word than what is forbidden in the sixth commandment, which also includes the less heinous crime of manslaughter.¹³ In other words, the narrative portrays Cain’s murder in the most wicked terminology possible. Adam and Eve only a short time ago dwelt together in the garden of Eden in perfect, blissful innocence, but now their firstborn son cold-bloodedly murders his own brother.

The Second Interrogation

Yahweh confronts Cain, asking, “Where is Abel your brother?” (Gen. 4:9). This question echoes Yahweh’s call to summon to Adam to judgment after the first sin in the garden: “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9).¹⁴ Adam and Eve avoided confessing their sin as long as possible, but they both ultimately acknowledged what they had done (Gen. 3:12, 13). Cain, however, refuses to confess his sin and instead lies to God: “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9).

Beyond the sheer brazenness of lying to Almighty God, Cain’s answer drips with tragic overtones. To begin, he states that he does not “know.” This is a lie, for Cain knows very well where his brother’s corpse lies. By saying that he does not “know,” however, we should remember the significance of “knowing” in the original temptation story from Genesis 3.¹⁵ There, the serpent lied to the woman, encouraging her to eat from the tree of the *knowledge* of good and evil by telling her, “For God *knows* that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, *knowing* good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). When the woman and her husband did eat of it, their eyes were opened, “and they *knew* that they were naked” (Gen. 3:7). Adam and Eve sacrificed innocent, intimate communion with Yahweh God and with each other to gain *knowledge*, and now Cain reports that he does not *know* anything about the murder he has just committed.

The word “keeper” is also tragically ironic. To start, remember that Abel was originally described as a “keeper of sheep” (Gen. 4:2), so that Cain is asking something like, “Am I the shepherd’s shepherd?”¹⁶ Abel cared for creatures of lower stature and authority, watching over the animals under his charge. Cain, on the other hand, cares for nothing beyond himself, not even his own brother, a human being made in the image of God. Finally, we should recall that one key part of the mission that Yahweh God gave to Adam in the garden of Eden was not only to work, but also to “keep” (Gen. 2:15) the garden—that is to protect and guard it from harmful, wicked intruders. Adam’s sin in allowing the serpent to deceive his wife was a failure to “keep” the garden. As the fruit of that first failure, sin entered the world, and, eventually, Cain likewise fails to “keep” his brother. Cain should have been a “keeper” of his brother, but he instead became the harmful intruder from whom Abel *needed* a keeper.

The New Curse

By asking Cain what had happened to Abel, Yahweh invites Cain to confess his sin just as Adam and Eve did.¹⁷ But, at no point is Yahweh confused or uncertain as to the facts of the case. When Cain boldly lies to Yahweh, Yahweh responds with horror, not curious confusion: “What have you done?” (Gen. 4:10). This question echoes what Yahweh God spoke to the woman: “What is this that you have done?” (Gen. 3:13).¹⁸ Yahweh then refutes Cain’s lie by pointing to the evidence of Abel’s

blood that is polluting the ground: “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground” (Gen. 4:10). The “voice” [*qôl*] of the blood corresponds to the “voice/sound” of Yahweh that Adam had heard: “I heard the *sound* [*qôl*] of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”¹⁹

Not only is Cain’s sin more serious than the sin of his parents, but the curse he receives is also far more serious than what his parents experienced. Yahweh declares, “And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. 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” (Gen. 4:11–12). Yahweh directly cursed the serpent (“Cursed are you...”; Gen. 3:14), but he did not curse the woman or the man *directly*. Aside from the curse against the serpent, Yahweh only directly cursed the ground that Adam must toil in to produce food to eat (Gen. 3:17). Here, Yahweh directly curses Cain, and he does so “from the [cursed] ground.”

Yahweh explains why Cain is cursed from the ground: he has polluted the ground through bloodshed, since the ground opens its mouth to receive Abel’s blood. Later, Yahweh will apply these same theological principles to forbid bloodshed in the Promised Land. Because Yahweh himself will dwell in the midst of his people in his tabernacle, the pollution of bloodshed would be an abomination:

“You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell, for I the LORD dwell in the midst of the people of Israel.” (Num. 35:33–34)²⁰

Eventually, the shedding of innocent blood becomes one of the main reasons that Yahweh expels the people of Judah from the Promised Land:

Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the LORD, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also for the innocent blood that he had shed. For he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the LORD would not pardon. (2 Kgs. 24:3–4)²¹

The exile of Cain, then, not only *follows* the pattern of the exile of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden (“drove out/driven out”; Gen. 3:24, 4:14).²² Additionally, the exile of Cain also *sets* a pattern for the eventual exile of the people of Israel out of the Promised Land because of their shedding of innocent blood (among other sins).

The Offspring of the Serpent

Cain’s curse, however, carries a deeper significance than what we have explored so far. By cursing Cain, Yahweh associates him with the serpent rather than with Adam and Eve.²³ We assumed in Genesis 4:1 that Cain is the firstborn of the offspring of the woman, but we now discover the shocking truth: Cain may have been *born* to the woman, but he is actually the *offspring* of the serpent. Cain’s murder of Abel takes on new significance in light of Yahweh’s curse against the serpent:

I will enmity between you and the woman,
 and between your offspring [lit. “seed”] and her offspring;
 He shall bruise your head,
 And you shall bruise his heel. (Gen. 3:15)

Through the rest of the book of Genesis and the rest of the Bible, most of our attention focuses on the identity of the offspring of the woman. This is especially true when the promised offspring of the woman becomes identified with the promised offspring of Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:1–3, 7). The Scriptures discuss the identity of the offspring of the serpent much less frequently.

Two notable New Testament passages unpack what this narrative in Genesis 4 is telling us about the identity of Cain. First, in a confrontation with Jesus recorded by the Apostle John, the Jews assert, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God” (John 8:41). Jesus, however, rejects their self-identified genealogy:

“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 has nothing to do with 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.” (John 8:44)

Again, Cain was *born* to the woman, but he is not the *offspring* of the woman. In the same way, these Jews may have been born into the line of Abraham, but they are, in fact, the offspring of the serpent.

Second, John also writes about the offspring of the serpent in his First Letter, where he specifically identified Cain as the offspring of the evil one:

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:8–15)

When John says that Cain was “of the evil one” (1 John 3:12), he is saying that Cain was “of the devil” (1 John 3:8)—that is, one of the “children of the devil” (1 John 3:10). John is drawing a contrast between those who are “of God/children of God/born of God” and those who are “of the devil/of the evil one/children of the devil.” John even states that the children of God have God’s “seed” abiding in him (1 John 3:9), and the Greek word “seed” is the literal translation of the Hebrew

word in Genesis that the ESV translates as “offspring.”

Cain, then, is the first offspring (seed) of the serpent, a child of the devil, and the firstborn of those who are of the evil one. Yahweh revealed the nature of his heart through worship, and by hardening his heart against Yahweh’s warnings, Cain descended deeper into an identity of self-righteous rebellion. As Jesus says, the devil was a murderer and a liar (John 8:44), and we see Cain taking up both of those roles over the course of Genesis 4. Earlier, we had noted the absence of a speech in the strange verse, “And Cain spoke to Abel his brother” (Gen. 4:8). In the light of Cain’s being the offspring of the serpent, it may be that we uncover the nature of what Cain “spoke”—that is, this may mean that Cain spoke *lies* to entice his brother out into the field where he could murder him.²⁴

The Offspring of the Serpent’s Offspring (Gen. 4:13–16)

After Yahweh pronounced the oracles of judgment against the sin of Adam and Eve, the first couple said nothing in direct response to their punishment (Gen. 3:14–19). Instead, Adam named the woman “Eve” as a gesture of faith in the promises of Yahweh as they prepared for life in exile outside of the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:20). Cain, however, is rebellious to the end.²⁵ After ignoring Yahweh’s warning and lying to Yahweh when confronted about Abel’s murder, Cain now protests his punishment:

Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. 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.” (Gen. 4:13–14)

In Cain’s eyes, his punishment is too severe since it alienates him from (1) the ground, (2) the face of Yahweh, (3) other people who might kill him. Some have argued that Cain’s words suggest some level of repentance,²⁶ since the word for “punishment” might also be translated as “iniquity” (“My *iniquity* is greater than I can bear”).²⁷

Living in Exile apart from Faith

The New Testament evaluation of Cain as the offspring of the serpent, however, undercuts that idea. From first to last, Cain’s heart arrogantly rebels against Yahweh. He does not grieve over the severity of his sin, but only over the severity of his punishment. In the language of 2 Corinthians 7:10–11, Cain laments because of worldly grief that leads to death, and not because of godly grief that leads to repentance. Worship revealed the nature of his heart, but rather than repenting, Cain further hardened his heart into the full-blown identity of the offspring of the serpent. At this point, that identity as the offspring of the serpent rules over and dominates to such a degree that he refuses to repent, even in the face of a severe punishment.

Still, Yahweh does not abandon Cain altogether. Instead, Yahweh protects Cain from any who might harm him by putting a “mark” (lit., “sign”) on (or, “for/concerning”) him (Gen. 4:15). The text is silent as to what this sign might be, except that we ought to recognize the sign as a mark of God’s grace toward Cain. In the same way, the rainbow will be a *sign* for Noah’s offspring to remember that God will never again destroy the world with a flood (Gen. 9:12–17), and

circumcision will serve as a *sign* to represent God's covenant promises to Abraham and his offspring throughout their generations (Gen. 17:1–14). Cain may be the offspring of the serpent, but Yahweh extends common grace toward him in spite of his rebellion. As Kidner writes, "God's concern for the innocent (10) is matched only by his care for the sinner."²⁸

Accordingly, Cain heads farther "east of Eden" (Gen. 4:16) than did his parents, who were driven out from the entrance "at the east of the garden of Eden" (Gen. 3:24) and forbidden reentry by cherubim with a flaming sword.²⁹ As Sailhamer points out, "east" is a direction that will be used throughout Genesis to suggest rebellious distance from God.³⁰ Additionally, Walton returns to the idea of garden of Eden as the first temple to write this:

If we use the tabernacle model as an analogy, Adam and Eve were banned from the antechamber while Cain is driven outside the camp. In the garden there was lush provision of food; outside the garden there was arable land with cultivation being possible; Cain is driven to a place that has no hope of agriculture, so that one must survive by hunting and gathering.³¹

Distant and separated from Yahweh in a cold world, even the ground has turned against this former "worker of the ground" (Gen. 4:2). Nevertheless, Cain persists in his rebellion by refusing to repent. Cain is a great villain in the narrative of the Bible, but his story is also a tragedy. In Cain, we see the seed of Adam's original sin coming into full-bloom fruition.

Love One Another

What, then, do we learn from Cain? First, we must learn to be quick to repent from our sins. Or, to put this another way, we must keep short accounts with God. When Yahweh confronted Cain in his word, Cain dug his heels in, refusing to repent. Through this, Cain revealed himself as the offspring of the serpent. Left to ourselves, we are no better than Cain. Apart from God's grace working in our lives, and apart from repenting from our sins and looking in faith to Jesus, we remain at enmity with God: "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph. 2:1–2, 4). Turn from your sins before your sin dominates you so that you no longer *want* to turn from them.

Second, we must first recognize that Cain is not the *last* seed of the serpent, but only the first. In fact, the second half of Genesis 4 will trace the outworking of the offspring of the serpent through the wicked line of Cain down to seven generations, culminating in the notoriously wicked Lamech who murders a man who merely strikes him (Gen. 4:23–24). As Kenneth Mathews writes, Cain merely draws "first blood in the perpetual struggle between the ungodly and the godly seed first anticipated in 3:15."³² It is this same struggle that will play out all the way to the cross, where the offspring of the serpent will rise up as a mob, crying out, "Crucify him!" to strike down the true offspring of the woman, Jesus Christ.

Third, as we read in 1 John 3, we must brace ourselves for the reality that this struggle continues on in the hatred of the world against believers: "Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you" (1 John 3:13). The same enmity that murdered Jesus will remain in the world until our Lord returns. This hatred, then, should never come as a shock or a surprise, and much less should it cause us to panic or fall into cynicism. We have no warrant in Scripture to lead us to believe that the world

will eventually come to understand us, much less appreciate us. The world will continue following Cain's pattern all the way until the end. In spite of this opposition, hold fast in faith to God's promises: the God of peace will soon crush Satan (and his offspring) under your feet (Rom. 16:20).

Fourth, John tells us of this perpetual struggle to cause us to seek out a different way of living from the ways of the world. Instead, John urges us to "love one another" (1 John 3:11). If love characterizes those on whom God's favor rests, then by loving each other we distinguish ourselves from Cain, who hated his brother *precisely* because "his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12). The Apostle even explains that love for fellow believers is an evidence of our salvation, since such love only springs from a supernatural new birth that only God can give to his beloved children: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death" (1 John 3:14).

Finally, then, we must beware any hint of self-righteous hatred of those who do righteous deeds, for that is the way of Cain, the offspring of the serpent, and it leads to death and destruction. We must be vigilant to inspect our thoughts and motivations in worship according to the word of God, for that is where the Spirit of God confronts us directly. Do we truly love God and our brothers and sisters in Christ, or do we enter into worship for some other purpose? In worship, we must repent of our sins, giving no foothold of unrighteousness to take foot in our hearts against God and against his people. Furthermore, we must look continually to Jesus Christ, the true offspring of the woman who bruised the head of the serpent for us.

And as we repent from our sins and trust in Jesus Christ by faith through grace, let us remember and obey the message that we have heard from the beginning: *Love one another*. If self-righteous bitterness is the cancer that will twist our hearts in rebellion away from the Lord, then *love* is the Holy Spirit-wrought antidote. As we love one another, the chains of our bondage to self-righteousness and self-justification fall away. Instead, through love, we experience the regular confirmation that we have indeed been brought from death to life, having become the children of God through Christ, the Son of God.

Discussion Questions

1. What are our first impressions of the world after the Fall? In what ways do God's blessings of reproduction, work, and worship continue? In what ways does the fullness of creation's original blessings cease? What does this tell us about the severity of sin? What does this tell us about the hope we have when Jesus returns to remake the heavens and the earth?
2. How does worship reveal the nature of Cain's heart? How does worship reveal the nature of our own hearts? Do we listen to God's word in worship with the desire to identify and repent from our sins by faith? In what ways might we minimize, downplay, or ignore God's word in worship? How might we need to repent from the way we worship?
3. Is it a surprise to discover that Cain is *born* to the woman, but the *offspring* of the serpent? What does the presence of an offspring of the serpent in the first family warn us about our unfounded assumptions surrounding the members of our own families or our churches? What should we learn about the unfounded assumptions that we make about ourselves?

4. What do the Scriptures teach us about the children of God? Are you repenting of your sins and turning to Jesus in faith? Do you love your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? If not, why not? If so, what should you expect from the world? How does knowing about the offspring of the serpent in the world help you prepare for what you will endure?

Notes

1. Most famously Augustine made this observation, writing, “Now Cain was the first son born to those two parents of the human race, and he belonged to the City of man; the second son, Abel, belonged to the City of God.” (Augustine, *City of God*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Book XV, Chapter 1, p. 635. Cited by Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 111, footnote 36.)

2. Kidner, *Genesis*, 80.

3. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 96.

4. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 222.

5. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 156.

6. Willison, *A Treatise Concerning the Sanctification of the Lord’s Day*, 36–37.

7. Calvin, *Genesis*, 194. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.x.i.html>>

8. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 157.

9. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 112.

10. “One brother apparently pleased God and found acceptance; but the other brother, thinking himself to be just as acceptable, was filled with envy and rage. The issue is how one reacts to seeing oneself passed over and another blessed. If we are self-righteous, we will react as Cain did.” (Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 156.)

11. Kidner, *Genesis*, 79.

12. For this reason, Victor Hamilton rejects the translation of “spoke” altogether, writing, “But this interpretation is unlikely, for in Biblical Hebrew *’amar* and *dābar* are never interchangeable.” (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 229.) For a range of interpretive options, see Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 229–30. Pace Hamilton, the vast majority of translators throughout history have understood this as a reference to speech, as demonstrated by the later insertion of the speech, “Let us go out into the field,” by the Samaritan, Septuagint (Greek), Syriac, and Vulgate (Latin) versions of this text (see ESV footnote).

13. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 230.

14. Kidner, *Genesis*, 81.

15. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 263.

16. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 106.

17. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 159.

18. Walton, *Genesis*, 265.

19. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 100.

20. Sailhamer cites this passage while noting the wider context of Numbers 35: the establishment of the cities of refuge, where someone committing manslaughter could flee to escape an avenger of blood. Noting also that Cain eventually builds a city (Gen. 4:17), Sailhamer intriguingly suggests that the “sign” given for Cain’s protection (Gen. 4:15) might have been the city itself, forming a pattern for what eventually became the cities of refuge. Of course, (1) the text of Genesis leaves the sign undefined, and (2) the cities of refuge would *exclude* Cain, since he had committed murder, not manslaughter. (Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 114–15.)

21. See also Lamentations 4:13; Ezekiel 22:1–31, 24:7, 33:25, 36:18.

22. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 263.

23. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 276.

24. I argue this point elsewhere in *That You May Know: A Primer on Christian Discipleship* (Omaha, NE: 19Baskets, 2014), 68.)

25. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, 233.

26. See, for example, Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 111–16.

27. “The sense of bearing away sins (forgiveness) is found when these terms occur together (e.g., Exod 34:7; Ps 85:2[3]; Isa 33:24), but the expression can also refer to the punishment for those sins (e.g., Exod 28:43; Num 5:31; 14:34–35). In Lev 20:19 ‘bear their iniquity’ (AV) is sufficient alone to indicate ‘punishment’ which is otherwise cited specifically in 20:17–18, 30. ‘Iniquity’ and its ‘punishment’ are both indicated by the one term, so the context determines which is in view. The context of v. 14 is more in keeping with complaint than request. Cain protests that his penalty is too harsh; he argues that isolation from God’s protective presence effectively results in a death sentence.” (Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 276.)

28. Kidner, *Genesis*, 82.

29. cf. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 110–11.

30. In his comments regarding Genesis 3:24, Sailhamer writes, “The author’s mention of the direction ‘eastward’ is not a mere geographical detail. Throughout Genesis, the author carefully apprises the reader of the direction of the characters’ movement. In doing so, he plants a narrative clue to the meaning of the events he is recounting. At this point in the narrative, ‘eastward’ has only the significance of ‘outside the garden.’ Later in the book, however, the author will carry this significance further by showing ‘eastward’ to be the direction of the ‘city of Babylon’ (11:2) and the ‘cities of Sodom and Gomorrah’ (13:11). Moreover, he will show that to return from the east is to return to the Promised Land and to return to the ‘city of Salem’ (14:17–20).” (Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 110–11.)

31. Walton, *Genesis*, 265.

32. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 269.