

THE ROOT OF SIN **AND THE CALL TO REPENTANCE**



A Look at Genesis 4:1-16

Marshall Dean Whitaker, D. Min.

The Root of Sin and the Call to Repentance: A Look at Genesis 4:1-16

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Used by Permission HCSB ©1999,2000,2002,2003,2009 Holman Bible Publishers. Holman Christian Standard Bible®, Holman CSB®, and HCSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Introduction

Over the last few months, the world's display of sinful behavior illustrates humanity's failings. A world reflecting its sinfulness has highlighted personal and particular sins with varying degrees of celebration and scorn. Whether the issues are Pride Month, the January 6th Hearings, The Depp/Heard Trials, Sex Abuse Reports, or Michael Sussmann, sin splashes across our culture and our society as a celebration or a castigation. In a world without God, there is no reason to concern ourselves with how society views sin beyond its immediate context, but because there is a God, the reality of sin and its presence goes far beyond its illustrations and expressions.



What is the root of sin? What are people supposed to do about it? Rather than focus on all of sin's offshoots, identifying the root of sin provides us with a Biblical avenue for confronting sin in all of its forms within our lives. The place for us to begin then is the Scriptures and as we begin this journey, a look at Genesis 4:1-16 is critical to understanding the root of sin and the call to repentance.

4 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.”

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.”

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.

Genesis 4:1-16 HCSB

Sin roots in our internal desires that displease God (2-3)



Genesis 4 begins with the birth of two sons of Adam and Eve. There is nothing in the text that demands that Cain and Abel were the first two children of Adam and Eve, but are two children that fit the narrative of Genesis and further the account of God's redeeming work after sin's corruption of the creation. Cain and Abel are offering sacrifices when Cain offers some of the produce from the ground and Abel offers from the firstborn of his flock. Many lose focus because Cain did not offer an animal. But the only descriptive difference the author makes between Cain and Abel's sacrifice is regarding the quality of the sacrifice. Cain offered some produce. Not the first and not the best. Rather, the connotation is that Cain offered the lesser quality or the leftover materials as a sacrifice to God.

In this event, we see sin on display. Cain's offering unmasks the root of sin for humanity. The root of sin breeds in our internal desires, which displease God.

I don't know why Cain did what he did. He may have done it out of a selfish motivation to keep the best for himself, he may have done it because he had determined that God only deserved what was leftover. He may have done it because he had recklessly wasted everything else God had given him. The motivation behind Cain's sin is not the focus of the text. Rather, Cain's internal desires resulted in choosing to offer a sacrifice to God of lesser quality and lesser value, thus producing sin in Cain's actions.



The New Testament book of James highlights this same truth in James 1:14 declaring that the root of temptation within us is our own sinful desires. Sin is anything that we think, say, or do that displeases God and all of those expressions of sin are rooted in our internal desires that war against God's rule over our lives.

Throughout the Scriptures, God has revealed both His expectations and His character to us, His creation. The result of this is a call to live a life that pleases him through the power of the Holy Spirit and reliance upon God's grace in Jesus Christ. However, as we go about our lives in this way, we will war with our internal nature and its desire to rebel. The world and its culture push us away from God toward our own sinful desires. But those things that displease God remain just as sinful when society lauds them as they are when society scorns them.

God has established his order for relationships, conduct, and character. As creator, he has the authority to both determine what is and is not right and the knowledge to determine what is best for us as his creation. When we rebel against that through sin, we call into question his rule, his character, and his love for us. Cain has allowed his desire to rule over his life and, as a result, this sin displeases God.

Sin results in God's Judgment (4-5)

Because of this sin, God brings a judgment upon Cain. The Scriptures tell us that God did not have regard for Cain's offering. While Abel gave from his first and best receiving God's regard, Cain was rejected. I do not know what God did or what happened and no one else does either. But it was apparently enough that Cain recognized God's rejection as a form of his judgment.

When we sin, God as creator and ruler brings forth judgment as the consequence. That judgment may be the pinging of our conscience, it may be a punishment, it may be internal or external in its nature. But sin always comes at a cost.

Many of our greatest trials and struggles are the judgment we face for indulging in our sinful desires. Sometimes they are the natural consequences of doing things that are sinful such as prison for stealing, overdoses on a narcotic, or losing trust because of previous dishonesty. Other times, those judgments take the form of internal consequences like heightened anxiety, guilt, depression, and mental restlessness resulting from our internal understanding of God's nature and character in conflict with our sinful desires. Just as an artist uses the tools of their trade to craft their creations, God blends judgment appropriate to his purposes in response to all of our sin.

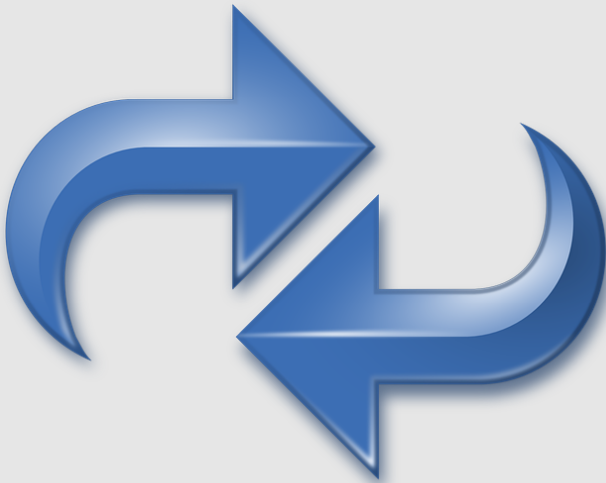


Temporal judgment is a call to repentance (6-8)



The masterpiece of God's judgment, though is not permanent separation. Rather, Temporal judgment is a call to repentance. God speaks to Cain in verses 6-8 calling him to put aside his sin. When we face sin's judgment, this is a reminder of God's rule, reign, character, and nature. This is an invitation to come back to God by turning from our sinful desire to Him for his forgiveness and his mercy. Jesus Christ would be the ultimate bearer of humanity's sin and would bear the wrath of God. Judgment in this life is a work of God to foster repentance.

When we do what is wrong and experience God's temporal judgment, this is an avenue for our repentance. God is inviting us back into a right relationship with him through the judgment that he sends. In Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve had sinned, God declares they had to be removed from the Garden to prevent them from eating from the Tree of Life and living eternally separated from His grace and mercy. In His temporal judgment, God extends mercy.



When Bruce Frank gave the recommendations of the Sexual Abuse Task Force to the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention, he defined repentance as, "Repentance is a change of mind that produces a change of heart resulting in a change of action." God calls us to repentance through the temporal judgment he offers to raise our countenance, approve our sacrifice, and restore our relationship.

Rejected repentance produces greater judgment (9-16)

But there is also a warning and its fulfillment in the text. Rejected repentance produces greater judgment. Cain, your sin lies in wait for you seeking to conquer and rule over you. God offers judgment to bring Cain to repentance. Rather Cain kills his brother and is exiled from his family.

When we reject God's offer of repentance, we reap the harvest of greater judgment. To bring us to right relationship He will use greater and greater judgment to increase the pressure upon us to drive a wedge between us and our sin. But the further we go into our sin, the greater our judgment will be.

Even in his exile and his banishment, God extended his grace to Cain. Rather than Cain die in his rebellion, God marked him providing opportunity to return to a right relationship with his God. His sin may have cost him his fields and his family, but God remained but one turn of the heart away.

Ultimately, the greatest judgment is to experience eternity bearing the wrath of God. Once this life is past, there is a day of judgment for the one who refuses God's mercy.



Conclusion

Sin is a common companion in this life. Because of sin, various judgments follow. But in judgment, God is calling us back to himself. No matter what sin you have committed or how far down the road of sin you have traveled, God is inviting you to turn from your sin to Him through what Jesus Christ has done. God calls us to put aside our sinful desires and embrace a right relationship with him.

This world will invite you to indulge the sinful desires within your heart. This world will tell you feelings are the ultimate arbiter of what is right or wrong. This world will tell you that God wants you to be happy. But this world and all that it promises will leave you broke and empty. This world will leave you depressed, anxious, angry, and confused.

But in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, God has provided you with hope, fulfillment, purpose, wisdom, clarity, guidance, and love.

Turn from your sin to God and embrace a right relationship with him.

Discover More
www.ubcriverton.org
or Connect with United
Baptist Church on
Facebook or Instagram
#ubcriverton