

CAIN AND ABEL

Genesis 4:1 – 5:32

Key verse 4:7

"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Thanks be to the Lord for the blessed Genesis Bible study. Last week we learned about God's searching and unchanging love for those who have fallen into sin. God sought Adam in spite of his sin and called him, "Where are you?" Above all, God gave him the promise of the Savior descendant who would crush Satan's head. God fulfilled this promise through Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross and resurrection. Let us believe in God's absolute love and, through the giving of thanks and the word of God, reject Satan's cunning temptations and live a victorious, happy life as God's people.

Today's lesson is about how sin continued to spread and what its consequence is. Cain killed his brother Abel out of envy. He had to experience the bad consequences of sin. He became a restless wanderer who lived in fear. Nevertheless, God loved this Cain and made a sign to him so that he could know God's love and return with repentance. Today, let us think about how to rule over sin instead of being ruled by the power of sin. Let us not live as a restless wanderer, but come to know God's unchanging love for sin-sick people and return to God with repentance. Forgiveness and salvation do not come through our vague human expectation, but through repentance and faith.

1. The Lord looked graciously upon Abel and his sacrifice (4:1-5)

After Adam and Eve had to leave paradise because of their sin, two sons were born to them: Cain and Abel. Perhaps this birth gave them hope of victory over Satan. In verse 1, Eve is rejoicing, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man." But Cain, too, was just a common sinner. So she named her second son Abel, which means "breeze" or "nothingness." Cain and Abel grew up healthy. Abel became a shepherd, and Cain a strong farmer.

Look at verses 3 and 4a: "In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock." Cain and Abel both brought an offering to the Lord. The sacrifice was the way sinful people could come back to God and reestablish relationship with Him. Outwardly, the two did quite similar things. But in fact, there was a big difference. Verses 4b and 5a report, "The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor." God was very pleased with Abel and his sacrifice, but God did not graciously accept the sacrifice of Cain. Why?

1 God is sovereign in His mercy.

Nowadays, many arrogant people think that God made a mistake. But God is the sovereign. He can accept or reject a sacrifice. It is God's grace if He accepts it. He is not obligated to act as we humans desire or imagine. God accepted Abel and his sacrifice by His grace.

2 Cain's attitude toward God was wrong.

The difference between Cain and Abel was not in the material value of the sacrifice, but in the attitude of the sacrificers. Verse 4 says, "The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering." So God saw the person first and then the sacrifice as an expression of their inner life. Abel brought the first animals of his flock and also of the fat, that is, the most desirable part. This shows that he highly respected God as God. He knew that as a sinner he had no right to come to God and did his best to please God.

In contrast, Cain's sacrifice is described as an ordinary part of his harvest. The sacrifice may have been an obligation for him. He thought that God must be pleased with what he brought. He did not realize that he was a sinner who needed

God's mercy. Perhaps he was like habitual Christians who think that God must be very pleased with them because they pay church taxes and sit in worship services on Sundays. Hebrews 11:4 says that Abel by faith offered a better sacrifice to God than Cain.

Psalm 51:19 says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." In other words, God sees our heart attitude above all else. Abel came to God with a humble heart and found His mercy. Cain came with a self-righteous heart, which did not please God.

3 Cain did not stand before God.

When God did not accept his sacrifice, Cain should have gone into himself and thought about whether something was wrong with him. He could have repented and renewed his attitude. Instead, however, he reacted in a very self-righteous way. He compared himself to his brother and began to envy and resent him. This shows that he did not seek God but wanted to present himself.

Here we may reflect on the attitude with which we bring our offering to God, or the attitude with which we serve God. Do I come to God with a bruised heart like Abel, asking for His mercy? Or do I think that I bring a service to God, like Cain? Some people work diligently for God on the outside, but they become angry and unhappy when God does not bless them immediately. Some react angrily when they don't receive the attention they expected, or when God entrusts their task to someone else. We are sinners who are saved by God's unilateral grace and are allowed to cooperate with Him. Therefore, like Abel, we may lay our best on His altar with gratitude.

Apostle Paul served God's mission most diligently by taking the gospel to Europe, as far as Rome and Spain. But he did not think that he had worked much, but said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, ... yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." Paul lived with a humble and bruised heart as an unworthy sinner and out of gratitude gave his new life back to Him as a living, holy sacrifice.

2. But you rule over them (4:6-14)

Look at verse 6: "Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face down-cast?" God immediately recognized what was going on in Cain's heart. Therefore, He held a mirror up to him and asked him why. Verse 7 says, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." There was a sinful feeling in Cain's heart full of discontent, resentment, rebellion, grumbling and strife. God already knew what was going on and warned him that sin was lurking at his door and wanted to dominate him. But instead of looking for the fault in himself, Cain continued to harbor envy and hatred for his righteous brother. Actually, it was the best opportunity for Cain to reflect on his sin and come to God with a repentant heart, but instead he nurtured his self-righteousness and sought fault with God and others.

What admonition did God give to Cain? Let's look again at verse 7b: "But you must master it." Here we see that God warned Cain very seriously that he should rule over his sin instead of being ruled by it. In this day and age, people think that it is healthy to act according to one's own feelings. "Just be yourself! Trust your feeling!" Satan persuades people that their feeling is an absolute truth that must not be doubted by anyone. Those who freely live out their feeling, who recklessly pursue their interests and brag about their sins, are admired by people, while those who fight a hard inner battle to obey God tend to be ridiculed. Nowadays, people who openly display their homosexuality are applauded as brave and sincere people. On the other hand, those who keep their lives pure by living according to God's commandment, such as abstaining from sex before marriage, are portrayed as backward, even dangerous.

Our feeling is not truth. Since the Fall, our feeling has been seduced by the power of desire. That is why feeling cannot be the absolute standard of all things. Man is created in the image of God, therefore he has a desire for the holiness and righteousness of God. Since the Fall, however, there is also a desire in man's heart that draws him to sin. Goethe described this struggle that rages within every human being in Faust: "Two souls dwell, alas! In my breast." Let us acknowledge that our feeling is deceived by sin. Let us not listen to the lie of sinful feeling, but rather align our actions with the Word of God. Thus, we may fight the victorious spiritual battle against sin.

But how can we have dominion over sin? In verse 7, we find two points.

First, we are to live piously before God. Living piously means living in the right relationship with God. Many people try hard to make a good impression in front of people. But as soon as no one sees them, they act differently. Those who live with hidden sins cannot raise their eyes freely. Joseph in the NT is described as pious before God because he lived before God and obeyed Him, even if it meant personal disadvantages for him.

Second, we are to listen to the Word of God. God gave Cain everything he needed to defeat sin. What was that? It was the word of God, "But you must master it." If he held on to God's word and obeyed, he could gain victory. There are many Christians who say that yes, they would try hard, but they are too weak. They excuse themselves, "I can't help it!" But this is Satan's lie. We need God's strength, which comes from the Word of God. That is why Psalm 119:9 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word." Jesus Himself fought against Satan's temptation, quoting the Word of God three times, "It is written," putting Satan to flight.

Unfortunately, Cain ignored the word of God. When he ignored God, he only followed his sinful feeling and misfortune took its course. He invited his brother Abel to take a walk in the field, then rose up against his brother and struck him dead. When his heart was filled with envy, grumbling and rebellion, he was finally controlled by sin and committed the first murder. According to James 1:15, desire gives birth to sin and sin gives birth to death. In other words, living under the dominion of sin is a death spiral.

Let's look at verse 9: "Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Here we see that Cain responded to God's question in a very rebellious and defiant way. He looks like a psychopath. He did not want to hear from God at all and be left alone. Although God addressed him directly about his sin, he did not want to listen at all. The consequence of the first murder was that God had to curse him. From now on, he could not get any more fruit from the field. He had to lead an unsteady and fleeting life. He lost his home and became a restless wanderer. He had to constantly fear

that someone might just slay him as he had done.

Here we learn that sin is very serious and brings dire consequences. It is vital that we fight a spiritual battle to have dominion over sin. Feeling is not truth, but often tempts us. Our human imagination such as human love, plans or ambition are not good counselors. By obeying one word of God, e.g. Mt 6:33, we can live a blessed life. Without obedience to God's word and repentance, sin will dominate our lives.

I know a young man who kept following his feelings. In this way he became a dangerous man. Thus, dominated by sin, he could ruin his whole life. But through Bible study he heard God's word Deut. 6:5: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." When he accepted God's word and gave his heart to God, he started to rule over sin. God changed him into a responsible shepherd for the next generation. Let us listen to God's word so that we may rule over sin and live a blessed life in obedience to the word of God.

3. God gave Cain a sign (4:15-16)

As we have seen, Cain now had to carry the guilt all his life. Fratricide is one of the worst crimes, and we think it would be just if he is punished badly. In fact, sinners have to live in terrible fear because the conscience never leaves them alone. According to Cain's testimony, his punishment was so bad that he could not bear it (13).

But let us look at how God dealt with Cain. Let's read verse 15 together, "But the Lord said to him, "Not so ; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him." God placed Cain under His special protection by making a sign to Cain. It is God's wonderful love that He did not let Cain run to damnation, but even put him under His protection. In this way, he could see God's love for him, guiding him to repentance. This incident shows that God hates sin and must punish it, but that He loves the sinner unchanged. God hates sin, but He loves the sinner.

We, too, actually deserve nothing but God's punishment. We may not have killed anyone. But Jesus said in Matthew 5:22 that anger or hatred is just as bad as murder: "But I tell you

that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." We have transgressed and destroyed God's commandments and order again and again, acting only according to our sinful ego. But it is the wonderful grace of God that He loves us and waits for our repentance and conversion. God has given us a sign of love. This sign of forgiveness that God has raised up is the cross of Jesus. On the cross, the Son of God bore the punishment for our sin, which we ourselves were responsible for. By doing so, he opened for us the way of repentance, forgiveness and new life. Everyone who comes to the cross of Jesus with a penitent heart, confesses his sins, receives his forgiveness and may begin a new life. The cross of Jesus is the sign of God's absolute love for sinners.

Saul was a merciless persecutor of the first Christians who spread fear and terror. The first Christians feared him as the people of Afghanistan now fear the Taliban. But he did not stay only in Jerusalem, he wanted to export his terror also to Damascus. But Jesus called out to this persecutor in his love, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" When he repented and came to the cross of Jesus with his sin, he was changed into a new man, Paul.

The cross of Jesus is God's sign to us that there is a way back. Through repentance and faith in Jesus' substitutionary sacrificial death for our sin, everyone may come back to God, receive His forgiveness, and make a new beginning. Let us personally accept God's absolute love, come to God with a repentant heart, and reign over sin with God's help.

4. Cain's descendants and Set's descendants (4:17 - 5:32)

Verses 17 to 24 tell us about the family tree of Cain's descendants after he left. In his family tree we find some outstanding people. They developed city culture, cattle breeding, music and even the first iron industry. At the same time, however, sin grew among Cain's descendants. Lamech lived polygamously and bragged to his wives that he had killed two people for base reasons. Here we see that sin produces more and more sin. Human achievements do not mean much if people remain under the dominion of sin in the process and become very cor-

rupt. After all, Cain's descendants all had to drown in the Flood.

In contrast, in the genealogy of Set we find the pious life of his descendants. In the time of Enosh, people began to call upon the name of the Lord. Enoch walked with God. God raptured him so that he would not experience death at the hands of sinful men. Finally, Noah was the one who built the ark of salvation and with whom God could make a new beginning.

Here we may think about what heritage we want to pass on. Great human achievements or material have no significance. But spiritual inheritance can carry on God's blessing to future generations so that God's salvation history can continue to flow through them.

We have received a great spiritual inheritance through the fathers of faith in UBF who served the world mission work with the devotion of their lives. Dr. Samuel Lee left us a word, "Back to the Bible," which became a guiding star for us, namely to study the Word of God deeply. Through GLEF, we may also carry on this spiritual legacy by mobilizing the next generation to study God's Word and live as global spiritual leaders.

We have received a great spiritual inheritance according to Mark 11:22: "Have faith in God." With this word, the servant of God M. Peter struggled to overcome the humanistic spirit of the times and serve the disciple-making ministry. Now, through Nehemiah 2:17, God has given us the vision to rebuild the spiritual walls in Germany and Europe. Let us live according to God's vision and leave the good spiritual heritage for our descendants.

Today we have learned that sin has severe consequences and leads people deeper and deeper into sin. God admonishes us to reign over sin. God has given us the cross of Jesus as the sign of His love for sinners, which leads us on the path of repentance and faith so that we may return to Him. Let us embrace God's unchanging love. Let us take hold of God's Word and reign over sin with God's help.