

LESSON: Am I my brother's keeper? **Date:** June 21 2015

TEXT: Genesis 4:1-10; Various Others

Prayer: May the Holy Spirit guide us in considering this question.

INTRODUCTION

As you can see from the title on your handout, I'd like us to explore Genesis chapter 4 today and the well-known question that Cain sarcastically proposed to God. "Am I my brother's keeper?" This is perhaps one of the more interesting questions in the Bible and there is much for us to learn not just about the answer to this question, but also from the context in which we are given this question in God's word.

Cain and Abel went and offered sacrifices and God honored the sacrifice of Abel, but not that of Cain. Cain gets jealous and angry and then kills his brother. God then asks Cain where his brother is and then we are given this age-old question: "Am I my brother's keeper".

I want to spend most of our time today studying out this passage in Genesis 4 and seeing some of the gems of discipleship that God has placed for us in these very verses surrounding this question.

Let's start by looking at Genesis chapter 4. As we read this I want you to pay particular attention to the attitudes and actions of God (the one who always seeks to have disciples) and the attitudes and actions of Cain (the one whom God would make a disciple). As this narrative unfolds, there are really two "characters" in this scene in front of us. Abel, having been killed by Cain is no longer on the scene and as such we are just left with the conversation between Cain and the God of all creation.

Let's read this passage together. Gen 4:1-10

In a matter of just 8 verses Cain and Abel are born, offer their sacrifices to God and Cain kills Abel. This narrative is not exactly how today's novels draw out mystery stories; I mean this story moves pretty fast.

Contrasting behaviors of Genesis 4:1-10

1. Attitudes and Actions of God

a. Lovingly Provided Instructions/Guidance

As I read and study this passage it is somewhat convicting to me to see how patiently and gently God interacts with Cain. As I've studied out this verse,

it isn't 100% crystal clear to me why Cain's offering was rejected or that he knew in advance what type of offering he was to bring. An article I found on the website of Answers in Genesis states: "We absolutely don't know that God required a blood sacrifice of Cain." After the offering is given we see God blessing Abel's offering and not Cain's offering. This much is clear from scripture. Hebrews 11:4 gives us more insight into the situation when it says "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." I John 3:12 says "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." In these verses we see commendation for Abel and heart attitude issues with Cain, but we do not see a clear statement for the reason Cain's offering was rejected.

So then we look for more context. Gen 3:21 says "And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them." So we see from this that there certainly could have been an explanation of blood sacrifice for the covering of sins. This teaching could have happened between God and Adam and then handed down to Adam's children, but we are still extrapolating from scripture to assume that had happened. The book of Leviticus and all of the sacrificial laws had not been documented yet for the Jewish people.

Perhaps previous offerings had occurred and Cain and Abel both fully understood the expectations of what to bring and how to bring it, but we just don't see that. Perhaps God was using this as an opportunity to start showing what was acceptable and in this event his blessing of Abel's offering is the confirmation of right versus wrong in the offering. Was Cain's offering rejected b/c it was 1) Wrong Type of offering 2) Wrong Quality of Offering 3) Wrong Attitude of offering? All of these could be reasonable extrapolations from Scripture although scripture never clearly states for us the one exact reason that Cain's offering was rejected.

So while there is more I wish I knew, what we can do is simply learn from what God does show us. In verses 6-7 I see God responding to Cain as a loving parent or teacher would to a child. God approaches Cain and gently asks what is wrong – "Why are you angry? And why has your face fallen?" Then the Lord takes the role of instructor and tells Cain: "If you do well, will you not be accepted?"

Contextually we see the sinning heart of Cain. But I also see God lovingly instructing Cain and showing Cain that he has every opportunity to be

“accepted”; for his offering to be “respected” just like his brother, but God is laying out certain rules to be followed and God’s blessings are contingent on Cain’s willingness to bend his own will in humble obedience to God’s will.

As we would engage in discipleship or brother-keeping ministry it is important that we follow God’s own example and lovingly provide instructions and guidance that would lead others toward God’s blessings.

b. Lovingly Offered Fellowship Opportunity

After the sacrifice: Gen. 4:5-7 “but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. (this fact we know) So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?” Here the opportunity for fellowship is extended to Cain.

God doesn’t meet Cain’s wrath with His wrath, Cain’s anger with His immediate judgement, but instead with gracious opportunity. The whole purpose of Jesus Himself coming to earth was restoration – to provide you and me with an opportunity for everlasting fellowship with God. Here God provides Cain with an opportunity for fellowship. It is an opportunity for Cain to accept the right way and then receive the accompanying blessing of right choices. Acceptance/Fellowship comes if Cain will “do well”.

We don’t know how much time passes between the rejection of the offering and the time that Cain actually murders his brother. We see in verse 5 he is angry and in verse 8 his anger leads to murder. But prior to the murder an opportunity of fellowship was given and rejected.

Now how does God interact with Cain? Cain is not just an angry man (a murderer in the heart); he has actually physically acted on those murderous thoughts of anger.

Gen 4:9-10 “Where is Abel your brother?” “What have you done?” I’m not sure what you see in those two simple questions, but I see God lovingly approaching a venomous sinner and offering an opportunity for confession, forgiveness and fellowship.

As we would engage in discipleship or brother-keeping ministry it is important that we follow God’s own example and lovingly offer fellowship opportunity. Sometimes that is going to include opportunities for confession, forgiveness and restoration.

c. Lovingly Asked Questions

Really we’ve already seen this point in our study thus far but it is worth making a special point of it so that it gets the attention it deserves. God continued to Lovingly Ask Questions.

Has anyone ever heard of the SOCRATIC METHOD?

SOCRATIC METHOD: Named after the classical Greek philosopher Socrates. It is a form of inquiry or discussion between individuals, based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and to illuminate ideas. The method has a purpose; perhaps two purposes. The point is that it is a purposeful communication approach.

Perhaps this should not be named after Socrates. After all, throughout Gen 3-4 as well as other Old and New Testament passages we see that this is often how God lovingly interacts with man. Here as elsewhere in scripture we find God interacting with man in the format of questions. Not verbally cursing him (although Cain’s sin had already done that), and this does eventually happen in this passage but that is not where God starts His discussion with Cain. Before God’s judgment is passed on Cain (after Gen. 4:10), God lovingly interacts with questions. God provides Cain with the opportunity to acknowledge his sin, request forgiveness and find reconciliation.

Questions allow for the opening of the heart whereas accusations quickly raise barriers to the heart. It is just how our flesh works.

The right kind of questions may cause us to think soberly. Notice that much like we see Jesus doing in the New Testament, God approaches Cain with convicting questions. God also did this in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. He didn’t start his conversation with accusations even though He clearly had the right to do so.

A quick review of Gen. 3:9-13 shows God interacting in this way:

Adam – “Where art thou?”

Adam – “Who told thee that thou wast naked?”

Adam – “Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?”

Eve – “What is this that thou hast done?”

Then again in Gen 4 we already saw these questions of God to Cain:

Cain – “Why art thou wroth?”

Cain – “Why is thy countenance fallen?”

Cain – “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?”

Cain – “Where is thy brother?”

Cain – “What hast thou done?”

As we would engage in discipleship or brother-keeping ministry we would do well to remember the Socratic Method not because it is named after Socrates but because this is how we see God Himself interacting with man in times of discipleship and accountability. As you study God’s word you’ll see this in both the Old and New Testaments. I hope it will help provide guidance to us on how we would engage in loving “one-another” relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

God:

- 1) Lovingly Provided Instructions/Guidance
- 2) Lovingly Provided Fellowship Opportunity
- 3) Lovingly Asked Questions

2. Attitudes and Actions of Cain

Now that we have reviewed the attitudes and actions of God – the one looking to make a disciple of Cain – we want to look at the attitudes and actions of Cain. In this instance, Cain is really the one being pursued spiritually. Every time Cain is pursued he is given an opportunity. Every time we see Cain rejecting that opportunity for forgiveness, rejecting right for wrong and stiffening instead of yielding, we see Cain continue down a fast and steep path away from God. He is given knowledge and with that opportunity he has choices to make. With his choices we see his consequences.

So now God has given us the opportunity to learn from the choices of others through the reading, understanding and application of His word. Likewise our choices will yield their own consequences. So let’s review the attitudes and actions of Cain – the downward spiral!

With our Bibles open to Genesis 4 it is important for us to notice the “State of Cain’s Heart”.

Proverbs 1:7 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Proverbs 9:10 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.”

a. Cast off the fear of God

In this passage what I see is God talking directly to Cain. The God of this Universe, the Creator of Cain’s parents talking to him and you see absolutely no “Fear of God” in Cain. How does he not see the awesome nature of the Sovereign Creator of the world?

Cain absolutely has no fear of God in this passage. We just read in Proverbs that having this fear of God is the absolute foundational point for knowledge and wisdom. Cain was a fool and his foolishness started with losing his fear of God. It absolutely didn’t exist and we will see that even more in his ongoing spiral of sinful decisions.

b. Rejected the wisdom of God

We read in Proverbs 1:7 that “fools despise wisdom and instruction”. Again we already looked at how God was lovingly providing instruction and opportunities to Cain and yet Cain, as a fool, rejected wisdom and he rejected instruction.

We never see Cain accepting the offer that God has provided him for acceptance. “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?” We can’t make decisions for others. We can’t make choices for others. If we provide wisdom and instruction to others then we’ve done our part. It is up to every individual to make their choices and to respond to wisdom and instruction.

Notice that God provides additional instruction to Cain in verse 6 when he says “And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. It’s desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” WARNING CAIN! Reject me, reject my way, reject knowledge and instruction and SIN, further SIN will get you. The ESV says “sin is crouching at the door”. Doesn’t that remind you of I Peter 5:8 “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Genesis reference to “crouching at the door” just makes our minds equate SIN with SATAN. He is always right there wringing his hands hoping you chose him; hoping we make decisions as Cain did in rejecting God’s wisdom and instruction.

This symbolism should have been quite familiar to Cain. I mean how many times would Cain have sat around a campfire with his parents and have heard them recount the slithering tactics of Satan to deceive his parents in the Garden of Eden. Satan and God were extraordinarily real to Cain and yet he rejects Him.

Our sinful flesh is just as susceptible to this as Cain! Oh let us heed this warning! Everything else that we see in the life of Cain stems from this point. He said NO to wisdom. He said NO to the audible voice of God. Each of us would be WISE to remember that FOOLS despise wisdom and instruction. God has provided us with a very vivid example.

c. Sinful Spiral away from God

Murder may seem a long way off from where you view yourself spiritually, but Cain's path started with not fearing God and then rejecting the instruction of God. Those are pretty basic sins that can and do creep into each of our hearts and lives on a daily basis.

Spurgeon said "Treasure lurks in every hesitancy to obey and dwells in every attempt to extenuate our fault when we have already disobeyed."

- Every hesitancy to obey is a heart crying out in rebellion against our Sovereign Savior.
- Every time our heart wants to justify a wrong doing we are arguing with an all-wise God.
- These sinful temptations are still in our flesh that we must die to each day. Yielding to these temptations were the basis of Cain's "Sinful Spiral Away From God".

Lets look at Cain's sinful spiral.

- 1) **Jealousy** - First of all it's pretty easy to see jealousy taking over the heart of Cain. Cain wasn't just angry at God for rejecting his offering. Cain became angry at Abel because God chose to bless Abel. Do you ever find yourself like Cain, having trouble with the blessings that God has given to other people?
- Our N.T. injunction in Romans 12:15 tells us that we are to "Rejoice with those who rejoice". Fools will choose the jealous path of Cain. The wise will seek to obey God's call on our life to rejoice with those who rejoice.
- 2) **Anger** – Cain's anger is easy to see in this passage. It isn't hidden beneath the surface as is the anger of maybe some even in this room today. God put's Cain's anger out in the open and on display is His word. Obviously God wants us to learn from it. Anger wants

to destroy! That's its desire. So then it is pretty easy then to make the deduction that Anger is Destructive. Am I right? Anger continues to destroys Cain, it destroys Abel and it reaps spiritual destruction on untold descendents of Cain even up to this very day.

So we ask the question again. Have you ever found yourself like Cain in this way? Have you ever responded to the helpful loving instruction of someone else with Anger? Cain chose anger and it lead to destruction. Fools reject instruction.

- 3) **Rejected Repentance** – Cain was unwilling to yield his will to truth. In Cain's spiral, even after we read of his murderous act God asks Cain those thought provoking questions and provides Cain an opportunity to repent but Cain rejects repentance. Cain wanted to hold on to something he knew was sinful. Has God made you aware of something in your life that you need to reject and repent of? Has someone in your life made you aware of something that you need to reject and repent of and yet you hold on to it? Look closely at Cain. Look at his choices lest we find our lives and our decisions aligning with this fool who spiraled away from God.

4) Insolent and Hostile Toward God

Let's take a step back to our the title of our lesson today and that thought provoking question of Cain: "Am I my brother's keeper". There are a lot of different spins you can put on that question if you just change around which word you emphasize.

"AM I my brother's keeper?" - AM

"AM I my brother's keeper?"- I

"Am I MY BROTHER'S keeper?" – MY BROTHER

"Am I my brother's KEEPER?" - KEEPER

Cain by occupation was a farmer while his brother Abel was a shepherd – a keeper of sheep. Cain was being INSOLENT in his response to God. Insolence = haughtiness, rude, arrogant, curt (often shows up in sarcasm). It was if he was saying "Do You think I have to keep him as he keeps his

sheep?” “Am I a shepherd as he was and am I to take as much care of him as he did of his sheep?” “Am I the keeper’s keeper?”

Just contemplate with me the spiritual state of a man who can dare to outrageously hold an audible sarcastic argument with the very voice of God.

Perhaps you’ve heard of the different types of “fool” mentioned in the Bible.

1. Simple Fool – lacks knowledge
2. The Fool – has knowledge but rejects it
3. The Scorner – the result of the continuing in the choices of the fool.

This is the exact progression we see in the life of Cain and we see him walking away from God a scorner – but that isn’t where he started. Remember where all of this started? I mean all of this spiral started with a sacrifice to God right. That’s a pretty far cry from becoming a scorner. But Cain goes from sacrifice to scorner in just 7 short verses. That’s how far and how fast sin can take us. That’s how simply the path away from God can happen.

Cain:

- 1) Cast off the fear of God
- 2) Rejected the wisdom of God
- 3) Spiraled away from God

Application:

As we review the sinful spiral of Cain’s self-condemning actions and attitudes we must evaluate our own life choices to ensure that we are not following him down this path. As I mentioned the quote from Spurgeon earlier, I’ll mention it again here: “Treason lurks in every hesitancy to obey and dwells in every attempt to extenuate (*or make excuse for*) our fault when we have already disobeyed.”

Conclusion

Am I my brother’s keeper? Are you your brother’s keeper? We’ve already been looking at this recently on Wednesday nights during our Midweek Connection. Keith has made it clear our “MISSION” is not just bringing glory to God with our lives but also increasing the glory given to God through discipleship of others. More Christians bring God more glory. Better Christians bring God more glory.

Matt. 28:19-20 (ESV) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Colossians 3:16 (ESV) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

As Keith has said, if the word “DISCIPLESHIP” seems intimidating to you right now, think of it as making friends and then walking with those friends towards Christlikeness.

In our lesson today we’ve seen some lessons on how to be like God in our efforts to disciple and we’ve seen some warnings on how we should not respond when others seek to disciple us.

Christian as you would seek to disciple others remember these lessons that we saw from God Himself as he dealt with Cain:

- 1) He lovingly provided guidance and instruction
- 2) He lovingly offered fellowship
- 3) He lovingly asked questions

Each of us can engage in those things as we go about friend-making!

Christian also BEWARE that in seeking to grow in your own life spiritually you do not respond like Cain who:

- 1) Cast off the fear of God
- 2) Rejected the wisdom of God
- 3) Spiraled away from God.