

Gen 4
Common Sins - Murder

It may sound odd to start a series on Common Sins by talking about murder. That's the thing we go to when we want to prove that we're not bad people... "At least I haven't killed anyone".
NOT SO FAST MY FRIEND

Jesus on murder....

There is a hiddenness of murder before it becomes exposed by actually taking a life.

Matt 5:21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

Surely no one here has ever called someone a 'good for nothing' or a 'fool', so we're good, right?

Let's listen to James 4

1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so, you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

James describes a chronic condition that existed among believers, a climate of conflict and antagonism. That was the early church. It was Not all romance and righteousness.

The occasion was not mentioned as the cause of the quarrels, so he writes to identify the CAUSE.

The seed that gives rise to murder is more common and easier to identify than we think.

It is not some complicated complex of experiences, hurts, and wounds. It's not because they weren't correctly potty-trained.

It is more serious than we think. It is worse than we think.

We think the cause of quarrels is a lack of 'compatibility' or a 'personality clash'.

It is worse than we think. It flows from the heart and ends in war and murder.

Quarrels and fights reveal the presence of sin that leads to war and murder.

Those addressed by James weren't actually killing each other were they? No and Yes.

We saw what Jesus said about murder, and what James says. It flows from the heart.

The Heidelberg Catechism and the WCFSC & LC speak to the sixth commandment, and they follow the path of Jesus in describing how murder is rooted in our words and our hearts.

Heidelberg 105. Q. What does God require in the sixth commandment?

I am not to dishonor, hate, injure, or kill my neighbor by thoughts, words, or gestures, and much less by deeds, whether personally or through another;[1] rather, I am to put away all desire of revenge.[2]

Moreover, I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself.[3] Therefore, also, the government bears the sword to prevent murder.[4]

106. Q. But does this commandment speak only of killing?

By forbidding murder God teaches us that He hates the root of murder, such as envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge,[1] and that He regards all these as murder.[2]

Following the first sin in the Garden, murder is the next sin we encounter in scripture in Genesis 4 – Fratricide =-killing a brother.

Gen. 4:1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.” ² And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground

Let’s look at this passage through the eyes of Jesus, James, and the broader scriptural teaching about sin, the heart, and idolatry. The root of sin is hidden in the heart and then expresses itself outwardly. **The narrative of Cain and Abel is an example of a heart rooted in something other than God that bears rotten fruit.**

We’re only four chapters in and right after the first sin of eating the fruit, BOOM, we get murder.

What is tucked away in this story?

David Stoddard, PCA pastor and MTW missionary had some very helpful insights.

First notice in v. 1 how Eve gave birth and said, “I have gotten a man with the help of Yahweh, the Lord.” This is a statement of joy and hope on her part.

Remember the issue from Gen 3- the curse on the serpent and the promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent?

It would have been natural for Adam and Eve to think, “This is the one – a male baby with the help of Yahweh.”

Cain was the first born, so he is special. His birth gets a comment from Eve that is in scripture for all to read.

Not so with the next child. (some of you are tracking and feeling this).

And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. ³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,

There is no exclamation of joy or talk about “having a man from the Lord.” Abel seems to be an afterthought while the focus is on Cain.

Eve has an heir and the spare. Sadly, it’s not uncommon for some children to feel overlooked in the family structure - it may be the younger or it may be the older (again, Everybody Loves Raymond, illustrates this point).

The context opens up even more when we understand the meaning of the names of the two sons.

“Cain” has the nuance of “productive or successful”. He gets the job done. He’s a mover and shaker, the golden child, and dare I say, the favorite.

He’s a farmer, a tiller of the ground and his labors bear fruit. He is pushing back the curse. The baby Eve got “with the help of the Lord” has become a successful farmer.

Now, Abel. What does his name mean? Does anyone remember the key word from the series from Ecclesiastes? The English word - “vanity”. The Hebrew word – “hevel” – vapor, weightless. Vanity of Vanity, all is vanity. It’s a word picture of futility and insignificance.

WHAT WAS ABEL’S NAME? – Mr. Vapor, Mr. Insignificance Mr. Cellophane – CHICAGO

A human being's made of more than air

With all that bulk, you're bound to see him there

Unless that human bein' next to you

Is unimpressive, undistinguished you know who.....Mr Cellophane.

Mr Cellophane should have been my name 'cause you can look right through me.

Walk right by me and never know I'm here.

His older brother, Cain, was Mr. Successful and Productive. He was voted most likely to succeed; he was the captain of the Camel racing team; Everybody Loves Cain.

I dare say that Cain knew it because his mother told him over and over.

EX: Do parents ever brag about one child and not the other, or others??? HAS THAT EVER HAPPENED?

Some Of you are tracking and are picking up what I'm laying down.

They needed some family counseling lest things might get out of hand. SPOILER ALERT...

Up to this point the text has nothing bad to say about either of the boys, i.e. Men. There's no hint of scandal or wrongdoing, YET.

. ³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So, Cain was very angry, and his face fell. ⁶ The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

Gen. 4:8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

There are a few things in the narrative that don't relate directly to the issue of murder, but they do give a sense of the meaning that Moses had for the original audience, i.e. To associate Cain with Egypt and Abel with the people of Israel. (Dr. Richard Pratt – ThirdMill Ministries)

One such item is the "occupations" of Cain and Abel. Cain was a settled farmer/agriculturist. Abel was a shepherd. We learn in Gen 46 that there is a tension between those groups. The Egyptians detested shepherds – the occupation of Joseph, Jacob and his sons.

A related issue shows up in the sacrifices brought to the Lord.

Cain brought "an offering of fruit to the Lord." There was no indication that it was first fruits or the best fruit. He was sure that he would impress God with whatever offering he brought. "Of course God will regard my offering, because, Hey, I'm the man my mother got with the help from YAHWEH.."

Abel brought the firstborn of the flock and the fat portion. This denotes a heart that has a high priority on worship and the glory of God.

NOTE : THE firstborn and fat portion both have ceremonial and sacrificial significance in the religious practice of Israel. Those practices were probably not in place yet when the story was written, but they did give a frame of reference for when the ceremonial laws were developed. Fruit of the ground was also an offering – see Deut 26:2, but it was the FIRST FRUIT OF THE GROUND. Cain just gathered 'an offering'.

God's response to the two brothers is perhaps unexpected, at least for Cain.

Mr. Successful had his offering rejected, but Mr. Vapor's offering was regarded by the LORD.

The script is flipped, maybe for the first time in their lives.

The brotherly dynamic took a chilling turn as Cain then took the 'fun' out of family dysfunction.

Cain has a setback and is angry – his face falls. This leaves him bitter, angry, and perhaps depressed. He wasn't used to failing or to coming in second place, i.e. the first loser. He has an internal meltdown that shows externally – anger and his face fell.

Cain had bought into the meaning of his name, and his identity was wrapped up in being productive and successful. He believed in his own status as "the man" his mother got from the Lord.

That can go to your head and become part of an issue of self-idolatry. "This isn't supposed to happen to ME. "

Cain didn't have a reputation as a bad guy, a street thug, a crooked farmer, etc. He's a good guy, right?

A hidden danger to our spiritual life is our own goodness, or our perception of our own goodness and competence to handle things without God.

v. 8 First WORDS, then MURDER- both flow from the heart.

We don't know what their conversation was like, but the tension escalated to murder rather quickly.

Something was going on deep inside Cain's heart and it wasn't the worship of God. He couldn't handle the disregard that God had for his offering, so he killed the one whose offering was acceptable.

Was there another way out? YES, God had already told him... 'there is a way to be accepted.'

7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

When you think your IDENTITY is at stake, you may find yourself doing desperate things. When the thing you've built your identity upon lets you down, that is the time to repent, not lash out at God or others.

When you are the center of your frame of reference, and your sense of self is threatened, then bad decisions come quickly.

EX: How many characters in shows or movies have committed murder and said, "I just didn't know what else to do."? It was lose face, lose my reputation, be embarrassed OR KILL the person who might expose my failure or sin.

Genesis 4 shows how given a certain context and opportunity, the seed of self-righteousness can give forth the rotten fruit of murder – either with our hands or with our words, as Jesus tells us.

If we're honest, we've all committed murder. We're all guilty.

That's why we need a Savior, and the GOOD NEWS is that Jesus is a REAL savior for real sinners.

Cain was so distressed, even though God gave him a word of hope, that he had to get rid of Abel who he saw as the reminder of his failing. I'm reminded of a scene in the classic TKAM...

EX: TKAM The young white woman, Mayella Ewell, broke the social code and tempted a black man, Tom Robinson. When it was revealed, and the social consequences came crashing down on her, she did what every child has done. She tried to put the evidence of her offense away from her. Tom Robinson must be removed from her presence. She must destroy the evidence of her offense. CAIN tries to GET RID of the evidence of his failure – ABEL, but God sees him.

The text of Gen 4 doesn't give much detail into the posture of their hearts – Cain and Abel. But

1 John 3:11-12 does. 11 For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; 12 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.

HEBREWS 11:4 –By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous,

It wasn't the offering per se. It was what God saw in the heart – faith in God or faith in oneself.

The silent pride of self can destroy, and it can be hidden for a time. It can even look good on the outside. It can look productive, successful, and very religious. But it is deadly.

The hardest sin to see and repent of is our own righteousness.

Phil 3:8...

I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, ... 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

Through faith in Christ, we are united to Him and we too are qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints.

2 Thess 2 :14 - It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As believers, we have been chosen and loved in Christ, who is the first fruit of all who are saved. 1 Cor 15:20

The first fruit offerings of the OT pointed to Jesus, the True first fruit of all who are saved. He is also the Firstborn over all of creation (Col 1:15)

The righteous one of Heaven gave Himself as an offering to bring us salvation.

The solution to our murder problem is a person who changes hearts and lives by His Grace..

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