

# The Beginning of the Worship Wars

**Preached by:** Matthew S. Black

**Text:** Genesis 4:1-16

**Date:** September 12, 2010, 5pm

**Series:** Genesis: The Book of Beginnings

**Text and Theme:** Please open your Bibles to Genesis 4. Genesis is the book of beginnings. We've seen the beginning of creation. The beginning of sin in the universe. We saw last week with Cain's offering, the beginning of false religion. Today we are going to look at Cain and Abel one last time and consider Cain's heart.

God wants our heart. Today when you mention the "worship wars" in Christian circles, most people think about styles of music and whether can sing older or newer hymns and songs.

What we are looking at tonight is something more at the core. God looks upon our heart in worship, and there is no place this is more evident than in Genesis 4.

This passage is a presentation of contrasts. It sets up our hearts and minds for intense drama. We have contrasting angles against each other. This passage is unique because of it.

There is

- an offering next to a murder
- a joyous sacrifice next to brooding anger
- stewardship next to sibling homicide
- ultimately we have deep faith placed next to rejection and unbelief

The Holy Spirit put it this way really to tell us what life this side of the Garden is all about. Let us read this passage so we can see these contrasts.

**Genesis 4:1-7**, "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. 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 for you, but you must rule over it 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. 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand."

[Prayer for Guidance]

If you look at the first few verses of Genesis 4, life after the Fall seems pretty normal. You have a husband and a wife. You have the birth of two boys. You have work. You have worship. It doesn't appear that a whole lot has changed. Until we see verse 5. Let's look at **verses 3 through 5**, "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."

Abel gives an offering from his flock. Cain gives an offering from the land. Both of these offerings are legitimate offerings. As a matter of fact in Leviticus 2 and following regulates both animal sacrifices and grain offerings. Both are legitimate. It is possible to contrast these offerings themselves, but it is better to look at what is clear from the passage. What was the greatest offense to God in Cain's offering?

Why was Abel's sacrifice accepted? Why was Cain's rejected? That's the key question of this passage.

It was Cain's heart. We read the powerful words in **verse 5**, "but for Cain and his offering he had no regard, So Cain was very angry, and his face fell". All we need to uncover to find out why Cain's offering was rejected, is to look at Cain's response to God's rejection.

Cain's response to God's rejection is the dead giveaway in this passage. You see if Cain's heart were in the right place when he gave the sacrifice, his response would have been confession, repentance, and a humble desire to worship God in the way God desires.

This passage prompts us to ask us the greatest question of all.

- What is the basis upon which God accepts our worship?
- Can we worship God in any way we want?
- Does it matter how we worship God?
- Is outward, external worship all that God looks at?

Here we have the beginning of the worship wars. We come to several truths that reveal what side we are on in the worship wars. Here's the principle.

I. God is not impressed with your worship if He does not have your **heart** (vs. 3-6; Isaiah 1:10-18; Mark 7:6).

God doesn't want your prayers if He doesn't have your heart. God doesn't want your songs if He doesn't have your heart.

A. Cain's response to God revealed a cancer in Cain's worship. It was clear even by the way his face looked. **Verse 6**, "The LORD said to Cain, **Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?**" You can imagine Cain's head down and face tightening with anger and even rage. He was mad that God wasn't as impressed as he was with his worship.

Now what is all this about? We learn something very important about sacrifice. The problem was not necessarily the substance of the sacrifice or the process of the sacrifice. The problem was in the heart of the person making the sacrifice.

B. God is not satisfied with just external acts of worship from us. He's not satisfied just because we showed up, or because we are singing, or because we nod once in a while, or simply because we are together or because we give. You see God wants our hearts.

Consider **Isaiah 1:10-18**, "Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! 11 **What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?** says the LORD; **I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.** 12 **When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?** 13 **Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.** 14 **Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.** 15 **When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.**

16 ¶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, 17 learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. 18 **Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.**"

Could these words be stronger? God wants your heart more than your sacrifice. May it never be said of us what Jesus said to the religious people of His day in **Mark 7:6**, "And he said to them, **Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me'**".

Cain's struggle is your struggle and my struggle.

II. Sin causes us to turn acts of worship into occasions of **self-righteousness** that disregard God and others. Sin

causes us to turn ministry into moments of self-aggrandizement. Even the most apparently God directed act of godly worship can in fact be a total sham, and truly be an act of self-worship. Worship isn't always what it seems on the surface. You say, "I'm not really sure what you mean".

- Are you more concerned about your personal preferences in worship than you are in helping others to grow and change in Christ?
- Are you making a conscious effort to engage with hymns and songs and the teaching of God's word?
- Are you able to forget the imperfect vessels that lead in worship and focus on the Lord?
- Do you see yourself as more important than others or find yourself feeling that you are doing God a favor by showing up for worship?

Do you see how acts of worship can be only superficial and external and gutted of their heart? We all struggle with this on this side of the Garden.

We are not doing God a favor by worshipping Him. It is sin causes us to think this way and turn acts of worship into occasions of self righteousness. It is our pride that is blinding us. We must look at worship as a privilege. We should not be here! We don't deserve to be here. We are doing God no favor.

When you look at Cain, you ought not to say, "What an awful person he is". You ought to say, "I have that in me too! – God help me and deliver me from myself". There is something awful in each one of us that wants to exalt self to the exclusion of God. It is our flesh. Paul says, "...I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh" (**Romans 7:18**). My flesh wants for me to have all the glory and God to have none of it. The flesh loves to be comfortable. The flesh wants self first, and self above all.

But the Lord says in...

**Isaiah 42:8**, "I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols."

There are occasions when I am a skilled glory thief! In a moment when God should be receiving glory, I take that glory upon myself. That's all of us.

Now, let me give you some hope.

III. God can **deliver** us from self-worship (vs. 6-7).

Listen to these words in **verses 6-7**, “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 for you, but you must rule over it””.

What does this mean?

A. In worship, we need to deal with our heart.

God is saying to Cain, deal with the issue. Deal with your heart. This is not about Abel’s offering. This is not about favoritism. This is about your heart Cain. Look within and deal with your heart.

We all love ourselves entirely too much. The worship of Christ is a place of crucifixion for all carnal pride. It is a place to come and humble ourselves with every tribe, tongue and nation, every socio-economic group.

It is an opportunity to come and essentially say, “I am nothing apart from the blood and righteousness of Jesus”. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. We are all equally condemned and in need of forgiveness.

B. Worship is an opportunity to deal with sin. Look at verse 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 for you, but you must rule over it””.

Sin is like a crouching lion. Lions will chase it’s prey for miles. In Africa, if you’ve watched any animal shows, you may see lions chasing a herd of deer for miles until the deer are utterly exhausted. And then suddenly the lions stop and wait and crouch.

As the lions recede and wait, the deer relax their muscles and believe they are out of danger, but that is the most dangerous time of all. It is at that time there is an explosion of movement, and these deer are pummeled and destroyed by the lions.

What God is saying to Cain is, “You are a sinner. Don’t let your heart relax. That lion is in sight of you. That lion is in your heart. It is called sin.”

Listen, there is grace and hope if we consider our sin and go to God with it. There is only one remedy. We cannot relax for a moment. Cain never came to know the saving grace of Christ, but even you who know Christ have this same indwelling sin in you. It cannot destroy you ultimately, but it can distract and disable you from worship God. It is crouching at the door waiting to overtake you. We cannot relax for a moment.

Sadly, you know the story. Cain was unwilling to look within. He was angry with God because Abel got what Cain thought he deserved.

## IV. There is a war for your worship (vs. 8-24).

- A. The war plays out in our own life. Our worship eventually comes out of our life. It's hard for us to imagine what went on in **verse 8**. There you have a very cosmetic telling of a horrible human moment. There were no guns. There probably were no poison or weapons by this time. There was an explosion of rage, and it seems Cain killed Abel with his bare hands. **Verse 8**, "Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him."

Cain worshipped his own way and he was willing to destroy anything that got in his way. Cain brutally murders his brother with his own hands, and then denies it. You say, I'm not like that, I would never think of doing such a thing.

- And yet, we get very irritated at the people that a sovereign God has placed in our pathway.
- We get angry at people who don't offer us the respect we think we deserve.
- We get discouraged with people who don't appreciate us.
- Our anger is especially fierce towards those who are closest with us.

We must understand that hatred is not ultimately directed at people, but at our Lord. We want God to endorse our kingdom, when He's called us to endorse His kingdom.

- B. If we are on the wrong side of the war, we will be **rewarded** by God accordingly. **Verses 9-12**, "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. 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand 12 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"".

1. Selfishness and sin never pay off. They always produce misery.
2. The root of all sin is self-worship and the self-promotion. When we act that way, we are living contrary to our owner's manual, and there are consequences. We know we've done wrong because God brings the natural response of our conscience that brings a dread to us and a desire, at least in the flesh, to lie.
3. For the Christian, we live in the light of the presence of God. We do not live in dread of God's condemnation, but in fear of displeasing our Father. Our accountability is minute by minute, we are encouraged and convicted by the Holy Spirit.

4. One day God will bring us all to account. Cain was afraid of his sentence because he thought it would cause people to want to take vengeance on him. We saw that last week. God let Cain live on the earth and bear children.
- C. The war for worshipping God rightly not only includes us but also our children. If we worship wrongly, not only do we lose, but often our children lose. We always reap what we sow.

**Verses 16-18**, “Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. 17 Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. 18 To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech.”

So in the sixth generation from Adam, we find Lamech.

1. Lamech is the first polygamist. **Verse 19**, “And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.”
2. Lamech perpetuates his great, great, etc. grandfather’s sins. Even after all this time, he wants to be like his grandfather.

**Verses 23-24**, “Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. 24 If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech’s is seventy-sevenfold.”

**Conclusion:** There is a war for worship. It matters not only what we believe, but how we worship. Our attitudes and our character and our ethics are effected by our worship.

It matters how you worship God. If we do not come to him in faith we are damned. If we are not careful with our hearts, it will have an effect. Our children and grandchildren will remember us.

Worship is no longer simple. Everything we do, everything we say, everything we think, every where we look. There is a war. It’s a war for your heart. It’s a war for the worship of God. Let us give ourselves wholeheartedly to God in the fight against sin that desires to destroy us like a crouching tiger. Let us realize that there is victory and deliverance in Jesus!