

A BROTHER THAT SHOWS YOU UP

.... losing it when you can't afford it

Genesis 4

WEFC November 16, 2008

The world had just experienced a major convulsion ... the outlaw, sin, had marched into town creating chaos.

It may have been that the chaos was not at all that evident in “big” ways, but as the record of humanity is rolled out, there is hardly a page where “sin” does not figure into the plot.

How does sin weasel into seemingly every nook and cranny?

Daily we make probably hundreds of choices, many of which are not at all earth-shaking or of seeming significance. But make a wrong choice and what we thought insignificant turns into being a big thing.

Much of what goes on into making a choice happens inside of us ... and therefore our WorldView becomes a critical element.

The simple little operation / matter - freedom of choice – is not meant to be complex, but becomes complex when wrongly implemented.

It is a choosing of “this” over “that” ... that can either make life roll or end up with another collision on our hands.

Often, our choices involve people ... and it handling them that complicates our lives.

The key is making the right choices ... and that becomes our problem ... because we know of what we are made.

Two shopkeepers were bitter rivals. Their stores were directly across the street from each other, and they would spend each day keeping track of each other's business. If one got a customer, he would smile in triumph at his rival.

One night an angel appeared to one of the shopkeepers in a dream and said,

“I will give you anything you ask, but whatever you receive, your competitor will receive twice as much. Would you be rich? You can be very rich, but he will be twice as wealthy. Do you wish to live a long and healthy life? You can, but his life will be longer and healthier. What is your desire?”

The man frowned, thought for a moment, and then said, “Here is my request: Strike me blind in one eye!”

The dilemmas that we face in our choices ... choices that obviously expose our character.

Key Thought:

In the midst of the smorgasbord of options the right choice can and must be made ... or else we face the inevitable consequences.

Genesis 4 moves us into the reality of close relationships ... getting along with those with whom we live. In this setting we come to this historical event between two brothers.

Genesis 2:3-5

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 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. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.

Making the right choice involves ...

1. The necessity to understand that disapproval of an act indicates a chance to make corrections and is not a indication of personal rejection.

We are going to make an attempt to not read things back into the text of God's Word as we attempt to understand why it is that God did not approve of Cain's offering.

There is no hint that prior to this incident that Cain and Abel were having any trouble. The brothers seemed to be getting along well.

Each gives that over which they have worked. This was a part of their profits.

Up to this point in time we have not been informed of any specific requirements as to what made a good offering and what made a bad offering.

The only suggestion for God's approval toward Abel and his disfavor toward Cain's offering may be that Abel gave his best - **brought fat portions from some of the firstborn** – while Cain gave whatever he happened to be closest. (He did not seek to give God his "firstfruits".)

It may be that both of them were finding out just what it was that pleased God. ... and if this offering did not meet with God's

favor, then they would adjust, make the necessary change and move on.

They were growing in their understanding of how to live with God. God sets the standards for what is acceptable and what is not ... and that both brothers were learning.

What pleased God and what did not - were set by God ... and so they were learning.

So when God informed Cain of his disapproval, God did not blame Cain for what he had just done ... that he was learning.

God simply pointed out that Cain needed to adjust matters.

A male golfer was preparing to hit his ball from the red ladies tee on the first hole, right in front of the pro shop. As he began his backstroke, a voice boomed over the public address system: "Would the man hitting his ball from the ladies tee, please move it back to the men's tee?!"

He glared over his shoulder, then began again to prepare to hit his ball.

The loudspeaker again shattered the silence, repeating, "Will the man hitting his ball from the ladies tee, please move it back to the white, men's tee?!"

At that, the man turned and faced the clubhouse. Cupping his hands on his mouth he hollered, "Will the man in the clubhouse please be quiet, so I can take my second shot?!"

God is not badgering Cain. He is teaching him.

Cain needed to make an adjustment in his understanding of God.

What God did hold Cain accountable for was his response to His divine statement.

Whether one was in the Garden of Eden or outside it, life worked the same way in both places – following God’s statements was essential.

Transition:

At this point we can only wish for more detail. But let’s attempt to dig just a bit into the brief detail we have been given.

Cain does not respond well to God’s correction. He mistakes a wake-up call to be instead God’s stiff arm, shoving him out, an outright rejection.

Genesis 3:5-7

So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Then the LORD said to Cain,

"Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?

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."

3. God asks the hard questions ... so that we might move on with the good and reject evil

Cain is struggling not with Abel, not with his parents, but with God.

His face gives him away, indicating that this is one very unhappy camper.

If we are correct at this point, this is what would have been running through Cain’s mind:

God, I brought you something and you don’t like it?

Why not? ... it’s the thought that count, not the quality of the product. You should be happy that I thought of You, not You being picky telling us, ‘This is good; this isn’t.’”

He is offended to think that someone could barge into his life, after he had put himself out and tell him that what he did was not good enough ... even if that voice was God’s voice.

Cain had trouble living with God in God’s World following God’s universal laws – whether they were the physical laws or the moral laws.

God was in charge ... and that is what bothered Cain.

“Who is God to tell us what works and doesn’t work when we have made the effort to accommodate Him? Can’t He see that we did ‘something’ for Him ... but to Him it isn’t good enough!”

Cain is not in the mood to listen.

He has flipped a switch inside of himself that put him on a collision course with God.

God steps into Cain's private and personal turf, his heart ... uninvited ... and asks the hard questions.

"Why are you angry?"

"Why is your face downcast?"

"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"

God, as it were is saying, "Let's think this one through. It is obvious that you are hot and bothered ... why?"

"The problem is not out there. It is with YOU."

"It is YOUR anger; YOUR face that has written all over it, 'unhappy'; YOUR choice; YOUR future."

It is time to make a choice, an informed choice, so let us make a wise choice. I, God will help you work through this. I am pulling for you. I, God, want you to mature and make the right move ... so let Me walk you through this one step at a time.

God invests heavily into Cain.

God notes the evidence, the indicators that Cain was portraying – anger and discouragement.

Then God laid out before Cain what it was that was really happening inside of him.

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."

... and each of us understands the validity of these statements and we can verify their accuracy in our own experience.

Here is what God is saying:

There is a way through this difficult situation. It is the right way, but it is not the only way. Therefore, though there are options only one choice is good.

Please note carefully how and what God, the Creator, the All-Wise One does.

We often reverse the stated order that we have written here.

God does NOT first assure CAIN of his acceptance and then tell him to do what is right.

God's order is the reverse: Do what is right ... and then will come acceptance.

For acceptance to be effective, real and workable, there must be substance in the process.

This is NOT a "works" salvation. This is not "earning" or "paying" our own way back to God.

This IS a choice to operate joyfully within the wisely set limitations of God's WorldView.

It represents a shift in attitude which becomes evident through behavior.

As God addressed this matter with Cain so today the Holy Spirit of God works in us as we face similar dilemmas. The key is LISTENING or RESPONSIVENESS to His voice.

The first funeral I ever conducted was for a beautiful three-year-old. She was the first child born to a couple in our church, and the first grandchild in their extended family. Unfortunately, she was spoiled. While visiting the little girl's home one day, I observed that she loved to ignore her parents' instructions. When they told her to come, she went. When they said, "sit down," she stood up. Her parents laughed, finding her behavior cute.

One day their front gate was inadvertently left open. The parents saw their child escaping out of the yard and heading toward the road. To their horror, a car was racing down the street. As she ran out between two parked cars, they both screamed at her to stop and turn back.

She paused for a second, looked back at her parents, then gleefully laughed as she turned and ran directly into the path of the oncoming car. The parents rushed their little girl to the hospital, but she died from her injuries.

As a young pastor, this was a profound lesson for me. I realized I must teach God's people not only to recognize His voice but also immediately to obey His voice when they hear it. It is life.

Henry Blackaby, *Hearing God's Voice* (Broadman & Holman, 2002); reprinted in *Men of Integrity* (May/June 2003)

God worked by asking questions ... difficult questions.

Question:

“Cain, **why are you angry?**”

Answer:

Because You, God, have exposed me, my inner attitude ... and You have shown me what I am like on the inside, and it is not what it should be.

You have called my bluff.

You have made me face reality.

Question:

“**Cain, why is your face downcast?**”

Answer:

If things are not right internally, it is hard to not show that in our disposition.

... and so God presents the choice that faces Cain -

- **Do what is right** and you will find the barrier between us removed.
- **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.**"

God pointed out why it was that Cain was experiencing this intense, inner, volcanic, unsettling emotion.

It was because of SIN ... a live, formidable force that is intent on taking out our feet from under us.

The reality is that ...

We either master sin or it becomes our master.

Sin takes every advantage it is given. It is ready at a moments notice to insert into our existence poisonous content.

It can definitely be restrained by those who “master it” under God’s direction.

Sin is aggressive and must be guarded against.

Sin is powerful, but not all powerful. We can reject it ... with Christ.

To personally reject sin on our part will require firm conviction, strong choice and deliberate behavior.

God does not “automatically” keep us from sin.

His grace put into our lives means we work to live out His investment in us. Grace is opposed to “earning”, but not to “effort”.

In this interrogation scene, somewhat tough on Cain, as he needed to think seriously about what he was up against, we find that ...

God asks the hard questions so that we can get through the hard times without being damaged.

Transition:

We do not hear a peep from Cain. No response.

And so Scripture carries us through the event ... with Cain inviting his brother out into the field and killing him.

He made a choice ... sadly, the wrong one, and now we are informed of God’s follow-through.

4. The choices we make are our own, but the consequences are pre-determined and delivered by heaven’s justice system

Genesis 4:9

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

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. So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

As God had done with Adam and Eve, so God does with their son. He comes looking for him.

“I have not seen Abel around for a little while. Do you happen to know where he has been hiding lately?”

Cain's response was simple and untrue: **"I don't know."**

God again initiates matters.

Abel's blood is said to be crying out from ground of the earth that soaked it up ... crying, "God, is there justice?"

"God, do you see what men do to others beyond the eyesight of any other human being?"

God assures us that He does.

The most polluting, defiling thing is shed blood.

Blood and life belong to God for we have been made in His image. To take a person's life is to take what belongs God's. God is the guardian and protector of human life.

Therefore, Cain, you are under a curse and the ground that soaked up your brother's blood, which you spilled, will not cooperate with you.

You will be a restless wanderer.

Cain understood the severity of God's judgment and realized the predicament he had placed himself in.

His cry of despair is met, of all things, by God's grace and judgment. He is protected, and still punished.

Judgment and grace walk hand in hand within God.

... in conclusion ...

What happened? How could Cain get it so wrong? It was over an offering ... and he made the wrong choice.

Key Thought:

In the midst of the smorgasbord of options the right choice can and must be made ... or else we face the inevitable consequences.

Cain became jealous of his brother and his gifts ... something we all do as we watch others.

It is difficult to rejoice in others' gifts and success.

At those moments we need to be on personal high alert.

We might tend to look at this event psychologically, saying that anger turned into resentment, which turned into jealousy that acted in deceit and resulted in murder.

That is true, but that is a surface analysis.

Life is never just me – or me and others - but always me, others and God ... and God becomes the "complicating" factor.

This God of the Bible is not one whom we shape. Rather, He shapes us and determines our ultimate end.

In His WorldView we are all tied together ... There in this circle we experience privilege and responsibility.

blood that covers all sin, washes it away, heals ... and brings us back into right connectedness with God.

When we are making choices that are related to people it is necessary to see all the connectedness that there is.

A failure to depend on God leads to a failure to respect our brother, sister, wife, parents, children.

Should we not operate under God's WorldView and reject it, we must still realize that ... **We cannot injure one another without wounding God Himself.**

It is a dangerous thing when it is too much for us to give up our anger in order to be freed in reconciliation.

We must hear what the Spirit of God is saying in those tense moments and respond wisely.

... and again we are reminded of the extremely high value that needs to be placed on God's Word, His WorldView ... for it gives us God's heart ...

God is the key, the absolute essential, the ultimate authority with whom we all must deal ... an experience that God desires to be as pleasant and rich as possible.

Yet we know all too well the reality of sin ... in our own lives ... and even here God speaks clearly and understandingly in His Word.

There is forgiveness through blood that was spilled on the Cross outside the city of Jerusalem ... seemingly poured out senselessly ... but in the Father's understanding ... here was the