

Sin and Mercy: Part One
(Genesis 4)

It does appear that after Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden that God made a provision to continue a communion with man. But now, that communion could never be as it once was – it would now be communion at a distance. There would be no more “cool of the day” (3:8) visits.

Also, some theologians believe that there had been given to Adam and Eve a regular time and place at which they were allowed to meet with God after the fall. That place could have been at the door of entrance to the garden where the cherubim guarded the way to the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). If this be true (and we have no way of knowing), this would be a constant reminder to Adam that he now lives in a fallen world.

After the fall Adam and Eve had children, and the first two born were boys (4:1-2). No doubt Adam and Eve had shown love to both of their sons and had instructed them both alike. Therefore, this is why many find it difficult to understand what caused Cain and Abel to assume such different attitudes, and such different characters. Well, this may not be the theological answer that you're looking for, but the answer can be found in their fallen nature. And it didn't take long for that fallen nature to raise its head. In fact, these innate differences began to manifest themselves in a most unusual way.

Cain was the firstborn, and he was a farmer. Abel, his brother, was a shepherd (4:2). And in the “process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground and offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell” (4:3-5).

Cain became very angry because God did not regard his sacrifice. In fact, his anger was so visible that his facial expression became contorted (twisted out of its normal shape). God then made a promise to Cain and said, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (4:7).

God warned Cain that if he did not do the right thing, sin would be crouching (“lieth at the door”) or desiring to have Cain. Cain was faced with a choice: He could allow sin to pounce on him, or he could “rule” over it (4:7). By God giving Cain this information, God was extending a hand of mercy to him.

But instead of reaching for God's mercy, Cain's anger only grew. And it grew to the point that he "rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him" (4:8). And as far as Cain is concerned, it is over. But not so with God – it was not over as far as God was concerned.

The Lord asked Cain about his brother's whereabouts, and the Lord did this to elicit a response of repentance (4:9). Cain responded, instead, with a lie ("I know not") and coldhearted apathy ("Am I my brother's keeper?"). Then the Lord responded by saying, "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" (4:10).

Cain in his sin refused God's call of mercy – he never really considered the depth, nor the consequences, of his sin. In fact, sin had hardened Cain. But God cursed Cain directly so that the ground would no longer yield anything for him (4:12). The punishment was appropriate, since Cain had been a farmer (4:2).

One writer said, "Cain was forced to wander the earth, scrounging for food. He became a wanderer in the land of wandering. Cain complained (4:13), but he never repented."

One of the saddest statements in all of Scripture is recorded in verse 14 where Cain said to the Lord, "and from thy face shall I be hid." I think one of the greatest horrors of hell will be the knowledge of never experiencing the presence of God's mercy – forever banished from God's presence is beyond words. This was how Cain felt.

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