

## Second Generation Sin

Genesis 4: 1-12

Need: To avoid sin.

Proposition: The impact of sin in one generation can be felt in the next generation.

Objective: To lead persons to avoid sin.

Introduction:

Sin can be worse in the second generation than it was in the first. I have lived long enough to observe this. Years ago I knew a husband and father who was secretly unfaithful to his wife. She was a good and faithful wife, but she died with a great hurt in her life.

In the next generation both of the sons in the family had a long history of immoral behavior before they were married. At least one of the sons fathered a child out of wedlock, and turned his back on his lover when she became pregnant. What the father had done secretly, the sons did openly. The sin in the second generation was worse than the sin in the first.

This frightening reality is demonstrated in the experiences of the first family. The father and mother sinned against God by eating the forbidden fruit in the first generation, but their oldest son went further---he not only sinned against God, he was actually guilty of the first murder when he took up violence against his own brother. The broken relationship between Cain and Abel is a sobering reminder of the spreading consequence of sin. We do have a choice in the commitment of the sin, but we have no choice in the consequence of the sin---it is totally out of our control.

We are a part of the generation that frowns on any public discussion of sin, but passages like this remind us that we need to make sure we understand what is involved in sin--in the first generation and in the second. There are people here tonight making choices that will impact generations that are to come after them. None of us live as an island unto ourselves-what we do does affect others.

#### 1. SIN PASSES NATURALLY FROM PARENT TO CHILD.

Just how does sin pass from one generation to another? This is a question has occupied much of the attention of theologians in generations past. While there is no clear statement concerning the transmission of sin in this passage, there is an indication concerning the passing of sin from parent to child.

##### 1. The child inherits an inclination toward sin.

Cain and Able were born into a different world from the one in which their parents began their life. Adam and Eve established their home under the blessing of heaven in a world that was innocent. They enjoyed unhindered fellowship with God and each other day after day. But when they sinned and came under the curse of God because of their sin, everything was different. Before their sin there had been no inclination toward sin in them, but after their rebellion against God they had to live with a personal inclination toward sin.

When Eve conceived and brought forth Cain, he was born with this deep-seated inclination toward sin. He was already bent in that direction when he came forth from his mother's womb. This has been true of every child born in the Adam's family since then. Even though we have no record of any sinfulness in the life of Abel, we know and are sure that he shared the same bent toward sin. In fact, as we will notice later, it may have been

an awareness of the inclination that prompted him to bring the offering to God that he brought.

You and your children have the same bent! The sooner you recognize this the better.

2. The child is influenced toward sin by the deed of the parents.

The sin of Adam and Eve made it easier for Cain to do what he did. There was more at work than just the spiritual change that took place in the human family; environment and influence also became factors to be reckoned with. Sin in the parent always makes sin easier in the child. This is the reason that it is not uncommon to find father and son in jail for similar transgressions of the law. You must be mindful of the fact that your transgressions will grant permission to those who come after you to commit similar or worse transgressions.

## II. THE SIN CORRUPTS THE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

Evidently the Creator gave to the First Couple some instructions concerning worship before He expelled them from the Garden of Eden. This instruction would have included both the time and the manner for sacrifices to be presented before God. When Cain and Abel began to do what the Creator had commanded, the broken relationship between Cain and God began to be evident.

1. The unacceptable sacrifice.

Why was the offering brought by Able acceptable to God, and the one brought by Cain unacceptable? Since the Bible does not answer this question as clearly as we might desire, we cannot speak dogmatically concerning this. However, the text indicates that the heart of the problem was that Cain himself was not acceptable to God, so any worship that he offered to God was not acceptable. This seems to be the point of the confrontation

that God had with Cane. God did not question his sacrifice, but rather his attitude. "Why are you angry? And why is your countenance fallen? And if you do well, shall you not be accepted?" The problem was in Cain--not just in his sacrifice.

However could this indicate that the very offering he brought was a sign of his problem? Why did Abel offer a sacrifice that involved blood, but Cain one that did not involve blood? Could it be that God had given instruction about an offering for sin that included the idea of a blood sacrifice? If so, Abel was demonstrating his awareness of need before God when he offered the lamb as an offering. Cain was indicating that in his pride he felt no guilt before the Creator. So the sacrifice was unacceptable both because of the pride that was in his heart and the deficiency that was in the offering. There was no offering of life, no blood on the altar.

What you offer to God will say much about your attitude toward God and the condition of your heart. Those who refuse to approach God on the basis of the finished work of Christ upon the Cross are revealing a heart that is not right with God and cannot be made right with God.

## 2. The destructive anger.

God made much of the anger of Cain. "Why are you angry?" Who was he angry with? Obviously he was angry with God. He felt that God had not been fair with him in refusing his offering. Surely he deserved better treatment from the Creator. His anger was rooted in his pride, his inflated sense of importance before God.

The consequence of his anger was a bad case of the blues, even depression. God spoke of his "fallen countenance". The depression that he felt in his heart was evident on

his face. A "fallen face" is often the sign of an angry heart. I wonder how much of the world's depression is rooted in anger toward God?

Anger toward God can be a serious problem. It can be caused by a perceived wrong from the hand of God. Cain could not forget the way that the fire fell from heaven to consume the offering presented by Abel, and the way that his offering was left untouched by the fire. It was obvious that God had given to Abel something that he desired and felt that he deserved. Have such thoughts ever invaded your heart? Are you blaming God for some bad things that have come your way? Do you feel that God has passed you by?

One of the interesting things is the way anger toward God affects our relationship with our brother. While the anger of Cain was first against God, it expressed itself in violence toward Abel. Whether there was a conscious relationship between the two or not, we cannot be sure, but the relationship was there. Just as first generation sin affected the relationship between Adam and Eve, second generation sin affected the relationship between their sons. John uses this bad relationship between the two as an example of the attitude of the world toward those who seek to serve God acceptably in this broken world. Because they are wrong with God, they hate those who are associated with God. Since the Creator had accepted Abel, and it was easier to strike out at a human associated with God than it was to strike out at God, Cain made Able the object of his hatred and violence.

It would probably surprise us to learn how many problems in the brotherhood start with someone being angry with God. If you find yourself bearing anger against a brother, you might be helped if you traced it back to its beginning. Have you secretly been bearing anger toward God in your heart? You need to deal with it before it leads to something worse.

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### III. THE SECOND GENERATION SINNER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS OWN SIN.

We need to be clear about this point! The fact that it is a second generation sin does not lessen your responsibility before God. You will never be able to excuse yourself because of something that the generation before you may have done. The confrontation between Cain and God makes this point very clear.

#### 1. The sinner has a choice.

God told Cain, "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." The Creator likens sin to a monster crouching just outside of the door to your home. If you choose to pursue a course that is not right, then the monster will be able to master you. However, if you chose to pursue what is right, and to do what is pleasing to God. You will be able to master the monster. Whether sin masters you, or you master sin depends upon the choice that you make. The fact that you were influenced in your choice by decisions made by your parents, or fiends, or the environment in which you live, will not change this. You are still responsible for the choices that you make. Sin will still become your deadly master.

This is an error in the thinking of our modern society. The accepted approach today is that if your parents raised you in violence, then you are not responsible for any violence that you heap on your children. You are a victim in the eyes of our indulgent society. While I deplore what happened to you in your childhood, or what you think happened to you in your childhood, it still does not excuse you from the sinful choices that you make. You will still have to face the consequences of your sinful choices.

2. The sinner either masters the sin or is mastered by the sin.

I state it separately just for emphasis. We have new words for the mastery of sin in our day. We prefer medical categories so we speak of addiction, but God talks about mastery. It is helpful to remember that is the kind of language that Jesus used. He declared that those who committed acts of sin became the slaves of sin.

#### IV. THE SIN GROWS FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.

We are familiar with the first generation sin. Adam and Eve broke the law of God in rebellion and ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. While the sin was despicable in every way, the sin of Cain is worse. Whether it moving forward in a life, or moving from generation to generation, it is the nature of sin to grow.

1. The sin itself grows.

The sin of Cain was worse than the sin of Adam. Because he had opportunity to benefit from the tragic experience of his parents, he should have been more aware of the seriousness of sin. However this did not keep him from approaching God in the wrong spirit and with the wrong kind of sacrifice. When he was confronted with the seriousness of his sin, he did not heed the warning of God, but rather pursued a course of violence against his brother. His sin was worse than the sin of his parents. Sin grows in the second generation.

A little compromise with honesty by the father can become open flagrant dishonesty in the son. An unwholesome relationship in the marriage in the first generation can become spousal abuse in the second generation. A compromise with porn in the first generation can become open immorality in the second. Let us just suppose for a moment

that the character flaw, the favorite sin in your life, grows in the life of your children and grandchildren, what will it be? Sin in any generation is a serious matter.

## 2. The consequences of sin grow.

We know that Adam's sin caused God to expel him from the Garden of Eden, but life seems to have continued with some normalcy from that point. Cain finds himself driven even further from the Garden, and for his own protection, the Creator God marks him so that no one will take vengeance against him for Abel. Being driven further from the Garden may indicate that the place of sacrifice and worship was to be at the entrance to the Garden where God stationed the Cherubim with the flaming sword. If so, then he was shut out from making any meaningful approach to the Creator God in worship. Adam was under no such imposition.

If you want another example of second generation sin, the life of David will be a good case study. In the first generation it was David's sin with Bathsheba and his betrayal of Uriah. In the second generation the sin is incest as Ammon rapes his sister Tamar, and violence against brother as Absalom slays Ammon in defense of his sister's honor. The consequences in the second generation were also worse as David's sin reproduced itself in the rebellion against his rule by his own son, Absalom.

This tragic chapter from the life of the first family must be read as something more than just ancient history. We need to hear it as a word of warning concerning sin. If we have become lax in our attitude toward sin, whether our sin or the sin of others, we need to repent. Sin cannot lead to anything good. We need to humble ourselves before the holy Creator God and petition him for mercy. As far as we know, Cain never did this. As far as we know, Cain is in Hades awaiting the final day of judgment, waiting the day when he



will finally be consigned to the lake of fire. At least your sin can have a different ending.

You can also prevent a third generation of sin as you seek the face of the Lord and his

mercy. Let's do it at once--even tonight!