

Cain's religion is still with us

Cain and Abel are still with us. There are still two ways of approaching God. There are still the spiritual children of Cain. 'I am a churchman, I come to such-and-such church, I repent of my sins, I am doing my best, I am really quite a decent person'. It is the religion of Cain still!

1. Self confident

1. **Cain was very self-confident.** He became angry that God had not received his worship. ^{□1} We like to save ourselves in our own way. We like to be right with God by our good deeds, and present our labours to God. Though Cain was a sinner he thought he could be acceptable to God by his good works, and rejected any idea that he needed an atonement.

□1 4:5b

2. His own way

2. **He chose his own way of approaching God.** Abel was following the hint that God had given in Genesis 3:21. Cain's way was purely self-invented.

3. Ritual to evade God

3. **Cain's religion used ritual as a means of evading God,** but his heart was not right with God. His sacrifice was a routine to make him feel safe but he had no real interest in the **LORD** and His ways with mankind.

4. Hostility

4. **Cain was characterized by hostility against God.** ^{□1} He resented his treatment by God. This is the way it is with all of the seed of the serpent. They are at enmity with God ^{□2 □3}, and need reconciliation with God. Yet God offers a way of salvation to Cain. 'If you do well, is there not a lifting up?', says God. ^{□4} It is an offer of forgiveness. A 'lifting up' means forgiveness. 'If you do well there is forgiveness, relief'. But Cain was not interested.

□1 4:6

□2

Romans 5:10; 8:7

□3

Corinthians 5:20

□4 4:7

5. Enslaved to sin

5. **Because Cain rejected God's way of salvation he became enslaved to sin.** God warned him. '*Sin is crouching at the door*'. ^{□1} It is like a wild animal ready to pounce and devour us. Cain finds sin to be more powerful than he imagined.

□1 4:7

6. Hatred of God's people

6. **This all comes out in bitter hatred of God's people.** Cain pretended to be friendly with Abel, invited him to a lonely spot, and killed him. Abel had not done anything against Cain, but Cain's guilty conscience causes persecution. The 'seed of the serpent' will always be against those accepted by God. The greater the guilt, the greater the persecution. True faith rouses the hostility of the world. Cain did not like it that Abel was accepted by God but he himself was not. It led him to jealousy and murderous feelings within his heart towards Abel.

Cain has a kind of religion! He feels it would be useful to have God's blessing in his life. He wants to have dealings with God. Yet he is not acceptable to God because he will not come humbly, and in faith. Abel's faith is the only way. Man-made religion always leads to hatred and animosity towards Christians. Faith leads to righteous deeds (^{□1}, '*his brother's deeds were righteous*') but righteousness only rouses resentment in the heart of Cain. There will always be this hatred and jealousy in the 'seed of the serpent', even though it can be covered over with a lot of superficial respectability and niceness.

□1 1 John 3:12

God's response to Cain

What is the attitude of God towards Cain? It is frank and straightforward, and yet it is full of love.

God tells Cain his sin cannot be hidden. ^{□1}

□1 4:9

• Tells him his sin

Cain tries to hide it. '*I do not know*', he says, '*Am I my brother's keeper?*' But the blood cries from the ground. ^{□1} God knows all about it. Murder is a

□1 4:10

very serious sin. Blood cries out. Sin cannot be covered up from God. It can be hidden from people, but not from God. Cain has probably buried Abel in some lonely spot, but the blood still cries from the ground. Our sins cannot be hidden from God. They go on crying out until they have been dealt with. They can only be dealt with by faith and confession.

• **God banishes Cain to a different part of the world**

Before the fall Adam had toiled the ground easily. Then it became harder. ¶¹ Now Cain is excluded from working from the ground at all, and is banished to a different part of God's world. He becomes a wanderer. God is a holy God, and sin brings God's displeasure. Sin will find us out. It may be covered for a long while but eventually it comes out. ¶²

¶¹ 3:18

¶² 4:11-12

• **Cain's fear**

Despite what Cain has done there is mercy for him. He is in an agony about his punishment and fears that he too will be killed. ¶¹ He does not fear sin but he fears the consequences of sin. The killer fears being killed.

¶¹ 4:13-14

• **God promises to protect Cain**

But God says He will protect Cain and keep him alive, giving him further opportunity to come to faith. God ordains some kind of sign to prevent Cain from being killed. We do not know what the 'sign' was. Some think it was a mark of some kind on Cain himself. Others – and I agree with them² – think it is some sign in the external world, such as an intensified fear of killing another human being.

• **A way open to return**

God is not willing that any should perish, and leaves the way open for Cain to come back to Him. Perhaps Cain might believe after all.

• **Cain's response**

Despite the opportunity given him, Cain '*went away from the presence of the LORD*'. ¶¹ He had salvation offered to him, but he went away. He begins to live a pagan life. He marries. He builds a city. He lives without reference to God. There is no evidence that God ever spoke to him again.

¶¹ 4:16

• **The only way to know God – admitting our need**

God still waits, still gives us a chance. He asks us to admit our need. The way of salvation is the same; it is to believe in a substitute. We can never progress beyond that. It is the only way to know God.

Footnotes

1 The Samaritan Pentateuch reads 'Let us go into the field'. This is supported by ancient versions and is apparently original.

2 The word 'sign' elsewhere mainly refers to an external event (¶¹, and elsewhere).

¶¹ Exodus 10:2

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