

Overcoming Bitterness: Avoiding the Way of Cain (Gen. 4:1-8)

I. DILIGENTLY REFUSING TO ALLOW A “ROOT SYSTEM” OF BITTERNESS TO BE IN US

- A. We are called to be diligent in detecting and resisting a root of bitterness in our heart. We must be intentional and deliberate in asking the Holy Spirit for insight of this in our hearts because we do not naturally detect the often unperceived root system of bitterness in our hearts.

¹⁵ ***Looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled... (Heb. 12:15)***

1. ***Root of bitterness:*** grows under the surface long before it is detected. Bitterness in the heart is like cancer in the body. A little undetected will soon be deadly if not dealt with.
2. ***Causing trouble (4-fold):*** emotionally, physically, relationally and spiritually (by causing our heart to disconnect from the vibrancy of the Holy Spirit).
3. ***Many defiled:*** bitterness is passed on and defiles others who then have the 4-fold trouble
4. ***Springs up:*** when the fruits of bitterness surface we will experience some of the trouble
5. ***Falling short:*** of God’s grace is to not experience the full power of it on our heart

- B. Jude warns us to refuse the lifestyle of three types of false teachers in the Church as portrayed by Cain, Balaam and Korah. The way of Cain leads us to live with a root of bitterness or the spirit of murder which is first manifest as anger and jealousy (Mt. 5:21-26; 1 Jn. 3:11-15).

⁴ ***For certain men have crept in unnoticed...ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness...Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. (Jude 4, 11)***

II. CAIN’S BATTLE WITH BITTERNESS: 4 QUESTIONS AND 6 PRINCIPLES (GEN. 4:2-12)

- A. Abel worked with the herds and Cain with the crops (v. 2). Cain sought to worship the Lord on his terms instead of God’s. God’s justice required the shedding of blood to gain forgiveness of sins. Therefore, God rejected Cain’s offering and worship, yet He accepted Abel’s.

² ***Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground...3 Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. 4 Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock...the Lord respected Abel and his offering, 5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. (Gen. 4:2-5)***

²² ***Without shedding of blood there is no remission. (Heb. 9:22)***

- B. Cain’s wrong bitter response to God and Abel is seen in becoming angry and sad. When God told Cain about his unacceptable sacrifice, instead of repenting with humility, he grew defensive and angry. The root system of bitterness was working in him.

⁵ *Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. (Gen. 4:5)*

- C. The root system of bitterness is founded on the belief of not getting what we deserve. People fall into bitterness usually because they feel either overlooked, not understood or mistreated related to money, honor or abuse (physically, emotionally, etc.).
- D. Of course, we do not really want from God what we deserve. Gratitude towards the Lord is the foundational attitude necessary in overcoming bitterness. It is the height of injustice to receive God's free mercy for our sin without extending it to others.

⁴⁷ *Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much (gratitude). But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little. (Lk. 7:47)*

- E. God sought to help Cain avoid the root of bitterness and its disastrous result in his life (v. 6-7). In a pastoral way, God asked Cain two questions then spoke four principles to him. Cain was the first man in history to wrestle with a root of bitterness. God was speaking to all His people through history in recording this pastoral conversation with Cain.

⁶ *So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." (Gen. 4:6-7)*

- F. God asked Cain two questions, "Why are you angry? Why are you sad?"

1. **Question #1:** Cain was angry or offended with God and Abel
2. **Question #2:** Cain was sad or disappointed and filled with self pity

- G. God spoke 4 principles to Cain to work through based on how he answered the 2 questions.

1. **Principle #1:** if you do well, will you not be accepted? If Cain did well by following through with his righteous choices then he was assured of gaining a new start in God with favor and blessing. It is never too later to start again because of God's mercy.
2. **Principle #2:** if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. If yielded to the root of bitterness operates in many stages as it grows like cancer spreading to other areas of our emotional life. To live with bitterness is to live with a toxic heart which dulls our spirit.
3. **Principle #3:** Sin's desire is for you. Satan wants our weaknesses to escalate to wickedness. Satan adds a demonic energy to our weakness so that we act-it-out giving him more access.
4. **Principle #4:** you are responsible to rule over it

- H. Cain talked with Abel instead of God in the midst of his turmoil with his root of bitterness.
- ⁸ *Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. (Gen. 4:8)*
- I. Cain did not understand the consequences of his actions. God asked Cain 2 more questions then revealed 2 principles of God's discipline on his circumstances and relationship that were designed to discipline his heart to help him respond to God. We are to apply this to our lives.
- ⁹ *The Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" 10 He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. 11 So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be...." (Gen. 4:9-12)*
1. **Question #1:** Where is Abel? What are the consequences on others because of your sin?
 2. **Question #2:** What have you done? What are the consequences on your life?
 3. **Principle #1:** You are cursed from the earth with more difficult circumstances.
 4. **Principle #2:** You shall be a fugitive and a vagabond with more difficult relationships. Sin causes people to retreat in isolation (so as to sin in private) or to hide in their shame.

III. JESUS CONNECTED ANGER TO THE SPIRIT OF MURDER

²¹ *You have heard..., "You shall not murder"...²² I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother...shall be in danger of the judgment...²⁵ Agree with your adversary quickly...lest your adversary deliver you to the judge...and you are thrown into prison...²⁶ You will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny. (Mt. 5:21-26)*

- A. We are in danger of the judgment because anger has a domino effect in our emotions. As it grows it leads us to greater acts of sin and bondage in the future that lead to God's judgment.
- B. Bitterness causes our heart to be in prison as *debtors of gratitude to God* because it is injustice to receive God's mercy for our adversarial actions toward Him without extending it to others.
- C. We come to a "spirit of agreement" by relying on Jesus as the third Person in the relationship to provide us with the honor, money and protection for what was in His will for our lives.
- D. We quickly "settle out of court" which speaks of getting free from bitterness before allowing emotional pressures escalate. Our hearts are injured in a far worse way by bitterness than by the person that opposed us. Jesus did not appeal to the nobility of integrity but to our "sanctified selfishness" by avoiding the prison of toxic emotions.

IV. THE WAY TO REFUSE THE WAY OF CAIN: OPERATE IN THE OPPOSITE SPIRIT

- A. Jesus taught us the way to avoid the “way of Cain” is to operate in the opposite spirit of murder or bitterness (anger) by loving those we are in an adversarial relationship with in a practical way. This includes three specific activities: blessing them, doing good to them and praying for them.
- ⁴⁴ ***Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you... (Mt. 5:44)***
- ¹⁴ ***Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:14, 21)***
- B. Our heart is not safe if we only avoid evil without doing good by acting in the opposite spirit. Loving our adversaries is not an option but is a necessity that brings our heart issues to the surface. If we neglect to do this, then we will live with a “residue of bitterness.”
1. ***We must bless them:*** which includes speaking kindly to them personally (instead of venting) and in conversations about them (instead of exposing their sin).
 2. ***We must do good:*** which includes acts of kindness (especially without them knowing it).
 3. ***We must pray for them:*** instead of ignoring them in our prayer life. Offering 90 second prayers several times a day a couple times a week will dynamically change our heart.
- C. When I have prayed for those I have an adversarial relationship with, I discover a resistance in my heart that forces me to go “above the storm” to see big the picture of truth.
1. ***Eternal friends:*** our greatest adversaries in the Body will be our cherished friends forever in the age-to-come. It softens our heart to see the temporary nature of the conflict.
 2. ***Entrusting ourselves to the Lord:*** seeing that no one has the authority to stop our God-ordained destiny. Saul could not stop David from his destiny. Only David can stop David.
- D. The false teachers in Jude’s day did not physically kill people but lived in bitterness and anger.
- ¹¹ ***We should love one another 12 not as Cain who... murdered his brother. Why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous...15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer... (1 Jn. 3:11-15)***