

Paul tells us when speaking about the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians chapter 10: "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come." So in other words, the Bible is written for us, Christians, to teach us. To teach us what it means to walk after God. And that's also true of our reading, our Old Testament reading for today, in Genesis chapter 4. Because Cain gives us an example of what we should not do, an example of the danger of sin and the danger of giving into the temptation of sin. So we should pay attention, then, so we learn what God has to teach us here in this reading.

Because at this point in Genesis chapter 4, it's been a long time since the fall into sin. Approximately 130 years, to be exact. Because Genesis chapter 5 tells us that Adam was 130 when Seth was born, and the end of Genesis chapter 4 tells us that Seth was born shortly after Abel was murdered. So it's a very reasonable assumption to say that it's been at least 130 years. And in that time, Adam and Eve have had many children, two of whom are Cain and Abel. And Abel has become a keeper of sheep to watch over the family flock, while Cain is following in the footsteps of his father and became a farmer tending to the ground. And in the course of time, the Bible says, both of them brought an offering to the Lord. Abel brought some of the firstborn of his flock along with their fat portions to be burned as a sacrifice, while Cain brought along some of the produce of the ground, perhaps wheat or barley or something like that. In both of these cases, they were giving thanks to the Lord for the things that he had given them, giving thanks for the bounty and the produce of that year. But the Bible tells us that God accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's. Why is that the case? Hebrews chapter 11 verse 4 tells us that: "By faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts." So in other words, Abel had faith in God. And Cain had fallen into some kind of sin. We're not told exactly what sin he fell into. Perhaps it was anger. Perhaps it was jealousy. That really doesn't matter. What does matter is that because of this sin, he didn't have faith in the way that his brother did. And so he became angry when he saw that Abel was accepted. Why didn't God choose me as well? But now he's left in this situation. Which way is he going to turn? Where is he going to go? What is he supposed to do now?

God speaks to Cain in that moment and brings to him the Word of God, calling him away from his sin, calling him to come back to the Lord. God says in verse 6: "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?" In other words, God is saying, "Examine yourself, Cain. Why do you feel the way that you do? Why are you going down this path? Confess your sin! Confess the thing that you have done. Recognize it for the sin that it is." And Christians, I think very often if we do the same thing--ask questions about why we are doing something or about why we want to do something--we too would see the truth of what they are. We too would find a resistance to the influence of sin.

But God continues: "If you do well," he says, "will you not be accepted?" In other words, Cain, do the right thing here. Repent. Turn away from that sin. Do well and turn back towards the Lord. And when that happens, you will find acceptance. Because God is seeking to forgive Cain here. He's not trying to punish him. He's not trying to drive him away. He wants Cain to come back. And so he is saying: "If you do the right thing, turn away from the sin, and repent, you will find my forgiveness." Because God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. This is what he wants to do.

But he goes on and says: "If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door." Cain, if you don't repent, if you don't turn away from this thing that you are doing, it's only going to get worse. Because sin is waiting for you, crouching at the door. And if you don't repent, if you don't turn away from that sin, things are going to get worse and worse and worse. Because that's how sin is. Sin grows. It builds on itself. One thing quickly leads to another. It's like running downhill. It's so easy to do as opposed to running uphill. When we give into one sin, another sin is waiting right there at our door to overcome us, so that we fall deeper and deeper away from God.

God continues and says: "Its desire is contrary to you." Cain, sin wants to rule you. It wants to be the master. It wants to be king. It wants to be God to you. Because it doesn't want to be restrained. It doesn't want to have to be put down. It wants to do whatever it wants to do. And the more and more you give into that sin, God says, the more and more it's going to lead you away from me. So don't allow it to do that! Or as God says, "You must rule over it." Resist it! Fight back against it! Repent, and you will find forgiveness for your sins.

And Cain in this moment in Genesis chapter 4 has a choice before him. Is he going to resist, repent of his sins, and turn back towards the Lord? Or is he going to continue down the path he's going? Which way will he go? Christians, how often do we find ourselves in a similar situation as Cain? How often do we find ourselves having fallen into some sin or are tempted to fall into some sin and were left wondering what should we do? We too have a choice in this moment. Are we going to resist that sin, to repent of it and to turn back towards God? Or are we going to continue in that sin and fall into deeper and worse sins than before? And Christians, in Jesus Christ, you do actually have a choice. You can choose to resist that sin, because in Christ you have been set free from sin. In Christ you are no longer bound to sin. In Christ you are a new creation. Apart from Christ, you don't have that kind of a choice. Apart from the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, you can't do anything but sin. But in Christ, you can resist. You can fight back against those sins and choose to follow after God. Now, notice that I did not say here that that choice would be easy. Very often when we have to choose against a sin, that's going to be the hardest thing in the world for us to do. Because we're going to want to keep going the way of sin. We don't want to go the way we should go. But we still have that choice in Christ. Because just as Christ resisted temptation, we too can fight back against it and follow after God.

Because sin is such a dangerous thing, Christians. Do we understand just how dangerous it actually is? When we don't fight back against sin, when we give into it, it quickly becomes greater and greater until it turns into something that we never would've even imagined. Cain is such an excellent example of this. Because Cain's anger continued into more and more sin. He didn't want to listen to God. He didn't want to repent of that sin. And so anger quickly became murder. Murder quickly became lying. Lying quickly became a hardened heart, one that wasn't sorry for anything that he had done. And because of that, he was afraid for the rest of his life, afraid by building walls around himself to protect him away from the world. And Cain's sin also brought about a whole generation of sin, because his descendants fell further and further away from God, so that by the time he got down to seven generations later, they didn't even know who the Lord was anymore. That sin of Cain became something so great, because sin builds on itself and becomes worse and worse and worse.

Christians, we see this happen in our lives too, don't we? Because think of how sin can so easily get ahold of us. Think of an example like this. Let's say we decide to skip church one Sunday morning. We think that we've got something else to do that's more important at the time. Or we think that we're just too tired. We want to sleep in, so that we can go to work refreshed on Monday morning. Pretty soon one Sunday turns into two. Two Sundays turns into three. Three becomes four, and then five, and before you know it, you're aren't going to church at all. That sin has grown upon itself and become something that maybe we never even would've imagined. Or think of it this way, with anger. Maybe we're angry at somebody, because they did something against us. And we feel that we're justified in that anger for whatever it may be. But pretty soon, that anger turns into hatred. That hatred turns into a grudge. And that grudge leads us to not want to forgive them, to refuse to forgive them as God has first forgiven us. In that way, sin has become something far greater than we ever would've imagined. Or one more example. We'll say, "I'll get to my praying later. I'm a little busy at the moment. I'll just get to it sometime later today." But pretty soon "I'll get to it later" turns into fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes turns into tomorrow. Tomorrow turns into next week. And before we know it, we aren't praying at all. Sin has a way of growing like that, of becoming something bigger than we ever would've imagined. And that's why it has to be resisted, Christians. That's why we have to fight back against it. Because as John Owen tells us, you must kill sin, or it will kill you.

But thanks be to God the Father that we can fight back against sin through his Son, Jesus Christ! Because when we fall into sin, Christians, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, who is the propitiation for our sins. When we fall into sin, Jesus will forgive us and lift us up again. And by the gift of his Holy Spirit, we can confess our sins. We can say that we are miserable sinners and mean it. And when we do that, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God wants to forgive us, and he is so ready to do that in his Son, Jesus Christ. And because of that, we are forgiven and renewed, a new creation in God, one who can resist the impulses of sin, one which can resist the temptations to sin. We can say "no" to sin in Jesus Christ and "yes" to God through the working of his Holy Spirit.

So Christians, as John tells us, we must not be like Cain who was a murderer, who murdered his own brother. Rather, we are called to be like Christ, who himself resisted temptation, who himself fought back against the temptation to sin, so that we would be forgiven, renewed, and able to follow after God. Follow him, Christians, and resist the temptation to sin, because you belong to God forever.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have forgiven us our sins in your Son, Jesus Christ, and made us a new creation by your Holy Spirit. Help us always to resist the temptation to sin, so that we may follow after you, doing what is pleasing in your sight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.