

RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS

One of the marks of maturity is the responsibility we are willing and able to assume. When God created man, He assigned responsibility to him. In a general sense, all of God's grace (His gifts to us) come with responsibility. Adam was given dominion over the physical world and he was to care for it. The records of events in the "physical world" in the Old Testament are many times types of things in the spiritual realm and we can find parallels in the New Testament. In this example, we see a parallel of God's gift of salvation to us in the Kingdom of God and find our responsibility to share that good news with others as Jesus commissioned to "go and make disciples of all nations."

In many ways the caring for the physical world can be much easier than having to deal with people. Most people who work in any organization will readily admit that the tasks of their jobs are relatively easy; however, the problems of dealing with other people are severe. You've probably heard someone say, "This would be a great place to work if it weren't for the people." Many times such frustrations come from not understanding our responsibility for other people. In the Word of God we can find God's prescribed way to express (both verbally and in deed) our proper responsibility for one another. For example, Jesus said "Love one another, even as I have loved you." Paul wrote, "Owe no man anything except to love one another."

The Bible describes the consequences of sin in the life of mankind. Adam and Eve had children. We are told initially about two sons: Cain and Abel. When Cain was born, Eve declared that he was gift from God. Life and the continuation of life is truly God's gift. The birth of a baby is truly miraculous for man cannot create life. The fact Eve acknowledged God as the Source of Life is significant. Even though the truly close fellowship and communion with God had been broken by sin, there was still a trust and reliance upon God that was possible.

The account is quite sketchy regarding the details of other children born to Adam and Ever. We are told of only a few; however, we can assume that many others were born to them in the several hundred years they lived.

That God was real to this first family is also evident in the account regarding Cain and Abel offering sacrifices to God.

And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. (Gen 4:3-5).

Down through the intervening centuries, people have speculated about why Cain's offering was not acceptable to God. One school of thought is that it was rejected because it was bloodless and God had already established the standard of shedding of blood as a covering for sin when He provided Adam and Eve with tunics of skin of an animal. If this is the reason, then the real sin of Cain was in his deciding for himself what would be acceptable. Such action is in essence identical to the original sin of "eating of fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Anytime we decide for ourselves what is right or wrong, rather than look to God for the answer, we will likely be wrong.

Others have suggested that the problem with Cain's offering was not because of the nature of the sacrifice; but because it was not offered in faith and sincerity, but in a formal and hypocritical manner. In other words, the fault was in the heart of Cain. In the ensuing events, we can safely conclude that Cain's attitude was certainly not one of humility and repentance. The writer to the Hebrews (Chapter 11, verse 4) saw that the major difference in the offering of Cain and Abel was that Abel offered his by faith. This would imply that Cain's action was nothing more than a formality.

Whatever the reason, we can learn from this example of Cain. We should not treat our worship of God as something we decide for ourselves as to what is appropriate and just ignore God's wishes. Also, if we know what is acceptable practices in worship, we should never treat our worship as a mere formality and expect to be pleasing to God. Without faith it is impossible to please Him.

Cain's response to God's rejection of his offering was that of anger and agitation. It could be seen on his face.

So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? "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) God cared enough to confront Cain. This word from God was a warning to Cain. It was almost as if

God were saying to Cain, “Do you really want to know why things are going so badly – just look at what you are doing. If it is right and for the right motives, then you will be accepted.”

There is also a warning that if we do not do the things that are right and start compromising, we then open ourselves to domination by sin. It is always nearby, lying in wait to harm, attack and capture those created in God’s image. We have a responsibility to overcome the temptation and the tempter. Through Jesus Christ and the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit we can do just that.

What kind of person was Cain? Did he learn from this correcting discipline?

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)

How many times do we try to blame someone else for our failures? The faithfulness of Abel made Cain’s unfaithfulness seem more apparent. Cain must have been thinking that the standard of comparison was another person; therefore, if he could eliminate the other person then he would be OK. We see this type behavior being displayed daily as people tear down one another in a feeble effort to make themselves look better.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?" And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. "So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. "When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth." (Gen 4:9-12)

Everything we do is open to God Who see everything. We have talked about our responsibility for the physical world and for other people; however, it is important for us to know not only that we are responsible FOR something but that we are also responsible TO Someone. God holds us accountable! We should not be surprised to see Cain being held responsible for murder; however, we are also accountable for lesser things. We will be held accountable for every idle word.

When Cain was confronted with his lack of responsibility, he did not do the very thing that would have literally saved him. He did not confess His sin, but denied it. Not only did he deny the deed, but he also denied any responsibility for his brother’s well being. The sarcastic and cynical query of “Am I my brother’s keeper?” speaks volumes about Cain’s character and attitude. Such attitudes which are prevalent today do not make for good citizenship in any type of community.

You would think that after Cain’s sentence had been pronounced that he would repent and be remorseful for what he had done. That was NOT his action nor his attitude.

And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! "Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me." (Gen 4:13-14)

Cain was totally selfish. He was thinking only of himself. Notice the use of “me” and “my” and “I” in the above passage. There is nothing so indicative of the old sin nature of man than the concentration on self. It is a curious thing that the punishment for self-centeredness was that Cain was to be isolated from family and community and separated from God. Many self-centered people do not really like themselves. However, they need to have constant attention from others to provide some sense of self-worth. His sentence of isolation was more than he could bear. In his isolation, the only person to provide feedback to him was himself and he knew too much about his own true nature.

In 1st John we find that “perfect love cast out fear.” Cain was filled with fear because he lacked the ability to love unselfishly. His fear was like paranoia – very strong. “Somebody is going to kill me” was his thought. In his own conscience he was condemning himself to a death sentence; however, his self-centered mind would not accept the justice of the sentence.

And the LORD said to him, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him. Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. (Gen 4:15-16)

Even as God punishes those who sin and are unrepentant, His merciful nature is evident. To allay Cain’s morbid fear of being murdered, God gave him a sign or a mark. We don’t know what was the “mark of Cain” but we do know that God continues to care for and love us even though He has to chastize and discipline us. That the kind of love that is truly amazing.