



BY GREG LAURIE

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER

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I read in the paper about a man who was hitchhiking across the country. He wanted to write down all of his experiences on the journey and put them in a memoir that he was going to call *The Kindness of America*. He was going to tell about all of his adventures and conversations with wonderful strangers who were willing to reach out and help a hitchhiker. The problem was that he got shot in a drive-by attack while he was having lunch. He wasn't killed—just wounded. He thought a guy was coming to pick him up, but instead the guy just randomly shot him and drove off. So much for the kindness of America.

It just goes to show that man is not basically good. When are we going to figure that out? If you believe that man is basically good, then you have more faith than I do because if history shows us nothing else, it shows us that man is basically bad.

Why is mankind the way that it is? Why do we do the things that we do? Why are we always fighting and warring and creating conflict? We can get a lot of insight into this problem by looking at Genesis 4. I am talking of course about Cain and Abel:

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD." Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel.

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 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.

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." (Genesis 4:1-7)

The Book of Genesis can be divided into three sections.

- **Chapters 1–2: Generation**

- **Chapters 3–11: Degeneration**

- **Chapters 12–50: Regeneration**

In Genesis 3, we saw the beginning of the sin of mankind, when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit. In chapter 4, we see the progress and results of sin, and we realize that it spreads quickly, and it is highly contagious.

Things had started happily enough. Adam and Eve were expecting their first child. Understand this was the first pregnancy, so even though they were expecting, they didn't know what to expect. Adam was looking at Eve and saying, "Girl, what are you eating? Pickles and ice cream? What is happening? And why are you knitting little socks all the time? For the animals? What is going on with you?"

The day comes and the first son is born and they name him Cain. *Cain* means "acquired." In light of God's promise of a deliverer (see Genesis 3:15), maybe Eve thought that this was the One—the Messiah who would put things to rights. This phrase "acquired" could also be translated, "I have gotten him." So, she was very excited. But he wasn't the Messiah. He wasn't the deliverer. He was going to turn out to be a murderer.

Later, a second child is born and they name him Abel. *Abel* means "frail." So this would suggest that the physical effects of sin were already becoming apparent in the human race. It would appear that Cain, the firstborn, was strong, and then along comes Abel, and he is not as strong as his brother. He is a little frailer. That is kind of a drag—to go through life with the

name *Frail*. “Hey, what is your name?” “Frail. But here is my brother, Acquired.” That probably made him feel a little inferior. (Give careful thought to what you name your kids.)

So, judging by these names, it would appear that Adam and Eve might have favored Cain over Abel. This can be a problem. As a parent, you need to avoid favoritism at all costs because it can produce problems that will carry on into the adult years of your children. Later in Genesis, we find that this played out in the lives of Jacob and Esau. Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob. That created a feud and a conflict that lasted for generations. And then, ironically, when Jacob became a father, he perpetuated that favoritism. He ended up favoring Joseph over his other sons, giving him a special coat of many colors.

One thing you quickly learn is that if you give stuff to your kids, you should give them all the same things. If I give a gift to one of my granddaughters, I have to get them all the same one. And I don’t even vary it. If I give them dolls with different hair colors, they always fight for the one they don’t have. So everything must be the same.

Anyway, it would appear that Cain was favored over his brother Abel. One day they brought their offerings to the Lord. God accepted Abel’s offering, but not Cain’s. The weakling’s offering was accepted while the superstar’s was rejected. Why? Verse 5 says that God did not respect Cain and his offering. It reminds us that we’ve got to do the right thing in the right way.

Now, why is it that one brother walked with God and one did not? It’s hard to say. Why is it in a Christian home you raise all your children in the same way, and one goes on to serve the Lord and one goes off the rails, and you feel you are a failure as a parent? This happens. You do the best you can do and train up your children in the way that they should go, but ultimately it is in the hands of God. Especially when they enter into their adult years.

Both Cain and Abel were raised in the same godly home, but one turned out to be a false worshipper. The other turned out to be a true worshipper. But why was one accepted over the other? The answer is found in Hebrews 11:4. "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." The Bible tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (see Hebrews 11:6). So as far as God is concerned, motive is everything.

It is all about the why. Why do we do what we do? Why do we pray? Why do we worship? Why do we give? God looks at the why. One day when I stand before the judgment seat of Christ, it will not be about quantity. It will be about quality. It won't be about how much I did as much as it will be about why I did what I did. The Bible says that we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and every man's work will be tried to see what sort it is. And what that means is God is looking at the motive of it all.

I can come into a worship service, and I can make a lot of noise, and I can draw a lot of attention to myself, and others will think I am some super-worshipper. But in reality, it may all be about me. I might even be thinking, "Look at me: super-worshipper. I look so good." You know what? God may be looking at that person who isn't hardly even raising their voice, but their heart is totally toward God.

So this was the problem. Cain was full of himself. There was no faith in the gift he was bringing to the Lord. So God accepts the offering of Abel, but He does not accept the offering of Cain.

This ticks Cain off. You can see that Cain is getting angry just by looking at his face: "Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell" (Genesis 4:5). He was burning with anger. God could see where this was headed and He lovingly reaches out to Cain with this question: "Why are you angry?" In other words, "Hey buddy, what

is up here? What are you so upset about. Why are you so mad?" God is trying to draw him out. Here is what Cain should have said: "I am angry because You accepted my brother's offering and not mine, and it is not fair. I am proud and I am jealous and I am envious." If he would have said that, it would have been an admission of the truth. But, interestingly, Cain does not respond to God. He evades. So God gives him a stern warning: "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" (Genesis 4:7).

Sin lies at your door. A better translation is, "Sin is crouching at your door." In Chinese, it is "Crouching sin, hidden danger." Just kidding. That sounds like the title of a martial arts film. But here is what God is saying: "Sin is lying at your door like a crouching beast, but you need to rule over it. Buddy, listen. You are flirting with disaster. You'd better throw the brakes on because sin is like a wild beast, and it is ready to pounce." But clearly Cain was not doing well at this point.

I read an interesting book a number of years ago called *Death in the Long Grass*. It was written by a big-game hunter. He tells the incredible stories of not just hunting lions but of a particular time when lions were hunting people. There was a certain group of lions that got a taste for human blood. They would come into the camps and they would step over several men without even waking them and find their intended prey. They could never figure out why the lions chose who they chose. But the lions would pick these people up, kill them immediately, and then drag them out—without waking up anyone else. This book pointed out that one large cat in particular killed over 100 people. It also mentioned that a charging lion can cover 100 yards in just three seconds. It is just an amazing illustration of what the devil is like. A lion is a magnificent, powerful, and very frightening creature. If you have ever been close to one, you know what I am talking about. They have the capability to quickly take you out if they want to.

The Bible likens the devil to a lion. 1 Peter 5:8 says, "Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" (NLT). The devil is always looking for trouble.

In Job 1:7, we have an interesting story of the angels presenting themselves before God, and Satan is among them. The Lord asks Satan, "Where have you been?" The devil responds, "I have been patrolling the earth, watching everything that's going on" (NLT). That is so creepy, isn't it? He is just going back and forth like a lion in his cage. "What kind of trouble can I make? What havoc can I wreak? What life can I ruin? What fool is going to play my game? Because there is always someone."

Do you ever watch those nature shows? There are the zebras and the antelopes moving together, and the lion is chasing them. They are all running. Who gets caught? It is always that lagger. Right? The one that is about 10 feet behind the others. Boom. Party's over. He is dead meat.

It is usually that way in life too. The person who breaks off from other believers in fellowship is most susceptible. When you isolate yourself from the church, you put yourself in a place of vulnerability.

Another way you can give the devil a foothold is by being angry with people. Listen to this warning in Ephesians 4:26–27: "Don't sin by letting anger control you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil" (NLT). You see, sin is crouching at your door too. And for some it is already across the threshold. Now, what that particular sin is may vary from person to person. One person is not necessarily weak in the same area that another person is. So we have to be careful. We have to keep our guard up. And when Satan knocks at my door, I say, "Jesus, would you mind getting that?" I am no match for the

devil. I need Jesus to give me strength. I need to stay as close to the Lord as I possibly can. And so do you.

In Ephesians 6, a lot is said about the various pieces of armor we are to wear in this spiritual battle. The helmet of salvation. The breastplate of righteousness. The shield of faith. Having your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. But before any of that is said, we are told in Ephesians 6:10, “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” So, even before you put your armor on, realize you need to stay as close to the Lord as you possibly can. If we are to master sin, we must first be mastered by Him who mastered it—surrender ourselves to God.

Cain did not do that. He was not mastered by God, so he became enslaved by the devil. We see sin mastering Cain in many ways. We don’t know exactly what caused him to murder his brother, but I think it is safe to say envy and jealousy played a part. You see, Cain jealously watched his brother’s sacrifice be accepted. Shakespeare called envy “the green-eyed monster.” It is a monster that can strangle you.

Envy is not just to admire something. Sometimes we will say, “I envy you. You are going on vacation.” We don’t necessarily mean that in the worst sense of the word. It is not a bad thing to admire something that someone else has, or perhaps a relationship or experience they have. A literal definition of envy is a malignant or hostile feeling. So it is not just “Hey man, you have a lot. Wow, that is really great. I wish I had that.” No. It’s actually “I am angry that you have those things, and I don’t have them.”

We don’t necessarily envy someone that we perceive as greater than us—the billionaires, famous musicians, or celebrities. We know we likely are never going to be on their level in terms of talent or opportunity. No, we tend to envy those we think of as peers. Aristotle said, “Envy grows naturally in a relationship

between equals.” Envy has been defined as a small-town sin. It breeds in proximity. We don’t envy someone that is huge and successful. We envy our neighbor. We envy a brother, a sister, a coworker. We envy someone who has worked at the job as long as we have worked, and they get the promotion, and we don’t.

When two men meet for the first time, it’s not long before one of them asks, “So what do you do?” The other one answers and then asks the same thing. Here is what they really want to know: *How successful are you?* They are like two dogs sizing each other up. Sometimes even preachers envy. Trust me. When two pastors meet each other, it’s “Hey bro. Praise the Lord. Where is your church?” Here is what we really want to ask: *How big is it?* People are people.

Listen, unchecked envy can be a major problem. Envy in the case of Cain led to the murder of his brother Abel.

I heard the story of a fisherman who never needed a top for the basket he carried his crabs in. Someone asked him, “Don’t you need a lid for that? Don’t the crabs crawl out?” He says, “Not a problem. The moment one crab starts to crawl up to get out the others reach out and pull him back down.”

We can be that way too. We are fine as long as we are all equal, all on the same level. But if one begins to succeed, if one gets an opportunity that we think we should have gotten, if one has something wonderful happen for them, we want to pull them back down again. That is what happened with Cain.

Victor Hugo said, “The wicked envy and hate. It is their way of admiring.” It has also been said that envy shoots at another and wounds itself. You want to be a miserable person? Be an envious person. Be a jealous person and you will give a foothold to the devil, as Cain did. You will face repercussions.

Let's see what happened to Cain. He was warned of what would happen, but he didn't listen.

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.

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."

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."

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. (Genesis 4:8-16)

God had a question for Cain: "Where is your brother?" Cain bitterly responds, "How am I supposed to know? Am I my brother's keeper?" This is the first blatant lie and the first human question in the Bible. The lie was Cain's denial that he knew his brother's whereabouts. He knew perfectly well. But of course he had been mastered by sin at this point. He lies to God's face.

God says, "What are you talking about? I hear your brother's blood crying from the ground." Now God puts a curse on Cain in verses 11–12, telling him he will be a vagabond and a fugitive. But Cain says it is more than he can handle: "My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

I want you to notice something about Cain. He never repented of his sin. He only expressed remorse, not repentance. We often confuse the two. Remorse is being sorry for the consequences of your sin. Repentance is being sorry enough to stop it. The Bible says that godly sorrow produces repentance (see 2 Corinthians 7:10).

So let's say you go out and break the law. You drink and drive, and you get pulled over for a DUI. You are so sorry. Why are you sorry? Because you got caught. I can tell you are not truly sorry because you go out and do it again. If you are really sorry, you would never do it again. You would learn your lesson, and you would repent of that sin. But you are only sorry that you have to face consequences.

That was the case with Cain. That is the case with a lot of people. The Bible actually warns us about "the way of Cain." Jude 1:11 says, "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain." What is the way of Cain?

1. The way of Cain is to worship God with impure motives. Remember that Cain brought his offering, but he didn't bring it in faith. It doesn't matter how great your gift may be; if your heart is wrong, it is going to mean nothing.

2. The way of Cain is to have a heart and life that is filled with jealousy, envy, and hatred. There are always going to be people that will do better than you. Girls, there is always going to be someone prettier than you. Deal with it. Guys, there is always going to be someone more successful than you. Accept it. There is always going to be someone more intelligent than you. You

can't be the top dog. Sorry. Are you just going to go through life frustrated and filled with jealousy and envy? Or are you going to say, "God, everything I have is a gift from You and I am going to thank You for it. I don't want to destroy my life through envy and jealousy." Recognize those things are sins before God, and if left undealt with, they can actually become deadly, as they were in the case of Cain and Abel.

3. The way of Cain is to lie to God about what you have done. There is only one way to deal with sin. That is to tell the truth because God knows anyway. God knows. He knew what Cain was about to do. He warned him. He said, "You have got to get control of this. Sin is like a crouching beast, ready to pounce on you. You have got to master it." But Cain went off and did what he thought he should do, and sin pounced on him and consumed him and mastered him, just as God said it would. It is the same for us as well.

When God speaks to us, I hope we will listen. Sometimes God will speak to us as we open up the Bible, and a verse will just jump off the page. Sometimes, God will speak through a preacher. A lot of times when I prepare a message, I have certain ideas I have written down, but there are often thoughts that come and things that I say that were not prepared remarks. I believe the Lord gives me those things for people that are listening to the message. I don't know how God sorts it all out, but people will hear a message on the radio later somewhere, or someone will hear a message that I gave a year ago, and it speaks to them. It comes down to this: God's Word will not return void. I have confidence in it.

The Lord can speak through a book or a television program or other forms of media. The Lord can speak through a friend. Whatever the case, I hope you are listening. Because the way of Cain can lead to the curse that came upon Cain. Don't walk in that way.

Instead, walk in the way of Abel. Hebrews 11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks."

In the words of the great theologian Steven Tyler, "Walk this way!" Walk in the way of Abel, not in the way of Cain. The way of Cain leads to death. The way of Cain leads to misery. The way of Cain leads to a curse. The way of Abel leads to blessing. That is the way we want to walk.

Maybe you are walking away from God. Maybe you have been giving a foothold to the devil. Maybe you have an area in your life where you know you are vulnerable right now. You have even begun to stumble and fall in that area. Think of this as a warning from your loving heavenly Father. He is saying "Listen, I am warning you because I care about you. Don't do that. Sin is crouching at your door, waiting to pounce." Don't play games with it. Don't think you are so strong you can overcome it on your own because you can't. Stay as close to the Lord as you possibly can.

One of the things that concerns me is when people will ask questions like "Can you still be a Christian and do [fill in the blank]?" "Can you do this and still be technically saved?" "If someone lives this way, will God still accept them into Heaven?" That type of question bothers me. Effectively you are saying, "How far can I go and still be saved?" The real question ought to be "Since I am saved, how close can I get to the Lord?" Don't be on the edge. Be as close to the Lord as you can be. Don't be skating on the thin ice. Stay close to God, in fellowship with Him.

Maybe you are not doing that. Here is the good news: God forgives. If Cain would have admitted his sin, God would have forgiven him. But he wouldn't even admit he had done anything wrong. He wouldn't come clean. His parents, Adam and Eve,

at first blamed others when they sinned, but ultimately they admitted it.

But Cain lied to God. He wouldn't even admit that he had sinned. So it was even worse. Don't lie, because you can't fool God. God knows the truth. Just tell Him the truth. "I have done this. I am sorry. I am wrong, and I turn from it." Whether it is the sin of jealousy, or envy, or anything else, God will forgive you. He will give you a second chance. And if necessary a third, and fourth, and fifth one. He is a God of mercy and forgiveness. But you must admit your sin and turn from it and come to Him.