

Faith Over Feelings

"If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."

Genesis 4:7 NASB

Genesis 4:7 is the heart of God's instruction to Cain who, along with his sacrifice had just been rejected by God. Consequently, ***Cain became very angry and his countenance fell*** (Genesis 4:5). Cain was angry and sad (fallen countenance). After all, Cain was a farmer and as a farmer, he worked hard and long at cultivating the cursed ground and tending his crops (v. 2). From those crops he got food and from his own food he was pleased to offer a portion as a sacrifice to God only in the end to be rejected by God. Why, in the light of such sacrifice, did God reject Cain's offering? The Bible tells us in two New Testament verses.

First, God's Word informs us that Cain's deeds were evil, ***"not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous."*** (1 Jn. 3:12). A quick read of this verse and our minds may think Cain's deeds were evil because he killed his brother. It is true that killing Abel was evil but a closer look at this verse reveals something else. Cain killed his brother because his own deeds were evil. Specifically, the deeds Cain committed before killing Abel. The deeds in view are those related to Cain's offering. So the first reason for God's rejection of Cain's offering is obvious, Cain's deeds associated with his offering were evil and God will not accept evil. It may have pleased Cain but it was not pleasing to God.

Secondly, Scripture informs us why Cain's offering was evil and consequently rejected by God. Hebrews 11:4 says, ***"By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks."*** This verse, in the context of Hebrews 11 enlightens us to the fact that Cain's sacrifice was not offered by faith. Hebrews 11 teaches us that faith is based on the revelation of the Word of God and that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:1-6). Therefore, the action a person carries out by faith is a response based on God's Word. Apparently, at some point in time whether indirectly through their father, Adam or directly to Cain and Abel, God communicated the need to present an offering and the qualifications for that offering. Cain, although he gave an offering, was in some way (possibly content Gn. 4:3), disobedient to those instructions. Because the offering was not presented in a faithful response to those instructions it was evil and God rejected both the offering and Cain who offered it.

That rejection angered Cain and his countenance fell (Genesis 4:5). However, God, because He is gracious, spoke to Cain while he was in his bewildered state of anger. In Genesis 4:6 God asked Cain two questions, "Why are you angry?" and "Why has your countenance fallen?" Because God is all-knowing He never asks questions in order to learn something. Instead, God asks questions as a form of teaching. Such was the case with Cain. God's questions called Cain's attention to his situation and prepared him for the instructions to follow. The instructions were

given to enlighten Cain as to how he might correct his former evil behavior and warn him of the consequences if he did not.

If you do well

This first phrase conveys the objective of God's instruction. At the heart of Cain's fallen countenance was his disobedience and that disobedience, as we saw was specifically a failure to walk by faith. Therefore, when God informed Cain, "***If you do well...***" the *doing well* God spoke of was walking by faith. Instead of instructing Cain to be happy and/or pursue happiness, God was essentially instructing Cain to walk by faith.

will not your countenance be lifted up?

As a consequence to fulfilling the objective, i.e. walking by faith ("***do well***"), Cain's fallen countenance would be lifted up. In essence, obedience to God's Word would be the rich soil from which would spring a lifted countenance and that countenance would be genuine, as it would be rooted in and sustained by truth in a life based on and in pursuit of truth.

And if you do not do well

As quickly as God's instruction began it shifted to a consequence of an altogether different kind. If Cain did not walk by faith he could expect something much worse than merely anger and a fallen countenance.

sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.

Failure to walk by faith is itself sin (Rm. 14:23c) and sin was already at Cain's house. In the next part of God's instruction to Cain God personified sin and used the allegory of a house to convey to Cain the nature of the consequence if he fails to walk by faith. God addressed three aspects of sin:

1. The insidious nature of sin (*sin is crouching*)

God described sin to Cain as *crouching*. The idea conveyed was that sin was lying in wait for him. Should he not walk by faith he will walk by sin (Compare Rm. 14:23).

2. The imminent danger of sin (*at the door*)

Note the location of sin as God conveyed it to Cain. It was not way off in some remote place that Cain might never happen to visit. Sin with its desire to master Cain was not locked away unable to reach him. No. Sin was crouching at the door! Specifically, sin was crouching at Cain's door, a door through which he must pass in order to conduct his life. In reality, sin was in Cain's life already. We might say sin was at the door of his heart.

3. The intent of sin (*and its desire is for you*)

The Hebrew word translated *desire* as used in this context speaks to the intent of sin to master Cain. God said sin was like a crouching animal lying in wait to overtake Cain. It longed to have the rule in his life, to use him against God and then destroy him.

but you must master it

God's final word to Cain in this encounter, "but you must master it." God told Cain he must master the sin that was crouching at his door to devour him. There is but one way this could be done and God already expressed that in the initial instruction, "***If you do well...***" As we saw, *doing well* speaks specifically to walking by faith. However, Cain did not walk by faith. Sin was Cain's master and Cain was sin's slave. After receiving God's instruction Cain passed through that allegorical door and sin with him, to a field where Cain killed Abel, the brother of faith. Cain spent the rest of his earthly life as a vagrant and a wander (Genesis 4:8-16).

When a person walks by faith sin is overcome (See 1 John 5:4 and compare to 1 John 2:15-16). A Christian is such a person. As Christians we can take a great lesson from this instruction God gave to Cain. We can see that as we walk by faith which entails walking in obedience to the revealed Word of God we can fulfill that precious command God has given to us to mortify the flesh (Colossians 3:1-17).

Beloved, much error has been propagated in our world when it comes to experiencing happiness and a happy countenance. Catch phrases of all kinds from "Don't worry, be happy" to "Pursue your joy" have been paraded before the minds of God's people in an attempt to make them happy (lift their countenance). From stoicism to hedonism the Christian community has been inundated with the vain philosophies of those who seek to promote happiness in the Christian community. And for the most part but sadly these peddlers of "happy thoughts" find fertile ground both inside and outside the church.

But as Christians we are not left in the darkness when it comes to the subject of happiness. We do not have to be led about by the craftiness of men and their worldly wisdom. While our verse specifically mentions a lifted countenance, we are aware that God has given us a full range of emotions. When these are expressed and experienced as by-products of walking by faith we can be confident we truly honor God. On the other hand, when they are missing from our present lives or when they become anything more than a by-product of faithful obedience, i.e. a pursuit or a standard in themselves, then we have placed the proverbial cart before the horse. We have turned God's instructions around as if He said, "If you lift up your countenance will you not do well?" Instead of, "If you do well will not your countenance be lifted up?"

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Pastor David Martin