

GENESIS

RockPointe Church Small Groups

Patriarchs of Scripture • Cain and Abel • Genesis 4:1-16 • Fall 2018

Main Point

Confession and faith in Jesus Christ are all that is necessary for freedom from the burden of religion.

Background

Video: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/VideoElement/182886>

Note: Requires Access to Right Now Media; if you have issues with accessing the link, copy and paste directly in your browser

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the hardest you have ever worked at a job or task? What motivated you to work so hard?

In what area of your life do you get the most reward for your hard work? Your job? Your relationships? Your physical fitness? Why?

In most areas of our lives, our success directly correlates to how hard we work. This explains why we are so susceptible to the enslaving mind-set that our relationship with God is performance-based. When we understand that through God's grace, our salvation is based on faith in Him alone, and that we can't do anything to earn or lose it, we're set free from the checklists that enslave us. Just like today, early Christians also struggled to apply this truth to their lives.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read Genesis 4:1-16.

How did Cain and Abel prepare their offerings for the Lord? What was the content of their offerings?

Why was Cain's offering rejected by God? Why was Abel's offering pleasing to God?

What does a religious approach to God, such as Cain's, look like in our culture today?

Cain's offering came from a sense of obligation. He felt he had to obey to check it off of his list. His religious spirit lacked a true appreciation for God. Abel gave the best that he had—the firstborn. Abel was commended for his offering while Cain was rejected, because Cain's heart was not in his offering.

In what part of your life are you most likely to perform out of a religious spirit like Cain? In what area of your life are you more like Abel?

Between Genesis 4 and Galatians 3 were thousands of years of addiction to religion. In Galatians 3, Paul explains that Christ is the way to freedom from religious chains.

| Have a volunteer read Galatians 3:1-9.

Why is Paul's question in verse 2 so crucial? How would you state his question in your own words?

How do you feel about yourself and your spirituality when you try to impress God with your works? How does that compare to how you feel when you rest in faith?

The believers in the Galatian church desired to follow Jesus well, but we learn from Paul's letter that many had fallen into a trap—legalism. Legalism is the belief that we must fulfill certain requirements in order to gain God's favor. The Galatian church was being influenced by false teachers known as Judaizers, who taught that people had to keep the Jewish Old Testament laws even after becoming Christians. Their teaching negated Christ's work on the cross, given that He became the perfect, final sacrifice for our sins.

| Have a volunteer read Galatians 3:10-14.

As Paul continued his warning, he illustrated the dire circumstances of people living as slaves to works and the law. Quoting the Old Testament, Paul reminded us we are cursed. Because of sin, we deserve eternal death. Our cursed nature is evident in the brokenness of this world and our inability to fulfill God's entire law.

What evidence do you see in yourself of your cursed nature? What evidence do you see in the world?

How did Jesus become a curse for us (v. 13)? What purpose did that fulfill?

The sin in our lives curses us and keeps us separated from God. But Paul pointed out that when Jesus came to earth as a human and died on the cross, He took sin's curse off of us and put it on Himself. Sin is such an assault on God and His creation that it demands punishment. Luckily for us, we don't have to bear that weight. Instead, we must choose whether we pursue a relationship with God through our own efforts or through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

What punishment does your sinful nature deserve? Why can't works set you free from sin's curse?

What effect does Jesus' work on the cross have on your life? Do you think it could potentially have a greater effect? Why or why not?

Working for salvation is tempting, because rules and lists can give us a sense of identity. They also provide a tangible way to measure how “spiritual” we are. But ultimately, religious addiction leads to a false sense of strength that makes us think we can earn God’s grace when, in reality, we have been saved by faith, not works (Eph. 2:8-9). We receive life, identity, freedom and strength through the work of Christ. Our new life comes through Christ’s payment on the cross, and it is transferred to us because we believe in Him.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Based on what we’ve studied this week, are spiritual works important? Why or why not? In what act of obedience and faithfulness do you need to improve?

Why is it more difficult for most of us to trust God in faith than to try to reach Him by religion and works? What can we do to increase our trust?

What can you do this week to start living in light of your freedom?

Pray

Make today’s prayer a time of thanksgiving. Thank God for sending Christ on our behalf, freeing us from bondage to the law. Thank God for giving us the law, which shows us what righteousness and holy living look like, providing us with a goal to strive for. Thank God for the Holy Spirit’s daily presence in our lives to guide, convict, and comfort us as we seek to live by faith.

Commentary

| Genesis 4:1-16

4:1. Adam and Eve now begin to fulfill God’s original command to them, to “be fruitful” and “multiply” (Gen. 1:28). A wordplay in the Hebrew suggests that the name Cain came from the verb “had” in Eve’s comment, I have had a male child.

4:2. The name Abel means “breath.” The term is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to that which passes away quickly and is unsubstantial (Ps. 62:10; Eccl. 1:2).

4:3-5. Cain’s sacrifice marks the first mention of an offering to the Lord in the Bible. The Hebrew term used here suggests a freewill gift given to an authority. Ironically, the first recorded offering given to God was also the first one rejected by Him. Since cereal offerings were authorized in the law of Moses, the fact that Cain’s offering was of vegetation rather than an animal is not why God did not have regard for it. Cain’s furious reaction suggests that the offering was rejected because of sin in his heart, not the nature of his offering (see note at verse 7).

4:7. The Bible makes it clear that God rejected Cain's offering because of Cain's wicked lifestyle (1 John 3:12). The animal-like description of sin as crouching is reused in Gen. 49:9 to describe a lion. The parallel use of desire in this verse and Gen. 3:16 suggests that sin wishes to be as intimate with humanity as a woman is with her husband. The only way to avoid this is to be its master, not its companion.

4:8. In a move that demonstrates premeditation, Cain led Abel to a field and attacked him in a place where there were no human witnesses. Though the blood of animals had been shed prior to this (v. 4), Cain's killing of his brother brought about the first death of a human being. The curse of human death pronounced against Adam (2:17; 3:19) had now been realized.

4:9. God's use of questions with guilty sinners continues here (v. 6; cp. 3:9-13). By claiming he did not know where his brother was, Cain added lying to his sin of murder. God once made Adam a guardian of the garden (2:15). Cain now asked if he was to be his brother's guardian. The Bible's answer to Cain's question is yes (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39; Gal. 5:14).

4:10. Unlike his father Adam (3:12), Cain never confessed his guilt, even though God directly confronted Cain with his sin. Although Abel never spoke in the preceding narrative, his blood now cried out from the ground.

4:11-12. God's judgment began with a curse that in the Hebrew parallels the curse placed on the snake. This is particularly fitting since both Cain and the snake were liars and murderers (John 8:44). It is possible to translate God's statement here as, "You are more cursed than the ground." The curse against a murderer is repeated in the law of Moses (Deut. 27:24). Cain's punishment destroyed his livelihood as a farmer and turned him into a restless wanderer.

4:14. Just as his father Adam had been driven out of the garden, Cain noted that God was banishing him from the soil. Since he would hide himself (or possibly, "be hidden") from God's protective presence, he feared that other descendants of Adam and Eve (5:4) would kill him to avenge Abel's murder.

4:16. Cain's departure from the Lord's presence was both physical and spiritual (Jonah 1:3,10). "Nod" means "Wandering." The land of Nod is never again mentioned in the Bible. Perhaps the phrase simply referred to any location in which Cain resided. The notation that Cain departed to live east of Eden identifies him with other sinners who also moved east.