

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.”² Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.⁴ But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”

⁸Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

⁹Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

¹⁰The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

¹³Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear.¹⁴ Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

¹⁵But the LORD said to him, “Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him.¹⁶ So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. (NIV 84)

Theme: Love for the Loveless

1. God warns us of the seriousness of our sins.
2. God gives us many opportunities to repent.

When you were growing up your parents warned you about certain things. They warned you not to touch the hot stove, to look both ways when crossing the street, and not to talk to strangers. You didn’t really like those rules and warnings. Perhaps you thought that they were too overbearing. But there is a good reason why your parents warned you about such things—they love you. They know the dangers of those things and they don’t want you to get hurt.

God loves us too. In fact, today we see that he has love for the loveless. And so, like our earthly parents, he warns us about the dangers of sin. And, once again in love, he gives us many opportunities to repent when we fail to listen to his warning.

It’s a story that many of us know well. Two brothers, Cain and Abel—most likely the first two people ever to be born. Abel was a shepherd and Cain was a farmer. One day **Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.** Both did something seemingly good and noble. They took some of their own possessions and gave them back to God. But the Lord doesn’t look at the outward appearance, he looks at the heart. He was pleased with Abel’s offering, but didn’t accept Cain’s. The writer to the Hebrews tells us why, **By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.** God didn’t accept Cain’s offering because it wasn’t made by faith—it wasn’t done out of love and thanks to him. Cain’s sin was tokenism; he seems religious, but in his heart was not completely in it—he wasn’t totally dependent on God and thankful to him. Cain became angry with God for not accepting his sacrifice. But he wasn’t just angry at God he was also angry at his brother, Abel. This was caused by jealousy. They both offered up sacrifices. But his brothers’ sacrifice was accepted while his wasn’t. So he became jealous of his brother.

So God, in his love, came to Cain. He asked him, **Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?** These are rhetorical questions. God wasn’t looking for answers—he knew them already. He was leading Cain to see his sin. He had no right to be angry. He sinned—he did what was

wrong. He didn't do what was right, and so God didn't accept his sacrifice. He had no one to blame but himself.

God continued by warning him about letting sin dwell inside of him.

If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it. Sin is serious. It's no laughing matter. If you don't repent of your sin, it will master you. It will control you and your life—it will consume you. God was warning Cain that sin was getting ready to pounce on him and take him down.

God gives us the same warning again and again. Multiple times he warns us against sin in general. In 1 Thessalonians 5, **Avoid every kind of evil.** In Romans 6:12, **Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.** He also warns us about specific sins. 1 Corinthians 6:18, **Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.** 2 Timothy 2, **Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.** On multiple occasions he tells us to avoid anyone who teaches anything contrary to his Word. In Romans 16, **I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.**

He also warns us about what happens if we remain in our sins. In Galatians 5:9, **A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.** In Deuteronomy 28, **If you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.** Hebrews 10, **If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left.**

Romans 8, **If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die.**

All of these rules and regulations—and many more. All of these warnings from God. Your sinful nature hates them. “The Church is too strict,” you say. God demands too much of you. He doesn't allow life to be fun and enjoyable. But why does he make so many rules and regulations? Why does he warn you about so many things? Why does a father warn a child to look both ways when crossing a street, or not

to talk to strangers? It's because he cares for him. It's because he loves him and wants to protect him.

The same stands with us and God. God loves us. He wants what is best for us. He wants to guard and protect us. And so he warns us. Again and again he warns us about how dangerous sin is. He wants us to see how serious each and every sin is to our spiritual lives. He urges us to repent of our sin—to flee from sin and turn to him. So he warns us about sin so that it will not master us.

God warns us because he loves us. But God does so much more when it comes to sin. He also forgives our sins when we fail to heed his warning.

God warned Cain, but Cain didn't listen. His anger turned to jealousy, his jealousy to hate, and hate to murder. He led Abel out into a field—away from any witnesses. He then he struck Abel and killed him. Premeditated murder. He then buried him in the ground and walked away. And he went on with his life as if nothing happened.

God warned Cain not to let his sin master him. But it obviously did. Cain was so entrenched in his sin, that he couldn't control it. He was mastered by his sin, and he became the first murderer. His parents were created in God's image—perfect and holy. But just a generation later, a murder. Cain, the first person ever to be born, killed his own flesh and blood.

So what did God do? God could have struck him dead. And he certainly had the right to do so. Yet, in love, he didn't. No instead he came to Cain once again, much like he did Adam and Eve, and asked what happened. **Where is your brother Abel?** Of course God knew what happened. He was simply giving Abel a chance to confess his sin.

But Cain didn't take that chance. He knew he had been caught. But he played dumb. **I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?** No remorse, no sorrow—no repentance.

And so God punished him. The ground would be harder for him to work. And he would be forced to be a wanderer on the earth. You may remember that Cain was a farmer—and if the ground wouldn't yield its crops for him and if he would be forced to move from place to place—his life would become much harder. So Cain, again not repentant, complained. **My punishment is more than I can**

bear...and whoever finds me will kill me. Cain didn't want anyone to do to him what he had done to Abel. So once again God showed his love to him. Somehow he made it known that if anyone killed Cain he would be avenged seven times over.

But why would God do that? Why would God allow Cain to live and not allow anyone to kill him? Out of love. God extended his time of grace. He let Cain live longer. Cain would have plenty of time to think about what he had done to his brother. God was giving him time to repent. Cain never did, however. We read that he turned his back on the Lord and left his presence.

Numerous times a day we fail to heed God's warning. We fall into the same sin as Cain. We hate others. And as we read in our second lesson, **anyone who hates his brother is a murderer and no murderer has eternal life in him.** We are just as guilty of breaking the fifth commandment as Cain; We are often loveless. And we often fail to show remorse. We often don't repent right away.

Yet God doesn't strike us down; he doesn't kill us instantly on the spot. He let's us live. He extends our time of grace. He keeps us alive so that we may realize our sin. So that we may see our sinful actions for what they are. He warns us in his Word. He sends people to us to point out our sin. He gives us a chance to confess our sins and turn to him for forgiveness.

And we know that he does forgive us. Through the sake of his Son, Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. For on the cross Christ took all our sins upon himself. He became guilty of everything we have done wrong. And not just us, but he took the sins of the whole world upon his shoulders. Even the sins of Cain. Christ became guilty of murder. He became guilty of all of your sins too—even all the feelings of hate you have had toward others. He paid the price for your sins, so you wouldn't have to. And it is through faith in him that you receive this wonderful blessing.

It is by God's grace that you are forgiven and saved. That is, by the undeserved love that God has for sinners. We read about that love in our second lesson for today, **This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.** We don't deserve his patience and mercy. Yet, that is what God gives us. Again and again he displays his mercy and love when he gives us chance after chance and extends

our time on this earth. Through Christ God does not look at us as sinners. But he sees those who are pure and holy in his sight. Perfect, just as his Son is perfect. Holy and without sin, because our sins were washed away by the blood of Christ.

When you failed to listen to your parents warning and ran across the street without looking and narrowly avoided getting hit by a car, they ran over to you and hugged you and consoled you. Love and forgiveness. That is what God has for us—love for the loveless. We are loveless when we fail to show love to him and love to others. We are loveless when we have a feeling of hate toward someone else. But God loves us. So he allows us to live—giving us time to repent. He loves us. So he sent his Son to die for us while we were still sinners. It is through him that we are forgiven and stand pure and innocent in the eyes of God. So out of love for God and the love he has for us, we strive to obey his commands. And when we fail to do so and when we fail to heed his warning, we know that we are forgiven through the work of Christ. Amen.