

**Series: God & Cain #1037**

**Title: Genesis 4.5**

**Cain is Angry (Part 5)**

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. My hope and expectation is that you are with us every weekday at this time on this fine station and/or that you listen to *God Is* on the free God Is Podcast, five times a week. Each day's teaching builds on the day before it, so if you have to miss for whatever reason do get caught up with us by visiting [godisministry.org](http://godisministry.org) and downloading the podcast. [godisministry.o-r-g](http://godisministry.o-r-g).

Yesterday we continued to discuss Cain's anger and we focused on this: Cain's anger was really against *God*. Cain is going to kill his brother, yes, but the driving force of his rage is that God has rejected Cain and his offering. By doing so, God has shamed Cain. Merrill Unger, in his *Commentary on the Old Testament* tells us that by the time of Cain and Abel's offerings to God the family had expanded and this was worship that drew the families of Cain and Abel. So that when God accepted Abel but rejected Cain, that led Cain to feel shame in front of the whole clan. And this further enraged Cain. How dare God embarrass him in this way?

It is theologian John Calvin's work we took up last time in order to learn more about what happens within people like Cain who bring *displeasing* and *unacceptable* worship before the Living God. And how when God rejects them, they get really, very mad at God. And you will remember that Calvin wrote this.

"In the person of Cain is portrayed to us the likeness of a wicked man, who yet desires to be esteemed just, and even arrogates to himself the first place among the saints. Such persons truly, by external works, strenuously labor to deserve well at the hands of God; but, retaining a heart inwrapped in deceit, they present to Him nothing but a mask; so that, in their laborious and anxious religious worship, there is nothing sincere, nothing but mere pretence (*Genesis*, 197)."

Since what he wrote is translated in English from an earlier century, we did a little interpretive work, then applied what was said to many who claim to worship God from the heart today. And we found that indeed there are those, for example in our churches, who while unrighteous claim to be *the most* righteous. They give themselves first place with God. But they have not come to God by *faith* but rather they have come to God by their *works*. They go through the motions of worship. But their heart, their inner person, is really not into it.

For people like Cain, worshipping God is laborious. These are religious people. They go to church out of duty, just following a pattern set by tradition. "Yea, it's Sunday so...I go to church. Well, it's Saturday so I go to Mass." These men and women turn up each week, usually considered faithful, and participate in the rituals. When everybody else sings, they sing. When everybody else listens to the sermon they appear to be listening. When everybody else gives their money, they make a point of giving enthusiastically. When an opportunity is given to have fellowship with each other, these folks are right in there talking and shaking hands (giving a COVID friendly kind of fist bump).

But really, underneath the mask, it's all just a religious slog. The attitude is: get this over and done with and get on with the day! Those who are like this may well have fooled us, but God is never fooled. They can lie to us. They can even lie to themselves. But God cannot be deceived. Cain had done that. He had lied to others, he had lied to himself, and he had lied to God. So, the Lord calls him out on it and *then* Cain gets flush with red, hot, burning anger.

Let's pick up with John Calvin again today. He continues in his commentary simply titled *Genesis*, quote, "When they afterwards see that they gain no advantage, they betray the venom of their minds; for they not only complain against God, but break forth in manifest fury, so that, if they were able, they would gladly tear [God] down from His heavenly throne." I will pause again and comment on Calvin's wise words about false worshippers of God.

Remember, he is talking about some of us! Those who try and worship God *their* way rather than *God's* way, are those who end up being unable to contain their fury with God – why? Because God rejects them and their worship. And when they see they have gained no advantage with the Lord, wow, then their

“venom” comes spurting out all over the place. These persons become so angry with God that, if they could, they would tear God down from His heavenly throne!

Basically, they think God really owes them for all this time they give to the tedious and boring rituals of worship. And when God withholds His blessing, when God does not give them what they want, there comes the rage.

Calvin has more to say, writing, “Such is the innate pride of all hypocrites, that, by the very appearance of obedience, they would hold God as under obligation to them; because they cannot escape from His authority, they try to soothe Him...as they would a child...[then] they think God does them a great wrong if He does not applaud them; but when [God] pronounces their offerings frivolous and of no value in His sight, they first begin to murmur, and then to rage (*Genesis*, 197).”

While all of us struggle with the sin of hypocrisy in our lives to some extent, with John Calvin let’s focus on the hypocrisy he highlights in his writing on Cain-like people. He emphasizes the “appearance of obedience.” That is what hypocrites do. They send the signal to the rest of us that they are being obedient to what God has commanded. But they do so only in appearance. *And*, importantly, they think the mere appearance of obedience makes *God* obligated to *them*!

But that is not how true, pleasing, and acceptable worship of God works. So as the hypocrite begins to figure that out, then comes an attempt to soothe God. But when that doesn’t work, when God does not give them a standing ovation, when God continues to reject them and their offerings, there is at first murmur and then full blown rage!

Now, it is possible that you are listening to this and you are thinking, “Well, I do not know what Calvin or Swallow are talking about! This is all news to me. I have been going to church a long time and I have never met any of these hypocrites. It seems to me everyone is sincere in their worship of God.” Well, if that is what you are thinking, then you either lack self-awareness because you are the very person we are describing, or you haven’t been a part of a church long, or you are *really, very blessed* that God has allowed you to be a part of a Christian community where the sin of hypocrisy has been rooted out.

But my guess is that the majority of you will relate, precisely, to what Calvin describes! And you have met and you know one or more people that act just like Cain.

Throughout my years of pastoral ministry have interacted with several such people. But my most alarming experience with hypocrites like Cain came in my formative years in the church in which I grew up. There were several prominent members of that church, very well known and active members, who I am now convinced were likely not even Christians. And I say that fully aware that I am not God. God will judge them. I will not. However, these were men and women that acted like Cain and we know what God thought of Cain and his offering.

I am thinking of one man in particular who was so angry with God. I mean really just furious, and his venom came spewing out all over the church. But he thought of himself as *the most righteous* among all of us. He was a long-serving deacon. He gave quite a bit of money. He was outspoken and had a strong presence on several committees. He never missed a Sunday. But his heart was wrapped in deceit. It was well known that he was a terror outside the church.

He was verbally abusive to his wife and children. He was impossible to work with and for, and to supervise, in his company. His reputation inside the church seemed to be good, but outside the church his reputation was awful. He definitely acted like God was under obligation to him. He tried to soothe God, and when they did not work out, boy, he felt God had done him a terrible kind of wrong. He would talk about this at certain moments.

So, Cain-like hypocrites do exist. Sooner or later you will meet them. And, being conscious of what the Spirit is saying to us, you may well be one of them.

We are out of time, but I will return to this (and to Calvin) at the beginning when you join me tomorrow for God Is.

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