

## 5. Man in the dock: Why are you so angry?

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Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if you'd like to open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 4 and to the passage that we read, you'll see that our question today in our series about a man in the dock, facing the questions that God himself asks of us in his Bible, our question is found in Genesis chapter 4 verse 6, where God says, why are you so angry?

And why has your face fallen? In other words, why are you unhappy? It's a question asked, as we've read, at the dawn of human history. But it seems that it's also a very relevant question today too.

Just the other day I read this piece in a daily newspaper. It said this, Britain is becoming an increasingly angry society. A study carried out for a BBC investigation into mental health found that one in ten Britons admit to losing their temper at least once a day and complain that even the smallest provocations cause them to fly off the handle.

Even more worryingly, one in six says they consider resorting to physical violence. Now why are you so angry? It goes on, recent cases dealt with by therapists include one involving a woman who ended up being imprisoned for three months for harassing her fourth husband.

In another, a man was jailed for six hours for shouting at railway staff when he missed his train.

Even an eight-year-old child needed anger training after attacking other children at school.

[ 1 : 44 ] Why are you so angry? It says a psychologist who specializes in anger management, rage has a dramatic effect on the body. The problem is it can become seductive as it creates a feeling of empowerment.

And the physical effect is similar to that of sexual arousal. We come across rage-aholics who are literally addicted to the adrenaline rush. But why are you so angry?

And so unhappy? Well, the psychiatrist will tell us, of course, that there are many factors at work in the etiology, the cause of depression, which is such a scourge in our modern lives, isn't it?

But anger that is not dealt with certainly is one of them. Hurts and disappointments that often result in anger.

It's cherished. It's held on to. It causes bitterness and resentment and a poisoned frame of mind. Real unhappiness. Angry people aren't happy people, are they?

[ 2 : 51 ] Well, the Bible tells us that anger and unhappiness, although rampant in our society today, are not a modern phenomenon. These are problems as old as man, or almost as old as man.

And right since the beginning, God has been asking that question to human beings. Why are you angry and unhappy with such sour faces? He's asking the question, of course, not because he doesn't know the answer.

Of course he does. No, he's asking it in order to force human beings like us to come to terms with it ourselves and to see the truth about ourselves and about the anger and the unhappiness that so often is in our hearts.

God wants us to see that the anger and the bitterness and the unhappiness and the depression that so pervades our world can always be traced back fairly and squarely, ultimately, to man's anger against God.

That's the truth that you need to grasp, says the God of the Bible. All the resentments, the bitterness in your hearts that affect your relationships with other people and that cause such misery among yourselves and in the world.

[ 4 : 06 ] In reality, all of this stems from resentment and bitterness and anger that you yourselves, deep down, have towards God himself.

And that's plain as a pike star, right? From the very beginning of time, according to the Bible. Right back here in the story of Cain and Abel that we read. So let's look at this story this morning as we

think about that question in verse 6.

And let's consider three things, three things about Cain's anger. Its cause, its consequences, and then the cure that God puts before Cain.

First of all, then, the cause of Cain's anger. We're told it quite plainly, aren't we? Why Cain was angry in verses 4 and 5. Do you see? I think it's rather double-sided, isn't it?

The Lord, we read, was one who had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering, he had no regard. So, Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

[ 5 : 08 ] He was angry. He was upset. He was unhappy. Well, why should God be pleased with Abel and not with Cain? Well, people have often speculated about that.

One of the common things that you might hear or read is that, well, Cain only offered crops, the fruit of the ground, we're told, whereas Abel, Abel offered an animal. It was a blood sacrifice.

But the word offering here in the text is an offering that's used throughout the Old Testament quite legitimately for sacrifices of grain and fruit, not just for blood sacrifices.

And the text here in Genesis doesn't say to us that there was anything lacking because Cain's sacrifice didn't have blood. But no, what the text does do is I think it draws our attention to something else.

It draws our attention, rather, to the attitude of the worshipper, doesn't it? If you look carefully, we're told, you see, Cain brought an offering. That's all.

[ 6 : 12 ] But Abel, we're specifically told, brought the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. Now, that might not seem to be a very big deal to us.

We might even think, well, imagine giving the fatty bits to God. That doesn't seem very good at all. But, of course, remember that the Old Testament Israelites were mercifully free from the fat police. They didn't have people moaning on about your fat consumption and things like that. In fact, it was quite the reverse. And remember that the first readers of this story, remember that would be the children of Israel in the desert wandering with Moses.

Moses was the one who put these words down. They would have understood immediately the significance of these little phrases, wouldn't they? Because, you see, to give God the firstborn and to devote to God the fat portion of the offering was to obey God's command to give the very best to God.

It's a way of indicating that God has all of us the very, very best of what we have. Now, you can read, there's dozens of references to that throughout the law of Moses, but here's one that just makes the point and illustrates.

[ 7 : 22 ] Numbers 18, verse 17 says, The firstborn are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar and their fat as a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

And you'll find that sort of thing all the way through in Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers. So what is this text telling us? Well, it's telling us that whereas Abel had a humble and an obedient attitude that responded to the way God had obviously told them to worship him and he showed it by bringing his best and his most precious things to God as a response of loving obedience to God. Well, Cain, Cain had a rather arrogant spirit. This is what I'm going to give God and God will just have to accept this. See, it's the heart of the worshipper that is crucial here.

It's not so much the nature of the sacrifice itself, whether it's meat or grain or anything else. That's made clear also if you look carefully at verses 4 and 5 in the order of the words, isn't it?

The Lord had regard for Abel, the man, and his offering, but not for Cain, the man, and his offering. Of course, that's just the Bible's consistent message, isn't it?

[ 8 : 42 ] David says it plainly, doesn't he, in Psalm 51. It's not outward sacrifice or offering that God wants, but it's the real sacrifice of a broken and a contrite heart. And Abel's heart was, but Cain's heart obviously wasn't.

He had a wrong attitude to God and God knew that. And that's why God wasn't pleased with Cain. And obviously God expressed that to Cain.

We don't know how. We're not told. Maybe God spoke directly to Cain and said he wasn't pleased with him. Maybe Adam, his father, challenged him and said to him, that's not what pleases God. But however it came to Cain, and it doesn't matter how, it certainly got to Cain, didn't it? And he became angry. He became very unhappy. The rebuke provoked him.

How dare you say my religion isn't good enough for God? How dare you suggest that my way of worshipping God isn't as good as yours?

[ 9 : 47 ] I choose my own spirituality, said Cain. I decide my way to be in touch with God and right with God. And it's the only way of God to be pleased with my way of worshipping him.

Very contemporary, isn't it? Not just ancient history, this. See, Cain, Cain is just the man of our world. Especially, I suppose, what we might call our post-modern world.

Yes, you can be very, very religious. You can be bringing offerings. You can be very keen on spirituality. You can be seeking real experiences of the divine and the supernatural. But, you see, your view of worship and the spiritual amounts to this.

I choose my spirituality. I choose my way of expressing my faith. I come to God my way. And, of course, God will accept whatever way I choose.

Well, our world's full of people just like that, isn't it? Lots of people. If you go out into Buchanan Street in Glasgow, maybe you're one of them here today. Maybe that's the way you think. If that is you, if that is the way you think, I suspect if somebody said to you what they said to Cain, you'd probably be pretty angry too, wouldn't you?

[ 11 : 00 ] So I know God's not pleased with your way of worshipping him. He says that. God says there's only one right way to approach him.

He says that there's only one offering and sacrifice that pleases him. And unless you humble yourself and you come that way, I'm afraid God's going to be angry with you. Now, if somebody says that to you, you're going to be very, very angry.

Aren't you? Just like Cain. Especially if you're a very religious person. You're very keen on spirituality. If you think that you should decide what it is that God gets from you.

And people, I find, really get mad at a God that has the temerity to say, actually, I decide how I'm going to be worshipped. I decide and I make it plain to you by my word.

And I expect you to follow that. I find that makes people very, very cross. And they get especially mad also at people who bring them that message. If you're a Christian preacher or an evangelist or just somebody witnessing to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 12 : 16 ] You just repeat the words that Jesus himself said that I am the way and the truth and the life and that no one comes to the Father but by me.

Well, people get very angry, don't they? In our culture. Even church people. Even a lot of church leaders these days get very angry. Do you suggest that? But here's the problem.

Like Cain. It made him very angry and unhappy. Just like the people in Jesus' day when Jesus said the same sort of things.

You must come to worship God now through me. You must humble yourself and accept God's ways and God's sacrifice for sin. They got very angry.

Just like today. If you dare to challenge somebody's way of worshipping and tell them that God has commanded them to come to him one way and one way alone by the way of obedient faith and God's appointed sacrifice for sins through Jesus Christ, his only Son.

[ 13 : 30 ] Well, that was Abel. That was how he came to God. Hebrews 11 tells us plainly it was by faith that Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain.

It wasn't the sacrifice itself. Of course, it was Abel's faith that pleased God. Hebrews 11 goes on to say without faith it's impossible to please God.

That was Abel. He had faith. But not Cain. Cain was angry. He couldn't stand a God who really was God who tells you what to do and how to live your life.

Didn't like that kind of God. God says, why are you angry? The answer is I'm angry because I want to be God myself.

I'm upset and angry because you dare to challenge me, God. That's the cause of Cain's anger. It's the cause of a lot of other people's anger too, isn't it?

[ 14 : 33 ] When that message of verse 5 gets to them that God dares to say that he's not pleased with them if they think and act in a certain way. If you were listening to Radio 4 this morning you heard Polly Toynbee being very angry with God in exactly the same way.

How dare, she said, Christian people tell me how I should live my life. Just a female version of Cain. She's now president of the Humanist Society of Great Britain.

And she's as angry with God as Cain is. Well, that's the cause of Cain's anger. What about the consequences? Well, anger's terribly destructive, isn't it?

Just look at how destructive Cain's anger is and not just for Abel, for Cain too. We all know the story, don't we? Verses 8 to 10 tells of this tale of resentment and revenge.

Even Geoffrey Archer took it up and copied it, didn't he, in his book? But don't miss the significance. Can you see the second half of verse 7? Where God says to Cain, sin is crouching at your door, its desire is for you or against you, but you must rule over it.

[15:45] You see, that attitude to God that Cain had, that attitude is the very essence of what the Bible means by sin. And if you allow yourself to be taken over by that attitude, then sin is a dark and devastating power that will destroy you and enslave you.

It will dominate you. This is the very first mentioned, you know, in the Bible of the word sin. And it's not referring to peccadillos, it's not referring to little mistakes that you make, is it?

It's referring to a vicious power, a crouching beast wanting to dehumanize humankind. You see, if you allow sin to rule, then you have de-godded God.

And if you have de-godded God, then the inevitable result is that you will go on to unman man. If you know C.S. Lewis, you'll know that that's his phrase from his wonderful book, *Perelandra, Voyage to Venus*, where he has a remarkable and evocative retelling of the story of the entrance of sin into the world and the vitiation and the reversal of the image of the divine in man that becomes of man. The very antithesis of man as he is created to be and Lewis calls him the unman. And Cain, you see, in this story we can see before us is unmanned. He's dehumanized.

[17:11] You see it in his retort to God in verse 9. Do you see? Am I my brother's keeper? Implying that he's not. But you see, back in Genesis 2.15, we're told that that is precisely what God created man to be.

God put man in the garden and put him to work it and to keep it. Now you see, man has turned his back on God and totally turned his back on his own purpose.

And having coveted God's crown, man now despises God's image. Man who is created for love, for love of God with his heart and soul and mind and strength and of his neighbor, his brother as himself, now has become someone full of anti-love.

He kills his own brother. You see how that word brother in verses 8 to 10 is repeated again and again? I tried to emphasize it when I was reading it. Six times to emphasize the horror, the inhumanity of the unman.

But you see, that, friends, is the reality. When God is not honored as God and as sovereign, then you will find that God's image is equally unvalued. Life is cheap.

[18:30] Society descends into chaos. There's no accident either that Polly Toynbee on the radio this morning was expressing her outrage in two particular ways. How dare Christians and religious people tell us how to behave?

And what were her two examples? Not allowing us to have freer abortion and not allowing us to have euthanasia. When you hate God, you despise God's image.

Human beings and life is cheap. Isn't it Paul's way of putting this in Romans chapter 1? For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools. You see, usurping God's crown. But what does that lead to? Well, Paul goes on. Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

They were filled with what? Love and peace and harmony. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness, evil, evil, so you despise God.

[19:52] The next immediate and inevitable step is that you despise and devalue God's image. Anger at God always ends up very quickly expressed in anger and resentment against fellow human beings.

And so Abel, the humble man who listened to God and obeyed God, is murdered by Cain, the man of the world, the man who is angry with God. He destroys his brother, but you see, in doing so, he destroys himself too, doesn't he?

William Stowe put it this way, Cain slew himself eternally by slaying Abel mortally. If you look at verses 10 and 11, this is the real tragedy, isn't it?

Cain might not value Abel's blood, but God does, and it cries out for justice, but Cain brings on himself personally here the curse that God visited on man generally back in Genesis chapter 3, verse 11, and now you are cursed from the ground.

You see, when people reject God, as we read in Romans chapter 1, God gives them over to their own devices. He removes his own restraining hand and that dark power of sin that is crouching and desiring to have us, but it takes over.

[ 21 : 12 ] It's a terrifying thing to see just how quickly, how easily, we dehumanize ourselves all the more. Look at the curse that Cain visits on himself.

He articulates it himself so clearly, doesn't he, in verse 14. The man who is angry at God, he becomes bitter and resentful with his brother. He loses his whole sense of identity and driven from the ground.

hidden from God's face, he says. That is, he loses all sense of what he's really created for and who he's created for. And he loses his sense of society.

I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. His relationships become a disappointment. He's restless. He can't find peace. And as a result, he loses also his sense of security, doesn't he?

Whoever finds me will kill me, he says. See, his life is governed by fear of the future, by fear of people that they want to hurt him. He'll be unable to trust anybody really anymore.

[ 22 : 17 ] He won't be able to commit to people or to relationships. Well, there are a lot of Cains in our world today, aren't there?

All around us. But that's the consequences of Cain's anger at God and his resentment and refusal to let God be God in his life.

He destroys his brother but he destroys himself too. And the most chilling thing about it all is his reaction, isn't it? Look at verse 13. Do you see?

He's utterly blind to the reality. He's very angry with God. He's still angry and he's protesting his own victimhood. My punishment's more than I can bear. This is outrageous, God. I don't deserve this.

This is all your fault, God. Look at verse 14. Behold, you have driven me away. There's not a shred of recognition, is there, that somehow Cain is actually responsible for the calamity that he's created.

[ 23 : 20 ] It's God's fault. I'm the victim here. Look what's happened to me. Not a word about what's happened to Abel. Not a word about his own guilt in God's eyes, now compounded abundantly by his murder.

No, it's all about me, says Cain. He's indignant. Look at what life has done to me. Look at what God has caused to happen to me. He gets even angrier with God.

That's pretty familiar too, isn't it? In a world where God has been banished to the periphery, where if he exists, well, he's there to revolve around us and our wants and our desires and our needs to answer them.

I came across another piece in the paper written by Raj Prasod, who's the professor for the public understanding of psychiatry at the Maudsley Hospital in London. The title was How the Culture of Blame Has Made Victims of Us All.

He says, we've become such a pampered society that it's virtually impossible for anyone to take responsibility for themselves. He says, we've got to have some external force always to blame for everything that happens to us.

[ 24 : 33 ] Somebody else or something else is always responsible for our misfortune, but it's never us. And he says, this victim mentality, quote, has had a dramatic impact on the nature of politics, on our mental and physical health, on crime rates, on the amount of drug abuse and teenage pregnancy, and even on how fat we've allowed ourselves to become.

A victim mentality. It's true, isn't it? And that was Cain, wallowing in his victimhood. Plenty of remorse and unhappiness about the consequences of his action and the misery he had brought for himself, but absolutely no sense of responsibility for his guilt and for his offence against God by his arrogant assertion of his autonomy and his offence against God and his brother by that murder.

Just self-justification and self-pity and more anger at God and more disaffection with the world.

You're responsible for this God and look, they're all out to get me.

Well, that's the consequences of Cain's anger. A killer who thinks he's the victim. A God-hater who thinks that it's God that hates him.

And yet the reality is quite the reverse, isn't it? Doesn't verse 15 speak of the extraordinary grace of this God?

[ 26 : 01 ] A God who protects with his power and an amazing mercy even for someone who's sworn themselves as an enemy, this raging, angry man, Cain. No, says God, I'll put a protection on you.

The Lord put a mark on Cain lest any who find him should attack him. Derek Kidner says in his commentary, it's the utmost that mercy can do for the unrepentant.

And yet this is the God that people are so angry at and rage at. The God whose grace in our world stoops to protect us from ourselves even in our waywardness.

A God who makes the sun shine and the rain fall on the unjust as well as the just. A God without whose protection and restraining hand upon this world we would certainly destroy ourselves utterly and the whole planet.

And this is the God who despite our rebellion and anger doesn't turn his face away and keeps asking the question, speaking, why are you so angry?

[ 27 : 12 ] That brings us to the third thing, the cure for Cain's anger. You see, God's question in verse 6 is an expression not just of his general benevolence, his common grace in the world as we sometimes call it.

It's an offer of his special sovereign saving grace into the world of angry and rebellious and bitter humanity. It's a question designed to help Cain to admit his failure and to repent.

God doesn't say to Cain, how dare you be so angry at me? Sometimes we do say that rightly, don't we, to our children? How dare you speak to me like that? No, God's not saying that here in that tone.

He's saying, come on Cain, don't be like that. Why are you angry? It doesn't have to be this way, you know that. Look at verse 7. If you do well, will you not be accepted?

Of course you will, just as Abel is. The way is open to you too, Cain, don't spoil it. That's what God's saying. That's the God that the world and the world of Cain is so angry at.

[ 28 : 21 ] The God who gently woos even the angry and the bitter and the resentful, the grudging man who's blind to his own sin and guilt. There's a way back, Cain.

Come on. Have an obedient heart. Do it my way. Repent and leave that anger and that bitterness behind. Have faith.

Come back. And if you do that, won't you be accepted? Of course you will. You see, verse 7 has a footnote that shows that the language is rather ambiguous.

It could be, it could be read rather than, won't you be accepted? Won't your face be lifted up? Won't you be restored to happiness and joy? And maybe that's deliberate ambiguity because it's the same thing, isn't it?

For God to be happy with us, for us to be accepted before him, is the only ultimate happiness, for us. But alas, Cain refused the Lord's pleading.

[ 29 : 23 ] Just as so much later, Judas refused the Lord's same pleading when the Lord Jesus offered him the choice morsel at the Last Supper and Judas turned away forever.

It's a terrifying thing, you know, isn't it? A terrifying thing that people can allow their anger and their bitterness against God to seal them in opposition against him forever. Even in the face of the most blinding revelation of God's truth.

There's a chilling verse in Revelation chapter 16 that speaks so vividly of the revelation of God's judgments on the earth in absolute clarity and certainty. And yet, the people of the earth far from repenting, we read, they cursed the name of the God who had power over these plagues.

They did not repent and give him glory. Utterly entrenched perversity. Well, that was Cain.

And alas, many others too, many today. Because, if you refuse to bow the knee to worship God in his one acceptable way, through the better sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, through the only way of forgiveness and the only way to the Father, if you do that and if you get angry and rage when somebody lovingly pleads with you, and tells you that there's no other way, well then you are despising his grace and his mercy.

[ 31 : 00 ] You're asserting your own sovereignty. You are being God and not allowing God to be God. And you're despising his sacrifice for your sins. And that means you're despising the one who is himself, the only God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And you can't do that and ever please God. You can't. How could you? You're spitting in his face. Because anger and resentment and real faith, they cannot mix, not ever.

I want to say to you, if that's you here this morning, maybe God is saying to you, why are you so angry and your face fallen? You don't have to be.

There is another way. There is a cure. If you do well, won't you be accepted? Of course you will. The Lord Jesus says, whoever comes to me, I will never, ever cast out.

Never, ever. If you're not a Christian believer today, I want to say to you, don't resist that. Don't resist it. But you know, there is a word here for every single one of us.

[ 32 : 12 ] Because, you know, you can be a believer, can't you? A Christian person, a follower of Jesus, and yet, you can have an awful lot of the spirit of Cade still in your heart, can't you? Harbours anger, resentment, against God.

Might be deep down and hidden, but it can be there. Full of self-pity, telling ourselves that we are a victim. Very full of our own sense of self-righteousness.

Very empty of any sense of our faults and wrongs against God and against our brothers and our sisters. That spirit of Cade can seep out in our lives, can't it, in all sorts of ways.

We get angry at any hint of criticism of ourselves. We deeply resent any word of rebuke from a brother or sister in Christ who knows us and loves us and cares for us and therefore wants to help us by speaking the truth and love to us.

Or we're jealous of other brothers or sisters who seem to have more blessings than we have. God says to us today, why are you angry?

[ 33 : 26 ] Why has your face fallen? Gently chides us, doesn't he, the Lord? He wants us to see the truth. He wants us to see that deep down, below our sense of victimhood, below our sense of feeling hard done to and being angry with others and bitter towards others, our Christian brothers and sisters especially, he wants us to see that behind it all, really, is anger with God and that's sin.

That spirit of Cain that just won't accept that God is sovereign in our lives, that refuses to accept perhaps the disappointments and the challenges that he allows to intrude into our way, the spirit that simply wants to have it our way, that's the spirit of Cain.

Do you recognize it? I'm very familiar with it in my own heart, alas. God says to me, why are you angry and unhappy?

Don't let that spirit get a hold of you. You know the way to a heart that's cleansed of all of that and a face that's lifted up with joy again. You know the way.

It's the way of the better sacrifice. It's kneeling again at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ whose sprinkled blood speaks a better word than the word of Abel.

[ 34 : 54 ] That's the only way to come to God, for God to cleanse you of your anger and pride once and for all, isn't it? It's to come on your knees to Jesus Christ. But you know, I find in my life, and maybe it's true for you, that that's the same place that I need to keep coming again and again, day after day, to be reminded that it's still the only way, that it's grace at the start and it's grace all the way to the end.

But alas, many won't because to really grasp God's grace is to be utterly humbled ourselves, isn't it?

In our own eyes and in the eyes of the world. And the spirit of Cain would rather remain angry and bitter than admit defeat and be humbled like that, wouldn't it?

But it needn't be that way. Let me close just by reading you the story of another angry, proud man just like Cain, but one who did listen to God and humble himself.

His name was Naaman. You know the story. He was a great man, a pagan, a commander of the Syrian army, the enemy of Israel, but Naaman was a leper.

[ 36 : 12 ] And you know the story. His Israelite slave girl told him that there was a man in Israel, a man of God who could cure him of his leprosy. And so he went and the man of God, Elijah, wouldn't even come out to see Naaman, but he sent a servant and he said to him, tell him to do this.

Go and wash in the river Jordan seven times and you'll be clean. But listen to Naaman. But Naaman was angry and he went away saying, behold, I thought he would come to me and stand and call upon the name of his God and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.

Are not Abana and Farper, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean? So he turned, went away in a rage.

But his servant came near him and said to him, my father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you. Will you not do it?

Has he actually said to you, wash and be clean? So Naaman went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan according to the word of the man of God.

[ 37 : 21 ] And his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child. and he was clean. Friends, it's the hardest thing in the world to humble yourself and bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But it's a great word that he has spoken to you. Will you not do it? Why are you so angry? Why has your face fallen?

It doesn't have to be that way. The Lord Jesus came to cleanse your heart and to bring joy to your face. Don't resist him.

Don't be like Cain. Let's pray.