

**Exposing Abortion Allies (pt. 1): Expressive Individualism**  
**Genesis 4 | 01.22.2017 | Rhythms of Mercy @OBC**

In recent days . . . actress / abortion advocate Lena Dunham has said she wishes to have an abortion.

When asked recently to tell her own abortion story.  
She confessed: “. . . I still haven’t had an abortion, but I wish I had.”

Receiving criticism from conservatives and liberals . . . she apologized.  
But the question remains: **Why would someone say something like this?**

**Is it pure evil? Complete ignorance? Or both?**

What kind of worldview is needed to desire to experience an abortion?

ATST . . . Why would one assume Dunham must have had an abortion to promote it?

The answer, I believe, is that authority . . . in our day . . . depends on experience.

Only those who have experienced something have the right to speak about it.

In a world where **Truth** has become relative . . . and **Authority** has been subjected to private feelings . . . **Morality** has been severed from objective reality and God’s moral law . . .

. . . **not to mention his future judgment!**

AS A RESULT: Self-expression has become our most precious virtue . . . self-denial our greatest vice

Even as Xians . . . people commanded to pick up our cross and die daily . . . we are not immune from the impulse to express ourselves, instead of denying ourselves.

Even when we stand against abortion and the evils of our day . . . it’s very possible we do so as an expression of SELF . . .

**How convoluted are our hearts !!!**

How desperately we need God’s grace	. . . To save us from ourselves
	. . . To root out ungodly individualism
	. . . To make us clean vessels, capable of service.

But part of the problem is even recognizing our sinful expressions of self . . .

I can imagine someone saying: “What is wrong with self-expression? And why?”

David Wells, in his book *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision*, explains:

**Expressive individualism** . . . grew out of the Romanticism of the late eighteenth century and today has an especial affinity with our therapeutic culture. [It] assumes that all people have a unique core of intuitions and feelings within them that is then coupled with the understanding that they have the inherent right to pursue and express these intuitions and feelings. (66) . . .

**[Entitlement is the key word . . . And not just any kind of entitlement] . . .**

**Expressive individualism** . . . is driven by a deep sense of entitlement to being left alone, to live in a way that is emancipated from the demands and expectations of others, to being able to fashion its own life in the way it wants to, to being able to develop its own values and beliefs in its own way, to resist all authority. To be free in these ways, many have come to think, is indispensable to being a true individual. (67)

I don't know of a better description of our world

. . . and the mindset that says “To feel alive . . . I must be myself.”

. . . and anyone who questions that . . . is a hater to be rejected

. . . and anything that gets in the way of my personal desires . . . even a child in the womb . . . becomes an obstacle to remove.

This self-first mentality is rampant in our world . . . but a commitment to self-expression is not new.

It is as old as sin itself.

As Solomon said, there is nothing new under the sun

God made man upright, but he has sought out many schemes. (Ecclesiastes 7:29)

And this radical commitment to self-expression is but one of them.

Therefore . . . to get at the root of the problem we need to go back to the beginning.

. . . back to the place we find the first time one person made in God's image kills another person made in God's image.

In Genesis 4 we find a tragic story of one brother killing another.

But the problem is far deeper than sibling rivalry gone too far

The great conflict is not between Cain and Abel . . . but between Cain and God.

In short, we find in Cain's rebellion against God an example of expressive individualism that should sour our stomachs

All of us to greater or lesser extents battle selfishness and we need stories like one to help us put those desires to death.

Specifically, Genesis 4 shows the danger of expressing our selfish will.

And how that selfishness . . . when not crucified with Christ . . . always leads to death.

Therefore, on this Sanctity of Life Sunday . . .

We confront not only the flames of abortion  
. . . but the fuel source of individualism that feeds it.

My prayer is that God will lead us weep over our sin AND the way this lie has made vulnerable millions of women to the false promises that abortion makes.

And I pray also . . . that God would enable us to walk in God's loving truth . . . so that we can bring good news to others . . . especially those who have aborted children.

*So let's dive into Genesis 4.*

## The Context

The story of Cain and Abel is the third narrative in Genesis 2–4

Genesis 2 shows humanity in perfect harmony with God and one another.

Genesis 3 recounts the way humanity fell from righteousness — By rejecting God’s Word for Satan’s lie, Adam led the human race into disobedience and death.

Genesis 3 records the strife that resulted between man and woman when they pursued personal autonomy . . . life ruled by self.

But Genesis 4 is where the fruit of self-rule begins to be seen.

The chapter is divided into three sections

Verse 1 begins with a statement about the fruitfulness of Adam and Eve’s marriage: **READ v. 1**

This pattern – to know, conceive, and to bear a son – is repeated in v. 17, 25 . . . giving us clear boundaries in the text.

Verses 1–16 are about Cain and Abel

Verses 17–24 about Cain and his children.

Verses 25–26 is about Adam and his son Seth.

### **In the Genesis 4:1–16 . . . We find a particular SHAPE to the text . . .**

Verses 1–2 provide an introduction to the section and the two sons – Cain and Abel. Then the next 14 verses provide a clear narrative arc, something like the St Louis Arch.

Verses 2b – 5 Begin with a mini-narrative about the actions of Cain and Abel. Cain works the ground; Abel is a shepherd. They bring sacrifices to the Lord. But only one brings right offering.

Verse 6–7 Elevates the tension in the story, as God comes and speaks to Cain – telling him his Sacrifice is unacceptable. But God also, as we’ll see, offers him a way of redemption. Sadly, Cain ignores or rejects God’s offer.

Verse 8 Brings us to the high point of the story, to top of arch – Cain leads Abel out into the field, where he strikes him down in cold blood.

Verses 9–15a Pick up the Lord’s Speech again, this time a dialogue with Cain, where the man-killer denies his knowledge of Abel’s death, his care for his brother, even as he pleads for God to spare him from woe.

Verse 15b–16 Concludes the sad story . . . with God putting a mark on Cain to protect him as he departs from the presence of God.

This context provides an overview of the passage, but our aim will be more specific.

We will focus on verses 1–8, to show how Cain’s unacceptable sacrifice demonstrates a man who is doing what is right in his own eyes . . . and not exercising trust in God’s revealed Word.

From there we will make application to ourselves today.

To get at the passage, notice 4 observations . . . related to 2 sons, 2 vocations, 2 sacrifices, 2 results . . . that all lead to one problem . . . the self-directed will of Cain.

## 1. Two sons

In the first two verses we are introduced to two sons of Adam and Eve—Cain and Abel.

Presumably, Adam and Eve had dozens of children . . . Scripture only records this pair to show sin’s effect on the human race.

The point then is not to give an exhaustive family tree, but to teach us something about human race . . . and perhaps even two kinds of sons.

Cain is born by the help of the Lord, but in time he will show that he does not honor God.

Abel, whose short life is like his name, which means ‘breath’ or ‘vanity’ does not find a permanent place on the earth.

Generations later he is remembered for his faith, as **Heb 11** recounts, “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous.”

So these are the two sons . . . and they each have a distinct and good vocation.

## 2. Two vocations

Verse 2 says “Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.”

Both of these occupations were noble. Adam was given the task to cultivate the earth; even after the fall, his task was to bring bread from the ground. Cain followed in this work.

Likewise, Abel’s task of tending sheep is regularly affirmed in the OT. Moses himself was a shepherd. And by the time Israel received Genesis they had a long tradition of sheep-herding.

So these two occupations are equally good.

As we move towards the point of separation between Cain and Abel, the division is not the vocation. Rather, it is the sacrifice.

### 3. Two offerings

Verse 3–4a reads, “In the course of time . . . READ

“In the course of time” / lit. “after a number of days” indicates this particular story occurred at no time in particular. As is often the case, life was moving normally when tragedy struck.

Moses is not telling the whole story of Adam’s ancestors, but he records this important milestone to explain the condition of mankind.

And as many OT scholars have noted, this divide between Cain and Abel begins the division between a line of faith and a line of hostility running throughout Scripture.

Gen 3:15 foretold that the hostility would exist between the offspring of the woman / serpent

Now . . . we begin to see it happen . . .

Cain will bring an offering from the fruit of the ground that does not please God,

But Abel will bring the first-fruits of his flock which does.

Numerous commentators have ventured a guess at what makes these two offerings different.

- [1] Some have believed that a mysterious principle of election made God prefer Abel.
- [2] Others have detected an impure heart in Cain.
- [3] Hebrews 11 indicates Cain lacked faith, while Abel brought his offering in faith.

Surely . . . because God looks at the heart . . . there is something personal and interior.

. . . But was there not something objective that made these two offerings different?

Gordon Wenham comments,

The [most common] view . . . , ancient and modern, is that it was the different approach to worship that counted and that this was reflected in the quality of their gifts. Whereas Cain offered “simply the produce of the land,” Abel offered the choicest animals from his flock, “firstlings” and “their fat portions.” (104)

In the text, we find at least 3 evidences there is something objectively better about Abel's offering

1. Verse 4 says he offered the **first-fruits of the flock** . . . throughout the OT the first-fruit always belonged to the Lord. It is a sign of putting God first and it resonates with later sacrifices. Thus, it indicates one reason why Abel's offering is better.
2. Verse 4 also says Abel brought "their fat portions." This again has the idea of the best part of the animal. Abel is not being skimpy . . . but as Moses words in **Lev 3:16** remind us: **the fat is the Lord's**.
3. The other factor that differentiates the offerings . . . is the simple fact that Abel brought an animal to the Lord, Cain brought the fruit of the ground.

There is debate on this point's significance:

1. Grain offerings are received later in the Pentateuch. Leviticus 2 describes the place of the grain offering. And so there is nothing intrinsically wrong about a grain offering.
2. The text says "*for Cain* and his offering he [God] had no regard." Thus, the stress is on the person making the offering, not the offering itself. As later prophets teach, a right sacrifice offered with the wrong heart is deplorable before God.

Hence, the issue here is less about what he sacrificed than how he sacrificed.

These are good arguments, but ultimately I believe the text leads us to goes further . . .

1. Grain offerings are always a part of a system of sacrifice and are never given by themselves. Grain offerings are not received by God without bloodshed.

As Hebrews 9:22 summarizes . . . "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." So . . . I am suspect of Cain's grain offering.

Yes, he's giving what he had . . . but like farmers who would buy animals for sacrifice, there's no reason to believe Cain could not have done the same. **I am more convinced . . . he is doing what is right in his own eyes . . . bringing an offering that doesn't match God's design.**

2. The text says that "*for Cain and his offering* he [God] had no regard."

Yes, God's judgment is aimed at Cain, but for what? For his faulty offering. There is something objectively lacking in his offering—something that is present in Abel's.

And that something is either the *quality* of the offering . . . or the *contents*.

In his rich exposition on Christ's atonement & intercession, William Symington makes a striking point about sacrifices in the days of Adam and Noah:

While it is admitted, the natural reason might suggest the propriety of offering to God [a thank offering], it is plain . . . these would consist of [grain offerings]. It is absurd to suppose, that the destruction of an innocent animal should be, in itself acceptable to God. (81)

I think Symington, a pastor-theologian from 19<sup>th</sup> C Scotland, has a valid point.

Imagine trying to make amends with a high and holy king for crimes you have committed against him in his kingdom.

One day you get the bright idea that the best way to make amends is to set up an altar before his castle . . . slaughter an animal on his steps . . . and light the bleeding carcass on fire.

Try to do that at the President's Inauguration . . . the result would be confusion and handcuffs.

Right? There's nothing meaningful about slaughtering an animal unless God ordains/explains it.

Yes . . . animal sacrifice is common in the ancient world . . . but this just proves mankind's common origin . . . and God's 1<sup>st</sup> communication to Adam about what pleased him.

So Symington concludes . . .

Nothing but duty . . . could make [the animal sacrifice] acceptable, and nothing but the command of God could make it a duty. (82)

I think he is right on . . . Abel pleased God, because he worshiped according to God's command:  
**But where do we see God's command to offer an animal?**

1. In Genesis 3 . . . God makes the first sacrifice as he provides skins to close his children. This may be the prototype which taught Adam how to worship.
2. Throughout Israel's long history, animal sacrifice is the normative practice for worship. You can't read the Torah without getting an education in animal sacrifice.

So here . . . Cain's failure to offer an animal would have been noticed . . . it would be like hosting a BBQ without meat. Sure . . . you can invite friends over for a vegan BBQ but . . .

3. Most plainly . . . Abel's offering pleased God because it was offered by faith (Heb 11). But faith is always responsive to God's Word. In other words, Abel offered the first-fruits of his flock in faithfulness to the word of God. **Faith follows God; it doesn't run ahead of him.**
4. By contrast . . . **and this is the main point and the main problem with Cain** . . . Cain did not follow God in faith. Meaning . . . he did not offer his sacrifice according to God's plan.

I think his grain offering rejects / ignores God's command to offer an animal to cover his sin.

**Now let me say** . . . I may be wrong about the difference between the two sacrifices, but the point stands: his faithless offering is filled with self-will as the next 3 verses indicate.



#### 4. Two Actions

Following these 2 offerings, Moses shares Cain's emotional condition and God's spiritual approach.

**First, verse 5 records Cain's anger.** Fueled by the lies of the evil one, he acted like Satan, raging at God and his creation.

His anger was provoked by his brother's righteousness, and instead of learning from his brother, he proudly refused to listen.

**Oh children . . .** do not refuse to listen to the good and gracious words of your parents, the wise counsel of your siblings, the warnings of godly friends . . . these are gifts to protect you.

Don't be like Cain . . . whose pride made stop listening. Because when you do . . . you miss God's loving invitation to find reconciliation and atonement . . .

Which is what vv 6 – 7 record – namely, God's loving invitation for Cain to repent.

v. 6 invites Cain "to do well" – IOW, to come again and present his sacrifice as God prescribed.

But he also says, "If you do not do well then = will destroy you.

Here in this text sin is personified as a power which threatens to destroy Cain.

In fact, there is even reason to believe that the 'crouch-er at the door' is a demonic spirit looking to destroy Cain.

**And how will Cain subdue this sin?** How will he escape the threat of this demonic spirit?

He must "do well" and put his faith in God's provided plan of sacrifice.

He must like his brother make an offering that will shed the blood of animal as showing his need for forgiveness and cleansing.

But horribly . . . this is what he does not do. Instead, he leads his brother into the field to kill him.

Instead of receiving God's offer of a substitute animal . . .

Cain takes matters into his own hands and further commits himself to the Satanic lie of self-reliance and expressive individualism.

Instead of doing what God said . . . and denying himself. He refuses God's word and becomes a murderer . . . just like his father the devil.

As 1 John 3:12 says:

We should not be like Cain, who was OF THE EVIL ONE and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

Friends . . . it is evil to shed innocent blood.

And abortion, therefore, is one of the greatest evils in our day.

Sixty million babies butchered since 1973.

How many million more killed through over the counter morning after pills?

And then . . . millions of would-be parents . . . seared & scarred b/c they bought Satan's lie.

And it's here where abortion and expressive individualism meet . . . **or where the world fuels abortion by whispering to the all-important self. . .**

"You are your own, take care of YOU, don't let anything steal your dream, you deserve to be happy and healthy and free . . .

"Don't deny yourself what you want . . . self-denial = unhealthy ... self-expression = that's where joy is found . . . this is freedom . . . this is life . . . and anyone who gets in your way

. . . well you don't need them . . . you can ignore them, break up with them, or abort them.

You see . . . there is nothing new under the sun.

Underneath and behind Cain's homicide . . . was a heart that sought to do things his own way.

Maybe if we were to put Cain and Abel on the big screen, we would have Frank Sinatra's "I did it my way" playing in the background as Cain killed Abel . . .

Because certainly . . . that was Cain's song.

And apparently, his self-willed approach to life did not stop him from worshiping God.

He just tried to worship God in his own way.

Oh how many times in Scripture we see this . . . the golden calf / Israel's idols / the Pharisees traditions . . . God's people provoking God's anger by worshiping him in their own way . . .

Even today . . . churches foster self-oriented, expressive individualism in the name of freedom.

But this only . . . fuels all kinds of sin. . . . Including abortion.

We might ask: How does knowing the connection between expressive individualism and abortion translate into action? **Let me suggest three ways from Genesis 4.**

**1. Genesis 4 exposes the way self-centered people justify their sin.**

Instead of humbling himself, admitting wrong, and receiving grace . . . Cain held fast to his sin.

The same is true today . . . how many defenders of abortion do so . . . because the pain of admitting their choice to kill a child is too much.

Instead of looking in the mirror and admitting wrong . . . they justify themselves by redefining good and evil. And making abortion a right to be protected at all costs!

**Rather than receiving the blood sacrifice which God offers . . . they create fellowship of blood themselves as they carry out their Cain-like 'freedom' . . . to take innocent life.**

**2. Genesis 4 reminds us that there is an atonement for sin.**

Abel came in faith with a blood sacrifice and he was received by God. Abel was a sinner who did not gain God's favor by works, but by faith. The same is true for you and me.

Only there is a sacrifice for us that is greater than Abel's sacrifice. It is the blood of Christ.

Jesus' death atoned for the wickedness of all people. There is no sin too perverse for his cross.

Even for women who have had abortions and the men who paid for it . . . there is forgiveness . . . there is forgiveness for anyone who comes and confesses sin . . . and clings to Christ.

**If you need forgiveness . . . cleansing . . . healing . . . look no further than Christ!**

**3. Genesis 4 teaches to stop living for self and start listening to God.**

Cain is a prototype and warning for those on the way to destruction.

Don't follow Cain. Seek God and his word. Listen to what God says . . . and you will soon learn that he calls us to celebrate children, to defend the unborn, and to oppose evil.

But we can only do that . . . as we stop living for ourselves and plead for others.

This is what Genesis 4 teaches: to deny self and serve others . . .

Indeed, in doing that you bring a way of life that chokes out the flames of abortion.

Yes, we must continue to oppose abortion head on . . . but let us also take captive the thoughts which make abortion possible.

Let us pick up the cross of Christ . . . and find life as we die daily to self.