



Journey Group Supplement  
Week of February 21  
Sunday's Text: Acts 19:11-20; Jn 20:21-23

Confession has some basic elements that are common to every experience, but it also changes in relation to the sin being confessed, the people involved, and the correction that is needed. In contrast to the event in Acts 19, the Bible also recounts many instances of people who insincerely or inadequately confess their sins. One of the very first cases involves Cain in Genesis 4:1-16.

After growing up in the first household, Cain and Abel take on their respective vocations working the fields and the pastures. As they bring offerings to God they are received quite differently. Abel brings “fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock,” indicating that he brings the best of his flock to God. On the other hand, Cain simply brings “some of the fruits of the soil.” Abel brings the best while Cain brings whatever is at hand, yet Cain gets angry when God “looks with favor” on Abel’s offering but not on his own.

Some commentators have suggested that Abel’s offering is accepted because it prefigures Jesus’ sacrifice as the lamb of God, but God’s own comments suggest otherwise. God says quite simply that Cain will be accepted if he does “what is right.” He has given God the second best or offered it with an attitude that is insufficient. In response, God warns him and calls him to repent. Essentially, Cain needs to agree with God and reconsider his offerings, and if something doesn’t change it will end badly.

Instead of examining himself, acknowledging his sin, and changing his response to God, Cain chooses to eliminate his perceived competition, Abel. Confessing his sins and improving his offerings in response to the initial warning would have addressed the issue, but instead Cain lets his problem fester and grow. Yet even after God confronts him with the brutal murder of his brother, Cain is unwilling to acknowledge his sin. He will not look at himself or identify and confront his own sin.

Despite all of Cain’s issues and evasion, God is still gracious and compassionate toward him. He shows Cain the truth consistently in offers of correction and restoration. And despite Cain’s rejection of the truth, God continues to seek Cain’s well-being even as he explains the consequences. God sets a mark on Cain to protect him from meeting the same fate as Abel. Cain cannot avoid the consequences of his actions, but what protection God can provide is generously given. Unlike Cain, the Ephesian Christians of Acts 19 take God’s warning through the sons of Sceva seriously. Instead of laughing at the sons of Sceva, the believers recognize that they could be next, consider their own behavior, and take their sin seriously. Not only does their confession relieve them of guilt and end further destruction in their own lives, but God also uses their actions to bring others to faith in Jesus. Through confession, God transforms greed and idolatry into faith and life.

### Discussion Questions

Greed appears to contribute to both Cain’s initial sin in keeping the best for himself and the Ephesians’ sin of sorcery for economic gain. Why can Cain’s sin be dealt with privately with God when the Ephesians act publicly? How does the nature of our sins affect the ways that we should confess and address them?

What do you find most difficult about hearing the confessions of others? How should seeing ourselves as representatives of God and agents of his forgiveness shape the way we hear others’ confessions?