THE NATURE AND POWER OF SIN
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When Cain discovered that only Abel's offering was accepted, instead of seeking the cause for his own rejection and correcting it, he became angry with God and Abel. Resentment, anger, and hatred welled up within him and were expressed on his face. God did not immediately judge him for his rebellious attitude, but appeared to him in preventive grace. First, He promised to give him "lifting" if he would have faith in Him and would desire to do right in His sight. "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" has been counted by some as the most difficult verse in the chapter. In fact, the problem is not as complicated as it appears. The verb "doest well," or "doest not well," in the following sentence is from the verb *yatabh* means "to be good." It is in the causative form, and hence means "to cause to be good." Its literal translation here would be "Behold, if you would make yourself to be good, there will be a lifting." "Accepted" in the original is the infinitive construct of the verb *nasa* meaning "to lift up," hence "lifting up of [one's countenance]." The idea of such a "lifting up of" face is very close to the idiomatic expression "giving face"; thus "accepted" would be a correct translation in English. The Preshito and Vulgate both have a similar translation, although the Septuagint has a different interpretation. Thus, etymologically, doing good as a personal responsibility is clearly indicated here. It is true, spiritually speaking, no one can be good in God's sight by his own efforts; nevertheless, a sense of personal responsibility for one's own actions is necessary for God's working in one "that which is well-pleasing in His sight" (Heb. 13:21).

God's second reasoning with Cain was really a warning: "And if thou doest not well sin lieth at the door." Sin had gained entrance into the world by action in the last period but was given no name until this period when, for the first time in Scripture, sin was called *chattath*. The Lord named it and described it in detail so the reality of sin as the antithesis to God's love may be known by Cain and all mankind. Both the form of *chattath* and its nature are very peculiar here. In order to understand its peculiarities, further study is necessary.

There are two ways to define things: nominally and essentially. "Nominally" means to derive a definition out of the word itself, while "essentially" refers to a definition from the very nature of the thing. For instance, the nominal definition of Adam is "man made of dust," while the essential definition is "a sinner, dead to God and condemned" (See Rom. 5:16-19). The nominal definition of Messiah is "the anointed one," since this passive noun is derived from the verb "to anoint," while its essential definition is "a priest, a prophet and a king," the three offices of our Lord. Sin can be defined in these two ways.

From its nominal definition, sin is not simply moral or ethical defects. Many things may be adequate morally or ethically and yet be sin in God's sight. Moses' smiting the rock twice to produce abundant water (Num. 20:8,11), Uzzah's taking hold of the ark instead of letting God take care of it (2 Sam. 6:6), and Peter's sympathy to Jesus' suffering (Matt. 16:21-23) were all good deeds. Morally or ethically speaking those

incidents were not blameworthy, yet they were all counted as sin in God's sight. The word *chattath* (sin) is derived from the verb *chata*, "to miss the mark," and is used in Judges 20:16 to describe those slingers who did not "miss their mark." Thus the nominal definition of sin is missing the mark set by God, which is lack of conformity to God's will. God has ordained definite means and end for every action and has set the right time and way of doing everything. If anything or any action is not carried out according to God's means, end, time, and method, no matter how moral and ethical it may be, it is sin.

For its essential definition, the nature of sin can be seen from its morphology and syntax. First, sin is attractive. The form of the word itself is in the feminine gender, denoting the attractiveness of sin in its seductive appeal, while its actual gender is masculine as indicated by the following modifying masculine participle *robhets*, crouching, denoting the destructive power and tyrannous nature of sin. Thus sin is double gendered. It would never approach a person with its ugly face but always with sweet appearance, sympathetic talking, and affectionate touching. When sin has caught the victim, however, it binds him with its cords (See Prov. 5:22) and slays him (See Rom. 7:11). Second, sin is intensive and forcible. Besides its actual masculine gender, the extreme strength of sin is also shown by the intensive form of the noun *chattath*, indicated by the doubling of its second radical, *tt*. It can even rob some people of sleep until they do wrong (See Prov. 4:16), or cause others to be like the troubled sea without ever having rest (See Is. 57:20). Third, sin is aggressive. The ever militant activity of sin is expressed by the nature of the Hebrew active participle which expresses active and continuous action in the past, present, and future to describe its ceaseless crouching or lying in wait, as a lion being ever ready to spring upon anyone going out the door. Keil and Delitzsch described it well. "The feminine *chattath* is construed as a masculine . . . sin is personified as a wild beast, lurking at the door of the human heart, and eagerly desiring to devour his soul."[1] This personification of sin as an unrestrained animal might have laid the foundation for the revelation much later of Satan as a roaring lion walking about seeking whom he might devour (See 1 Pet. 5:8).

God made it plain to Cain that he had no reason to be angry with Him and Abel, and that he had to realize the power of sin and its consequence upon himself. In later revelation, *chattath* would come to mean both sin and sin offering. In the Authorized Version it is translated as sin 169 times, sin offering 116 times, punishment and purification for sin twice each, and punishment of sin and purifying once each. It is a remarkable message that where there is sin, there is the punishment of sin and yet there is also a sin offering. Surely this is the embryonic form of the distant revelation "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). Thus God brought to Cain's attention that although sin and punishment were crouching at the entrance, the sin offering and purification for sin were also there. However, Cain himself had to make the final decision between life and death, blessing and curse, since he alone was responsible for mastering the ever-present sin (4:7). Unfortunately, Cain chose the latter, rejecting God's reasoning, and as a result committed the first murder on the earth.

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[1] C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), Vol. I, p. 112.