

## GEN 4:17-24—The Way of Lamech

**Intro:** A lot of people say “I can’t judge (or, I don’t know) the condition of someone’s heart.” I’ve said that myself about various people. Has anyone else here ever said something like that?

- Often when we say that we are trying to be charitable toward someone who is acting like a jerk. True?
- Or, we are talking about someone we don’t know personally.
- Or, we recall that “Man looks to the outside, but God sees the heart” (1 Sam 16:7)

And then there’s the even deeper and more personal issue of how do we judge our own heart? After all, **Jer 17:9** says “**the heart is more deceitful than all else and desperately sick, who can understand it?**”

So, how do I know I’m not a hypocrite? Especially those of us who say we are Christians: We say we believe in Jesus; He is our Lord; He’s IN us—and yet, do any of you ever have in the back of your mind the thought: “What a fake I am?” How do we know if our faith is “real” or not?

Today’s passage of Scripture—**Gen 4:17-24**—will help us deal with those issues.

### **READ Gen 4:17-24**

What is this telling us?

**PROP:** Our attitude toward people reveals the condition of our heart.

**O/S:** We will see how our attitude toward people reveals the condition of our heart as we look at: (1) our attitude toward our spouse (**23a**); (2) our attitude toward others (**23b**); and (3) our attitude toward ourselves (**24**).

But before we get there we need some background.

**Background:** This is a narrative portion of scripture. IOW, it’s not a didactic or teaching portion like the epistles; it’s not prophecy; it’s not poetry like the Psalms. Rather, it is narrating an account of something. All biblical narratives have a point. They are in the Bible to teach us something.

Most biblical narratives tend to be bare-bones. IOW, they are not like modern histories or novels that have lots of background details (you know, “it was a dark and stormy night”). In biblical narratives usually the speeches of the characters are most important. That is the case here. This whole account leads up to and is focused on Lamech’s speech in vv.23-24. Look at Lamech’s speech [**READ vv.23-24**]

What does it tell us about this man? Does it give us the picture of Mr. Rogers? (“It’s a beautiful day in the neighborhood, a beautiful day to be neighborly”) What kind of character do you see here? [**Ask Audience**]: arrogant; proud; self-centered; unforgiving; harsh; unrepentant; dominating attitude; angry; revengeful; far from God and full of himself. Unlike many of the OT examples we have seen in the past few weeks, Lamech is a negative example, in many respects the opposite of Christ. But looking at the negative helps us to see its opposite in greater light.

We will look at vv.23-24 in more detail in a few minutes, but first let’s briefly look at vv. 17-22. Vv.17-22 are the background and history of Lamech that leads up to his speech in vv. 23-24. What do we see?

- **(v.17)** He is of the line of Cain. Cain himself was an angry and jealous man and was the first murderer. What does that tell us? We are all products of our own heritage. It has been said, “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” For example, in my case, my dad is dead. He was not a Christian. Yet when I look at myself, I realize that he was, and in many ways still is, perhaps the most important influence on my life—both for good and bad.

But this tells us something else: We are not slaves to our past. We can change and grow. In fact, many of us see evil and wrong in our families and rebel against it or consciously act to change. Lamech did not do that. In fact, he took his spiritual, attitudinal, and behavioral inheritance from Cain and built on it & took it to extremes. He was not a self-reflective person. Don’t be like that. We need to “Know Thyself”—including how we got the way we are, and work to change those negative traits that we know are in us.

- **(v.19)** Lamech was a self-centered man who acted contrary to God’s plan. When God created the first people, He created Adam and Eve—not Adam and Eve and Mary and Sarah. And He said “the 2 will be one flesh,” not “the 3 or 4 will be one flesh.” Jesus reaffirms that in the NT. In fact, **Eph 5** tells us that marriage is designed to be a picture of the relationship btw. Christ and the church. The church is even called the bride and wife of Christ in **Rev 21**. How many brides does Christ have: 1 or >1? He is married to the church, not to the church and the mosque or the world. And He is faithful to his bride.

But Lamech said, “That’s not good enough for me.” You see, “it’s all about me.” Lamech was the first polygamist. Others followed in his footsteps, including patriarchs such as David and Solomon. Yet every time, polygamy resulted in problems. Again, there is a lesson here. Although we do not have polygamy in this country—other than what is called “serial polygamy” (i.e., you get sick of one spouse, so you divorce her and marry another; and again; and again)—all of us, in various areas and in different ways have Lamech’s attitude that “it’s all about me.” We need to ask ourselves: in what areas do I feel that way? And how do I act on those feelings? B/c when we act contrary to God’s ideal, we are following in the way of Lamech.

- **(vv.20-22) Lamech was an outwardly successful man.** Look at his children: creative; productive; successful. They probably reflect Lamech himself, particularly since back then there was much greater integration of families than there is today in the West. But this also tells us something: Our character is not determined by what we do or by what we have. You might be a rich Philistine, but you’re still a Philistine. What matters to God? Remember: “Man looks at the outside, but God looks at the heart.”

Which leads us to Lamech’s speech in **vv.23-24**. And here we clearly see that **“our attitude toward people reveals the condition of our heart.”**

### **I. Our attitude toward our spouse.**

I have already hinted at this, when we looked at Lamech’s polygamy. God’s ideal for marriage is 1 man married to 1 woman for life. When God said in **Gen 2** that “the two will be one flesh,” that is more than just physical, but implies that we are to be on the same page spiritually, financially, and in other ways. We have been designed to help and encourage each other, and build each other up.

You see, marriage was designed not only to reflect the relationship between Christ and the church, but in its own very limited way to reflect the perfect, loving, wonderful, intimate oneness between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That is the ideal. Marriage is spiritual. Nancy and I have been married for >30 years. And I can tell you that, when done right, the end can be better than the beginning.

That is where Lamech provides us with a good negative example—an example of how not to do it. Hear the tone of how he addresses his wives: **“Listen to my voice, you wives of Lamech.”** You get this tone of anger and self-centeredness. And that is contrary to the very basis and design of marriage itself. IOW, marriage is designed to be the most intimate, loving relationship in the world. A relationship where you can be “real” with your spouse; where there is no fear; where you can be vulnerable—b/c you know that your spouse is always there for you. But this man is basically threatening his wives. He is a taker, not a giver. He is using them to aggrandize himself. B/c it’s all about ME, ME, ME. That attitude always causes problems. B/c marriage is a relationship unlike any other, in a very deep way **our attitude toward our spouse reveals the condition of our heart.**

### **II. Our attitude toward others [READ v. 23b]**

In the Law of Moses, God est’d the principle of *proportionality*: i.e., “eye for eye; tooth for tooth,” NOT “an arm and a leg for a tooth,” let alone “life for tooth.” But look at Lamech. That’s not good enough for him.

Text is ambiguous as to whether Lamech killed two people, a man and a boy, or just one: ESV says **“I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me.”** NASB says **“I have killed a man for wounding me, AND a boy for striking me.”** It really doesn’t matter, b/c either way his whole attitude toward others is out of whack, which resulted in extreme, disproportional acts of revenge. Why? B/c again it’s all about ME: You hurt me, I don’t just hurt you back, but I kill you. You’re just a boy—so what? I AM LAMECH.

How many successful “big men,” and not a few women, are like that? They might not physically kill, but that is their attitude and approach to others. Again, **our attitude toward others reveals the condition of our heart.**

### **III. Our attitude toward ourself [READ v. 24].**

This goes back to earlier in Gen 4. After Cain killed Abel God punished him by saying that he would be a vagrant and a wanderer. Then Cain said, b/g in **v.14 [READ Gen 4:14-15].**

Notice 2 things here: First, even in exacting punishment, God had mercy on Cain. Yet Lamech has NONE. Second, as was true with Lamech’s attitude toward marriage and his attitude toward others—where he disregarded God’s plan and God’s standards—the same is true in his attitude toward himself. He says “If Cain is avenged 7X...” IOW, God est’d a 7-fold vengeance for Cain, the founder of the line—but Lamech is saying, “That’s not good enough for ME.” I am greater than Cain. Even God’s standards are not good enough for ME. It’s all about ME.

The way of Lamech is the exact opposite of the way of Christ. I can't prove it but I can't help but think that this very passage was in Jesus' mind in **Matt 18** when Peter asked him "**How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?**" And Jesus replied "**I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.**" By saying that, Jesus is contrasting the way of Lamech with the way of Christ. B/c those are really the only two ways that face us. The way of Lamech is all about ME. The way of Christ is all about others. But the two are related: Our attitude toward ourself necessarily implicates our attitude toward others, and *vice versa*. So again, **our attitude toward ourself reveals the condition of our heart.**

**APPLICATION:** This passage is mainly designed to get us to assess the condition of our own heart. How do we do it? By assessing our attitude toward people: our spouse; others in general; and ourselves. But secondarily, doing this should help us come alongside those we love—our family members, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances—when we see them starting down the way of Lamech.

But how do we know what our attitude toward people is? That is actually fairly easy to discern. Look to how we *habitually treat people*. Our *attitude* affects our *actions*.

- Greatest command (**Matt 22:36-40**)
- **1 John 4:20**. IOW, how we do the 2<sup>nd</sup> command (loving your neighbor) is the test and the proof of whether we are really doing the 1<sup>st</sup> command (loving God). Why? B/c everyone has been made in the IOG. How we treat God's image shows what we really think of Him. God is not fooled by our lip-service. Rather, he gives us a concrete, visible test *so that we can clearly see and know* the state of our heart and whether or not our faith is real—that concrete, visible test is *how we treat people*.
- We see this principle in the final judgment. Bible freq'ly says that, at the judgment, we will be judged "**according to our deeds.**" This does NOT mean that we can work our way to heaven by doing enough good deeds. The fact is that we are all subject to the power of indwelling sin which is inside us and corrupts even our good deeds. We are only saved by God's grace through faith in Christ. But as Luther said, "we are saved by faith alone, but faith is not alone." IOW, true saving faith will change the way we live. And most especially we should see that in the way we treat people.
- **Matt 25:31-46**—the sheep and the goats—is a description of the final judgment. [EXPLAIN]
- How we habitually act toward people reveals to us, to other people, and to God, whether or not we in fact have true, saving faith. **Jas 2:15-17** makes this clear [EXPLAIN]. How we treat people is the outward & visible sign of our inward, spiritual state. Or, to put it another way, **our attitude toward people reveals the condition of our heart.**

We will never be perfect in this world. We will always take certain steps along the way of Lamech. But when we do, we should recognize what we are doing, and repent, and turn, and get back on the way of Christ. Christians can do that. Why? B/c Jesus said that when we b/c believers and followers of Him, He sends the HS to live in us, and empower us to begin living like Him. **1 Cor 2:16** says that we have the mind of Christ. We also have the Spirit of Christ. Christ has opened His Word to us. And He has given us the body of Christ. All of these things are means to help us to walk in the way of Christ, not the way of Lamech.

Draw upon these means of grace to assess the state of your own life, particularly as you see any seeds of the way of Lamech starting to grow up in your life. Be looking for this, and nip them in the bud. Instead, as we draw upon Christ, our attitude toward people will change. As our attitude toward people becomes like Christ's, our actions toward people will change, and will become more like Christ. And then they will see—as they should—the difference between the way of Lamech, which is so prevalent in the world, and the way of Christ—and they will be drawn to the beauty of Christ.

Let us pray.

Benediction: **Eph 4:24-25**