

Building on Biblical Foundations

Genesis 3:21-4:5

“The Heart of the Worship”

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Genesis 3:21-24

21 “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them. 22 And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: 23 Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. 24 So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.” KJV

So the Lord covers Adam and Eve’s shame literally. He sends them out of the garden – so they cannot also eat from the tree of life (the tree of eternal life) now that they have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He even sets angels to guard the garden.

Adam and Eve leave Eden and begin their new life, the life that resulted from their disobedience. If they had only known the extent of the consequences of their actions, if they only knew the depths of depravity that would the world would sink to because of that one foolish choice . . . I am sure they would have chosen differently . . . but they did not.

We cannot live our lives in reverse. We make our choices and live with the results of such choices.

The reverberation of destruction that came from that first sinful act is still echoing today. And it would have echoed eternally had Jesus not stepped in to provide the everlasting sin covering – his own blood.

Genesis 4:1-2

“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.” KJV

So Adam and eve become parents of two sons. One son is a shepherd and the other is a farmer. The sons grow up and continue in relationship with the Lord, like their parents, who have obviously taught them about the Lord as evidenced by what we read next:

Genesis 4:3-5

“And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.”

What just happened?

They both brought offerings to the Lord. Let’s look a little closer.

In verse 3 we read that Cain brought the fruit of the ground to the Lord – he brought a portion of his harvest. But Abel brought the firstlings of his flock and the fat.

What was wrong with Cain’s offering? Is it because his grain offering was not as valuable as the animal offering? Is it about the value of the offering?

What did Jesus say about our giving to the Lord?

Mark 12:41-44

“Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.” NIV

Clearly the Lord is more concerned with the manner in which we give, not in the amount.

To bring offerings unto the Lord is entirely voluntary.

Both Cain and Abel bring their offerings in obedience.

BUT . . . Abel’s heart is turned toward the Lord.

Abel brings his offering as an act of worship, praise and thanksgiving.

Cain is going through the motions. Checking that box for the day.

Cain brings his offering to fulfill a duty.

Scripture is here to help understand the past, understand the Lord and understand ourselves.

When we come into the house of the Lord – when we bring our offerings, all of our offerings – not just our material gifts, but our songs, our prayers, our attention, our presence – are we going through the motions? Fulfilling a duty? Or are we bringing all we have as a love offering unto the Lord? Our own act of worship, praise and thanksgiving?

When we make an offer unto the Lord does it matter how we do this? Or only that we do it?

We know that Adam and Eve had trained their sons in the ways of the Lord because they are offering sacrifices to God. This much is inferred by these verses. Where else would they have learned to do this? So what can be said of Abel's acceptance and Cain's rejection?

From what we do know in scripture – Cain quickly reveals his heart. As we will see in just a few verses there is evil festering within him. But God already knows this. There is no hiding from Him. He knows the intentions of the heart. Even more than we do.

Jeremiah 17:9-10

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." KJV

God is well acquainted with each of us. There is no hiding from him.

Jeremiah1:5

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." NIV

Psalms 139:13

"For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." NIV

Even when the outward appearance fools others, God sees our true intentions. In this case he sees Cain's heart.

God knows that **Cain's offering is an act of obligation**. He brings a portion, not the best or the first, but merely a portion. He checks the box of worship but his heart is far from the Lord.

Isaiah 29:13

“The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.”

Abel’s offering is an act of pure worship. His heart set on doing what pleases God, not what is only convenient or expected, or in his own way. He doesn’t just bring one of his lambs, he brings the first, the best, and the best portions thereof – which would have been the fat portions. He goes over and above just satisfying a requirement or obligation. In his joy and reverence for the Lord he gives what he knows will please the Lord.

This is a heart matter. It always is. What is in your heart? Is it to please the Lord? Or please yourself? Is it to bring our best into God’s service? Or to save the best for ourselves and give whatever is convenient? OR do we rely on others to give their best, while we hold back?

Remember Anannias and Sapphira?

ACTS 5:1-5

1-2 But a man named Ananias—his wife, Sapphira, conniving in this with him—sold a piece of land, secretly kept part of the price for himself, and then brought the rest to the apostles and made an offering of it.3-4 Peter said, “Ananias, how did Satan get you to lie to the Holy Spirit and secretly keep back part of the price of the field? Before you sold it, it was all yours, and after you sold it, the money was yours to do with as you wished. So what got into you to pull a trick like this? You didn’t lie to men but to God.”5-6 Ananias, when he heard those words, fell down dead. That put the fear of God into everyone who heard of it. The younger men went right to work and wrapped him up, then carried him out and buried him.” The Message

I cut this story off without including all of it. If we read a little more we will see that Sapphira also lies and her fate is the same as her husband.

So . . . Why did they fall down dead? Because they did not give their money to the Lord?

No. Peter says that the sin is not withholding money, but lying to the Holy Spirit. They wanted others to be impressed with their generosity – thinking they had given ALL to the Lord. But the Lord knew their hearts. They wanted the appearance of being a true worshipper without actually being one.

Jesus called out the Pharisees who did the same:

Matthew 23:27-28

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.

In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Cain and Abel each provide a pattern or type of worshipper.

The Cain type:

Proud, hardened, despisers of God’s way, Trying to please God their own way.

The Abel type:

Humble, lovers of God, Drawing near to God as He has proscribed. (Adapted from *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*)

We know which one God prefers. He made that quite clear to Cain and Abel. Jesus also spoke of the kind of worshipper the Father seeks.

The Apostle John recorded in his gospel what Jesus said concerning this. . .

Jesus said:

John 4:23-24

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” NIV

What does that mean?

Jesus was talking with the Samaritan woman at the well about where the Jews worshipped. Jesus made it clear that the location was of less importance than the condition of the heart.

True worshippers – those who worship God in sincerity, in purity, wholly, – would worship him (any where and every where) in the power of the Holy Spirit and in all honesty. This was in stark contradiction from the way the Pharisees had been worshipping – out of religious obligation – full of pomp and circumstance but lacking the humility and (as in the widow’s mite)

We have the advantage of scripture, Jesus’ teachings and the Holy Spirit to teach us how to worship, to help us worship the Lord in the manner he prefers.

Yet, the Lord also expected Cain and Abel to know this as well. How could they have known this? The word of God says that all of creation knows he is Lord and gives him praise. We are without excuse. Here are but a few verses to remind us:

Psalm 19:1-2

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

Psalm 68:8

“The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: *even Sinai itself was moved* at the presence of God, the God of Israel.”

Job 12:7-10

“But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you.

Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind.”

Also, they were just one generation removed from the garden where their parents enjoyed communion and fellowship with the Lord.

Perhaps Adam and Eve schooled their children. Perhaps the Lord directed their worship himself. What we do know is that the Lord accepted Abel’s offering as worship and did not accept Cain’s.

We also know that the Lord is just, is merciful and is gracious to us. He is good and his goodness extends to us. He wants us to get it right. He is not looking for us to fail.

On the contrary when we do miss the mark, He is there to guide us back. We will get into this more next week.

Next week we will examine how Cain responds to the Lord’s rebuke and the consequences of that response.