

The Seriousness of Acceptable Worship

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[0 : 00] As we begin our lesson this evening, we find Adam and Eve living outside the Garden of Eden.

! Their expulsion followed their disobedience of God's command regarding the forbidden fruit.! And when we come to chapter 4 of Genesis, we learn!

We learn something of our original parents. Eve has conceived and given birth to a boy. Genesis 4.1 says, Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, I've gotten a man with the help of the Lord. And in this verse, Moses, and of course he was the human author of Genesis, the Holy Spirit is the ultimate author, begins to describe the human descent of mankind. It is important to note that the command of God to increase and multiply was not abolished by sin.

That command is still in force. And in the first part of verse 2, we read these words, And again she bore his brother Abel. Now for generations, theologians have discussed and debated the possibility that Cain and Abel were twins. Even a theologian as wise as John Calvin believed it was likely. He bases his conclusion on the fact that verse 1 mentions one conception, but by the time we get to the next verse, we have two births. Calvin also points out that the command to replenish the earth with inhabitants would be better carried out by having male and female as twins.

twins down through the years. Of course my thinking on that point was with that rationale, it would be even quicker if the woman would just go ahead and have quintuplets. But I'm not going to go there. My feelings are that since the scriptures are silent over whether this was one birth or twin births, we should be silent as well.

But by the time we pick up the story in the second verse, Adam and Eve have two boys. Now there's something of note happening in verse 1 where Eve says, I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.

[3 : 02] That phrase has been the subject of great discussion among some really great theologians. What specifically does Eve mean here? The Hebrew word that Moses uses means to acquire or to possess.

Some interpret this as Eve saying she is given birth to a boy by the kindness or by the favor of the Lord. And I would suggest every birth is that.

That interpretation is certainly consistent with the later writings of the Psalms. In Psalm 127.3, it says the fruit of the womb is the gift of the Lord.

It's the gift of the Lord. A similar interpretation is that Eve possessed a man from the Lord.

There is, however, a third interpretation. It's not widely accepted, but it's been around for centuries. And that translation has Eve saying, I've obtained a man, Jehovah.

[4 : 11] Or I have obtained a man, even Jehovah. Based on that interpretation, some have argued that Eve believed her firstborn, being Cain, she believed him to be the Messiah based upon the promise of Genesis 3.15, which we've already studied, which is the first prophetic verse in all the Bible.

It's not possible, promising a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, by name, would be coming. It didn't mention his name in Genesis. But the greatest problem with this interpretation is that Eve knew she had conceived with the seed of Adam.

So how could she think this child was from the Lord physically? Interestingly, she refers to her newborn baby as a man. I found that interesting.

I've obtained a man. She sees the human race being renewed, which it needed to be following the episode in the Garden of Eden.

And it's being renewed, which both she and her husband had ruined through the decision to be disobedient and commit sin. So it's rather intriguing to look at those things.

[5 : 39] Next in the chronology, Abel is born. So we have two children born to the first parents, both boys. That would please my wife.

She had boys. Usually I get a groan at that point. Their names are Cain and Abel. I think we all know that names were important in the Bible.

They spoke of the character and the quality of a person, good or bad. I mean, even Jesus. Jesus is the word, he who saves.

He's the Christ, the anointed one of God. He's the Lord. That's the king of the universe. So names are important. Cain comes from a Hebrew word, which means possession.

Possession. And we're going to see this later in our study. But Cain was big on possessing things. And we'll take a look at that probably next week.

[6 : 45] Later, he even built a city to live in. He possessed a city. Abel's name is a bit more difficult to wrap our minds around.

It means vanity. Well, that's an interesting name for a child. Vanity. The 17th century Bible commentator, John Trapp, said Abel is called vanity because he saw the world's vanity and was driven out of this vain world by his untimely death.

I'm not sure that's totally accurate, but John Trapp was a brilliant theologian, and I've got his commentaries on the Old Testament that are quite instructive. In the second part of verse 2, we read, Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.

A lot has happened in the second verse. We have no knowledge of Adam and Eve having two boys now, and by the second part of the verse, they're grown.

They had little boys, and now they're grown. It's the same verse. One is a shepherd. That's Abel. He's a keeper of sheep. He has a flock.

[8 : 07] One is a worker of the ground. That's a farmer. That's Cain, and that's post-fall in the garden when God told Adam, you're going to plant and sow with thorns and thistles.

It's going to be a tough life. Now we need to establish something up front here concerning the two boys and their chosen profession.

Both of these lines of work are honorable and necessary. There are some theologians, very few, but they find fault with Cain's line of work, but not Abel's.

Well, there's nothing wrong with either one, shepherd or farmer. We need those who provide meat for our tables, and we need those who provide vegetables as well.

There is no fault to be found in the chosen line of work of each of these boys. And then beginning in verse 3, in the course of time, Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.

[9 : 32] Now, both of these boys had been well instructed in worship. And this is a form of worship here that they're engaging in.

I think we can assume that they learned such from their parents, although it is certainly possible that they heard directly from God on the matter.

And we'll find out next week that God is actually going to talk to Cain, and Cain's going to hear him with his ears. Whether that happened before or not, I don't know. But they understood the concept of offering sacrifices.

And this, of course, is not the first sacrifice to be offered. God slew an innocent animal in the Garden of Eden. And remember, he did that to hide the nakedness of Adam and Eve.

When they sinned, they realized they were naked and they hid from God. So perhaps these boys were taught by their parents, or perhaps by God directly.

[10 : 43] Both were offering sacrifices. One an animal from his herd, and one from the produce of working the ground.

There is a sign in offering sacrifices that they held out hope of salvation and acceptance with God. So they're offering a sacrifice. But it really comes down to both of these men. They're men now. It comes down to their heart attitude.

What is their heart in all this? These sacrifices were worship, and any time we seek to worship the true God in an acceptable manner, it is a manner of the heart.

It is a matter of the heart. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering. But for Cain and his offering, he had no regard.

[11 : 52] So we note four truths in that verse and a half of Scripture. The Lord had regard for Abel. The Lord had regard for Abel's offering.

The Lord had no regard for Cain. And the Lord had no regard for Cain's offering. God had regard or respect, same Hebrew word, for what Abel had done.

I looked that word up in the Hebrew language. It means to gaze at, consider, or inspect. Interesting phrase.

Now there is a fine point, but one we must consider. Abel, I'm convinced, had already become a follower of Christ and justified by God.

Now Abel did not know the name of Jesus. But he knew Genesis 3.15. His mom and dad told him about it. He didn't know about justification.

[13:01] And it may sound strange that he knew Christ because the incarnation of Christ would not occur for thousands of years. But we and Abel had been introduced to the Messiah in Genesis 3.15.

And we know that because his offer was regarded and accepted by God. Like Abraham, after him, Abel believed in the promise made by God concerning the coming Messiah and it was credited to him as righteousness.

He believed God. He took God at his word. God has no such regard for an unbeliever who doesn't believe his word. An unbeliever cannot worship without first coming to the bloody cross, repenting and having faith in the finished work of Christ.

And by the way, that takes God to pull that off. Abel looked forward to the cross. We looked back at it. But it's the same cross. It's the same cross.

It is God who looks on the heart. And he could see into the deep recesses of Abel's heart and Cain's as well.

[14:28] And may I add, and ours. That should bring peace to most of us. I hope all of us. John Calvin had this to say, All works done before faith, whatever splendor of righteousness may appear in them, were nothing but mere sin being defiled from their root and were offensive to the Lord whom nothing can please without inward purity of heart.

For this must be received at a settled point that in the judgment of God no respect is had to works until a man is received into his favor. God has respect for our obedience only when he looks upon such and sees his son as our Lord and Savior.

Apart from the faith given us as a gift, all our works are described in the Bible as a filthy rag. before the eyes of God. Any human effort is a filthy rag.

There's none righteous, not even one. So Abel's gift was acceptable because his heart was right. It's acceptable because he was a Christ follower.

But we also learn that God had no regard for Cain's offering. Why? Well, I think we can and must infer at this point that Cain was not a Christ follower.

[16:09] In fact, as the more we study this, this week and next, I think we're going to find out Cain was a Cain follower. In true worship, we offer ourselves as spiritual sacrifices to God.

But when God sees hypocrisy of worship, he does not bear such but rejects with contempt such offerings. Now, the early Jewish commentators came up with explanations that in my view are not only erroneous but I think sinful in describing God's rejection of Cain's offering.

They said that Cain must have offered inferior vegetables such as small ears of corn or diseased fruit. Cain could have given God the entire harvest and it would have been unacceptable because his heart was not right.

I saw that similar in a movie called The Bible. It was really kind of a good movie but they had parts in there and they had Abel came with his offering and then Cain came and he had this big basket of produce and then he took some back.

And they were blaming it on that. Well, there's nothing in scripture about that. Nothing. And remember God sees the heart. Well, what did he see in Cain? Cain was very angry and his face fell.

[17:38] The Wycliffe Bible written or translated centuries ago said this using some old English words, and Cain was wroth greatly and his chair felled down.

That's the old English. It felled down. I find that rather expressive of what is being said here.

According to Webster's 1828 dictionary, wroth means very angry and very much exasperated.

That is a good definition of what Cain was experiencing. It didn't take long for Cain to realize that God was pleased with his brother.

And it also didn't take him long to realize that God was displeased with him. That is why Cain is wroth and his cheer felled down.

A hypocrite desires and seeks earthly blessings or recognition. You can always mark that down. Cain was a wicked man.

[18 : 56] That will be played out on how he reacts to his brother. But even and perhaps especially wicked men still want to be first place among people.

They want to be first. Even in many churches people strive to be first and to be recognized. They want to be recognized. They do so by external works and might even labor to impress God. But God always sees the heart.

And in the case of Cain and many like him it is a heart wrapped in deceit, insincerity, and pretense. Now we see this graphically portrayed in the New Testament in Matthew chapter 7.

Jesus of course is speaking. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven, on that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?

[20 : 23] and then will I declare to them, I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. These people wanted and beyond that expected salvation by the human effort they were putting forth.

Look at what we've done. And they have this rather impressive list. we've prophesied your name, we've cast out demons in your name, and we've done mighty works in your name.

Well, who are they focusing on? God or themselves? They're focusing on themselves. They wanted and expected salvation by human effort.

When they learn that they're not entering into God's kingdom, and that's what Matthew 7 is all about, they point out these works that they've performed.

But wait a minute, Lord, you've made a mistake here. Listen to what we've done. We've prophesied, cast out demons, and did not just works, but we did mighty works.

[21 : 38] Jesus did not know them, and orders them as workers of lawlessness to depart from him. You know, we spend a lot of time asking people, do you know Jesus?

Do you know Jesus? A better question is, does Jesus know you? savingly? Does Jesus know you savingly? That's a really good question. We can contrast Matthew 7 with what went on in Luke 18 in the temple in Jerusalem, and this is what it says, two men went into the temple to pray.

One a Pharisee, don't you love them, they're always hanging around somewhere, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. You know the two most hated classes of people in Israel?

Tax collectors and shepherds. You know why shepherds were hated? They smelled, so they couldn't go into the temple to worship.

They smelled like wet sheep. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, what a prayer, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

[23 : 04] I fast twice a week. Notice the personal pronoun I. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get.

But the tax collector standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven. He couldn't even look upward, but beat his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

And Jesus says, I tell you, this man went down to his house just defied rather than the other. The other being the Pharisee, the religious man.

And he gave even down to seeds. Pharisees would give one out of every ten seeds they got out of their garden. In Genesis, Cain is related to the Pharisee and able to the tax collector.

Cain, like so many people in the world, displayed the appearance of obedience. After all, he brought an offering. He got that offering by the sweat of his brow, by putting up with thorns and thistles and drought.

[24 : 23] He brought an offering. By that fact alone, Cain believed God was under obligation to accept him. He put God under obligation.

Mark it down, God's never obligated to any of us. He's under no obligation. But God's ways are not our ways. He rejects Cain's offering.

What follows next is universally true. Cain believes that God has done him a great wrong. A great wrong.

He wanted God to applaud his actions, actions, but instead the Lord rejects his actions. God pronounced Cain's offerings as frivolous and of no value in the Lord's sight.

It was without value. Well, Cain reacts in the manner many such persons react. He grew angry. He grew very angry.

[25 : 32] I think we weren't there. We couldn't listen in, but if we'd been the fly on the wall or on the tree, I guess, in those days, we would probably have heard Cain to begin to murmur.

He's cursing under his breath, and soon that murmuring is going to turn to rage. He's been violated, he thinks, and by God.

And by God. Cain's attitude was such that it was a tremendous hindrance to reconciliation with God.

He's getting further and further away. When Cain realized that his sacrifice was unacceptable and his brother's was acceptable, he burned with furious indignation.

He can't believe this has happened. And Cain's probably looking at Abel out there in the fields playing a flute or something to keep the sheep, and he's sitting on a rock and they're grazing while he's digging and watering and doing all that.

[26 : 43] And now he's furious. He's absolutely furious. When people are angry at God, that anger is usually not poured out on God.

you can't reach God. You can't get to Him. Usually that anger is poured out on the people of God. On the people of God. I got nose-to-nose with one of my officers years ago. This was a long time ago. And you know what he accused me of? He said, you read the Bible.

That's the first thing he did. That was his attack on me. You read the Bible. I said, every day. That didn't help him. So we see this anger poured out on the people of God.

Well, remember, there's only three people on earth at that time. Adam, Eve, Abel, other than Cain, I mean, four with Cain. So Cain would soon pour out his anger on his unoffending brother.

[27 : 59] Abel hadn't done anything wrong in God's eyes or man's eyes. Now, depending on the translation, we read that his face fell or his countenance fell.

Cain was seized and locked up with vehement anger, and he is wasting away with unbridled envy for his brother.

He is so envious and jealous that his brother's offering has been accepted and he is rejected by God. So I don't think there can be any doubt, but Cain was murmuring and that murmuring would turn to rage and really soon, like a week from tonight, that rage would turn to murder.

The murder of his only brother at that time, his only sibling. I'm always amazed, having been in law enforcement 47 years, worked homicides, that when we had four people on earth, one was a murderer and one was a murder victim.

It's amazing, isn't it? But that's where we're going to start next time. I don't know what time it is, but I'll try to go longer next time to keep you here later. So with that, let's close with a word of prayer.

[29 : 26] Father, we thank you for the day and this evening, and Lord, we thank you for your word. It has been preserved for us by the Spirit of God. May we read it, take it in, remember it, learn by it, and live by it, Lord.

Be with us now, as we return to our homes, be with those who couldn't be here tonight, Lord. Be with all those mentioned in these prayer requests, and Lord, I'm sure there's others, and we pray for them all, and we ask all this in Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. Thank you.