

Genesis 3:22-4:5

Genesis 4 Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a manchild with *the help of the Lord.*” ² Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. ³ So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. ⁴ Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; ⁵ but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

Genesis 3 and Expulsion from Paradise...

Genesis 3 and the biblical account of the Fall concludes with the dramatic record of verse 24: “He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.”

Cherubim are depicted in Ezekiel 9 and 10 as the winged bearers of God’s holy throne. In Ezekiel 1, they are the “living creatures,” each with four faces (a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle), together with four wings (Ezek. 1:5–10). They appear again in Revelation 4, when John is permitted to gaze on the throne of God in heaven and sees “the four “living creatures” posted as sentinels.

The cherubim are guardians of the presence of God in the garden of Eden. Having heard God’s summation of Adam’s condition and God’s sentence of Adam and Eve to live east of Eden, here we view God’s security to guard the tree of life from rebel mankind.

There were, in fact, two guardians, since the cherubim were joined by “a flaming sword that turned every way” (Gen. 3:24). The inference is that the chief problem of sin is its effect on God. The problem of sin is shown to reside not merely on Adam’s side, since God’s justice is offended and his sword bars the way to life. Not only is Adam alienated from God, but God is alienated from him! God’s holy justice cannot and will not permit Adam to turn back into the garden. Together with the cherubim, the sword of God turns every angle to bar the way back. By his own means, therefore, Adam will never be permitted back to the garden, the tree of life, or God.

Derek Kidner writes, “His way back is more than hard, it is resisted: he cannot save himself.”

Adam went on to live for 930 years (Gen. 5:5), during which he never again set foot in the garden of Eden. Never did he extend his hand to eat from the tree of life, so that he might live forever. Never in all those years, we may safely assume, did he look again upon the blessed face of God. While he lived long in a world where his hands tilled the ground and his sweat watered the earth, ultimately he died.

We may also be sure that Adam lived those long, hard years with an earnest hope of salvation. His faith rested on God's promise to bring forth a Savior to overthrow the devil's work (Gen. 3:15). God had prefigured the atoning work of Christ by placing Adam's guilt on an innocent sacrifice, clothing him in its sinless hide (v. 21).

Moreover, Adam could come to the gate of the garden, where his sons Cain and Abel also came to worship the Lord. Seeing the created glory of the cherubim, Adam could glimpse a reflection of the majesty of his Maker, knowing that the day would come when God's promise would be fulfilled and the sword of his justice removed.

Genesis 3:24 concludes the Bible's account of the fall with an impenetrable barrier: "at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life." So far as sinful man was concerned, the way back to God and eternal life was barred forever.

The Awful Consequences of Sin...Genesis 3 and the Post-fall world

Sin separates us from life, so fallen Adam must leave the garden of Eden, "lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (Gen. 3:22). So Adam is expelled from the garden of Eden.

Remembering the Bible's depiction in Genesis 2:8–14 of its rich and lush environment and the bliss Adam enjoyed there in the presence of God, we should reflect on the enormity of our loss. We remember that once there really was a perfect world and that we were made to live in it. Adam was placed in the garden and given the fulfilling task of working and keeping it. Now, because of his sin, Adam is barred from paradise and excommunicated from the presence of God.

Such is the holiness of God that the Lord "drove out the man" (Gen. 3:24). Adam was not merely asked to leave but forcibly expelled from God's presence...

Kenneth Mathews writes: "It is the language of divorce and dispossession (e.g., Exod 33:2; Deut 33:27). Adam and Eve are 'out in the cold.' "

This observation yields a second lesson from this passage...**sin separates us from the presence and blessing of God.** Whereas before there was intimacy with God, now in sin there is alienation from God.

A. W. Pink comments:

The moral significance of this is plain. It was impossible for Adam and Eve to remain in the garden and continue in fellowship with the Lord. He is holy, and that which defile[s] cannot enter His presence. Sin always results in separation. “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you” (Isa. 59:2).

Cast out from the garden, where God had provided lush trees for Adam to work and keep, now the man would till the soil for himself...“the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken” (Gen. 3:23). In contrast to the abundance of Eden...The man’s bitter toil would pose a daily reminder of “God’s sentence...“cursed is the ground because of you” (v. 17).

Our own struggles and sorrows ought likewise to remind us of the consequences of sin. Obeying God would have enthroned Adam in the paradise garden, but he now stands in heavy bondage to the very soil that he was first privileged to control. This is the world east of Eden. Adam and Eve are now separated from God, and life apart from his presence is a very different and challenging world.

James Boice comments:

What has brought them to such a sorry state? The culprit is sin, and the consequence is separation from the One who is altogether loving. Let us learn, then, that sin does matter and that the devil is wrong when he says that sin will not hurt. Sin disrupts that greatest of all relations: that between a man or a woman and God.

Alasdair Paine writes...

With Genesis in our hands...God has seen to it that our experience in life is a constant reminder of two great truths—God’s majesty as revealed by creation, and the fact that there is a problem between us and him...We cannot physically see the disruption in our relationship with God, so God makes it known by these effects, shouting to us that there is a problem.

The Legacy of Adam's Fall...Excerpts from the Westminster Shorter Catechism...

Question 16 Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression? (Excerpt)

...all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression. (Gen. 2:16–17, Rom. 5:12, 1 Cor. 15:21–22)

Romans 5¹² Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned
Romans 5¹⁹ For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

1 Corinthians 15²¹ For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

Question 17 Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?

The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery. (Rom. 5:12)

Question 18 Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?

The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it. (Rom. 5:12,19, Rom. 5:10–20, Eph. 2:1–3, James 1:14–15, Matt. 15:19)

Ephesians 2¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Question 19 What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?

All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, (Gen. 3:8,10,24) are under his wrath and curse, (Eph. 2:2–3, Gal. 3:10) and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever. (Lam. 3:39, Rom. 6:23, Matt. 25:41,46)

Colossians 1¹³ For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

But Jesus came and declared, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Jesus alone has satisfied the sword of God’s justice, which struck him on the cross when he died. Now, through Jesus alone, the sword is raised, God’s justice is satisfied, and eternal life is opened to all who believe in him.

Turning to Genesis 4...

As we turn in Genesis to chapter 4, we enter a pivotal transition in the biblical record of history. Genesis 2 tells of the creation of mankind, the blessing of our first parents in the garden, and their covenant obligation to obey the Lord. In Genesis 3, the serpent appears and seduces Eve and then Adam, so that they fall into the curse and alienation of sin. The chapter concludes with the introduction of God’s grace for sinners. The Lord promises a Redeemer to be born from the woman—One who would overthrow the realm of Satan (Gen. 3:15).

There would be enduring consequences, however. In addition to a life of great difficulty outside Eden, followed by death, the offspring of Adam and Eve would be divided into two humanities. The Lord said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring” (Gen. 3:15). Thus, the descendants of Adam and Eve would fall into two distinct categories: those who follow Satan through unbelief and rebellion and those who follow the faith of the redeemed first couple.

Genesis now moves to the next generation and the future foretold by God. Here we encounter two sons. These sons represent the two humanities in a fallen world. Cain, the firstborn, is consumed by pride, and in his anger he murders his believing brother. Abel, the first in the line of the godly, is justified by his faith and is persecuted by his brother as a result. As Genesis expands on this theme in the chapters to come, we see that two spiritual lineages emerge from Cain and Abel.

What began with Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 remains the great dividing line of humanity, the one line destined to live forever in heaven by the grace of God and the other destined for the punishment of God in hell according to his justice and power.

Two Spiritual Lineages...

1 John 3 10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. **11** For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; **12** not as Cain, *who* was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

Genesis 6 5 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

A Tale of Two Sons

The first couple had been driven by sin out of the garden. East of Eden they resumed their lives and turned to each other in love: "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived" (Gen. 4:1).

Of particular emphasis is the name that Eve gave to her son. She named him "Cain," and said, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD" (Gen. 4:1). The name "Cain" is taken from the verb for "gotten." The probable meaning is that Eve has "gotten" or "acquired" the child whom God had promised and who like her husband Adam is a "man."

Genesis 4:1...The first birth is recorded. No doubt she longed for the promised Seed (3:15) to reverse the effects of the fall. But she in fact gives birth to Cain who refuses to walk in God's way and is hostile to God.
Michael Barrett, RHB

In naming her child, Eve honors the faithfulness of God. Our English version says that she acquired her son "with the help of the LORD." This reflects most translators' view of the meaning, but the Hebrew original states merely, "I have gotten a man with the Lord." As Eve saw it, God was not merely an assistant but was a vital participant in the birth of her child. She therefore uses God's covenant name, "the LORD," to signify his faithful provision.

Moreover, Eve's naming of Cain evidences her continued faith in God's promise. It is possible that she believed that Cain was himself the Savior to be born through her and that her naming had the effect of saying, "Here he is!" We can imagine her counting off the days until his birth... and then suffering the first agonies of childbirth, all in the expectation of an imminent salvation. This was not, however, God's plan for history.

If Eve was expecting an immediate Savior, she would be bitterly disappointed. The first human child would not be the Christ but a killer, exemplifying not the promised salvation but the sin into which mankind had fallen.

Eve's naming of Cain bears witness to her faith and regeneration.

H. C. Leupold writes...

"That she expresses it as she does . . . affords proof that the mother of our race had not remained in her sin but had come to repentance and faith in God's promises."

It was God's word that shaped who our first parents became. How little of God's revelation they then possessed! But what they did have contained the gospel promises of God concerning Jesus Christ. By trusting in him, Adam and Eve received eternal life through faith in the Lord.

In time, Adam and Eve had another child, Abel. The full significance of this name is not given, but since it has the meaning of "breath" or even "vanity," we may suppose that Eve had come to understand not only the hope of salvation but also the fleeting nature of fallen life in this world.

A Tale of Two Sacrifices

It is significant that fallen mankind had access to God even outside the garden. We can imagine our first parents and their sons praying as a family, expecting God to hear them wherever they dwelt. It is most likely that in bringing their offerings, Cain and Abel would have appeared at the gate of the garden where a cherub barred their way to the tree of life. Genesis 4:3-4 records this: "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."

The key to this passage is the contrasting results of the two sons' offerings: "the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard" (Gen. 4:4-5). There are two different sons, two different offerings and ways of approaching God, and two dramatically different outcomes.

Abel and his offering were acceptable because of his faith, whereas for lack of faith Cain was rejected...

Hebrews 11 4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

This raises a question, however, as to what it was about the offerings that involved faith or unbelief...The text notes a contrast in the offerings themselves. Both brothers made gifts deriving from their respective work. Cain brought “an offering of the fruit of the ground,” whereas “Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions” (Gen. 4:3–4). The contrast involves the fact that Abel offered the first and best portions of his flocks, whereas Cain did not offer his best. Cain’s unbelief is thus seen in the merely outward nature of his offering.

Leupold comments, “It is evident that the one gave because it was time and custom to give—pure formalism; whereas the other gave the best—pure, devout worship.”

John 4 23 But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. **24** God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

The contrast between these brothers’ gifts provides an important principle that should animate our worship today. Our worship is not “in spirit and truth,” as Jesus put it (John 4:24), if we worship merely with our feet, hands, and mouths but do not offer the praise of our hearts to God, earnestly desiring his honor and glory. Cain thought he was doing what God wanted: he came and brought an offering, after all...God, however, “looks on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7), and rejects people in worship who come to him without a true faith and adoration.

Worship...God is Worthy

Westminster Confession of Faith 21.1...Regarding Worship

1. The light of nature shows that there is a God, who has lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and does good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. (Rom. 1:20, Acts 17:24, Ps. 119:68, Jer. 10:7, Ps. 31:23, Ps. 18:3, Rom. 10:12, Ps. 62:8, Josh. 24:14, Mark 12:33)

But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture. (Deut. 12:32, Matt. 15:9, Acts 17:25, Matt. 4:9–10, Deut. 15:1–20, Exod. 20:4–6, Col. 2:23)

God is to be.....

- **Feared**
- **Loved**
- **Praised**
- **Called Upon**
- **Trusted in**
- **Served**
- **With all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might.**

Importantly...The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will

There is another difference between the offerings of Cain and Abel. Whereas Cain brought an offering arising from his own work, Abel brought an offering in blood from a lamb that was slain. In this is seen the difference between the two religions that are joined to the two lines of humanity, one of unbelief and the other of faith in God's gift of atonement. It is not that Cain believed nothing—he believed in his own works. Abel, however, came to God, trusting in the sacrificial blood that God himself would provide through the offspring of the woman, in the coming of Jesus Christ. Abel was accepted, therefore, by his faith in the gospel of Christ and his atoning work, whereas Cain was rejected because of his lack of faith in the Savior who would come.

God himself had given to Cain and Abel's parents a specific example in the aftermath of their fall. I noted earlier that Adam and Eve had only a small amount of divine revelation, so far as the Bible shows.

How prominent it was, then, when God enacted his saving plan precisely in terms of blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Genesis 3:21 records how God instructed Adam and Eve in the essentials of true religion: “the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.”

Genesis 4:3...Cain brought of the fruit of the ground for the worship of God, but Abel brought a blood sacrifice from the best (firstlings . . . fat) of his livestock, which the Lord respected.

This shows that (a) God requires a blood sacrifice which is implied by the earlier covering of Adam and Eve, and (b) Adam had taught both brothers that this was required, since Abel offered his sacrifice by faith (Heb. 11:4), and faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). God had revealed the way of acceptable worship.

Michael Barrett, RHB

The great evangelist George Whitefield explained:

“What were the coats that God made to put on our first parents, but types of the application of the merits of the righteousness of Jesus Christ to believers’ hearts? We are told that those coats were made of skins of beasts. ...Those beasts were slain in sacrifice, in commemoration of the great sacrifice, Jesus Christ, thereafter to be offered. And the skins of the beasts thus slain, being put on Adam and Eve, they were hereby taught how their nakedness was to be covered with the righteousness of the Lamb of God.”

We must ask...if Abel had not been taught the rudiments of this salvation doctrine, why did he present slain lambs as his offering? For what other purpose would he have shed their blood, especially since animals were not yet taken for food (see Gen. 9:3)? By far the most likely explanation is that his parents had taught him true religion—atonement for sin by the blood provided by God—and believing this gospel, Abel came to God with a picture of Christ’s coming death.

It is also important to note the language of Hebrews 11:4, which presents the Bible’s authoritative interpretation of this episode. We have already seen that the writer of Hebrews emphasized the faith by which Abel’s offering was “a more acceptable sacrifice” than Cain’s. But he adds: “through which he was commended as righteous.” The issue in Cain’s versus Abel’s offering, then, pertained not merely to worship in a general sense, but to the hope of salvation by which the respective brothers intended to be justified before God. For justification, the only acceptable faith was and is trust in the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

Justification through Faith

God's acceptance of Abel grounds one of the great teachings of the Bible: the doctrine of justification through faith. This doctrine is at the core of the gospel, the good news that God offers us in Christ, because it declares exactly what we see in the case of Abel, namely, how a sinner can be accepted and declared righteous by the holy God.

We are not righteous by works, which declare our supposed merit—this was Cain's mistake, and the cause of his rejection as he came to God with a picture of his own works for salvation—but we are justified only through faith, which declares our need and our acceptance of God's gracious gift.

Abel was a sinner, being the son of Adam and bearing sin's corruption in his fallen human nature. Yet when he came to God, bearing the blood of a substitute, "the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering" (Gen. 4:4). The blood turned away God's wrath by speaking of the cross of Christ, and on that basis God received Abel with gladness.

Genesis 4:5...Cain was very angry because his offering was not accepted and his anger is expressed against God directly.

Michael Barrett

This acceptance was available not only to him; Cain could have been justified this same way. As God explained to bitter Cain: "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?" (vv. 6–7).

The Voice of Abel

Hebrews 11:4 concludes its exposition on Abel: "And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks." Faith brought Abel to God, trusting the blood that Christ would someday shed. God responded with acceptance, bearing a testimony of justification, in response to this faith. By this faith, Abel, though dead, still speaks.

During all the long years and centuries before Jesus Christ, the faith of Abel preached the gospel to the people of God. His offering symbolized a sacrifice that was yet to come and would take away our sin. He spoke of faith, instead of works, as the way of justification. Now that Christ has come, Abel still speaks of God's atoning grace, with a voice that fully rejoices.

Many of our hymns echo his message.

Rock of Ages

Augustus Toplady (1776)

1 Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood,
from thy wounded side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure;
save from wrath and make me pure.

2 Not the labors of my hands
can fulfill thy law's demands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.

3 Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savior, or I die.

4 While I draw this fleeting breath,
when mine eyes shall close in death,
when I soar to worlds unknown,
see thee on thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee.

Horatius Bonar's words would also be welcome and familiar to the lips of this son whose sacrifice testified to faith in the Savior's blood:

Not what my hands have done can save my guilty soul;
not what my toiling flesh has borne can make my spirit whole...

Thy work alone, O Christ, can ease this weight of sin;
thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, can give me peace within. . . .

No other work, save thine, no other blood will do;
no strength, save that which is divine, can bear me safely through. . . .

I praise the God of grace; I trust his truth and might;
he calls me his, I call him mine, my God, my joy, my light.