

Family Foundations, Part 4 – The Biblical View of Children (Genesis 4:1-2)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on December 14, 2008

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Genesis 4 introduces to us the first two children ever born. We're not going to focus this evening on the ensuing story of Cain and Abel and what happened later and the deterioration of the family and society in Genesis (that will come in another couple lessons) but we want to start with the foundation that is laid down in God's Word for children and family

Genesis 4:1-2 (NKJV) ¹ Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD." ² Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

I don't know if you've ever given much thought to what a remarkable evidence of God's grace this passage is. We have just turned the corner from Genesis 3 (what happened in chapter 3)? Sin has come to our world, and God had made very clear to man that if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die deservedly and instantly seems to be understood.

We all know the story; a snake shows up speaking partial truths and questioning God's goodness, i.e., "*why He is so restrictive?*" (3:1, 4-5). Eve was tempted by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (v. 6) and she eats the fruit and gives to her husband with her and he eats, too (v. 7). They can run but can't hide from God – God calls Adam as the responsible head first, even though Eve sinned first, the husband bears primary responsibility due to his role as head of the family. God calls him out on the carpet of lush paradise, and singles him out as the man in v. 11 emphatically "*Who told **you** that **you** were naked? Have **you** eaten from the tree of which I commanded **you** not to eat?*"

You also are familiar with what happens next, as you've heard before, Adam blames Eve, Eve says basically "the devil made me do it," and the serpent doesn't have a leg to stand on.

The serpent is not given any chance to speak or repent (no fallen angels are given such an opportunity) and God could and should at this moment punish mankind by death, physical and eternal.

Spiritual death, separation from God due to sin, did take place that very same day that they sinned, but notice as I read verses 14 and following that this passage we typically identify as God's curse or judgment would have been originally heard as including grace

Genesis 3:14-21 (NASB95)

¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; ¹⁵ And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And **between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.**"

Wait a minute, "her seed"? God is not talking to the woman, but you better believe she picked up on it. *That means I'm going to have a child, that means I'm not going to die today! What mercy!*

Look at God’s amazing grace in the second half of the v. 15: “He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.” This male offspring would be attacked by the serpent personally (ultimately the devil behind the serpent) and there is the great promise: that same One Man will deal a fatal final blow to the head of the evil one. God’s first words after sin enters creation are not all bad news; there is very good news, good tidings of great joy as Christmas celebrates. This is the first promise of a Messiah!

The blessing of life and children is also seen amidst this judgment:

¹⁶To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply Your pain **in childbirth**, In pain **you will bring forth children**; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you.” ¹⁷Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it **All the days of your life**. ¹⁸“Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And **you will eat** the plants of the field; ¹⁹By the sweat of your face **You will eat** bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return.” ²⁰Now **the man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living**. ²¹The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

Instead of killing them, God apparently killed an animal as a substitute for them, clothing them instead of condemning them. You can’t help but think what a picture this is of grace and what a picture this is of the gospel for sinners like them. Adam believes God (v. 20) and God is true to this promise of children in 4:1-2.

Genesis 4:1 says Adam literally “knew his wife Eve” – that’s a biblical word that often refers to the closest intimate relationship, in this context the one-flesh marital intimacy including intercourse.

NASB “the man *had relations with his wife*”

NIV “Adam *lay with his wife*”

HCSB better “Adam knew his wife *intimately*”

NET “the man *had marital relations with his wife*”

It’s been pointed out that this euphemism or ‘idiom appears again in this chapter in vv. 17 and 25. It is not without significance that often the sexual relationship described in the Bible is one in which the partners fully know each other [and are in a relationship of committed covenant love]. One partner does not exploit the other. Rather than being an end in itself, cohabitation is a means to an end, and that end is a deeper, more intimate knowledge of each other. In other words, expressing oneself sexually is not just a [biological] function’¹

Outside of a covenant love commitment (2:24) man and woman are never to be joined as one flesh in this way, as the original readers of Genesis would later learn in the law. Sexual relations outside of marriage, adultery, is so serious to God that His law gave the death penalty for such violations. Sex is God’s good gift for man and woman’s pleasure (Prov. 5, Song of Solomon), partnership (Gen. 2:18-25), purity (1 Cor. 7) and procreation (here)

What a gift of grace that the woman whose sin brought death was allowed to become the mother

of all living instead! Man and woman after marring God's creation are given the privilege of procreation to restore and reproduce God's image on earth through godly offspring as we saw a few weeks back. Can you imagine what it was like to have never known anyone pregnant before and to become pregnant and to feel and see a child growing inside of you for nine months, to be the first ever to experience this?

Principle #1: Children Are a Supernatural Gift From God

Every child is a miracle, but imagine the first time ever. Kent Hughes imagines how

'Eve's pregnancy certainly must have been a source of joyous wonder to the couple. Like millions of her daughters to follow, Eve likely placed Adam's hand on her tummy so he could feel the stirring life. Perhaps he even listened in awe to the busy heartbeat within. [*What a supernatural thing this is!*] Eve's was the first pain ever in childbearing. But those terrible pangs gave way to a joy so deep that it subsumed her pain. The Hebrew for "man" (*ish*) is not used anywhere else in Scripture to describe a baby boy [the NASB "manchild" is ok, but reminds me of Mogli in Jungle Book, so I prefer just "man"]. The baby's gender was that of Adam. This was another *ish!* Eve said in effect, "*God made man, and now with the help of the Lord, I have made a second man!*" She rightly saw Cain as a work of God. Her words were an implicit declaration of faith. Adam had believed the promise of Genesis 3:15 and so had named her Eve: "*The man called his wife's name Eve ["Life"], because she was the mother of all living*" (3:20). And the new mother praised God with a newly charged faith ... Abel's birth doubled her joy. Eve had become the mother of two sons. Three men filled the earthly horizons of the mother of all the living. Hope welled high in the first family.'²

We saw in chapter 2 that God intended man to realize what a grace and gift from God it was to have a wife, in the way He created woman different than the rest. Children are also portrayed as a gift.

For woman in particular, God communicates what a grace and gift it is to have children and to be a mother, the blessing of childbearing and childrearing is conveyed here. This is a divinely designed role for the woman created by a good and gracious God. Adam's faith came out in 3:20. Eve's faith in God comes out here.

One commentator writes on her reference to the LORD in 4:1 as the ultimate source of her child shows: 'both thankfulness and praise: thankfulness at deliverance from pain and danger, praise that Jehovah is manifesting His grace and faithfulness in giving a son. So the use of the name "Yahweh" should be observed. Apparently, then, since the name stresses His gracious faithfulness, Eve praises God that He who promised victory to the seed of the woman actually lets "seed of the woman" be born. Nothing indicates whether Eve did or did not anticipate that this very seed, Cain, should personally crush the serpent's head [some writers suggest this]. But, in any case, she had a token of Yahweh's fidelity. That she expresses it as she does also 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 ... her utterance is also to be regarded as a word of faith.'³

She believed this child was not merely produced by her and Adam. She understood children to be a gift from God Himself. What an amazing thing it must have been to be the first mother to

ever witness the miracle of a birth with no prior context, with no doctor or midwife, with a husband that probably didn't know what to do, she had to rely on the LORD for every part of this miracle.

Principle #2: Children Are Seen as a Blessing Not a Burden

One commentator said Eve's words in 4:1 are an exclamation of joy that she had a child. The Hebrew brings out a play on words: the name "Cain" she gives in the original language sounds like the verb in v. 1 "I have gotten / acquired / brought forth." His very name testifies to her understanding of a divinely enabled blessing:

"with *the help of* the LORD" (NASB, NIV, ESV)
 "from the LORD" (NKJV)

The underlying Hebrew (*'et*) is not often translated that way, but is used similarly at the end of Genesis, 49:25, in part of Jacob's words to Joseph: "From [*min*] the God of your father who helped you, from [*'et*] Shaddai who blessed you." Supporting evidence for *'et* meaning "from" is now found in ... Akkadian ... Ugaritic'⁴

Judges 8:7 and Esther 9:29 also support this interpretation, as do the ancient Jewish Targum and LXX. Eve is emphasizing God's role in the birth of her child. He's a gift and blessing from the Lord

Genesis 1:28 (NASB95) ²⁸ God **bleſsed them**; and God ſaid to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth**

In English, this phrase "be fruitful and multiply" ſounds like a command, but the Hebrew is really more of a bleſſing. As we diſcuſſed in our ſtudies in Genesis 1 laſt year, God's bleſſing is actually what cauſes or endows fruitfulness with children

READ 9:1, 7 – repeated to Noah's family after the flood

Genesis uſes this word "bleſs" ſimilarly in 17:16, where God's bleſſing of Sarai imparts to her the capacity to bear a child: "I will bleſs her, and indeed I will give you a ſon by her Then I will bleſs her, and ſhe ſhall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

The idea of bleſſing through offspring is a theme in Genesis:

- Abram (12:2-3, 22:17-18)
- Ishmael (17:20)
- Isaac (26:3-4)
- Jacob (28:3, 48:3-4)

Deuteronomy 7:13 (NASB95) 13 "He will love you **and bleſs you and multiply you**; He will alſo **bleſs the fruit of your womb** and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increaſe of your herd and the young of your flock, in the land which He ſwore to your forefathers to give you.

CHILDREN ARE A BLESSING FROM GOD, NOT A BURDEN. You cannot read through even the firſt book of the Old Teſtament without noticing that the Bible is very pro-child in ſtark

contrast to much of American society. This idea also prominent in Hebrew poetry. Psalm 127:3 describes children as fruit of the womb. Psalm 128 also highlights the blessing of children. There is no question that the biblical view of children sees them as a great blessing and not as a burden, and having a “full quiver” of children was both a joy and sign of divine favor to Jewish families.

Sadly most of our modern world views children quite differently than Genesis and God’s people through the ages. When we were in Germany this month 4 years ago, we just had our two little girls at the time, and as we went around towns and villages, there were not many strollers. The Germans don’t have many kids, it’s very common for couple to have no kids, and we in some ways really stood out. The birthrate is so low in many places like that in Europe while the immigration rate of Muslims is high that in one generation their entire culture could be changed from the outside in, and if this trend continues (Muslim majorities in parts of Europe)?

Many Americans are anti-children as well, whether subtly or vocally, but it’s sad that a growing number of those in the church have unbiblical views of children. In some cases their ideas of children very much oppose the Scriptural perspective of kids.

One mom said it better than I could: ‘If you don't believe this, ask any mother of more than the socially acceptable number of children. Unless she attends a truly unusual church, she has probably been forced to endure insults, criticisms, jabs, and mean-spirited joking at the hands of fellow Believers. Two comments, made to a close friend of mine following my husband's joyful announcement of our fourth pregnancy, sum up a prevalent attitude towards children: [Your wife] is sure putting on a good front about this," sighed one woman as if my husband had announced an impending family tragedy. Another said, "I don't know whether to offer her congratulations or condolences."

Some churches in Southern California go so far as to ban children from worshiping with the rest of the church body. Apparently they take Jesus words of "Let the children come unto me" to mean that this should take place somewhere where only a few adults--their teachers--will have to endure the company of children. One family told me about being barred from entry at the door of a church sanctuary and being told that no children, even well-behaved ones, were allowed inside. An older couple told of visiting such a church and seeing the family in front of them escorted out. Their two boys had behaved in an exemplary manner, yet their very presence in a church was, according to a written statement handed out by the ushers, a "disruption" of worship.

A worldly philosophy of children becomes somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Children viewed as burdens tend to act like burdens. Children left untrained bring shame on their mothers. Children banned from church attendance lose interest in church and become either disruptive or disinterested. However, when we develop and live out a Biblical view of children, we experience blessings beyond our expectations. Our children really **are** blessings, we quickly discover--and we consider ourselves especially blessed if God generously grants us more of them. The faith of our children is a testimony to us. Teaching and training them causes us to grow in wisdom and knowledge. Serving them, using Christ as our example, causes us to grow in maturity, compassion, and godliness. Loving them brings endless rewards.

Truly, children are a blessing--and motherhood is a joyous privilege.’⁵

Principle #3: Children Are Special As Created in God's Image

Back in Genesis 4, verse 2 and following we return to the account of Cain and Abel. We're not going to go through the details of this story tonight, that will be in a future message, but for now I want you to notice an important implication about God's image in man:

Genesis 4:2-11 (NASB95)

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. ⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ "If you do well, will not *your countenance* be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." ⁸ Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. ¹¹ "Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

When Abel killed animals and brought them before the LORD, He was pleased. But when Cain kills his fellow man, God is not pleased. This is a key distinction that may be obvious to us, but is important to emphasize in our world, that is a very important and special thing when a child comes into the world in God's image.

Genesis 9:2-3 (NASB95)

² "The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. ³ "Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as *I gave* the green plant ... ⁶ "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man. ⁷ "As for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it."

Murdering a human is such a serious thing because it reverses God's intention for His image to multiply and be spread on the earth. Right on the heels of mentioning God's image in v. 6, God again reminds them of the creation commission or blessing to be fruitful and multiply and spread God's image and glory abroad through children. Don't murder, multiply God's image through children. Children are special and precious in our Lord's eyes.

Sadly, quite a different view of children is held by so much of our world. Children are seen as unimportant, nuisances, in the way of what grown-ups want to do, they're seen as liabilities, hindrances to a woman's career, a mere choice for woman's rights, burdens not blessings, and for many liberal leaders of our nation; as long as an infant is not completely out of the birth canal, late term abortion is considered ok. The evil of abortion is such a serious and Satanic undermining of God's very purpose that Genesis 1 and 9 records and we need to pray God would open the eyes of our leaders and legislators – even unbelievers – to what is right and wrong.

We live in a country which is so harsh on people who kill certain unborn animals, and yet so harsh toward any who want to protect unborn human beings from being aborted. It's illegal to

kill an unborn eagle, it's unthinkable wrong for baby seals to die, while the killing of baby humans is legally sanctioned and furiously fought for by liberals. Try and cut some trees down in many areas, and you'll cause quite an uproar, but those who want shade for their family from liberal agendas, those who want to protect unborn children and protect a biblical understanding of the family, those like us are painted as the intolerant dangerous bad guys.

I was struck watching the media's coverage of Sarah Palin, and liberal women in particular, who we might have expected to say "you know I disagree with her on some conservative issues, but I am happy to see her as possible first female VP of America." But what I heard several say is what infuriated liberals most about her, and what drove much of the vitriol and rhetoric against her from fellow ladies in particular was her belief that life is sacred and should not be aborted, even in the case of a disabled or mentally handicapped child, because of her biblically-based view of children that they are special to God and in His image which is to be preserved rather than destroyed.

John MacArthur in one of his book points out how much the 'values now embraced by society as a whole are badly out of sync with God's divine order. For example, the American court system sanctions the wholesale massacring of millions of unborn children annually, but a court in Kansas City [in 1997] sentenced one woman to four months in jail for killing a litter of unwanted kittens. A court in Janesville, Wisconsin, [1998] sentenced a man to twelve years in prison for killing five cats "to relieve stress." The case was indeed a heinous example of cruelty to animals. But two days after that man began serving his twelve-year prison sentence, a Delaware court sentenced a woman to only thirty months in prison for killing her newborn infant. The woman had tossed the newborn child out a third-floor motel-room window into a garbage bin in the alley below, umbilical cord still attached. Evidence showed the baby was alive when thrown out the window but died of exposure, abandonment, and massive skull fractures. It is clear that our society as a whole no longer believes humans are made in the image of God, very different from animals ...

Ingrid Newkirk, founder of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), says, "There is no rational basis for saying that a human being has special rights. When it comes to having a central nervous system, and the ability to feel pain, hunger, and thirst, a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy." Newkirk sees no difference between the atrocities of World War II and killing animals for food: "Six million Jews died in concentration camps, but six *billion* broiler chickens will die this year in slaughterhouses." ...

Michael Fox, vice president of the Humane Society of the United States [no relation as far as I know to Michael J. Fox from *Families Ties* TV show, this Mr. Fox does not see the family or humanity as very special in God's creation]. He says, "The life of an ant and the life of my child should be granted equal consideration." ... The future is unthinkable for a society without any moral standard by which to determine right and wrong. Already we are willing to sentence people to prison for killing animals, while encouraging abortionists to kill children. Where is our culture going? What kind of value system, what kind of morality, what kind of world are we establishing for the next generation?"⁶

This is why this study we're doing on Family Foundations is so important as we are returning to the first few chapters of God's Word, which alone gives adequate basis and understanding of who we are, where we are going, mankind's special purpose, the sanctity and dignity of human

life, the basis and origin and design for manhood and womanhood and marriage and the family.

Genesis 1:1 (NASB95) ¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

That's the absolute starting place and standard we must uphold. We are not merely a little higher on the evolutionary plane from the animals. It is something very special and significant and supremely important to be created in the image of God for the glory of God.

Genesis 1:20-28 (NASB95) ²⁰ Then God said, "Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens." ²¹ God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed **after their kind**, and every winged bird after its kind; and God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." ²³ There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day. ²⁴ Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures **after their kind**: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth **after their kind**"; and it was so. ²⁵ God made the beasts of the earth **after their kind**, and the cattle **after their kind**, and everything that creeps on the ground **after its kind**; and God saw that it was good. ²⁶ Then God said, "Let Us make man **in Our image**, according to **Our likeness**; and **let them rule over the** fish of the sea and **over the** birds of the sky and **over the** cattle and **over all** the earth, and **over every** creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and **rule over** the fish of the sea and **over** the birds of the sky and **over** every living thing that moves on the earth."

Man is over God's creation, and is to use it for his benefit. He's a little lower than the angels. All humans, young, old, and unborn, are in the image of God, and so human life has inherent sanctity and a special place in God's plan of redemption. I certainly don't want to abuse or be cruel to animals or God's creation, but I don't want to glorify creatures rather than the Creator. Animals are for our food and other benefits, but God doesn't have a plan of redemption for them (sorry, dogs don't go to heaven).

Interestingly, God doesn't have a plan of redemption even for angels. Fallen angels have their fate sealed from what we can tell in Scripture. It would have been perfectly fair and just for God to treat fallen humanity the same way, sentencing us to hell justly for our cosmic treason, our rebellion against our Creator. But He graciously for humanity provides a way of salvation, through the Messiah prophesied in Genesis 3:15, through the substitution of an innocent life slain for another and covering from God, as pictured at the end of Genesis 3 as God clothes them with skins of presumably slain animals. It's pictured by the faith of Adam and Eve and Abel, that we'll see in a future message. God created us in His image for His glory, including children (such is the kingdom).

The biblical view of children we see in Genesis 4 and the rest of Scripture is:

1. Children are a Supernatural Gift from God
2. Children are Seen as a Blessing, not a Burden
3. Children are Special as Created in God's Image
4. **Children are Sinners in Need of God's Truth (next time)**

¹ Hamilton, *New International Commentary of the OT*, 1:220-21.

² Kent Hughes, *Genesis*, 102-103, italics and brackets mine.

³ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, online edition from www.ccel.org

⁴ Victor Hamilton, 220-21.

⁵ <http://www.fix.net/~rprewett/view.html>

⁶ John MacArthur, *What the Bible Says About Parenting: God's Plan for Rearing Your Child*, p. 4-5.