

## Family Foundations, Part 5 – The Most Important Starting Point for Parents (Gen. 4:3-5)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on January 4, 2009

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Genesis 4:1-5 (NASB95) <sup>1</sup> 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.” <sup>2</sup> Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. <sup>3</sup> So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. <sup>4</sup> 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; <sup>5</sup> but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

We began a few weeks ago reviewing some of the foundational truths in Genesis 1-3 about family, marriage and manhood and womanhood. In Genesis 4, we began our verse-by-verse study through this chapter last month and will continue working our way through Genesis in the weeks ahead. In our last study, we drew several observations from verses 1-2 about the biblical view of children. This evening we continue in vs. 3-5, and we’re not in a hurry to rush through this chapter, because there are many truths here that are foundational for parents and all people to understand.

At the end of verse 1 is the mention of the first child to the first parents ever, and then their second son Abel. In the Bible, terms for parents and children are used in (I believe) every book of the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation this is a dominant image and relationship. You know how many times the Bible uses a term for parents or children? 8,150 times in my Bible! Over 8,000x we read of child / son / daughter / father / mother – this is a major subject.

Roy Zuck notes, “We normally think of the Bible as a book about adults and for adults—and it is. However, the Bible includes hundreds even thousands of references to children and related subjects such as conception, childbirth, families, and descendants”<sup>1</sup>

This is not just the language of physical life and relationships, but it is language often used for spiritual life and relationships. One of the fundamental ways God is revealed by His Son Jesus is “our Father which art in heaven.” Child is a common yet profound term used to describe the relationship of God’s people to God, both Israel and the church. The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* sums up how fitting this metaphor is for us in relation to God:

- 1) Children are *learners*,
- 2) children are *dependent*,
- 3) children are a *reflection* of the parent’s nature,
- 4) children were *cherished* in Bible times.<sup>2</sup>

Christ Himself loved children and had a special place for children. A little child is one of the key illustrations Christ used for those who are of the Kingdom of heaven. They were very important to Jesus in contrast to the views of some in their culture (and in ours).

The OT also has a very high view of children. A book on Bible manners and customs contrasts questions of today’s parents with the Jewish mindset: ‘the people living in ancient Israel would have found [the mindset of many couples today] strange and startling. For example, the following questions would not have entered the minds of the Israelites:

“Should we have children?” “If so, should we limit the number to one or two?” Or, “If we do have children, when should we begin?” The ancient Israelites’ attitude could be summed up like this: “We want children. We want them now ... many children ... children are very important to us. In fact, we would rather be ‘wealthy’ with children than with money.”<sup>3</sup>

In contrast today, our society has hundreds of thousands of unwanted, unloved, and un-fathered children, to say nothing of the millions unable to be born because of a “woman’s choice.” My wife and I knew a married couple in the apartment complex next to us years ago, she had a stay-at-home job, but when she would get pregnant she would have an abortion, because she didn’t want kids. One survey done in America showed that 70 percent of parents surveyed would not have children if they had to do it over again.<sup>4</sup>

There is an organization in America called N.O.N. (The National Organization of Non-Parents). They say they don’t want to complicate their lives with children.

What are we doing with the future generation? Even when they are born, it seems as though they are left to themselves.<sup>5</sup>

But Eve knew that children were a blessing not a burden, as verse 1 says. This man, this child, was from God, a gift in God’s image and for God’s glory to multiply on the earth, as we saw past weeks.

For this week, I want us to notice together for the first parents ever and the first children ever, notice the first thing Scripture records about them. The first reality, the first activity, the starting point that Scripture first mentions and highlights is WORSHIP.

Our text begins in verse 3 with the statement “So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD”

It’s interesting to me that it doesn’t mention a lot of other things about the two boys and their parents and how they were brought up -- it begins with their worship, their offerings, their sacrifices to God. Worship is the first event recorded of the first family in this new world, and sacrificial worship is also the first act after the flood in Noah’s family who similarly are the only family entering a “new world” with a similar commission to Adam and Eve’s family

Worship is the first act recorded of mankind as new children come into the world of Paradise Lost, and when Paradise is restored in Revelation, the children of the Lord will continue to worship Him forever in heaven. The first glimpse we have of heaven is worship – from the beginning to the end of the Bible (and human history) we see worship, either true or false. Arguably every page of the Bible relates to this subject at least indirectly. From the first Adam to the last Adam (Christ), our beginning and end is worship.

There are a lot of details *not* recorded in the life of Eve’s boys – verse 2 just records their birth order and occupations, both noble and good occupations to God. They were apparently at least young adults, who had been brought up by their parents and were old enough to be responsible for themselves and old enough to be married as we see later in this chapter in the case of Cain.

*Where and when and how did worship originate? Where did this idea come from to bring an offering in v. 3?* The text doesn't tell us – it doesn't even tell us this is the first type of offering brought by mankind. Offerings may have been a very normal thing for them.

The commentators give us various explanations:

H. C. Leupold: 'Nothing indicates that this episode marks the inauguration of sacrifice by mankind. It may not even have been the first time that these brothers offered sacrifices. The casual way of reporting the fact that they brought sacrifices would rather lead us to believe that something was being done which was not of a character to challenge attention because of its newness ... since no commandment is recorded authorizing or requesting sacrifice from man as a thing divinely sought, we are, no doubt, nearer the truth when we let sacrifices originate spontaneously on man's part as a natural expression of a devout spirit and of gratitude toward the omnipotent Giver of all good things. Sacrifice meets a deep need of the human heart.'

'The origin of sacrifice, therefore, is neither to be traced to a positive command, nor to be regarded as a human invention. To form an accurate conception of the idea which lies at the foundation of all sacrificial worship, we must bear in mind that the first sacrifices were offered after the fall, and therefore presupposed the spiritual separation of man from God, and were designed to satisfy the need of the heart for fellowship with God. This need existed in the case of Cain, as well as in that of Abel; otherwise he would have offered no sacrifice at all, since there was no command [recorded] to render it compulsory ... The offerings were expressive of gratitude to God, to whom they owed all that they had; and were associated also with the desire to secure the divine favour and blessing'<sup>6</sup>

### **1. Worship is Natural and Constant for Children**

The place where the text begins for the first children ever is representative of all children since then. We may not all do the same types of sacrifices but we are all always worshippers. It's been pointed out that all human beings, young or old, kids or parents

'generally speaking throughout the history of the world have [all] been religious. In fact the whole of the human race is incurably religious. And you can go to the darkest corners of the world through human history and you're going to find people worshipping something. The sun, the moon, the stars, animals, reptiles, insects, a rock, a tree, a waterfall, a river, a lake, a mountain, an image of their own making. Or even worshipping themselves. But man is incurably religious. He has to attach his worship somewhere. And Cain was a worshipper. Cain was religious, verse 3 says ...

[John MacArthur points out in this case in particular, for Cain and Abel, when you think of who their parents were, who had enjoyed walking with God in the garden in unbroken communion and worship before, Adam and Eve could tell their kids better than anyone about this, firsthand, what it's like to be in perfect fellowship with the Lord and] what it means to be lost. Who better understood what it meant to fall victim to Satan? How many times do you think Adam sat those boys on his knee, how many times do you think Eve sat them down at the table and told them what Eden was like? What the garden was like. She told them what they forfeited by their sin.

How many times? How many times did they plead with them to believe God and not Satan? How many times did they plead with those boys to put their faith in the promises of God because the promises of God brought joy and blessing and the promises of Satan brought death and destruction? I can't imagine anybody better equipped to get that message across than the two people who were thrown out of paradise.

... They could tell them what it was like because they were there. [We saw Eve's faith in past weeks, and] a mother like Eve would have plead with her boys to trust God. And a father like Adam would have done the same. And how many times had they recounted the story? I'm sure Cain and Abel could have told the story in every single detail about how the fall occurred and how wonderful it was in the garden and how sad it was that they couldn't go back.

And they knew full well about the angel with the flaming sword in every direction to keep anybody from ever going in there. Many times they had been told to trust God and to believe his promises. And to repent and believe that God was going to send someone who would bruise the serpent's head and overthrow this usurper and bring back paradise. And they were no doubt told that you need to honor God. You need to show respect, worship toward God. And so Cain brought an offering. This is an act of worship.<sup>7</sup>

Romans 1 affirms worship has been natural for all children since creation. Scholars may debate where and when worship came from and how sacrifices in particular originated, but the biblical text is not very concerned with where worship *came from* – it assumes worship is natural for children and all humanity.

Romans 1:20-25 (NASB95) <sup>20</sup> For **since the creation of the world [since Adam and Eve's children to our day]** His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, **being understood through what has been made ... [but look at v. 23, man foolishly] ... exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image** in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. ... <sup>25</sup> For **they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator**, who is blessed forever. Amen.

All humanity since creation - including children - all have been worshippers. Eternity is set in our hearts. God is known to all men through the general revelation that declares the glory of God to all people at all time as Psalm 19 says. But sinful man suppresses the truth about the true God and tends to create his own god.

Worship is the first thing mentioned about mankind and his children in Genesis 4 and it is the fundamental determining reality of life, the most important starting point for parents and all people to know. Worship is natural and constant for children and adults.

A few years ago I heard a message during a parenting conference by Ted Tripp that I believed then would be one of the most important messages I ever heard. He really developed this idea that the most important starting point as parents is to recognize that all children are worshippers naturally and constantly, seeking glory. We are natural-born worshippers. Much of what follows in this first point is indebted to that message which he also includes in his excellent book *Instructing a Child's Heart*, where he shows that:

'Children are instinctively worshippers. They are glory givers. It isn't a conscious decision on their part; they are hard-wired for worship. [Our task is] teaching our kids to see the glory of God and respond in worship ...

They are uniquely designed for worship. Their eyes and ears and imaginations are receptors for seeing the glory of God in all that he has made so they can respond with worship, adoration, and love.

Your children go into the world everyday in search of an answer to the question, “What makes life worth living? What can I find to excite and delight me?” We do not have to look far; the world conspires to seduce the heart with cheap and empty pleasure. God designed children for worship. The only question is, what will they worship? Romans 1:19-20 says God is revealed in his creation. His glory is seen through what he has made so that mankind – children are without excuse. The physical world showcases the artistic creativity, endless power, and manifold wisdom of its Creator, so that we might find eternal joy in his glorious goodness.

What happens when creatures uniquely designed to be dazzled by God’s greatness ... fail to worship God? They do not cease [to] worship; they simply worship something other than God ... [Romans 1:23 says they] “exchange.” They exchanged the glory of God for the worship of created things. The same truth is repeated in Romans 1:25 ...

Kids love to be amazed. That is why we enjoy watching sports on TV. We love to marvel at amazing feats that ordinary mortals cannot accomplish. Whether football, basketball, ice skating, or skiing, we love to be dazzled [ex: Sportscenter highlights over and over, Jordan, etc.] ...

[Ted Tripp says] This is uniquely human. There are no diving competitions for penguins in the Antarctic. They dive from massive ice flows, barely breaking the water, and yet no one scores them. At the end of the day there is no award ceremony.

A brown bear grabs a salmon from the raging Columbia River. No bears line the shores applauding. Little bears don’t idolize Big Brown. They don’t have posters of him in their dens.

Idolizing greatness is innately human. We are made in the image of God and engineered for worship. We are fashioned for the fascination his glory evokes. Worship is a response to greatness. Your children will worship God or idols.’<sup>8</sup>

What are some of the idols of the heart they (and we) can worship?

- Pursuing coveted things (Col. 3:5)
- Power and Influence
- Performance
- Possessions
- Pleasure and Sensuality
- Passion for Approval of Man
- Pleasing People (peers, those they like)

### ***Point #1 – Worship is Natural and Constant for Children***

#### **2. Wrong Worship Leads to a Multitude of Sins**

Romans 1:25-32 (NASB95) <sup>25</sup> For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator

... <sup>28</sup> And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, **God gave them over** to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, <sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, **murder**, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, **disobedient to parents** ...

Disobeying parents, and all those other sins, are not the root problem of children or any people. It is the fruit of wrong worship.

Back in Genesis 4, we see that the wrong worship of Cain is his main problem that leads to a multitude of sins:

<sup>5</sup> for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. <sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup> “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.” <sup>8</sup> 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.

There are a multitude of sins we see in Cain that continue and are compounded and snowballing in Cain’s heart and life, but at the top of the hill, what gets the ball rolling is wrong worship and then a failure to respond rightly to God, and the avalanche ensues and buries him in its wake. Verse 4 says God accepted or had regard for Abel’s offering. *What was wrong with Cain’s offering in v. 5?*

Some have suggested the difference is that Abel brought an animal sacrifice, blood sacrifice, so he pleased God while the bloodless plant offering of Cain could not atone. But both types of offerings are pleasing to God according to God’s law – in fact this particular Hebrew term for “offering” usually refers to a grain offering, not a blood offering. And the language and context does not imply their offerings were for atonement. The original readers of the Torah would not have expected animal sacrifice with this term (cf. Lev 2)

If we look a little more closely at the text, v. 3 says at the end that Cain simply brought his offering from “the fruit of the ground.” Then v. 4 says that Abel brought the first fruits or firstlings of his flocks, including the fat portions, the very best. So it’s been argued that the quality of the offerings is contrasted, which may indeed be the case. But there’s more - a contrast in the quality of their hearts.

Walter Kaiser’s book *Hard Sayings of the Bible* gave some help here:

‘there was a problem with Cain’s “gift”—*he* was the problem ... The telltale signs that we are dealing here with a contrast between formalistic worship and true worship are the emphasis that the text gives to the men and the verb it uses with both of them. In Genesis 4:4–5 there are four emphatic marks used with reference to the two brothers.

Literally, the Hebrew of verses 4 and 5 says, “And Abel, he brought, indeed, even he, some of the firstlings of his flock and some of the fat portions belonging to him. And the Lord regarded with favor Abel and [then] his offering. But unto Cain and [then] unto his offering, he did not have regard.”

Clearly the focus of this passage is on the men. There are four emphatic elements in the text that mark this emphasis: first, the man’s name; then the verb for “bringing” with the pronominal suffix; then the emphasizing particle *gam*; and finally the personal independent pronoun. It is difficult to see how the writer could have made it any more pointed that it was the men, and their hearts’ condition, that was the determinative factor in God’s deciding whose sacrifice was to be accepted ...

The verb [in v. 5 is translated in various versions as “regard” or “respect” (NKJV) or “favor” (NIV) or “pleased”] with the preposition ... means “to regard with favor.” Ever since Luther, commentators have noticed that God’s favor was pointedly directed toward the person first and then, and only then, toward the offering that person brought. Accordingly, this became the determinative factor in all worship: the heart attitude of the individual. If the heart was not found acceptable, the gift was likewise unacceptable.’<sup>9</sup>

*The ESV Study Bible* (an excellent new resource I recommend) sums it up well when it says ‘at no point does the Bible suggest that offerings work automatically, as if the worshiper’s faith and contrition did not matter; and Cain’s fundamentally bad heart can be seen in his resentment toward his brother [v. 5, 8] and in his uncooperative answers to God in the rest of the passage.’

In v. 7, God’s own statement on the matter makes clear that Cain did not do what was right or acceptable, but God gives him an opportunity: “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?”

I’ve read a lot of writings of men about this passage, but God’s own assessment is what most concerns me, because I know God’s judgment is always right and just and fair and never arbitrary, so I don’t have to know all the details. If God said it, I don’t sweat it.

It’s also been pointed out that in addition to God’s speech, ‘*Cain’s speech*, disclosing his unregenerate heart, condemns him. His sarcastic question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” betrays both his callousness against God and his hate of his brother made in God’s image (v 9). He calls into question God’s wisdom, justice, and love and attempts to justify himself, claiming [in v.13]: “My punishment is more that I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence” (vv 13–14). Even after God mitigates his sentence (v 15), he fails to respond to God’s grace (v 16) ... The NT validates our conclusions drawn from the text. Jesus characterized Abel as righteous (Matt 23:35) ...

According to [1 John chapter 3], Cain belonged to the evil one and was himself evil: “Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous” (1 John 3:12) [we’ll look at that text in future message].

According to Jude, Cain spoke abusively and thought like an unreasoning animal: “Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; ... like unreasoning animals ... woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain” Jude 11f.) ...

[Hebrews 11:2-6 (NASB95) <sup>2</sup> **For by it [faith] the men of old gained approval.** <sup>3</sup> By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. <sup>4</sup> **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.** <sup>5</sup> By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. <sup>6</sup> And **without faith it is impossible to please Him**, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.]

Elsewhere Yahweh rejected the gifts of Korah (Num 16:15), Saul’s men (1 Sam 26:19), and apostate Israel (Isa 1:13), not because of some blemish in their offering, but because of their deformed characters. Cain’s flawed character led to his [false] worship.’<sup>10</sup>

Without faith it's impossible to please God in worship or anything. *False* worship in particular is a root problem producing fruit of many other sins. Man's self-worship and worship of self, also called pride, and all the other multitudes of idols and ideologies that come hyphenated after the word self (self-righteousness, self-exaltation, self-centered, self-promotion, self-glorification, self-serving, self-willed, self-seeking, self-focused, self-driven, self-love, etc.) these form the polluted fountain that all sins flow from.

Turn to Exodus 20, where God seems to affirm the first two points of our outline, that worship is the most important starting point and reality, and that false worship precedes and produces all manner and multitude of evil in our life. I believe the original readers of Genesis 4 were intended to see this clearly as the Torah unfolded, how utterly essential true worship is.

Exodus 20 (NASB95) <sup>1</sup> Then God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> **"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.** <sup>3</sup> **"You shall have no other gods before Me.**

<sup>4</sup> **"You shall not make for yourself an idol ...**

<sup>5</sup> **"You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children ...**

<sup>7</sup> **"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.** <sup>8</sup> **"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy ...**

[The first tablet of the Hebrew Decalogue was about true worship – it is not till the second tablet that we see family and fellow man]

<sup>12</sup> **"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.** <sup>13</sup> **"You shall not murder.**

Children must know to honor their father and mother and what not to do to their brothers or sisters or fellow man in action or in their heart, but before and above all that, children must know to honor their *Heavenly Father*. As Jesus taught His disciples to pray "Our father in heaven, **hallowed be thy name.**" The honor and worship of God is the starting point of prayer, and of parenting as well.

### 3. True Worship of our Glorious God is our Greatest Task

We'll look at this more next time, but if worship is as important as the Scriptures indicate, it is surely our most important task. As parents, your kids will know whether or not you find God dazzling and satisfying and whether He truly is the goal of your life or just a little compartment of your life, a little thing you do on the side. If you want your children to have a reason to sing on Sunday, you've got to give them a great and glorious God. If you want them to have a reason not to *sin* during the week, you've got to give them a great and glorious and very big God of glory.

'How then can we talk casually of this Lord? How can we merely slot him into our fully scheduled lives? How can we think there might be more important things for us to do in life than to worship him? If we even begin to comprehend his glorious nature, we cannot. We will be caught away from our worldly experience and transported in our spirits to realms of glory. We will be overwhelmed by the thought of being in his presence, tremble at the thought of hearing what he has to say to us, and be amazed at the thought that we can speak to him and he will listen! How can we not desire to transcend the ordinary routine by entering his courts to praise and glorify him above the profane things we so eagerly value?

Truly, if our worship, if our spiritual life, is going to rise above this earthly existence where our minds are fixed on mundane thoughts and our attention is given to mundane concerns, then we are going to have to begin to focus our hearts and our minds on the holiness and the glory and the beauty of the one we say we know and love ... the Lord God himself, who is higher and more significant and far more glorious than life itself.’<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roy Zuck. *Precious in His Sight: Childhood and Children in the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ryken, L., Wilhoit, J., Longman, T., Duriez, C., Penney, D., & Reid, D. G. (1998). *Dictionary of biblical imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p. 141.

<sup>3</sup> Packer, J., Tenney, M. C., & White, W., editors (1995). *Nelson's illustrated manners and customs of the Bible*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, p. 441.

<sup>4</sup> Lance Morrow, “Wondering If Children Are Necessary,” *Time* [5 Mar. 1979]:42.

<sup>5</sup> John MacArthur, *The Fulfilled Family*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> Keil and Delitzsch

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Sermons/90-249>

<sup>8</sup> Tedd Tripp, *Instructing a Child's Heart*, p. 93-94.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Kaiser (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, p. 99

<sup>10</sup> Bruce Waltke, “Cain and His Offering,” *WTJ* 48:2 (Fall 1986) p. 370-71.

<sup>11</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*, 37, 39.