

On the Beginning

8. Good and Bad Religion

NOTE ESPECIALLY Genesis 4:1-12

Adam had sinned. Man had fallen. The man and the woman had been expelled from the Garden of Eden (westward). The creation was cursed, decaying, and dying. Now men would be natural-born sinners (Look up Ephesians 2:1-3). Then Eve had a baby boy.

“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.” (Genesis 4:1)

Cain means “gotten.” Eve was both thrilled and amused at the miniature man that had come forth from her womb. As time went on, Adam and Eve had other children (See Genesis 5:4). The next one after Cain (we think) was Abel. When they grew up, Cain and Abel both set out to worship God. That’s when the trouble between them began!

1. A More Excellent Sacrifice!
Genesis 4:2 says that

“... Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.”

Cain had taken up his father’s work (Genesis 3:17-19) of agriculture. Abel kept sheep. When they decided to bring an offering to the LORD, their sacrifices reflected their work.

“... Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. . .” (Genesis 4:3b-4a)

The Scripture records that God accepted Abel’s offering and rejected Cain’s, and that this choice by God provoked Cain to be angry, both at God and at his brother (vs. 4b-8). No explanation is given in Genesis, but the Book of Hebrews in the New Testament gives insight as to why Abel’s offering was accepted.

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.” (Hebrews 11:4)

In this verse we find several important things about Abel’s offering, but we notice first that it was “*a more excellent sacrifice.*” To deal with the issue of man’s sin, God must have an animal sacrifice in which blood is shed (See Hebrews 9:22). Cain’s offering of crops would not suffice for the sin-issue. Abel’s sacrifice of a lamb was what was needed.

The first family learned about the need for animal sacrifices from the Lord Himself. Back in Chapter 3, we see that God made “*coats of skins*” to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve (v. 21). The

“aprons” they made for themselves out of “fig leaves” (3:7) were insufficient as proper clothing. The matter of nakedness was not really a matter of sexual temptation at first, since the only people involved were husband and wife. It was a question of man’s attitude toward his sinfulness. When they fell into sin, our first parents became sinners by nature and the founders of a race of sinners. No longer could they be naked and “not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25). “Shamefacedness” is right and proper for God-fearing people today, and it has everything to do with wearing enough clothes (See I Timothy 2:9-10). But the aprons Adam and Eve made for themselves were not acceptable as a solution for their shame before God. They needed clothing made by God Himself, and He made this clothing by shedding the blood of an innocent animal. All the blood-sacrifices God required in Old Testament days pictured and prophesied the sacrifice of Christ for our sins (Read Hebrews 10:4-10). It is the only sacrifice that will save us from our sins and their just penalty!

The offering of crops to God was justifiable and right for God’s people (See Leviticus 2 and Proverbs 3:9-10) but never as the basis of their salvation. Cain and Abel had to deal with their sins before they could do anything to show gratitude for God’s blessing. The only way to do that was to bring an animal sacrifice. Abel was saying, “God, I am a sinner, and there is no way for me to atone for my own sins. I am now symbolically laying my sins on this lamb, and I will slay him so that his death and blood can symbolically pay for my sins. The lamb is innocent, but he is bearing my sins and taking my punishment so that I can be free.”

2. “By Faith.”

Hebrews 11:4 says that Abel offered his sacrifice *by faith*. Cain was saying, “God, you and I have worked together to produce this crop, and I could never have done it without you. Here’s an offering to show my appreciation.” His religion was about man cooperating with God. It involved his working to please God. Abel’s religion, on the other hand, was about faith in God to do for him what he could not do himself. More than that, it was about trusting God to do *everything* involved in his (Abel’s) salvation. There is a radical difference between *faith* religion and *works* religion, even if the human works are in cooperation with God!

Good religion says, “Live and do.” Bad religion says, “Do and live.” Faith in Christ is the only way to God!

3. “Cain Rose Up Against Abel.”

Really, Able was the first martyr for the Cause of Christ. The animosity between the brothers was basically *religious*. Read I John 3:10-12.

“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.”

There are actually only two religions in the world: the religion of Cain and the religion of Abel. Cainism has always persecuted the true religion of God. Is your religion good or bad?