

Principle Faith: Genesis Four

Part 10

The audio and print files for this class can be found online at <http://www.etspm.org/audio/principlefaith>

Introduction:

See prior lessons for statements of purpose, goals, definition of principle and understanding Genesis in context.

4:1ff ... the role of parents (given by God)

1. Nothing is explicitly stated in Genesis 3-4 about the “role” of parents. Eve is referred to as the mother of all living (3:20) and then in chapter 4:1, she gives birth to Cain and in 4:2, to Abel.
2. It is obvious, however, from the “dominion” and “be fruitful and multiply” passages in 1:26, 28 and from the “sorrow” and “pain” passage from 3:16 that Eve was intended to bear children.
3. The assumption to this point appears obvious: God would expect of Adam and Eve’s offspring just what he expected of Adam and Eve. Genesis 2:17 would demand that God expected adherence to his commands and 3:14ff would lead us to believe that the consequences of sin in the garden would not be limited to Adam and Eve alone. The “seed” principle, of both the serpent and the woman, indicates that generations of “seed” later the final conclusion (i.e., solution) to the problem (of sin) would be realized. That entails all future generations, including, of course, Cain, Abel, Seth, et. al.
4. No specific parental responsibilities are spelled out in this context either, but if, as it appears, that Adam was responsible for informing Eve of God’s command in Genesis 2:17 (God created man - gave the prohibition - then, after the prohibition, created woman), then the same responsibility that fell to Adam who was created before Eve would fall to both Adam and Eve who came before Cain, Abel, et. al. This is consistent with the parental responsibility passages we see in Deuteronomy 4, 6; Eph 6; et. al.
5. The 2:17 prohibition focuses primarily on the spiritual side of man - do not eat this or else you will die. No domestic responsibilities, either positive or negative, are described. It appears that this is the primary duty of man — fearing God and keeping his commandments, even if there is but one, appears to be a consistent principle throughout revelation, not just the conclusion of Solomon’s wisdom in Ecclesiastes.
6. The stage set before the births of Cain and Abel demands that spiritual upbringing is greater in importance than physical upbringing.
7. This principle appears throughout God’s word - in general, the animate creation other than man provides for the physical care of it’s young - what distinguishes man from the rest of that creation must be that we care for more than food, clothing and shelter. Our primary concern must be for emotional, psychological and, primarily, the spiritual, development of our children. (cf. Eli vs. Samuel)
8. Eve’s remark in 4:1 that he had “acquired a man from the Lord,” sometimes mistakenly understood as fulfillment of the “seed” promise in 3:15, more likely refers to her understanding that this child (and all) was a gift of God. That understanding would, hopefully, be consistent with the highest degree of spirituality that both parents had for their children. (cf. TGC #1 & TGC #2 - not developed to this point, but definitely inherent in everything so far. Mt 22:40)

4:1ff ... the role of children (given by God)

1. As just noted concerning the role of parents, there is also nothing explicitly stated here about the role of children. Obviously dependent on their parents for physical existence, we know nothing of the specifics in context their spiritual upbringing.
2. We learn, later of course, what God expects of Israel in training their children (cf. Deut 4ff; Proverbs), and we know what God expects of spiritual Israel in that regard (Eph 6:1ff; Col 3:20ff).
3. It is not a far stretch to assume that, because wanted Adam and Eve to be faithful, that he also wanted Cain and Abel to be faithful. That would have necessitated their instruction in spiritual things as well as instruction in physical things (e.g., farming and shepherding).

4:3ff ... the role of sacrifices (directed by God)

1. In prior lessons we noted that man's ability to cover sin, in addition to being "selfish," is also inadequate. In that context we noted that God's "cover" for sin was not only more complete physically, but more complete spiritually. It covered in the sense of "hiding" their sin and shame from God's "sight" (as in the day of atonement, Lev 16; cf. Ps 103:12). Their sins were not going to be counted against them immediately, a demonstration of God's grace.
2. God's covering, the skins of some animals, is not directly addressed in Genesis 3. But we don't go far until we see offerings and sacrifices presented as if they were commonplace by this time. There is not explicit instruction for Adam and Eve to offer sacrifices prior to this account, yet, if what Abel (and Cain) did they did by faith, and if that faith always requires advance notice (again, Gen 2:17; Amos 3:7; Heb 11; et. al.), then they would have been instructed by God about the details and importance of the practice.
3. We are not fully informed of the details of Cain's and Abel's sacrifices, but there are some truths that we do know:
 - a. what Abel offered, he offered by faith - "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks." (Heb 11:3)
 - b. to offer by faith means that Abel was informed in advance (cf. Heb 11:7 - "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen,"); every "by faith" instance in Hebrews 11 implies the same advance "warning"
 - c. Cain's awareness of the requirements would have been the same as Abel's
 - (1) that is seen from the question that the Lord asked in vs.6 ("why are you angry?"), which is asked assuming that Cain had no reason to be angry
 - (2) it is also seen in vs. 7, which indicates that Cain already knew that if he did well, as did Abel, he would be accepted just as was Abel
 - (3) it is also seen in the general principles everywhere revealed about God: he doesn't lie, he doesn't play favorites, he doesn't hold us responsible for what we can't know, he doesn't punish us when we have no responsibility or awareness of that responsibility
 - (4) we also know that God's conversation with Cain seemingly implies that Cain would yet make things right, even after failing the first time; "if you do well" does not necessarily mean "if you did well" (and there exists no further opportunity for doing right), but that it also includes "if you do well" in the sense of if you do so in the future
 - (5) this conversation with Cain clearly demonstrates the depth of God's grace; Adam and Eve sinned, but even though they were punished for it, they were given an opportunity to continue to live and, hopefully, continue to serve God; Cain is afforded the same opportunity
 - (6) the specifics of what Cain offered versus the specifics of what Abel offered have been discussed at length - it has been assumed that Cain's offering was rejected because it was a grain offering rather than a meat offering - but that may not be the case; under the Mosaic law grain offerings were expected and accepted by God - that does not prove the case here, but it does weigh against the conclusion that it "must have" been why Cain's offering was not accepted; it has also been suggested that Cain's sacrifice was not accepted because it was just one sacrifice (from the ground only) rather than two (from the ground and from the flock) - there is just no way to know this conclusively; it assumes that Abel's was accepted because it involved two sacrifices, grain and flock, but again, that can not be known conclusively; another consideration - the text says that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground but that Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock, not just of his flock; is it possible that Abel's sacrifice was accepted because he brought the best of what he had to offer, not just because it was an animal sacrifice; what is the significance of the "firstborn" in this context, and what bearing does it have on the connection with the principle of "firstfruits" later seen in the old testament;

furthermore, what is the connection between the sacrifice that Abel offered and what God offered in Genesis 3 as compared to the connection between the sacrifices of Adam/Eve and Abel - did the latter two offer the best, and was it their failure to do so that made the sacrifices unacceptable; this principle, if true in this context, is certainly consistent with the principle found in “firstfruit” passages (Jericho/Achan in Joshua; Israel and robbing God in Malachi; Rom 8:23, 11:16; 1 Cor 15:20, 23; James 1:18)

4. The significance of worship according to God’s dictates is here, and elsewhere, clearly stated. God wants what he wants in worship, nothing more and nothing less.
5. That principle appears taught, not only in scripture, but even in philosophy. Consider this remark by Socrates to Alcibiades: “**Socrates:** You see, then, that there is a risk in your approaching the God in prayer, lest haply he should refuse your sacrifice when he hears the blasphemy which you utter, and make you partake of other evils as well. The wisest plan, therefore, seems to me that **you should keep silence;** for your ‘highmindedness’--to use the mildest term which men apply to folly--will most likely prevent you from using the prayer of the Lacedaemonians. **You had better wait until we find out how we should behave towards the Gods and towards men.**” (Alcibiades II, translated by Benjamin Jowett, Gutenberg.org etext #1677)

4:8ff ... the second sin (“brother’s keeper?”)

1. Much has been made of the significance of the “first sin” in Eden, and with legitimate reason. But the sin in this context is equally instructive, and in some ways, perhaps even more so.
2. Eve, in an apparent attempt to justify herself, blamed the serpent ... Adam blamed Eve. Each showed disregard for the TGC #2 as well as TGC #1.
3. In this account, Cain also showed disregard for his “neighbor,” and to most extreme degree. He killed Abel. Why?
4. The trigger of conscience, usually functioning in “self-justification” mode, apparently “must” be right all the time. To be “right,” even when you are wrong, you must some how, some way, claim/believe that someone else must be “wrong” even though they are right.
5. This self-defense mechanism is seen throughout scripture. Ahab had the audacity to accuse Elijah of being the one who was troubling Israel. Isaiah 5 warns us about those who call good, evil, and evil, good.
6. 1 John 3:12 says: “not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.” People guilty of sin often feel compelled to justify themselves, and in so doing, they demonstrate an element of conscience that continues to reflect God’s nature in their own.
7. Cain’s murder of Abel shows the degree to which we can go to “justify” ourselves. We “must” be “right,” regardless of the cost to others. All sin arises out of our own desires/lust/selfishness, but taking the life of another in this way seemingly shows a higher disregard for God’s will than the prior sin.
8. Point: As bad as the “first sin” was, there are some ways in which the second was worse.
9. God expected Cain to be his “brother’s keeper,” just as he expected Adam to “intercept” Satan’s lie and just as he did not want Eve to sin against herself, her God and her husband. Watching out for others was then, and is now, a primary concern for God’s people (Mt 22; cf. reflexive/reciprocal aspect of “golden rule” and TGC #2)

Up and Coming Principles: Can’s punishment; God’s mercy continues; one wife, not two (God’s subtle revelation); chapter five - God’s selective history/the role of genealogies [additional principles to consider - what is death?; what does separation from God mean?]

Assignment: Read through and continue to study Genesis 4-5 for additional principles.