

Cain and Abel: Two Different Offerings

Passages: Gen 4:1–15; Lev 27:26; Num 18:17; Deut 28:11; Gen 3:21; Heb 11:4; Prov 21:27; Jer 17:10; 1 Jn 3:12; Jude 11, Eph 4:26; Rom 6:11–13; 12:1

Memory Verse

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
1. By faith, Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice to God than Cain. 2. Despite the consequences of his actions, Cain did not learn, but was upset at both God and Abel.	1. God is omniscient. 2. God is just.	1. Be filled with God’s word and Spirit to resist sin. 2. Examine our heart to see if we are submissive to God’s teachings. 3. Develop a heart of truth.

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Conclusion: We need to recognize our true attitude in front of God. If our attitude is incorrect, we should humble ourselves, repent and change it.

Spiritual Teachings

Introduction

Today, we are going to be studying the character of Cain, Adam and Eve’s firstborn. Let’s start by comparing Cain and Abel, based on Genesis 4:1–15. What actions or characteristics does the Bible describe for each of them?

(Teachers: Have the students read the passage together and take turns writing down one characteristic or action of either brother on the board. Below is what the chart should look like when they finish.)

Cain	Abel
He was born first. He worked the soil. He was the tiller of the ground, a farmer. He brought some of the fruit of the ground as an offering to the LORD.	He was born second. He kept the flocks. He was a shepherd. He brought fat portions and the firstborn of his flock.

A. Two Different Offerings

Burnt Offering

Let’s take a closer look at the offerings that they each gave to God. First, Abel’s was not the first animal sacrifice that was made in the Bible. When Adam and Eve were cast from the garden of Eden, God sacrificed animals to clothe them in garments of skin (Gen 3:21). So, what is the significance of Abel’s offering, “the firstborn of his flock and of their fat”?

Let’s read Leviticus 27:26: “But the firstborn of the animals, which should be the LORD’s firstborn, no man shall dedicate; whether it is an ox or sheep, it is the LORD’s.” Let’s now turn to Numbers 18:17. “But the firstborn of a cow, the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem; they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar, and burn their fat as an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD.” Based on these two passages, we can conclude that the firstborn is the Lord’s. It is also holy, and when the fat is burned as an offering, it is “a sweet aroma to the LORD” (cf. Lev 17:6; 3:1–5).

Grain Offering

Cain was a “tiller of the ground,” and the Bible described his offering as “the fruit of the ground.” Let’s read Deuteronomy 28:11. “And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.” Cain’s offering, like Abel’s, was from the fruit of his labor. But unlike his brother, Cain worked the land, so his offering was more like the grain offering described in Leviticus 2:1. The two offerings were indeed quite different, but the key difference lay not in the physical offerings, but in the brothers’ hearts.

Blessings

At times, we may feel like God is not paying attention to the “offerings” that we are giving to Him. As in the case of Cain, we first need to ensure that our heart is first in the right place when serving God. In Abel’s case, the Bible says that the Lord “respected Abel.” Abel did the right thing, but this did not necessarily result in physical benefits or blessings. However, his offering was remembered by God. In the same way, it may seem pointless, at times, to do the right thing, but it is important to remember that even if we do not receive a physical reward for our deeds, God will remember (Mt 25:37–40).

B. Cain's Offering

"[...] And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. [...]"
(Gen 4:4–5)

We do not know what prompted the brothers to sacrifice to God, or if God told them what to offer. But they both brought to the Lord acceptable offerings. Both were the fruits of their labor, so why do you think Cain's displeased God? After all, he made an offering, didn't he? Was meat better than vegetables? Does God prefer animal sacrifices?

The reason can be found in the description of the two brothers' offerings. Cain's was simply "the fruit of the ground," whereas Abel's offering was "the firstborn of his flock and of their fat" (Gen 4:3–5). Let's read Hebrews 11:4. "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Simply put, Abel gave the best and the richest of the flock he had and offered it to God with faith. Cain did not. God later asked Cain that if he did well, wouldn't he be accepted? (Gen 4:7).

These verses teach us the whole picture. It was not simply a matter of a burnt offering compared to the fruit of the land. The Lord didn't look only at the physical offering, but also at the heart of the one who offered. He saw the attitude and the hearts of the one who offered. God saw something in Cain's deeds or thoughts that were not right in His perspective. Cain's token offering reflected his incorrect thoughts, so the Lord did not respect it.

From the teachings of the Bible, it is clear that God is ultimately more concerned with the intention in our hearts when we offer to Him. Let's turn to Jeremiah 17:9–10. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings." Others can only see our physical actions, but God can see our hearts, just as He saw Cain's heart that offered without faith.

C. Cain's Anger

Cain may have lacked faith in his offering, but he had a chance to correct his error. God said to him, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Gen 4:6–7). Cain had not yet done anything, but there was anger in his heart.

Paul wrote, " 'Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil" (Eph 4:26–27). Anger can produce evil thoughts and lead us to sin. God's warning to Cain teaches us about the power of anger! Anger lures us into doing what is contrary to God's teaching and is powerful enough to lead us astray.

Cain's Second Chance

God gave Cain a second chance to do what was right. Even though Cain did not offer the correct or most pleasing offering, God did not reject him. In fact, God cared about Cain, going so far as to give him both warning and instruction. God never stated that He would always reject Cain's offering. Instead, God gave him another chance to improve. Unfortunately, Cain chose not to heed God's word.

D. Cain's Sin

Anger, when handled poorly, can be incredibly destructive. It can turn into hatred, and a person who “hates his brother is a murderer, and [...] no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 Jn 3:15). It was this very same anger that drove Cain to murder his brother, with complete disregard for God’s loving care and instruction (Gen 4:8). He allowed himself to be fully controlled by anger and hatred.

Anger normally begins as silent indignation. Even if we don’t act upon this anger, when we harbor resentment in our hearts, we cannot accomplish God’s purpose. In the worst-case scenario, as John wrote, we become a murderer, and no eternal life is in us. Cain allowed his resentment to grow in his heart, and as a result, the thought of murdering his brother consumed him entirely and drove him to sin. We should never follow the desires of sin but cut it off in our hearts and instead become instruments of righteousness. We must learn to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, so that we will not succumb to sin (Rom 6:11–13; 12:1).

Cain’s Third Chance

Cain had committed a most dreadful act, but still, God gave him a third chance. The Lord, who is omniscient and knows all, asked Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” (Gen 4:9). Cain’s reply, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”, is the greatest evidence of his utter lack of remorse. He was completely controlled by the resentment in his heart and the power of sin, so much so that the thought of murdering his brother didn’t bother him at all. In summary, Cain:

1. Allowed anger to rule his life
2. Allowed his hatred to drive him to murder
3. Lied to God
4. Showed no respect towards God’s omniscience
5. Showed contempt towards God
6. Challenged God’s authority
7. Showed no remorse or regret for murdering his brother

The deeper he fell into sin, the less Cain respected God. He was completely controlled by his evil desires. Let’s read 1 John 3:12. “[N]ot 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.” Jude 11 also says, “Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.”

E. Cain’s Punishment

We have now come to understand more about Cain. In the end, what was the punishment for his actions? Let’s read Genesis 4:11–16. Cain was cursed and driven from the land to become a restless wanderer. The ground would no longer yield crops for him, and Cain had to leave the presence of the Lord. However, despite his punishment, Cain still showed no remorse.

Let’s look at Cain’s response to God’s judgment and take note of his words (Gen 4:13–14). His reply to God indicates that his heart was not sorry for what he did. In fact, he thought God was being unfair because he would now be “hidden from [God’s] face.” His words reflect his unrepentant heart. It is clear that Cain did not learn the lesson that God was trying to teach him. In the end, God was still good to Cain by marking him for his protection. God showed mercy, but Cain’s punishment did not change.

Cain's life serves as a warning to us all. He let his worldly desires lead him to sin, and as a result, Cain became a vagabond both physically and spiritually. He was never able to find peace and rest in God's presence. We need to learn to resist sin and fear God, so that we will never be driven from His presence.

Check for Understanding

- 1. According to Mosaic Law, what is important about the firstborn?** It is the Lord's; it is holy; and when the fat is burned as an offering, it is "a sweet aroma to the LORD" (Lev 27:26; Num 18:17).
- 2. What was the key difference between Cain and Abel's offerings?** Their hearts were different. Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice because of his faith (Heb 11:4). Cain, on the other hand, simply gave a token offering, which was a reflection of his incorrect thoughts.
- 3. What is so dangerous about having anger in our hearts?** Anger can produce evil thoughts and lead us to sin. It lures us into doing what is contrary to God's teaching and is powerful enough to lead us astray.
- 4. List some of the reasons Cain fell into sin.** Cain: allowed anger to rule his life; allowed his hatred to drive him to murder; lied to God; showed no respect towards God's omniscience; showed contempt towards God; challenged God's authority; and showed no remorse or regret for murdering Abel.
- 5. What does Cain's response to God's punishment tell you about his heart?** His heart was not sorry for what he did. He felt that God was being unfair by giving him the punishment and that he would be staying away from God, hidden from God's face. His words reflected his unrepentant heart.

Life Application

1. Don't Become a Victim of Sin

It is important to be fully aware of how powerless we are against sin. The Lord warned Cain that "sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Gen 4:7). Sin is something we are born into and something that we constantly have to battle every day of our lives. It lurks around every corner because Satan is always waiting for an opportunity to make us fall (1 Pet 5:8). But if we are so powerless against sin, how do we rule over it? We can learn a few strategies from the story of Cain:

- Resist sin from the very moment you recognize it (Jas 4:7).
- Don't let any impure thoughts grow within you. They will overtake you (Jas 1:14–15).
- Refuse to give Satan even the slightest foothold in your heart (Rom 13:14; Col 3:5).
- Resist temptation with the help of God's instructions (Eph 5:17; Prov 3:5–6).
- Rely on God's strength through the Holy Spirit (Eph 6:10).

As humans, we are weak and prone to giving up. We cannot overcome sin on our own. But the Holy Spirit can give us the power and strength to rule over sin. In the garden of Gethsemane, the moment the Lord Jesus felt the most afraid, He turned to prayer (Lk 22:41–44). As a result, He was strengthened and, ultimately, able to endure the suffering of the cross. We need to fight our spiritual battles with the power of the Holy Spirit and God's word (Deut 20:4; 1 Pet 1:22). Then, as the Bible says, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (Jas 1:12).

2. Diligently Guard Our Hearts

We learned today that the key difference between Cain and Abel's offerings lay in their hearts. The Bible often teaches us the importance of controlling what lies within our hearts. If we let our hearts remain full of wickedness (Jer 17:9), we will be driven from God's presence the same way Cain was. On the other hand, the more our hearts pursue God, the less concerned we become with worldly desires. "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Prov 4:23 NIV). The New

International Version translation of Proverbs 4:23 warns us to “guard [our] heart.” What does this mean?

Diligently guarding our hearts is a process of learning how to submit to God’s will. Just as soldiers need to condition their bodies to fight, we need to train ourselves to control what goes in and out of our hearts. If we do not change our hearts to follow God, our desires can lead us into sin. With the help of God’s instructions, we can change and purify our hearts with faith (Acts 15:9). Let’s look at a few verses to see how God wants us to change our hearts.

- a. Psalm 9:1 – A heart of praise
- b. Jeremiah 29:13 – A heart that seeks the Lord
- c. Matthew 5:6 – A heart that hungers and thirsts for righteousness
- d. Matthew 11:29 – A heart that is gentle and humble
- e. Psalm 90:12 – A heart of wisdom
- f. John 4:23–24 – A heart of truth

In the process of change, we may make mistakes. During those times, the Lord may discipline us, but this punishment is never out of anger. God wants us to restore our relationship with Him, so if He disciplines us, it is out of righteousness and love (Heb 12:5–6). To reconcile our relationship with God, we must avoid Cain’s example and, instead, guard our hearts so that we abide by God’s instructions.

Discussion

- How do you normally react when your parents tell you that you have done something wrong? Do you usually correct the mistake or deny it?
- Do you have any personal shortcomings which you find difficult to change in your heart, such as anger or jealousy?
- Are there any areas in your servitude that you need to improve according to God’s teachings?

3. A Heart of Truth

Let’s read Matthew 15:8. “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.” Sometimes, there is a gap between our actions and our hearts. Our lips say one thing, but our inner attitude is completely different. Let’s look at a few scenarios and examine the gaps between the characters’ actions and their hearts.

Scenario 1:

Your school is holding a rummage sale to raise money for the homeless, and all the students have been asked to donate items from home that they’d be willing to sell at the event. You remember visiting a homeless shelter with the church youths last quarter. You saw how sad their situation was and wondered how you could help them. Well, this would be the perfect chance — especially since you have plenty of great stuff stored away in the garage and backyard, most of which your parents have been threatening to give away or throw out since you don’t use them anymore.

When the sign-up sheet finally gets to you, you’re surprised that only a few people have signed up, but you feel good knowing that you have some pretty cool stuff to donate. Some friends come by and ask if you are going to donate anything. “Yup,” you reply confidently as you jot down: Bicycle, tennis racket, baseball mitt, skateboard, baseball bat, clothes, books, backpack, sports duffle bag. At home, you start gathering the items, but you hesitate. You had forgotten how much you actually liked this duffle bag,

and now that it's getting warmer, you could start riding your bicycle again. And honestly, all of your sports equipment is still pretty useful. Maybe you won't donate all of these, after all...

- **How is Matthew 15:8 reflected in this scenario?** *(We might say we will do something to feel or look good, but then later, our hearts are no longer in it, and we aren't willing to carry it out.)*
- **What kind of heart do you need in this situation?** *(A heart of righteousness and truth.)*
- **What should you do to correct this attitude?** *(Try to match our willing heart with action and deed and keep the commitment we made by remembering the reasons we wanted to do it in the first place. If we are struggling, we should ask God to help us make the right choice. Ultimately, we should avoid saying or doing things simply for the sake of looking good in front of others.)*

Scenario 2:

The youth choir has been practicing hymns to present for an evangelical service. You love to sing, but during practice your mind wanders, and you think about all sorts of other things. Choir practice is after the whole Sabbath day of services and R.E. classes, so it's hard to stay focused when you're tired and restless. Many times, you goof around with the other youths. Sometimes you start playing around and start talking or hitting each other for fun. You often don't pay attention to the choir conductor until he motions to your section to start singing. The conductor wants everyone to think about the words of the hymns as they are singing, but to be honest, most of the time you don't pay attention to what the hymn is saying.

- **How is Matthew 15:8 reflected in this scenario?** *(Even though we are singing to encourage and inspire the listeners, if the content of the hymns that we sing are not important to us, in reality, our heart is not in it. Our behavior ultimately reveals that we do not think the content is important, and that we do not even understand or believe in what we are singing.)*
- **What kind of heart do you need in this situation?** *(A heart of praise, that seeks the Lord.)*
- **What should you do to correct this attitude?** *(Try to pay attention and understand the message that you are singing. If you don't really understand the message, ask God to help you. Try not to rehearse simply to "put on a good show." Practice sincerely with the goal of sharing that message with the listeners, and with the goal of making that hymn a pleasing offering to God.)*

Memory Verse

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10)

Context

David wrote this psalm after he took another man's wife.

Meaning

We need a clean heart "created" in us because we are born as sinners, and our natural tendency is to please our flesh. Therefore, we need to ask God to create a new heart in us, one that is clean, with a new spirit of righteousness. This verse is also a form of repentance. God wants a contrite heart in us. We need to pray with repentance and tell God how sorry we are for our sins. And when we pray with sincerely and humility, God will forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Conclusion

Cain and Abel's offerings each reflected their different hearts towards God. We need to examine our true attitude towards God. If our attitude is correct, then God will be pleased with our offering. But if our attitude is incorrect, we should humble ourselves, repent, and change our hearts. Otherwise, if we do not change our hearts, we will fall into sin, and we will be driven from God's presence.

Lesson 4 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. Why do we need a clean heart “created” in us?
Because we are born as sinners, and our natural tendency is to please our flesh.
2. “The sacrifice of the _____ is an _____; how much more when he brings it with _____!” (Proverbs 21:27)
wicked, abomination, wicked intent
3. God told Cain to rule over sin and its desire. What does this mean to us?
We must make sure that sin has no dominion and control over our thoughts, actions, and words.
4. What can we learn from Abel’s offering and Cain’s offering?
Abel gave the best and the richest of the flock he had, and he offered it by faith; we should do likewise. Cain was evil and wicked. He had the wrong attitude before God. He did not resist sin but, instead, allowed sin to completely take control of his life. We need to have the right attitude in front of God and constantly ask God to empower us with the Holy Spirit to walk in the truth and in the newest of life.
5. In what areas do you need to learn to be submissive to God’s calling?
Personal answers.