

**The identity of sacrifice and work**

After the fall of Adam and Eve, man is “fated to labor, and often bitterly”. What could God’s reasoning be that man would struggle through life rather than experience childlike play in a perfect garden?

**Gen. 4:1-2** – “Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.” Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks and Cain worked the soil.”

Work is a unique activity made just for humans. No other animal “works”. Why is this?

Work is sacrificing now for future gain or pleasure. So if work is sacrifice, what does that tell us about the human mindset as related to being made in the image of God? What does that tell us about the character of God?

“What exactly are we and should we be working for? Sacrificing to? What is the meaning of our effortful striving?”

**Mark 3:24-25** – Jesus said this after the teachers of the law said he was possessed by demons: **“And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.”**

What is Jesus telling us about our thoughts and actions in life with regard to our ultimate goals, being, meaning of life?

What do you serve?

1. Multiplicity – You are confused, anxious, aimless, and hopeless.
2. Unity – You are united in spirit with those who share your same unity.

**The hostile brothers of good and evil**

The sibling rivalry of Cain and Abel reflects the conflict of good and evil. It can take many forms. Cain was a farmer, Abel was a rancher (shepherd). They are close in age and competitive in parental attention. This is true in families today. Can you think of any family and child rivalries in your life? What is the root of the anxiety and confrontation?

What is God foreshadowing in the killing of Abel? Where have you heard of the killing of a shepherd with a great sacrifice?

**The sacred patterning of the political**

The killing of Abel “constitutes the pattern for the victim/victimizer narrative that plays such a key role in the ideologies of resentment that so truly characterize our time.” What does this mean?

There is resentful thought based on distinctions from race, sex, class, ethnicity, attractiveness, age, weight, height, etc. There are those that think that others benefit unequally from their desirable positioning. What is this mentality to you?

Was Cain concerned with the will of God? Not at this time in his life. He was jockeying for comparative status, setting the stage for the dominion of hell. “This is the consequence of the imitation of Cain – and the fate of the Canaanites, the children of Cain, who are constantly defeated in the biblical tales by those who live by the Logos and pledge their devotion truly to God.” Did you know this?

**The good shepherd as archetypal leader**

Abel was a shepherd.

**Psalms 23:1-2** – “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters.”

Shepherds in biblical times faced a stunningly difficult environment – one requiring endurance, skill, and courage. Shepherds had to protect their flocks from predators, including wolves and lions, navigate treacherous terrain to locate food and water, and endure extremes of heat and cold. God used David the shepherd to slay Goliath. Have you ever thought of the shepherd in this way?

“The classic shepherd is in some real sense the ideal man,…”

**John 10:11-13** – Jesus says: “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees: and the wolf catches them, and scatters the sheep. The hireling flees, because he is an hireling, and cares not for the sheep.”

Hireling - a person who works purely for material reward. “the management and board of directors are just hirelings of the stock owners” What type of person is Jesus referring to here? Do you know any of these types of people?

If society is not structured under a sacrificial relationship in the upward manner, it becomes a hedonistic society based on self-gain. The old Soviet joke “We pretend to work and they pretend to pay us.” prevails and the good order becomes a hell on earth.

“Someone possessed by lust, anger, hunger, or envy is not the master of that ancient motivation or hierarchy of motivation but its slave. The orgiastic and materialistic worshipper of the golden calf are hardly masters of their own fate.” What do you think?

**The sacrifice pleasing to God**

Abel’s offerings are acceptable to God. Cain’s are not. Abel works honestly and hard, sacrificing diligently and completely. He offers what is both “first born” and of the “highest quality”.

First born – the intent of an offering, a piece of work, a job. It sets the tone, establishes a pattern, & constitutes the aim.

Highest quality – without blemish, thus the perfect offering, that of the most value.

**Creatively possessed by the spirit of resentment**

**Gen. 4:5** – “...but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.” It was Cain’s response to failure that leads to his dismissal from the garden. Instead of rectifying the issue and showing repentance, his pride and arrogance prevails. Have you known a situation where criticism was not taken in the correct manner?

**Humility and faith versus pride, despair, and vengeful anger**

What does it mean to you to do well or not do well; to succeed or to fail?

The guidance of God is “calling” and “conscience”. If the ancient people were trying to not fail and to please God, as Cain was, what were they missing? Why was Cain’s sacrifice insufficient?

Cain’s killing of Abel is the ultimate revenge upon God. Killing God’s favorite son to get even for his pain of inferiority, his vengeance, his contempt, his greed, his ego, his frustration, and his hatred. When did this happen again?

“Unlike Cain, Job has the sense to hold his tongue in the face of God’s reminder of his ineffable mystery and omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent sovereignty.”

**Job 42: 2-3** – Job said: “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.” What does this mean? “You asked ‘Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.”

Job does not fall into the temptation of pride. How many times do we wrestle with God when things are not going as we want?

**Fratricide, then worse**

God curses the ground that Cain tills and Cain will become a “fugitive” and a “vagabond” of the earth.

“Nothing the now-damned brother works toward will ever come about. He will wonder and hide forever.” Such is the fate of one who murders his own highest aspirations as Cain did in killing Abel.

And this follows the children and generations of Cain. Cain’s sin leads to the chaos of the flood and the catastrophe of the Tower of Babel. There are consequences of turning from God.