

At the 2013 College World Series... two young ladies rushed out on the field to take a selfie of themselves... later posting the video of them being tackled by security... and earning Internet fame in the process. I guess it never occurred to the young ladies that the thousands of people who dropped good money to watch skilled athletes compete for a national championship... were **not** actually there to see them. ... Something significant was taking place on that field... but in their minds... the field was **their** stage and this was ***their*** time.

We certainly live in a “look at me”... social media... age of the selfie. ... The selfie is the modern-day version of the self-portrait... except now you don't have to be a legitimate artist to create one... just a narcissist with a smartphone.

(But listen!)... every Sunday when you come here to worship God... (the **only** way that He will accept it)... is if you actively rebel against the self-focused spirit of our age...

(You see) we often come to church every Sunday... like the little boy who got to be batboy at the World Series... He thought the crowd was there to watch **him** retrieve bats... He just didn't understand that the event was much bigger than him... and his part in it. There is a reason why baseball almanacs don't print statistics on batboys...

Batboys are not the point of baseball... and **we** are not the point of life.

Folks... worship will not be accepted by God... if we attempt it... with any thought (what-so-ever) that worship is about **us**... or **we** are the point of life.

Worship is the single, most important activity of humankind. Worship must be regular and correct, or everything else in life becomes a shambles.

We are going to learn more about this... in today's passage of our study through Genesis. ... This is a significant passage of Scripture. The central lesson deals with true and false worship... (true and false approaches to God.) The lesson centers around the first two children born upon earth... Cain and Abel.

Genesis 4:1-2

There was more to Adam and Eve's joy... than just the pregnancy and birth of the first child. ...There was the hope of *the promised seed*... (the Savior of the world.... Which God had promised that He would send through the seed of the woman. (We saw this back in Genesis 3:15.)

Adam and Eve believed the promise of God. Their belief was so strong that Adam named his wife "*Eve*"... which means "to give life"... or "the mother of all living." ... But there is also significant evidence here... that Adam and Eve were hoping... (if not down-right expecting)... that this child would be their promised Savior... (the One who was to restore them to perfection and make it possible for them to reenter the Garden of Eden... their paradise.)

One reason is the name *Cain* (qanah). The Hebrew word means to acquire... get... or possess. Eve wanted her son named *Cain* because her child *had been promised and was now given* by the Lord. ... But that is not the best evidence... for why many believe that Adam and Eve thought that Cain was the promised Messiah.

Better evidence is found in the Hebrew wording. The original Hebrew text is difficult to understand. The English translators of our Bibles saw the difficulty... and so... they added a few words... thinking that it was the best way for us to understand it. They alter (*just a little*)... the translation of the Hebrew wording... “*et-YHWH*” which (on its own) means “*with the Lord.*” ... (Now... please say these words with me out loud... “*et-YHWH*”... .. . It simply means “*with the Lord.*”) ...

Our English translators saw (and I agree)... that the most literal translation (“*I have acquired a man - with the Lord*”) doesn’t make much sense. (No one thinks that Eve would be saying “*God and I acquired a man...*” Not only is Adam left out... as not having a part in this... but this brings God down to Eve’s level. ...”*God and I have equally created a man...*”)

That is unacceptable... so... the teams that translated the NIV and the ESV (English Standard Version)... which I preach from... expanded “*et-YHWH*”... to - “*with the help of YHWH.*” Now this makes (a *little* better) sense... Eve acquired... and God is still God. But it is difficult for these translators to support this addition from Hebrew grammar... and the existing text. (These words - “*the help of*” simply are *not* there.)

Martin Luther pointed out... and several Hebrew scholars... (Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum - a scholar that I deeply respect - being one of them)... that the word... that is translated into English - “*with*”... (in this case... “*with* *YHWH*”... which is... the word I had you say it with me... “*et-YHWH*”)... provides us with the key. ... These scholars point to the fact that “*et*” is... (in several cases)... *not* to be translated - “*with.*” ... “*et*” can just as easily be used as a marker of apposition. ... (Huh...?) ... OK... for those of you

who are not grammar nerds... keeping up on all the grammar you learned back in “grammar” school... let me say that if this is a *marker of apposition* (which Hebrew rules of grammar **do** allow for)... then Eve is not saying “**with** God”... but is instead saying “**which is** God...”

If “*et-YHWH*” is to be taken as an appositional marker... then Eve is saying... “*I have acquired a man... that is... **the Lord**.” **Say What...?!!!** ... This sounds even more confusing!!! What does “*a man that is the Lord*” mean?*

Let me (first) say that... a consistent following of the Hebrew grammar... is a better way to translate... than adding words that are not there. While I can certainly appreciate what the Bible translators into English are trying to do... I subscribe to the belief... that Eve was actually saying “*I have acquired the promised Messiah... the man... who (with God-like characteristics)... will crush the head of Satan.*”

(I think that it was Dr. Fruchtenbaum who wrote that it is even entirely possible that Eve uttered a prophecy about the coming Messiah. ... “He would be both man and God... at the same time.” ... And... of course... Jesus **is** both man and God.)

Then I look at what she named her second child... and it seems as though Eve recognized her mistake. Cain was **not** the one. Cain was a murderer... not a savior. Throughout Cain’s early childhood... before it came time to name her second child... Eve must have seen clear evidence that she did not bear a god-like person at all. She seems rather discouraged when she names her second son.

(Now Folks!)... this is almost funny. (OK... it really is!) The Hebrew word “Abel” means “vanity”... “breath”... “temporary”... “meaningless”... or “empty”. ... Was she now disheartened and downcast because she sensed that the promised Savior was not to come any time soon? ... (I believe that the answer is - “yes.”) ... Those of us... who see Eve’s naming Cain as a declaration of her belief that he was that savior... believe that Eve was now completely dismayed that he wasn’t – and neither was her second child.

OK... **Now** let’s get to the convicting part about worship...

Genesis 4:3-10

The implication is that Cain has **failed** in his worship. ... Why? ... Is it the **nature** of the offering? ... He brings an offering from the ground... but was he was supposed to bring an offering of blood... like his brother...?

I don’t think so... (You see)... there are appropriate offerings prescribed in the law given to Israel... that are **not** blood sacrifices. ... One of the sweet savory offerings required in Leviticus... is an offering of fine flour... with oil and frankincense poured upon it (Leviticus 2:2). No... I think there is more to Cain's worship failure... than the absence of a blood sacrifice.

Well then... is it the quality of the offering? ... In part... I believe that this may be why Cain’s offering was rejected. I believe that the text implies **two** reasons why Cain’s sacrifice was inferior. Quality was probably one of the reasons.

Verse 4 says that Abel brought to God the “*best of the firstborn from his flock*”. In other words... he went out of his way to please God - with the best and the first of his flock.

Leviticus taught the Israelites... that they were to bring the fattest of the firstborn of the flock. ... By contrast... what does verse 3 say...? The text simply says that Cain “*presented some of his crops*” as an offering.

Cain appears to be simply discharging a duty. ... He is just “going through the motions of worship...” Accordingly... God had accepted Abel and his offering... but not Cain... or his offering.... In other words... Abel was acting by faith... seeking to please God. ... By contrast... Cain was performing a ritual duty.

(Let me tell you something...) All worship settings... **since** then... have had the same two types of worshippers. ... There are those who go out of their way to please God... .. and those who simply show up and discharge a duty. Abel’s worship was accepted... whereas Cain’s was rejected. (May God do His convicting here... wherever it is needed...)

Worship is the single, most important activity of humankind. Worship must be regular and correct, or everything else in life becomes a shambles.

The fact that people attend religious meetings and participate in church activities is no proof that they're true believers. 2 Timothy 3:5 warns that it's possible to have "*a form of godliness*" but never experience its saving power.

Matthew 15:8 (ESV)

This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;

The second reason why Cain's offering was inferior is reflected in verse 5... and in the punishment we will see God render to Cain... later on.

We see in verse 5 that He became angry — very angry — and downcast. The Hebrew is descriptive in picturing Cain's reaction... he burned with anger... ferocious anger... and his face and countenance fell and were downcast.

Obviously... the issue for Cain was his pride. This describes the sinful reaction to a pride being crushed. ... The second reason why Cain's offering was rejected was because Cain came with an attitude of pride. What is pride...? It is putting ourselves front and center. 'His countenance fell' which tells us that he had tried to make his worship about himself. He did not understand that worship is the moment - when God is the center of attention.

Let me repeat something that I said earlier... Our worship will not be accepted by God... if we attempt it... with any thought (what-so-ever) that worship is about us... or we are the point of life.

I do not think that it takes much of a stretch (at all) for us to interject ourselves into the thinking of both of these worshippers... while considering the full context of the story. So bear with me for just a bit... as I try to use the clues that Scripture gives us here... to understand it better. Let's start with Cain.

Having been successful in his overcoming God's curse on the earth... he comes to God showing off his own labor and success. It was ascetic...

impressive... and beautiful in its outward form. *“Look at what I was able to do... over-coming the thorns and the thistles... working hard at tilling the ground...”* ... *“Just look at what I accomplished on my own...”*

...Now as for Abel... He had to stand before God and slay the lamb. By this action... the focus is not on Abel... (“Abel is NO WHERE NEAR the center of his worship...”) The focus is on the **lamb**. The lamb's life was taken. In that sense... the lamb gave more... than did Abel. ... There could **never have been any** sense of giving the **greater** offering in Abel's mind. ... Even the lamb was superior to him. ... The lamb was giving more than Abel.

Think about the attitude of Cain as he observed the offering of Abel. The act of killing a lamb was a gory and ugly site. It certainly was repulsive to his senses. ... So as Cain compared his beautiful vegetables to this **freak show** of Abel's... he could have been ridiculing it in his mind.

Cain obviously thought that he had a better idea. He was certain that the beauty of his offering would be more acceptable... than the ugliness portrayed in the slaughter of animals... and the smelly burning of flesh. Imagine how startled he was when the beauty of his offering was rejected and the ugliness of Abel's offering was accepted.

(LISTEN!) Worship is the single, most important activity of humankind. Worship must be regular and correct, or everything else in life becomes a shambles.

Cain began speaking to Abel... and led him into the field... perhaps into his vegetable garden. We can well imagine the kind of thing he might have said.

"Your religion is disgusting and offensive, a religion of the shambles. Your gospel is a gospel of gore. It is repulsive to a refined, sensitive, moral human being. And what did it cost you? Nothing! Look how much effort I put into my religion. I refuse to believe my effort is worthless. Look at your disgusting altar! Look at it, red with blood, black with smoke, stinking to high heaven! ... Now look at mine! Look how beautiful it is. Come and smell the herbs and flowers. Obviously my way is better than yours."

But this... and Cain's murderous act... was the result of Cain snubbing God's attempts of pursuing him. YHWH encouraged Cain to do the right thing... and told Cain that it was still possible to gain His favor. But Cain didn't listen. Cain led his brother Abel out to his field AFTER God showed Cain this incredible love and mercy... Cain flatly rejected God.

Genesis 4:6-7

If you do what is right... you will be accepted. Notice that God gently asks several questions of Cain. "*Why are you angry?*" ... "*Why is your face and countenance downcast?*" ... Then God answers those two questions Himself... by asking Cain a third question: "*If you do what is right... will you not be accepted?*" God will not reject him... if he corrects his mistake. There is still hope.

God used questions to stir Cain to think about right and wrong worship... God longed for Cain to approach Him in the right way. ... But if you do **not** do right... sin lies crouching at the door.

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The phrase “sin is crouching at the door”... reflects the image of an enemy... or a wild animal... squatting down at the door... ready to leap upon us and to devour us. “... *it’s desire is for you...*” manifests a hunger for domination.

Sin is never small... and never inconsequential. It may appear only as a small thing... but it is always ready to totally consume us. ... (LISTEN... Church!) We cannot play with sin... and not be mastered by it.

Driving to the post office the other day... I was listening to a broadcast of James Dobson. He and a guest were talking about the way we Christians treat our sin. I thought they made a profound statement in telling their audience that most believers do not try to kill sin in their life. They only want to manage it. ... We put it away... inside a cage when we are not using it. That way... it remains... under our control... so that we can come back to it... and enjoy just a little of it... from time to time. ... But the problem is... that we keep feeding it... and it grows. It gets larger and larger – as sin always does. Then one day we come and open the cage door. It pounces and devours us. There is no managing of sin. It will always - eventually manage us! ... Now... God does tell Cain to rule over it... but that is defined by what He said immediately before. “*Do what is right.*” This is “*what is right*” according to what Scripture says...

Colossians 3:5 (ESV)

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

God's word to Cain is a warning... and an encouragement. He is suggesting that Cain... instead of being downcast about the rejection of his

offering... be grateful for the warning that can (if Cain accepts it)... prevent him from being mastered by sin. But Cain doesn't accept it.

We can't help but notice Cain's silence. No response is mentioned. Apparently... he never responded to God. ... He chose to continue on in approaching God as he wished. He continued to believe that his manner of sacrifice made better sense... that it was the better approach.

Genesis 4:8

“OK... God... so it's blood that You want...? Take that!” ... I don't know if that is what he actually thought. But sin that we refuse to repent of... does have a way of bamboozling our thinking... to such a degree of lunacy. ... One thing that we do know... is that sin was indeed crouching at the door and ready to pounce!

Cain talked his brother into going with him to some field... far away from where people could see and hear them. ... Cain pretended friendship... and disguised his true feelings of hostility. ... No doubt... Abel didn't have a clue as to what his brother was plotting. ... Cain deceived — deliberately and wilfully deceived — his brother... so he could carry out his murderous plot.

Look at the sins of Cain. Some of them don't seem (all that) harmful. ... Most of these sins we justify in our own lives. First there was a “focus of self in worship.” Then there is “anger.”... This is followed by an “ignoring and rejecting God's warning and Word.” There was also some “deception”... But then... finally there is horrific “murder.”

Think carefully about how many of us allow some of these to take hold of our lives. How many of us... allow ourselves to remain in the center of our worship... become angry... ignore and reject God's warning and Word... or deceive others...?

We must heed the warning of God and His Word... so that we won't allow sin to grow within our hearts... and we become consumed with sin. All of our unconfessed sin... and sin that we try to manage in a cage... is crouched at the door and ready to pounce.

Genesis 4:9-10

"Where is Abel your brother?" ... God was not asking for information. ... God knew exactly where Abel was. ... God sees and knows all things. God wanted Cain *to think* about his sin... about the terrible thing he had done... so that he would cry out for mercy.

But Cain was like so many of us... after we have committed some terrible sin. We try to hide our sin and push it out of our minds. ... This is never the thing to do... and Cain missed what every sinner needs: to face his sin and cry to God for forgiveness and mercy. ... Cain needed to change his ways before it was too late. He was soon to doom himself eternally unless he repented and cried out to God for mercy and forgiveness.

"I don't know..." Cain replied. ... Cain refused —absolutely refused — to take responsibility for his sin. ... Notice how sin multiplies when we refuse to repent and face up to our sin. ... Cain committed sin after sin... built sin upon sin... just like so many of us when we turn away from God.

He refused to face his sin and denied that he knew where Abel was. But he **knew**... and he knew that he had done a terrible wrong. Cain just wanted to live like he wanted... not like God demanded. Cain continued to rebel against God... and... he **lied** to God.

Here is another example of how sin befuddles our thinking. ... How can anyone think that they can lie to God...? God knows everything. We can't trick Him... lie to Him... or hide anything in our private closet and think that He doesn't see it. ... We may **know** this. But... is there anything that you are trying to hide from God...? ... (It is not working... and it never will!)

Then Cain becomes very dicey in his attitude with God. He adds... "*Am I my brother's keeper...?*" ... Likely... Cain still had God's rejection of his offering in mind. ... In effect he is saying to God... '*You liked him so well, why didn't you take care of him?*' ... (You see)... Cain is not so much denying what he has done... as he is **blaming** God.

Adam and Eve had also attempted to shift blame. Adam had subtly tried to put partial blame on God when he said, '...The woman who You gave to me... she gave me of the tree...' (Genesis 3:12). ... But here we see that Cain's words take it a step further. "God not only caused his sin to happen... God should have prevented it."

Cain places a new perspective on the blame game. ... In Cain's inner being there was no accepting of his state as a sinner. ... He had a high-handed way of saying to God... that Abel was His favourite... but when Abel needed Him... "God(!) You were not there!"

Blaming God for the mess we make of our own life is a nifty little trick that humans often try. Cain's question of God was a proclamation of innocence. He was innocent because God could have prevented it. It is weird reasoning... but perfectly normal for a mind that refuses to admit that it is depraved.

"The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground" ...
This is another way of saying, *"Be sure your sin will find you out"* (Numbers 32:23). ... Sin cannot be silent. ... It makes a noise that God hears. ... Sin may be quiet to mankind... but it will shout out loud to God.

Here is stark... compelling evidence that we simply can **not** hide sin from God. The apostle Paul says,

Galatians 6:7 (ESV)

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

The evidence that Cain believed to be hidden... is clearly visible and speaking to God. ... We may try to destroy the evidence against us... but it is always readily available to God. ... As humans contemplate sin... and think it will be secret... (no one will know)... it would be wise to remember God's words to Cain... *"The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground" ...* (4:10).

Genesis 4:11-15

The heavenly Judge decreed the sentence upon Cain for his crime. It was a heavy sentence which was a great burden to Cain to bear the rest of his life. ... Cain would be moved from the favorable farm land where he the

ground would be hard to farm. ... As he wandered off to the east he would find only a cropless soil to work, making life even more difficult than it had been before.

Cain had effectively fought the earth's elements... and was proud of his mastery over the ground... and brought an offering of the fruit of the ground. ... His offering was delivered in the sense of 'showing off his proficiency in subduing the earth.

The irony is quite noticeable. ... The one thing of which Cain was most proud... which he believed demonstrated his own effectiveness... and his right of acceptance... is stripped from him.

The ground... which he battled to produce the vegetables brought for an offering... was cursed... in order to force humans into dependence on God. But Cain had used it for the exact opposite... (to show off his independence.) ... He tried to use the curse in keeping himself in the center of his worship. (*“Look at what I was able to do... over-coming the thorns and the thistles... working hard at tilling the ground...”* ... *“Just look at what I accomplished on my own...”*)

The Lord's curse on Cain... insures that the ground will never again produce for him.

Worship is the single, most important activity of humankind. Worship must be regular and correct, or everything else in life becomes a shambles. ... We absolutely **MUST** get this right!

Give your best to the Lord – but never be proud of it!