

How to Do Good (The Perfect Offering)

Genesis 4:1—5:2

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Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/how-to-do-good-the-perfect-offering/>

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This document was prepared by Heather Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Heather know. Thank you!

Prayer

I'm longing to believe. Teach me to receive. Await my soul. Amen.

Message

Let's check on the offering. This is kind of cool, because now that so much is given online, we can check on the offering in real time! I brought my computer here, so we could just look this up.

So, for the month of May... let's see... Wow! Ted Hubbard, \$600 so far for the month of May! Dear Ted, let me just say in front of everyone how much this means to me and to all of us. We are all so grateful for you, Ted.

Let's see now, Alan Parsons: \$600 so far for the month of May? —Um, this is embarrassing. Alan, I don't know quite what to say... I think we're all a bit insulted. Tell you what, we don't need you money. Why don't you keep it?

But Ted—just wow!

[Alan stands up and gestures/begins yelling at Ted.] Alan, sit down! [Alan sits down and looks down.]

Oh, what's wrong, Alan? Are you angry? Are you going to cry? If you do well, will you not be exalted? If you don't do well, sin is crouching at your door. Its desire is for you and you must rule over it.

And now it appears that I need to preach on the offering. But before I do, let's pray:

Father, I thank you that I, Peter Hiett actually do not know what anyone gives in the offering at the Sanctuary, including Ted and Alan. And I ask that you would now help us to know what it is that you want from us, what it is that makes an offering "good." I pray that you would help us to preach. In Jesus's name, amen.

In Genesis 4:1, Adam and Eve have just been kicked out of the Garden of Eden, just after God promised that the seed of the woman (and there's only one at this point) would crush the head of the ancient serpent.

¹Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired [*qanah*: "gotten," "bought"] a man from the Lord [or "with the Lord," or even "as the Lord."]ⁱ (New King James Version)

She must have thought Cain was the promised seed.

Whatever the case, Cain is a big deal: First man born of woman—or at least Eve. His name may mean "Javelin" or "Smith," as in iron worker—he's a manly man. We know that his name means "I have gotten, acquired, or bought," because Eve tells us so—it's based on the verb, *qannah*: "to buy" or even "create." Cain means "I create" or "I bought" and "I got." Cain is a big deal.

Next verse:

² Then she bore again, this time this brother Abel [*hebel*: vapor]. (NKJVersion)
We don't need anyone to tell us what Abel means, for "Abel" is literally the same word as "vapor." It's also translated, "futility," "vanity," or "breath" ... it's "next to nothing."

Cain: "*I got, I possess, I create*"...and vapor boy: Abel.

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep ["flocks"], but Cain was a tiller of the ground [like his Dad]. ³ And in the process of time it came to pass that...
[Literally, in Hebrew, this simply reads "At the end of days," which is utterly fascinating and mysterious. But translators don't like mystery, so they change it.]

[At the end of *yamim*—the days or ages]—Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. ⁴ Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected [*"gazed at"*] Abel and his offering, ⁵ but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance [*pane*: face] fell.

⁶ So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your [face] fallen? ⁷ If you do well, [*yatab*... *towb* is the noun "good." *Yatab*, the verb: "do good," but that's bad English, so we say "do well"]—If you *do good*, will you not be accepted [literally, "lifted"]? And if you do not do [do good], sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

⁸ Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

⁹ Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?"

He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

¹⁰ And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground [*adamah*]. ¹¹ So now you *are* cursed from the [*adamah*], which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

12 When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and [nuwd: a wanderer] you shall be on the earth."

13 And Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment [that is, "iniquity;" it's one word in Hebrew] is greater than I can bear! 14 Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground [adamah];

He's an Adam driven from the *adamah*... and from the face of the one who breathed him into the *adamah*—the ground of his being; he's ungrounded.

Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and [nuwd: wanderer] on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me."

15 And the Lord said to him, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord set a mark [a sign] on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him.

16 Then Cain went out from the presence [face] of the Lord and dwelt [settled] in the land of Nod [of wandering] on the east of Eden.

Cain the Unsettled settled in the land of unsettledness... ⁱⁱ Ever been there?

Genesis 5:

1 This is the book of the [generations] of Adam. In the day that God created man [Adam], He made him in the likeness of God. 2 He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind [Adam] in the day they were created.

There is so much going on here, in the story of Cain and Abel, but right off the bat, we learn six or seven rather amazing and counter-intuitive things.

First: This is still a part of the story of the creation of Adam. Until the end of days, it is still the day that God created Adam, and we are Adam—that's what we just read. So...

[Image: slide on screen showing the following numbered list]

#1. The story of Cain and Abel is also the story of our own creation: the creation of me and you.

#2. Adam (mankind), Cain, and Abel, all of us, like to make offerings...

You may dread the "offering" in church, but it's in your nature to make offerings—No one tells Cain or Abel to make an offering; they just do it. Perhaps your whole life is like an offering.

Third: Cain and Abel bring these offerings to the Lord, who is with them—Did you catch that?

#3. When the Lord kicked Adam and Eve out of Eden, the Lord kicked himself out of Eden... just to be with them. He will not forsake them.

If it's not Eden for Adam, it's not Eden for God. Eden means "delight."

#4. Doing "good things" doesn't mean "good things" will happen to you... at least not in this world (East of Eden).

Doing good things may very well get you killed - like Abel, like Jesus.

So, when people tell you to give money to get money, they're probably lying. Give your life and you may lose your life, like Abel and like Jesus. And yet, you will be "lifted," says the Lord. "If you do well, will you not be lifted?" (Whatever that means.)

5. We also just learned that trying to be good can make you very bad.

"Do-gooders" are often "do-badders." In all recorded history, this is the first instance of religion, the first instance of envy, and it's also the first instance of murder.

6. It's very difficult to know what's good and what's evil—at least objectively, from the outside.

Both fruit offerings and meat offerings were prescribed in Israel. It's not like God hates farmers and loves ranchers. Objectively, they were each probably worth about the same amount—perhaps \$600 or so, just like Alan and Ted.

So... What is it that makes one deed good and another deed bad? What is it that makes Abel's offering good and Cain's offering evil? It would appear that at least Cain doesn't know. Which is surprising, since only three verses before this, his mom and dad just took the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

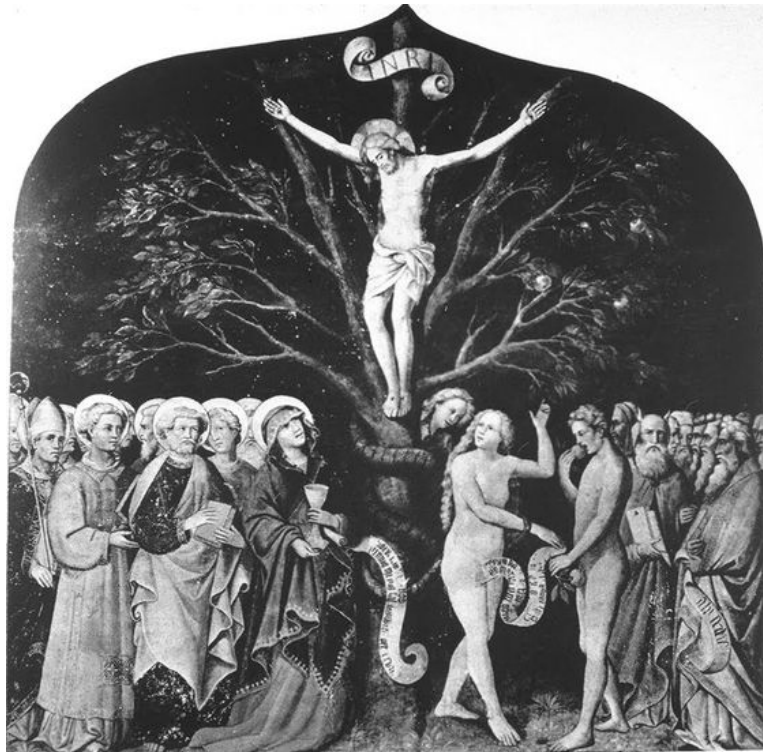


Figure 1 "Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena (1420)

Only three verses before our story, the Lord God says, "Behold, the Adam (humanity) has become like one of us knowing good and evil. Now lest he reach out his hand and take also (which can also be translated "take again") unless he take again of the tree of life and keep living without dying..."ⁱⁱⁱ

“Therefore, God sent him (Adam) out from the garden...”

We all assume that we are adults, and so we know what is good and what is evil. And God just said that we know good and evil... but we must not know it very well or we must not know it in the right way. Why?

Well, right here Cain seems to be having a really tough time sorting it out. Even thousands of years later, Jesus says, “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they’re doing,” as he hung on a tree in a garden. We didn’t know we were crucifying the Good and doing the evil.

(Most people seem to think that I’m supposed to just tell them what is good and evil, and then they can just go do it—but maybe it’s not that easy.)

There’s an amazing verse in Hebrews chapter five that I don’t think I have ever heard explained...Hebrew 5:14:

“But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment (that’s “knowing stuff”) trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”

Then the author writes, let’s leave the elementary teachings about stuff like laying on of hands, resurrection, and eternal judgment, so God willing we can go on to this... that is, knowing Good and evil.

See, it’s like the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil really works, but it may take an entire lifetime, or more than a lifetime, and in the process, you will die... and then hopefully, live.^{iv} It’s almost as if there’s a seed in the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and that seed will die and rise within you... and then you will never have to die again; you will have eternal life.

So anyway, what is it that makes one deed “good” and another deed “bad”? What is it that makes Abel’s offering good and Cain’s offering bad?

For that matter, why are they offering offerings at all? Does God need sheep? Sacks of grain? Baskets of grapes? Bread and wine? Does God need your \$600?

This is Genesis four. In Genesis one, we discover that God makes everything that’s anything... So, what could we possibly offer him that he doesn’t already have? Everything God makes is Good, and God makes everything that’s anything, which means that evil is really nothing but a shadow or a lie... like a void in the light (a shadow), an absence in some truth, or a need for creation within God’s creation [Peter points at himself].

Now that’s a challenge to think about, and yet we all agree, don’t we? We agree that God made everything that’s anything and that all God makes is good.... and what he doesn’t make is evil and actually nothing.

What do you give the one who made everything? Perhaps your “nothing.” But maybe you cannot give your nothing, if you think you yourself are really something and therefore possess something that God doesn’t already have, including you and your nothing.

Romans 11:35 · “Who has given a gift to God that he might be repaid?”

Has anyone given a gift to God that he might be repaid? Well, probably not Abel.

“Abel” means “vapor,” “weakness” or “emptiness.” He’s like an empty vessel, empty pipe, or a set of empty lungs. He knows that whatever he gives was first given to him; that is, whatever is good, and maybe even his absence of good—his weakness—his need, even his need to believe. So, Abel’s gift is literally a gift from “weakness,” from “vapor;” just a “breath.” He’s able because he’s not able. That’s Abel.

But Cain... Cain is a big deal, and I bet he might even think that he himself is the Promised Seed, and so he himself could give “a gift that might be repaid.” It’s not Cain’s gift of the fruit of the field that reveals this, but Cain’s sorrow, anger, and envy after the gift is given and not repaid. The sorrow, anger, and envy, reveal that he expected to be repaid with gratitude, validation, and love.

In other words, Cain expected to earn God’s love. Maybe my sorrow, anger, and envy reveal that I expect to earn God’s love? “Why are you angry, Peter; why has your countenance fallen?” he whispers in my soul.

Romans 11:35 · “Who has given a gift to God that it might be repaid? For from Him, to Him, and through Him are all things... to him be the glory.”

Did Cain make that grain? Did Cain make the Cain who farmed the grain? Can you make money? Can you make the “you” that made the money? Can you make faith, hope, and love, or does love, hope, and faith make you?

We say, “I made good choices.” Well, who made the “you” that made those choices? To have “a choice,” there must be a chooser. Who makes the chooser?

Romans 9:16a · “So it depends not on human will or exertion...”
So, it must depend on God’s will and exertion... right?

“It depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy.”

Well, Cain clearly thinks God’s favor should be dependent on his will and his exertion, for he thought he deserved something in return for his offering. It must have appeared to Cain that Abel got something in return for his offering and that this something was good... for he was already “lifted.”

Cain talked with Abel in verse 8, and I bet Abel seemed right... he seemed good.

And so, Cain grew jealous of the Good in his good-for-nothing brother Abel, and so tried to take the Good from Abel—like his parents tried to take the good from the tree, like we all try to take the good from each other, like we all take the life of Christ on the tree in the garden.

Cain gave an offering for a reason. Cain gave in order to get, which is the worst kind of giving—it’s a lie. (It’s a nothing that seems like a something... even to Cain.) Cain tried to buy the love of God, which is making God— a what? A harlot. Cain offered things, but he did not offer himself. Then, Cain tried to be first by making his brother last. Cain tried to take the Good from Abel, and everything got even more evil.

Cain tried to exalt himself and he was humbled. His sentence was to bear his iniquity and wander in the land of wandering. The Hebrew used in that description is the same as that used for the scapegoat driven to wander in the wilderness on the Day of Atonement. And yet, God marks Cain with a sign (*owth* in Hebrew); the next place we read that word, Genesis 9, it is the “*owth*’ of the Covenant”: the rainbow.

He exalted himself and was humbled; but once humbled, perhaps he could be exalted.

God told him, “If you do good, will you not be lifted, that is, exalted?”

So how do we do “good”? It appears that Abel did good, and he was lifted. The humble was exalted, the last became first, the weak became strong... the vapor got real, that little breath become the Wind of God. As I mentioned, Abel is the Hebrew word, *hebel*, which is translated “vapor,” “breath,” “futility,” or “vanity.”

Psalm 39:5 · “Surely all Adam stands as a mere breath, *hebel*.^v

In Ecclesiastes, *hebel*, is like Solomon’s favorite word: Ecclesiastes 1:2 · “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher, “vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

“*Hebel* of *Hebalim*,” says the Preacher, all is *hebel*.”

Ecclesiastes 1:14 · “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, all is *hebel* and grasping after *ruach*, [translated “wind”].”

Hebel striving after *ruach*—that’s how Scripture describes our world.

And now, this is where the story gets utterly fascinating. There are at least three Hebrew words that get translated as “breath.” And so far, all of them have appeared between Genesis 1:2 through 4:2.

Genesis 1:2 “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the *ruach* of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” [*Ruach* is translated, “Spirit,” “wind,” or “breath.”]^{vi}

The *ruach* of God is the Spirit of God that creates all things.

Genesis 2:7 · “... Lord God formed the Adam, of dust from the Adamah and breathed into his nostrils, the *neshamah*, the breath of Life and the Adam became a living *nephesh* in Hebrew, a living *psyche* in Greek, a soul.

The *ruach* breathed into the clay is our *neshamah*—the breath of life.

Genesis 4:1-2 · “Eve conceived and bore Cain—“I got, I own, I possess.” –And again, she bore his brother: *hebel*.”

Are you getting this picture? All Adam is *hebel*... like a breath no longer breathed. Each of us is the breath of God, having been breathed into clay. Cain is *hebel*, just as Abel is *hebel*, but Cain can’t lose himself. Cain is holding his breath; Abel is letting himself go.

Abel can lose himself, and so find himself, in the presence of the Lord. Abel can breathe... or should I say, is breathed, by God. Humbled, he is exalted.

Wouldn't your spirit be lifted if you were never concerned with exalting yourself? You would never be offended, never be resentful, never be insecure, with nothing to prove, nothing to protect. Abel is lifted... so Cain slays him in the field.

Cain envied Abel when he spoke to him in the field, for he was already lifted—he was happy; he was fully alive. He was righteous, which means “right.” It's the very thing we all want.

1 John 3:12 • “Why did Cain murder Abel?” asks John. “Because his own deeds were evil, and his brother's righteous.”

According to Scripture, envy is the reason we all crucify the Christ.

Well, Abel offered a lamb, but he must've known that he didn't make the lamb and didn't even “possess” the lamb. All he could do was slaughter the lamb... then offer that lamb. He didn't create the good, so he didn't expect to earn the good, just surrender the good and his nothing. That means: He did not give in order to get.

So this is the big question: Why did he give?

Perhaps his giving was already getting... as if giving was its own reward?^{vii}

You know, if I give in order to get, I'm not giving... I'm purchasing. If I love for a reason, I don't love... for love is the reason. If I do good for a reward, I'm not doing good, for the good is its own reward.

The best things that are done are done for no reason, for they are the reason. We must love for no reason because Love is the reason. God is Love, so Love is the reason for everything that's anything.
^{viii}

The best offering is given for no reason because it is the reason,^{ix} like the lady who dumped a year's worth of ointment on Jesus's feet. He said it was “the greatest offering.” Why did she do it?

Like the sheep before the throne, Jesus says, “You clothed me, fed me, loved me.” But they don't even remember it. So, why did they do it?

Like Jesus said, “When you give, don't even let your right hand know what your left hand is doing.” So how do we do it?

Like when I was a young father, I'd sneak in the kids' bedroom every night and kiss them on the cheek. They never knew it. Why did I do it?

Why did God do...you? Why did he make you? I think he sneaks in your bedroom every night and kisses you on the cheek. Why? Why does he love you?

Well, you see, there is no “why” for the Love of God because Love *is* God, and Heaven is what God does, which is where, when, and how God is.

“Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire,” writes CS Lewis. “It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to.”

People think: “I must be good to get to Heaven” ... but being good is Heaven.

They think: “I must give an offering to get to Heaven” ... but Heaven is a continuous offering.

If giving gifts to people that haven’t earned those gifts gets in your craw... In other words, if you hate mercy... well, you might as well just go to Hell, because you are not going to enjoy Heaven. In fact, Heaven will burn you like fire, for it is fire—the unmitigated presence of our God who is Love.

If you don’t love Love, you might as well go stand in the outer darkness with the older brother... go stand with Cain; go stand in the middle of nowhere and nothing, because that’s what you have chosen—It is your judgment.^x

Understand? If God were to validate Cain’s gift, he’d be validating Cain’s hell. So, when God disregards Cain’s offering, he’s disregarding the thing that’s holding Cain down, the thing that’s holding Cain’s breath. He disregards Cain’s ego. He disregards that thing that traps Cain’s *hebel* in hell... that thing that keeps each and every one of us from being lifted... all the time.

Brennan Manning used to tell about a New Year’s Day in 1969 in St. Ramey, France, when he was a monk with The Little Brothers of Jesus. He sat with six other monks in an old stone house. Each of them was committed to living a contemplative life among the poor. The days were devoted to manual labor and the nights were to be wrapped in silence and prayer. Their lives were to be a continual offering.

On this New Year’s morning, the talk at the breakfast table was very animated and soon turned to the topic of their jobs in town. The German brother remarked that their wages were substandard (60 cents/hour). Brennan commented that their employers were never seen at mass. The French brother suggested that this showed their hypocrisy. In disgust, the monks concluded that their self-sufficient, avaricious employers slept all Sunday and satiated their lusts, never thinking of God, while they themselves gave their very lives as a living sacrifice.

At the end of the table sat one old monk named Dominique Voilaume. The whole time, he never opened his mouth, but Brennan noticed the tears running down his cheeks. He said, “Dominique, what’s the matter?”

His voice, barely audible, “Ils ne comprennent pas.” —“They don’t understand.” It was all he said.^{xi}

[Image: previous image of Modena’s *Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man* on screen]

If Jesus spoke French, in 33 AD, as he hung on the tree in the garden, that’s what he might have said: “Father, they don’t understand; they don’t know the good.”

In Hebrew, or Aramaic, he said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” And he said, “It is finished.” (You know, like “the end of days.”)

Then all four gospels record that he did something that we seem to have utterly missed—he *expired*; he consciously, intentionally ek-spirited.

John 19:30 · “...He delivered up, (*paradoken*), his *pneuma*.”

It's the only place—except maybe one instance of David, who is a picture of Jesus—It's the only place in all of Scripture up to this point where any Adam is said to surrender his *pneuma*.

But Jesus wouldn't have said *pneuma*, (that's Greek); he would've said:

- *ruach*, for his breathe is the breath of God... or
- *neshamah*, for he is the breath God breathed into us... or he might have said,
- *hebel*, for he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all; he came to help us lose our souls and find them—he came to help us breath... to expire that we might be inspired, and expired and inspired and expired continuously by God.

He came that our *hebel*—our weakness, our vanity, our vapor—might be caught up and become one with the *ruach* of the Living God.

Paul wrote that we become “one Spirit, (one breath), with him.”^{xii}

Understand? God breathed into the adamah creating Adam, and Adam became a self, (a psyche, a soul, containing the Life of God who is the breath of God). But a snake convinced Adam to hold his breath, that is, possess the life rather than surrender the life—the Spirit is Life, writes Paul; the Breath is Life.^{xiii}

But when we hold our breath, it's like the breath dies—the *ruach*, becomes *neshamah*, and the *neshamah* becomes *hebel*... and then we die. But when we surrender our *hebel*, it becomes *neshamah* and then *ruach*... and we live. Life is constantly offering your *hebel*; life is breathing... or should I say, it's being breathed by God.

And that's #7. Abel offered a slaughtered lamb, but only because the slaughtered lamb offered Abel from the foundation of the world. He lifted his head and cried, “Into your hands I commit my *hebel*.”

Cain and Abel's offerings appeared to have the same value...but Cain didn't actually offer anything, including himself... his *hebel*, like Abel.

But how do we offer ourselves without becoming proud of ourselves for offering ourselves, and thus, trapping ourselves even deeper and deeper in outer darkness... just like the worst Pharisee that crucifies Jesus? “Do-gooders.”

How do we humble ourselves without becoming proud of our humility? In other words: How do we have faith, that's not faith in our faith—that is, ourselves?

The Book of Hebrews argues that most of us religious folk really don't know how to distinguish between good and evil, but that it only comes with practice—like a lifetime of practice. That's chapter 5 of Hebrews.

Then it talks a bunch about Jesus our high priest, who does what we could not do: Chapters 6-10.

Then it starts talking about faith. Hebrews 11:1 “Faith is the assurance [*hypostasis*: substance] of things hoped for.” What do you hope for? Jesus? “Faith is the substance of things hoped for.”

Hebrews 11:4 · “By faith, Abel—[*hebel*, vapor-boy]—offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain—[“Mr. I-got-this, I own this”]—through which he [Abel the vapor] was commended as righteous.”

Hebrews 12:1 · “...Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder, author, pioneer, and perfecter of our faith...”

You know, faith is reckoned as righteousness because it is righteousness. And Jesus is our righteousness. God has made Jesus to be our “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,” writes Paul. Jesus is the faithful one.

Romans 10:10 · “With the heart, one believes (has faith) and so is justified (made right),” writes Paul.^{xiv} But just as we learned in The Prophets, we all have a heart of stone. And so, God must give us a heart of flesh.

[Image: On screen is previous artwork of Modena’s *Fall and Redemption*]

- Do you know what’s hanging on the tree in the middle of the garden?
- Do you know what’s standing on the throne at the beginning and end of time?
- Do you know what righteousness is?

It is the heart of God, a slaughtered lamb.

So how do we get righteousness; how do we get faith? How do we offer the offering that God desires? Can we take it and possess it, like Cain? Or must we surrender to it, like Abel?

Did you notice what the Lord said to Cain—“Why has your countenance (your face) fallen...? Cain, why are you looking down?”

I imagine Cain glanced at the Lord and then looked down—he had too much to lose, he had a lot of ego to protect. Abel had nothing. Abel looked and never looked away from the pioneer and the perfecter of his faith

God said to Moses, “No man can see my face and live.”^{xv} Cain killed Abel, but I doubt that Abel was too upset, for he had already died and begun to live such that he would never actually die again.

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes (has faith) in me, through me, by me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

So, why do we come to worship? To die.

When we look into the face of God, Cain dies, our ego dies in the light of the Truth: We don’t create ourselves, save ourselves, or redeem ourselves. Cain dies and Abel is lifted—right into the lungs of God; we expire and then are inspired by God. And that’s how God “saves us” from ourselves. The Old Adam dies, and the eschatos Adam, the New Adam, is resurrected.

So, why do we come to worship? To die and be resurrected. To have faith and become the body of the one who is faithful.

Communion

So, on the night he was betrayed, Our Lord took bread and he broke it, saying, “This is my body given to you. Take and eat and do this in remembrance of me.

And in the same way, he took the cup saying, “This is the covenant in my blood,” —now that’s interesting, because the life is in the blood; the oxygen is in the blood—“poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, and do this in remembrance of me. It is finished.”

This [Peter gestures to the communion table] is the end of days; this [gestures again] is the judgment of God; this [gestures again to the table] is how he makes you in his own image and gives you what the first Adam lacked in the garden: Faith.

So, don’t look down; don’t look away. Let him humble you and exalt you. Because, you see, each of us is Cain—an arrogant self-righteous fool. And each of us contains an Abel [*hebel*—the very breath of the living God.

Come back to this table every week, even every day, maybe every minute... “looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of your faith.”

Don’t look down, don’t look away; look into the Face of God, and with whatever faith you’ve already got—even if it’s just a seed—with whatever faith you’ve got, make an offering. Maybe you could just say, “Thank you.” That will take some breath.

- Maybe you could breathe and say, “Thank you for the breath.”
- Maybe you could breathe until you realize you are the breath of God.^{xvi}
- Maybe you could sing until you realize that you are the song being sung by God.
- Maybe you could preach until you become his message.
- Maybe you could even try to do good until you realize you are the good that is being done... and then you’ll no longer need to try.

We have two stations: Wine is in the clear cups and juice in the covered. With tongs we’ll hand you some bread. But the Body and Blood is an indestructible seed; it’s faith.

Benediction

Faith, Hope, Love...a little like *hebel*—*neshamah*—*Ruach*.

So, I’ve asked this question all my life: What can I *do*?

I think that I can observe the creation of me...and then have faith.

Pray with me:

And so, Lord God, we thank you that we’re coming home; we’re coming back to the Garden, and when we open our eyes, it will be a city full of every creature in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and in the earth, and all that is within them praising the slaughtered lamb who stands on the throne—an entire new creation. We thank you, Lord God, that we are coming back to the Garden with the thing that we lacked when we left the Garden: Faith. And we’re coming back because you

followed us out of the Garden. And not only did you follow us, Jesus; the tree followed us. For you are the tree, you are wisdom; you are the Tree of Life. And taking your life, we learned the knowledge of Good and evil. And we took your life... And yet on that tree, at the edge of the city, outside of the Garden, we watched you deliver up your spirit that now cries out from the depth of your people, "Abba, Daddy," as we walk home...because you walk us home. How great you are! Thank you.

So, this is what I'm saying: To do Good, you must worship the one who is Good. And then you will become what you actually are: the Good who is done. You are the breath of God. You are the breath that God is breathing.

And then I just want to read this one final thought. Brennan Manning writes this about Father Dominique:

The following year, Father Dominique learned he was dying of cancer. He moved to Paris and got a job as a night watchman. Every morning after work, he would go to the park and sit on one particular park bench around 8:00. He would sit there in the park with drifters—dirty old men, derelicts, winos. He never criticized, but he laughed and told stories and shared his candy and accepted them into the fellowship of his heart.

One day they said to him, "Dominique, tell us about yourself." And he told them about Jesus who loved them tenderly and stubbornly. Jesus, who came to get men just like themselves.

The next morning, he didn't appear on the bench. Those men began to wonder where Dominique was. They searched until they found his body. He had died the night before in obscurity somewhere in a Parisian slum. They found his body, and they found his diary. The last entry was this:

"All that is not the love of God has no meaning for me. I can truthfully say that I have no interest in anything but the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. If God wants it to, my life will be useful through my word and witness. If He wants it to, my life will bear fruit through my prayers and sacrifices. But the usefulness of my life is His concern, not mine. It would be indecent of me to worry about that."

They buried him in a pine box at St. Ramey. A little wooden cross was all that marked his grave. And on the cross was this inscription, "Dominique Voillavme, a witness to Jesus Christ." More than seven thousand people from all over Europe attended his funeral.

To do good, you must become what you are, the good that is done. You must offer your breath in worship, and become what you are: the breath of God.

In the name of Jesus, believe the Gospel. Amen.

Endnotes

- ii Genesis 4:25 *And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed."*²⁶ *And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD.*

It's interesting that Seth means something like "God put" or "God appointed." *Shiyth* is the Hebrew verb "put, appoint, or set." *Seth* is literally the Hebrew noun for buttocks—where you sit or are set. Cain Wanders and Seth is Set. Cain is "I own, I buy, I choose" and Seth is "God sets, God appoints, God chooses."

After Cain kills Abel and wanders in the land of wandering. Eve gives birth to Seth—he is our great grandfather. The promised seed was in Seth.

- iii Genesis 4:22-23. It's fascinating that verse 22 is not a complete sentence. Ancient Hebrew had no punctuation, but clearly there should be something like and ellipsis or dash, for we are to understand that there's much more to this story. Indeed, it's the rest of the Bible and the rest of history; it's the story of redemption.

- iv "She dare not come within a hundred miles of the Tree, for its smell, which is joy and life and health to you, is death and horror and despair to her."

Everyone was staring solemnly at the Tree when Aslan suddenly swung round his head (scattering golden gleams of light from his mane as he did so) and fixed his large eyes on the children. "What is it, children?" he said, for he caught them in the very act of whispering and nudging one another.

"Oh-Aslan, sir," said Digory, turning red, "I forgot to tell you. The Witch has already eaten one of those apples, one of the same kind that Tree grew from." . . .

"So we thought, Aslan," she said, "that there must be some mistake, and she can't really mind the smell of those apples."

"Why do you think that, Daughter of Eve?" asked the Lion.

"Well, she ate one."

"Child," he replied, "that is why all the rest are now a horror to her. That is what happens to those who pluck and eat fruits at the wrong time and in the wrong way. The fruit is good, but they loathe it ever after."

"Oh I see," said Polly. "And I suppose because she took it in the wrong way it won't work with her. I mean it won't make her always young and all that?"

"Alas," said Aslan, shaking his head. "It will. Things always work according to their nature. She has won her heart's desire; she has unwearying strength and endless days like a goddess. But length of days with an evil heart is only length of misery and already she begins to know it. All get what they want: they do not always like it. . . .

- C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, p. 173-175

- v This means Cain was a hebel too, but he didn't know it... not yet.

- vi *Ruach* is what they walk in, in the garden. "*The cool of the day*," is *Ruach* in Hebrew. It's all around us. In *ruach* we live move and have our being.

vii And iniquity its own punishment. It's extremely instructive to ponder the fact that the word translated "punishment" in Genesis 4, is more commonly translated "iniquity." Do you see? Iniquity is its own punishment. We don't have to worry that sinners might not be punished; they are already being punished. Just as doing good is its own reward; Doing evil is its own punishment.

viii It's also the reason for nothing. The "nothing" exists for the revelation of "something:" I Am that I Am.

ix Jesus is the reason, the logos, the meaning of God. He is the Word of God; that's the Logic, logos, in the breath of God. Jesus is God's meaning manifest in the *adamah*.

x "Hell" (Hades) is literally our judgment. "Heaven" is literally God's Judgment. Gehenna is the place where God's Judgment consumes our Judgment. The tree in the middle of the garden is the place where God's judgment is revealed, and our judgment in surrendered to God's Judgment and becomes God's Judgment—the miracle of Faith.

xi It had been a dark and cold December kind of day. We retired early but rolled out of the sack at midnight for an hour of nocturnal adoration...

Later we gathered in the kitchen... The table was decorated with fruit bread, strawberry preserves, canned peaches and bottles of white wine. The Little Brothers of Jesus play as they pray... I went to bed... thinking of something Paul Gallico had once said-how he would readily have signed the Franciscan contract and followed the primitive rule in all its rigor, except for the impossible clause. At the end of it all, Francis would deny him the only satisfaction he really wanted-a haughty disdain and lusty contempt for the mediocre Christian.

New Year's Day brought the first heavy snowfall... nature lay dying and 1969 seemed a very good year to die to all the values, attitudes and behavior patterns that were not of Christ Jesus.

There were seven of us seated at table. The conversation centered... around our work in the town...

The table talk grew animated when the German brother remarked that our wages were substandard, and the Spaniard added that the hours were lousy... We concluded that our self-sufficient patrons slept all day Sunday, drank wine, made love and never lifted their minds and hearts in prayer to thank God for his gifts...

Dominique... sat at... the table and never opened his mouth. I saw tears rolling down his cheeks.

"What's the matter, Dominique?"

His voice was barely audible. "*Ils ne comprennent pas*," was all he said.

They don't understand!

- Brennan Manning, "The Gentle Revolutionaries", Chapter 7, pg. 62 and 63

xii 1 Cor. 6:17

xiii Romans 8:10

xiv Romans 10:10

xv

"But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."

-Exodus 3:22

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?

-John 14:9

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

- John 11:25

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

-2 Corinthians 4:6

^{xvi} A Buddhist legend says a man painted such a masterful picture of Buddha that when he finished only the painting remained.

- Richard Wurmbrand, *Reaching Toward the Heights*, April 14