

CAIN AND ABEL

Genesis 4:1-15

After the review of the last lesson the teacher in each class will need to cover briefly the story of the Garden of Eden. The emphasis should be on the disobedience, the reason for it, and the resultant expulsion from the garden, treated in each case according to the level of understanding of the class.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord knows the future and makes provision for it.

The early people knew the correspondence of everything in nature.

Worship of the Lord has no goodness in it unless there is love in the heart.

All true love comes from the Lord as we learn of Him and obey Him.

Notes for Parents

When the first people created upon the earth had reached the stage of development pictured by the seventh day, they became the first great “church,” the Most Ancient Church. They were very different from people today. They cared little for the things of this world and lived in close touch with heaven, trusting the Lord and depending upon Him for guidance and care, just as a little baby depends on his parents. In the Bible the beautiful state in which they lived is pictured as a garden—the Garden of Eden. Mythology calls this the Golden Age.

But we all remember that there was one tree in the garden of whose fruit the Lord had commanded them not to eat, and that the serpent tempted them to doubt the Lord’s wisdom and to try the forbidden fruit. The tree of knowledge of good and evil pictures the belief that we ourselves are able to decide what is right

and wrong, and the serpent is our five natural senses, which show us only the things of this material world.

When Adam and Eve listened to the serpent instead of to the Lord and ate of the forbidden fruit, they were driven out of the garden. As soon as a child yields to the promptings of his physical nature and his natural inheritance and begins to think that he knows better than his parents, he loses the happy, trustful state of infancy. As soon as a man decides that this world is all-important and that he does not need the Lord to tell him how to live, he has started on the downward path away from heavenly happiness.

After Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden, two sons were born to them. Cain and Abel represent faith and charity. Faith is recognition of the Lord in the mind and charity is love of the Lord and the neighbor in the heart. They are brothers, meant to work together and help each other in the service of the Lord. But when men think that they can guide themselves, these two brothers are separated. Then faith in the Lord becomes mere “lip service”—Cain’s offering—and all genuine love is killed; for true, unselfish love comes only from the Lord as we learn of Him and obey Him.

The Lord did not allow Cain to be destroyed even after he had killed his brother, because as long as we even say we believe in the Lord and go through the outward forms of worship, there is hope that we may read or hear something which will make us stop to think and change our ways.

Primary

The notes suggest a simple approach to the lesson and a practical way of connecting it with the children’s experience. Stress the point of willful disobedience and its results rather than going into detail about the garden and the serpent. Cain’s disposition can then be discussed as one of the consequences of the original turning to self-will.

In the Bible, after the story of the creation of the earth and everything on it, the Lord tells us a story about the beautiful

Garden of Eden which He gave to men to live in. They had everything they could possibly want. There was only one thing He told them not to do, and that was to eat of the fruit of one particular tree, the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

But the first people, who in the story are called Adam and Eve, wanted to try this fruit and so they disobeyed the Lord, just as you sometimes make up your mind to do the very thing your father and mother have told you not to do, even though you have been told plainly that something bad will happen if you do it. Adam and Eve, because they wanted to have their own way instead of obeying the Lord, had to leave the beautiful garden and go out and work very hard for their living.

After a while Adam and Eve had two sons. Let us read the story about them. [Read Genesis 4:1-15.]

Who was the first son of Adam and Eve?

Who was the second?

What was Cain's occupation?

What was Abel's?

What offerings did they bring to the Lord?

Why did the Lord not accept Cain's offering?

The Lord is never deceived when we only pretend to be good.

He knows our hearts.

How did Cain show that the Lord had judged him correctly?

What did he say when the Lord asked him where Abel was?

Really each one of us is his brother's keeper.

Each of us should do all he can to help others.

When we listen to the first part of this story, it seems to us, doesn't it, that both brothers were trying to please the Lord, and that Cain's offering was just as good as Abel's. But the Lord knows what is in our hearts, and He saw that Cain was only pretending to be good. Cain did not really love the Lord. The kind of feelings he had in his heart were the kind which led him to kill his brother. If there is love in our hearts, we will show it by trying never to hurt other people but instead always to help them and make them happy.

Junior

This class should have a thorough review of the story of the Garden of Eden. They should have the details of the story fixed in their minds, but should also understand that it is a Divine allegory which teaches us about the spiritual history of mankind and about developments in our own souls.

In how many days or stages was the world created?

What was the final creation?

How does man differ from the animals?

What is his proper relation to the other things in the world?

What did the Lord do on the seventh day?

How did He set the seventh day apart?

When the Lord was in the world, what did He do on the sabbath day?

What simple rule did He give for it?

You all know the story of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden which follows the story of creation. Let us see how many of the details we remember.

How was the Garden of Eden watered?

Into how many branches did the river divide?

What tree was in the midst of the garden?

What other tree is mentioned?

What were Adam and Eve told about this second tree?

What did the Lord say would happen if they ate of its fruit?

Who persuaded them to disobey the Lord?

How were they punished?

We know that this story is an allegory, a kind of parable, in which the Lord is describing for us—under the figure of the beautiful, fruitful garden and the man Adam and his wife Eve—the happy, peaceful state of the people of the Most Ancient Church, the first church formed among men after they had been instructed and developed by the Lord. Over and over again in the Bible the Lord tells us that if we will only learn the true way of life from Him and follow it, He will give us freely everything we need and will make us happy. The trouble with us—just as with Adam and Eve in the story—is that we think we know better than the Lord what is good for us. So we disobey first our parents and teachers and afterward the Lord Himself, and then we have to learn “the hard way.”

And our story goes on to show us that one disobedience leads to others. After they were driven out of the garden we learn that Adam and Eve had two sons.

What were their names?

Which was the older?

What was his occupation?

What was Abel's occupation?

What offering did Cain bring to the Lord?

What offering did Abel bring?

Which offering did the Lord accept?

When we first read this story, we sometimes think the Lord was unfair. The two offerings were different but apparently each man brought the best he had. When you are a little older, you will learn what each of these offerings really represents, but even in the literal story you can find the explanation of the Lord's rejection of Cain's offering if you look for it. Read verse 7 and remember what kind of person Cain afterward showed himself to be.

You know that we sometimes pretend to be good when we are not, but the Lord always sees our hearts. Cain pretended to be worshiping the Lord when he brought his offering, but his heart was selfish. He was really just trying to buy the Lord's favor. People today may do the same thing. They may pretend to believe in the Lord and may go to church regularly and give money to the church and for charity when there is no love for the Lord or the neighbor in their hearts. Like Cain, they are just trying to win favor and honor, and when they do not get what they want, they become angry and try to hurt other people, just as Cain in the story rose up and slew his brother Abel. Cain's character was just a further development of the wrong turning which Adam and Eve took when they chose to follow their own judgment instead of obeying the Lord. Cain did not want to acknowledge his obligation to love the Lord and cherish his brother. If we obey the Lord, each one of us sees that he must be his brother's keeper, helping those about him in every possible way.

You can see how this story pictures for us the difference be-

tween genuine love for the Lord and a declaration of belief in Him which has no real love in it. Love and faith are two brothers who must live and work together. When either one is destroyed, unhappiness follows. Cain became “a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth.” He would always have to live in fear and he would never have a settled home. Selfish and evil people are always in this unhappy state inside, even when they seem to be prosperous outwardly.

The Lord did not permit Cain to be killed. Cain represents faith, and faith is necessary. For as long as we even profess to believe in the Lord, there is always a chance that we may see our selfishness and turn from it and begin to do better. Read Ezekiel 18:23.



Intermediate

The emphasis should be on the use the people of the Most Ancient Church made of their freedom of choice, and on its direct result in the separation of faith and charity. Clear instruction should be given as to the meaning of faith and charity and the necessity of both in our lives.

We are all familiar with the story of the Garden of Eden, and you have perhaps learned that it is an allegory given us by the Lord to hold in our minds as a picture of the peaceful, happy state in which the man lives who is in genuine love to the Lord, trusting the Lord completely and looking to Him for guidance and support in all things. This was the state of the people of the Most Ancient Church and is the state of the celestial angels. The picture given us of the Garden of Eden is a more detailed development of the state described by the seventh day—the goal of creation.

But we know that the people of the Most Ancient Church did not remain in this happy state. They were men and women—not mere automatic recipients of the Lord’s blessings. They had their own reasoning faculty and they had freedom of choice, just as we have today. In time they became restless under the Lord’s direction and wanted to lead themselves. This is represented in the story of the temptation of Eve by the serpent and the eating of the for-

bidden fruit. Then they were driven out of the garden to “till the ground” from which they were taken. They had chosen to lead themselves, and the happy, innocent, peaceful state was gone. From that time on they had to work for their spiritual bread.

Now in the story Adam and Eve have two sons. All through the Word the birth of children pictures new developments of goodness and truth or of evil and falsity—depending on the spiritual state of the parents. When the first people were driven out of the garden, they had taken a downward step spiritually, but they were by no means evil. They still recognized the Lord and intended to serve Him. But their desire to decide for themselves led to a divided mind, because they were resisting the Lord’s guidance. In the Word when two sons are born, one always represents truth or faith, and the other goodness or charity. Faith is belief in the Lord in our minds. Charity is love for the Lord in our hearts. Both are necessary, because we have to learn what is right and we have to want to do it. The two “brothers” should always be each other’s “keepers.”

But we know that sometimes people have good intentions but do not make the effort to learn what is right, and also that sometimes people who know the truth and acknowledge it with their minds do not want to live according to it. In our story Cain represents faith. He was a tiller of the ground, and the ground represents the mind. Abel represents charity. He was a keeper of sheep, and sheep represent innocent good affections.

Each brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of his own toil and the Lord accepted Abel’s offering and rejected Cain’s. Does this mean that the Lord wants our hearts but not our minds? That He wants us to love Him without trying to understand Him? The Lord said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.” In our religion we must use our minds as well as our hearts. And in the story the Lord says to Cain, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?” It was not Cain’s offering that was at fault but what was behind it in Cain’s heart. For the Lord knows our hearts. Do people ever profess to believe in God,

go to church, and support the church because it will make them better pleased with themselves and more respected in the community in which they live?

When people try to appear religious for selfish reasons, charity—true love of the Lord and the neighbor—is killed. Cain’s jealous rage in the story is repeated again and again with all self-centered people. His question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” is answered by the Lord Himself in John 13:34, an answer which is incorporated in our own Statement of Faith. We should all know this verse, for it is a bulwark against selfish passions.

When faith is separated from charity—that is, when people think it is enough to know what is right without doing it—their minds have no firm foundation. A good, kindly life is the true home of the soul. Selfish people are driven from this home and wander about from one disappointment to another, a prey to falsity and evil. So Cain became a fugitive and a vagabond. But the Lord protected Cain so that he should not be killed. Faith—the study and acceptance of the truth—is absolutely necessary to us, for without it we have only our own ideas to guide us. So the Lord always preserves faith in the world somewhere.

Basic Correspondences

Cain = faith

Abel = charity

the ground = the mind

sheep = innocent affections



Senior

The young people should be led to think seriously of the practical effects of the separation of faith and charity in the individual and in the history of the church and the world. The quotation from AC 362 at the end of the lesson should be read and discussed, as it describes a tendency to which we all are subject and which is the cause of many conflicts.

Cain and Abel are the first of several pairs of brothers in the Bible. When our desire and our thought unite—which all marriages

in the Word picture—they produce results in our hearts and in our minds. These are the children. Usually new desires are pictured by daughters and new thoughts by sons. But as our desires come to our consciousness in our minds, things of the will may also be pictured by sons. So two brothers always picture the will and the thought side of a new development.

We say that Cain and Abel picture faith and charity: mental acceptance of a truth and the will to do it. The two are brothers. They belong together. For truth is of no use to us if we do not live according to it, and the desire to do right comes to nothing if we do not know what is right.

Cain, who represents faith, is born first because every new step in our progress through life comes to us first through some new knowledge or idea entering the mind. But Swedenborg tells us that into each truth that we learn the Lord insinuates the feeling that we ought to live according to it. This is the birth of Abel, or charity. And it is the basis of what we call conscience.

Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground is our acceptance of truth with our minds. This is necessary and right, but it is worthless unless our will is to live according to the truth. Abel's offering represents this acceptance by the will. The Lord said to Cain, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" Goodness is nothing else than living according to the truth from a desire to serve the Lord. When we see the truth but do not try to live according to it, the Cain in us kills his "brother" Abel. His punishment is that he becomes a fugitive and a vagabond, When we do not apply to our conduct the truths that we learn, we live in constant fear of disgrace or punishment and our minds have no settled abiding place.

One common idea of faith is that it is blind belief in something we cannot understand, and a widespread idea of charity is that it is giving to the poor. The New Church regards them quite differently. Faith is belief in what we have found to be true, belief which actually directs our thought and action. And charity is the desire of the will to serve the Lord and the neighbor instead of self. Faith is not really faith unless we act according to it, and

charity is not really charity unless it looks to the Lord for guidance and recognizes Him as the giver of all good.

From our lesson for today we learn that the separation of faith and charity—which is something we find in ourselves as well as in the life of the world about us—began long ago in the Most Ancient Church. You may remember from our last lesson that the serpent’s words to Eve (Genesis 3:1-5) picture the first inclination of men to question the truth as it came to them from the Lord and to rely on their own judgment based on what they saw about them in the world, and that this was the beginning of the decline of the Most Ancient Church. The separation of faith and charity is the inevitable result of the choice of self as a guide in place of the Lord. The quotations at the end of this lesson show how this separation affected all later history.

Adult

Since this lesson on the Ancient Church will be centered on the end rather than on the beginning of that church, it will be better to point out the difference between the two “churches” in this lesson. Discussion should also bring out the fact that “faith alone” is a doctrine still common in some churches and that as individuals we are all believers in that doctrine to the extent that we take it for granted that we shall get to heaven just because we go to church.

We have seen that the seventh day of creation—in addition to its meaning for our individual lives—pictured the celestial state of the people of the Most Ancient Church, a state in which, because they loved the Lord and trusted Him wholly, they could be instructed in His truth by an inner way. This beautiful state is further pictured by the description of the Garden of Eden.

But we remember that men were not content to remain in this state. Self-consciousness developed in them—represented by the creation of Eve—and through it the temptation to reason from the evidence of their physical senses—the serpent—instead of trusting the inner dictate of truth from the Lord. So they were driven out of the garden. Man, once he begins to develop self-consciousness and to assert himself, loses the innocent, trustful state of his early

infancy and comes into the hard necessity of learning from experience. We think of the development of a child as an advance from infancy to maturity, and on the external plane it is; but spiritually it is a decline, a progression downward from the celestial to the natural state.

In the internal historical sense of the Word we see this decline clearly in the description of the character of the successive churches. The story of the birth of Cain and Abel and the slaying of Abel by Cain is the basis of our understanding of this decline. Swedenborg says of it: “As this chapter treats of the degeneration of the Most Ancient Church, or the falsification of its doctrine, and consequently of its heresies and sects, under the names of Cain and his descendants, it is to be observed that there is no possibility of understanding how doctrine was falsified, or what was the nature of the heresies and sects of that church, unless the nature of the true church be rightly understood. Enough has been said above concerning the Most Ancient Church, showing that it was a celestial man, and that it acknowledged no other faith than that which was of love to the Lord and toward the neighbor. Through this love they had faith from the Lord, or a perception of all the things that belonged to faith . . . But the case is far different at this day, for now faith takes precedence of charity, but still through faith charity is given by the Lord, and then charity becomes the principal. It follows from this that in the most ancient time doctrine was falsified when they made confession of faith, and thus separated it from love. Those who falsified doctrine in this way, or separated faith from love, or made confession of faith alone, were then called ‘Cain.’”

The name *Cain* means “possession.” Cain represents faith, a faith of the mind, believed to be self-derived and so separated from charity. Abel represents charity, love to the Lord and the neighbor in the heart. Abel was a keeper of sheep. Sheep, we know, represent innocent affections. Cain was a tiller of the ground. The ground is the mind in its natural state. We are told (AC 345) that “Those were said to ‘till the ground’ who look to bodily and

earthly things.” Both Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord, the offerings representing worship. Of Cain’s offering Swedenborg says: “That by the ‘fruit of the ground’ are meant the works of faith without charity, appears also from what follows; for the works of faith devoid of charity are works of no faith, being in themselves dead, for they are solely of the external man” (AC 348). Abel’s offering of the firstlings of the flock and of the fat thereof represents love and the faith thence derived, the fat representing “the celestial itself.”

Even in the letter we are not left in doubt as to the reason why Cain’s offering was not accepted. The Lord looks upon the heart, and in the Lord’s sight Cain did not “do well.” The state of his heart became evident when he slew his brother. Of this, as it applies to the later state of the church, Swedenborg says (AC 369): “. . . while both faith and charity were from the doctrine of faith, yet faith separate from love could not but disregard and thereby extinguish charity; as is the case at the present day with those who maintain that faith alone saves, without any work of charity, *for in this very supposition they extinguish charity.*” Cain’s attitude is also clearly expressed in his question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Nevertheless, the Lord does not permit Cain to be destroyed. The killing of Abel represented the destruction of the innocent love in the heart through which, up to that time, the Lord had been able to instruct and guide mankind. The Lord had foreseen that man would develop in this direction and was providing a new means of reaching him and saving him from himself. Of the successive churches on the earth only the Most Ancient Church was of the celestial type. In AC 393 we read: “The Most Ancient Church was of such a character as to acknowledge no faith except that which is of love, insomuch that they were unwilling even to mention faith, for through love from the Lord they perceived all things that belong to faith. Such also are the celestial angels of whom we have spoken above. But as it was foreseen that the human race could not continue to be of this character, but would separate faith from love to the Lord, and would make faith a

doctrine by itself, it was provided that they should indeed be separated, but in such a way that through faith—that is, through the knowledges of faith—men might receive from the Lord charity, so that knowledge or hearing should come first, and then through knowledge or hearing, charity—that is, love toward the neighbor, and mercy—might be given by the Lord, which charity should not only be inseparable from faith, but should also constitute the principal of faith. And then instead of the perception they had in the Most Ancient Church, there succeeded conscience, acquired through faith joined to charity, *which dictated not what is true, but that it is true, and this because the Lord has so said in the Word.*” Faith—even faith without charity—is better than no faith at all. So long as a man recognizes God with his mind there is a possibility that something in the Word may strike home to his heart and that he may “come to himself,” as we read of the prodigal son (Luke 15:17-19): “And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.”

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 340: “With such as are called ‘Cain’ faith is recognized and acknowledged as a thing by itself . . . Previously, they had been as it were ignorant of what faith is, because they had a perception of all the things of faith. But when they began to make a distinct doctrine of faith, they took the things they had a perception of and reduced them into doctrine, calling it ‘I have gotten a man, Jehovah,’ as if they had found out something new; and thus what was before inscribed on the heart became a mere matter of knowing.”

Arcana Coelestia, n. 362: “The doctrine of faith called ‘Cain’ is here described, which in consequence of separating faith from love, separated it also from charity, the offspring of love. Wherever there is any church, there arise heresies, because while men are intent on some particular article of faith they make that the main thing; for such is the nature of man’s thought that while

intent on some one thing he sets it before any other, especially when his imagination claims it as a discovery of his own, and when the love of self and of the world puff him up. Everything then seems to agree with and confirm it, until at last he will swear that it is so, even if it is false. Just in this way those called 'Cain' made faith more essential than love, and as they consequently lived without love, both the love of self and the phantasy thence derived conspired to confirm them in it."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Who created the earth and everything on it? *God*
- P. In how many days or stages was it created? *six*
- J. What was the final creation? *man*
- P. What did the Lord do on the seventh day? *rested*
- J. What did He say of this day? *blessed and sanctified*
- J. What do *blessed* and *sanctified* mean? *made happy, made holy*
- J. What does this teach us about how we should use Sunday?
make others happy, worship
- I. By what story in the Bible is the state of the people of the first church on earth pictured? *Eden*
- J. What one prohibition did the Lord give them?
not eat of tree of knowledge
- J. How were they tempted to disobey? *serpent*
- J. What was their punishment? *driven from garden*
- P. In our story for today what two sons were born to Adam and Eve?
Cain, Abel
- P. What was Cain's occupation? *farmer*
- P. What was Abel's occupation? *shepherd*
- J. What offerings did they bring to the Lord? *grain, lamb*
- P. Whose offering was accepted? *Abel's*
- J. Why was Cain's offering rejected? *insincere*
- P. What did Cain do which showed his true character? *killed Abel*
- J. What was his punishment? *wanderer*
- J. How did the Lord save him from being destroyed? *mark*
- I. What do Cain and Abel represent? *faith, charity*
- S. What is represented by Cain's slaying Abel? *thinking it is enough to know what is right without doing it*