



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI † DEO † GLORIA

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

The Faith of Abel

Hebrews 11:4

January 31, 2010

“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.”

- ❑ In two weeks, America will celebrate what is probably the quintessential “Hallmark Holiday”: Valentine’s Day. I must admit, each year it seems to catch me by surprise, and I panic to get Kimberly something that will express my love and care for her. Inevitably, like so many men, when I panic, I spend *much* more money on Kimberly than I would have if I planned ahead.
- ❑ Yet, when each Valentine’s Day rolls around, I know what Kimberly does *not* want: yellow roses. I personally think yellow roses are fine. However, Kimberly does not like them. So, in my panic each year, regardless of how beautiful an arrangement of yellow roses I may see, I do not purchase them.
- ❑ The reason for this is because, of course, she is my wife and I know and love her. I desire to give her gifts that I know she likes. There have been times in our nearly ten years of marriage that I have gotten her things that *I would like*; however, that is not the measure of a good gift for her.
- ❑ So, as I get to know Kimberly more and love her more, I desire to give her things that I know she will want. For example, she prefers thoughtful letters and notes more than anything of monetary value. Therefore, if I truly love her, I will do this for her.
- ❑ Consequently, when I give my wife a gift, the gift itself says much about my commitment to her and her desires.

- So it is with our relationship with the Lord. If we love Him, we will give Him what He has stated that He seeks from us: simple obedience. He is not impressed by wealth, fortune and fame. Yet, He has called us to a life of humble obedience: for, *to obey is better than sacrifice*.
- This morning, we come to the story of two brothers: Cain and Abel. One seemed to understand this principle. The other seemed to disregard it. One acted in faith; the other did not.

- I. **Abel Offered An Acceptable Sacrifice**
- II. **Cain Offered An Unacceptable Sacrifice**
- III. **Through His Faith, God Commended Abel as Righteous**

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I. Abel Offered An Acceptable Sacrifice
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- The author of Hebrews writes, in **Verse 4**: “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain..”
- It is important to note that Cain and Abel were the first men of faith, for since their parents, Adam and Eve, walked with God, there was no need for faith. Even after they fell, they would be able to remember the immediate relationship they once had with God. Therefore, it makes sense that Abel would be listed in the Book of Hebrews as the first “man of faith.”
- This Verse recalls the account in **Genesis 4:1-5** of Cain and Abel:

“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.’ And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.”

- The author of Hebrews makes it very clear: “**Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain...**”
 - This verse and the account in Genesis 4:1-5 have often caused much confusion and even frustration among Christians.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The reason for this is that it seems unfair of God to arbitrarily or capriciously accept one time of sacrifice and reject another when, <i>it is assumed</i> that both worshippers were sincere in heart. After all, Cain was

a farmer and brought *what he had*; whereas, Abel did the same thing, bringing *what he had*, which happened to be an animal sacrifice.

- Yet, if the Word of God is righteous and perfect (which it is), then there **must** be more to this story (and there is!).

□ The great question, then, is this: **Why was Abel's sacrifice acceptable to God when Cain's was not?**

- In order to understand this most crucial question, it is important to first go back just one chapter in the Book of Genesis.
- In **Genesis 3** we read of the Fall of Adam and Eve. Immediately after the Fall, God, in His grace, made **the first sacrifice** and covered Adam and Eve:

“And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.”
Genesis 3:21

- ❖ This was God's solution to deal with sin: a **God-provided blood sacrifice as a covering and substitute for sinners.**
- In fact, God had made it very clear that **sin would lead to death**...and it most certainly did: ***the death of an innocent substitute.***
- George Whitefield said, regarding the account in Genesis 3:21:

What were the coats that God made to put on our first parents, but types of the application of the merits of the righteousness of Jesus Christ to believers' hearts? We are told that those coats were made of skins of beasts... Those beasts were slain in sacrifice, in commemoration of the great sacrifice, Jesus Christ, thereafter to be offered. And the skins of the beast thus slain, being put on Adam and Eve, they were hereby taught how their nakedness was to be covered with the righteousness of the Lamb of God.”

- Immediately after God clothed Adam and Eve **in the Garden of Eden**, He expelled them **from** the Garden of Eden:

“therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the Garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.”
Genesis 3:23-24

- Notice that when God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, He **placed cherubim** at the east end of the Garden to prevent man from entering back into direct fellowship with Almighty God.

□ The only way back into fellowship was ***through the flaming sword*** (the flaming sword always symbolizes the judgment of God throughout the Scriptures).

- This is particularly interesting when we get to the Book of Exodus and read of God’s commandment to erect a Tabernacle, the place where the people of God would worship Him and He would dwell with them.
- **Just as God dwelt with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, so the Tabernacle was erected to symbolizes God’s dwelling with His people.**
- Exodus 26:31: “And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it.”
- It is very possible, then, that God had Moses pattern the tabernacle after the Garden of Eden [The parallels between the Garden of Eden and the Tabernacle are undeniable.] **Further, just like the Garden, the cherubim sewn into the veil of the Tabernacle guarded God’s dwelling from the presence of sinful man.** The only time a sinner could go behind the veil and commune with God – and that but once a year – was through the shedding of blood – symbolizing God’s propitiatory judgment on sin.
- Consequently, it very well may be that Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices to the entrance of the Garden of Eden, where the cherubim were. They may have erected an altar similar to the mercy seat atop the ark of the covenant.
- Richard Phillips writes, “We may infer from this that after their sin and expulsion from the Garden, Adam and Eve still came to worship God at the entrance to Eden. It was to the guarded way between the cherubim that they came with sacrifices of blood. Likely, this is where Abel and Cain came, one with a sacrifice of blood and the other with an offering representing his works. Abel would have been like the later priests of Israel, able to come to the gate, to the holy place, to live and serve in God’s reflected light, but barred from the inner sanctum by the guardian angels, just as the thick veil with the image of cherubim kept Israel’s priests out of the holy holies.”

□ **So, what does this all mean?**

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- **In short, it means that when Abel came to worship God, he brought the acceptable type of sacrifice that God required in order to commune with Him.**

- But, again, this raises the questions: **Why was Abel's sacrifice better than Cain's?**
- Given what we have seen from the Genesis account, we can conclude that Abel's sacrifice was better for several reasons.

1. Abel's Sacrifice followed the Pattern Established By God
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- It is safe and proper to assume that Cain and Abel knew of God's sacrificial provision for Adam and Eve after the Fall. They would have most likely known that God sacrificed an animal in order to cover Adam and Eve.
- A.W. Pink writes, "Now in Old Testament times, God spoke to men sometimes directly, sometimes through others. In this instance, we believe the reference is to what God had said to Adam and Eve, and which they had communicated to Cain and Abel. By turning back to Genesis 3 we discover *what the Lord said to their parents.*"
- And, what *the Lord said to their parents* was perfectly consistent with what *the Lord did for their parents*: provided a blood-sacrifice.
- From the first sacrifice recorded in Genesis 3:21 we learn several truths that will echo throughout the pages of Scripture and find their fulfillment in Christ:

1. An acceptable sacrifice for sin must be given by God.

- Abel's sacrifice, being that it was a living creature, came directly from God.
- Abel could in no way take credit for the "quality" of the animal sacrifice, for it was God's.

2. An acceptable sacrifice must be a blood-sacrifice.

- Abel's sacrifice, like the Lord's first sacrifice, was a blood-sacrifice.
- It is very possible that Abel brought his blood sacrifice to an altar in front of the cherubim at the east side of the Garden.
- As the cherubim stood and guarded the entrance to the Garden with the flaming swords, Abel took his sword and sacrificed an animal, demonstrating what was required to commune with God.

3. An acceptable sacrifice provides a covering.

- Like the first sacrifice of the Lord, Abel’s sacrifice would have provided a covering.
 - The fact that the Lord sacrificed animals in order to cover Adam and Eve foreshadows our “covering” in Christ.
 - In fact, the word *Atonement* comes from the Hebrew word, meaning, “to cover.”
- ❖ Therefore, the first reason why Abel’s sacrifice was better than Cain’s is that it followed the pattern God had already established in the Garden of Eden.

2. Abel’s Sacrifice was the Firstborn

- The account in Genesis 3 makes it clear that Abel brought the firstborn of his flock to sacrifice to the Lord.
- In other words, it was the best from what *the Lord had given him*.
- This certainly foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ: the firstborn of all creation and the firstborn of Mary.

3. Abel’s Sacrifice was Given in Faith.

- This is the crux of the matter. Abel had faith and Cain did not. Therefore, the nature of Abel’s sacrifice reflected the faith out of which it came.
- Furthermore, if biblical saving faith **is a gift**, then we must assume that God had given Abel the gift of faith.
- So, when someone asks, “How would Abel have known the pattern God had established for proper sacrifices in the Garden of Eden?” The answer would be: *by faith*. Certainly Adam and Eve would have told their sons the story of the Fall and God’s covering of them through a sacrifice (for this story would have been passed down from generation to generation orally until it was written down); however, Abel *believed* and *applied* what he heard because He had **faith**.
- John Calvin wrote: “The sacrifice of Abel was more acceptable than that of his brother only because it was sanctified by faith... Where did his pleasing come from other than that he had a heart purified by faith?”
- We must conclude, then, that Abel understood that **there was nothing that He could do to earn the favor of God**.
- Pink writes, “Saving faith, then, in its simplest form, is the placing of a Substitute between my guilty self and a sin-hating God.”

II. Cain Offered An Unacceptable Sacrifice

- Now that we see why Abel's sacrifice was acceptable, we should further probe into **why Cain's sacrifice was unacceptable to God.**

1. Cain's Offering Reflected *Him and His Efforts*

- It should be said that Cain's offering to the Lord – fruit of the ground – would have been the result of **a tremendous amount of work.**
- Consider that one of the results of the Fall is recorded in Genesis 3:17-19:

“...cursed is the ground because of you;
In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
And you shall eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your face
You shall eat bread...”

- There is no doubt that Cain would have had to work hard through sweat and toil in order to raise the fruit from the ground before offering to God.
- The ancient Jewish historian, Josephus wrote, “The brothers having decided to sacrifice to God, Cain brought the fruits of the cultivated ground and of trees, while Abel brought milk and the firstlings of his flocks. This latter offering gave the greater pleasure to God, who is honored by those things which grow spontaneously and in accordance with nature, and not by those things which are forcibly produced by the ingenuity of covetous man...”
- In a real sense Cain foreshadowed the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed that would was righteous by *what he did*. They fasted, they prayed, they worked. They did so publicly, widening their phylacteries and praying loudly and publicly.
- There was probably not a group of people in the first century more *devout* than the Pharisees; however, they were devoid of genuine, saving faith; for their faith was *in themselves* and *in their ability to impress and earn God's favor.*
- We must continually ask ourselves the question: **Do our offerings and our worship reflect ourselves or Christ?**

2. Cain's Offering Was Not What God Required.

- Even though Cain worked and sweated in order to produce the crop for the Lord, **this is not what God required.** God's example in the Garden of Eden made it clear what He required.

- ❖ Imagine the arrogance of the husband, for example, who thinks he knows better than his wife what *she* desires (for a gift) – especially *after* she has demonstrated to him what *she* wants!
- ❖ How much more is it with God. It is as though Cain ignored God’s model of sacrifice and adopted one that *he* (Cain) preferred!

Jude 11 states, “Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain...”

- ❖ Consider how true this is for us today. **We have an Apostolic Model of worship in the New Testament. It is simple, and it is clear. However, it is viewed by so many Christians as being inadequate.**
- ❖ We, therefore, believe that we can come to God **on our terms, in ways that are comfortable and convenient for us.**
- ❖ **We no longer approach God with reverence and awe; we approach Him with flippancy and humor. We tell each other, “God will love you just as you are,” and we demand no conformity to the Scriptures or contrition for sin.**
- ❖ Consider something as simple as *when* we worship, for example. The Apostolic model is the Lord’s Day – Sunday. Yet, this is inconvenient for some, so we say: worship whenever and however you want as a church, as long as it is convenient for *you*. **We fix our worship around our schedule; rather than the other way around.** We conform when and how we worship around our lives, rather than conforming our lives to our relationship with the Lord.
- ❖ **And the list goes on and on.**

James Montgomery Boice writes, “That is the problem with so many ‘good, religious people.’ They come to God with their heightened sense of esthetics and want to be received by God because of their beautiful offerings. But God rejects them and their godless worship. There is no blood, no Christ and, hence, no true Christianity, however beautiful their service might be. If one comes first through faith in Christ and his shed blood, then he can present all the beautiful things he is capable of finding or creating. And God will be pleased by this, because the person does not trust these things for salvation but rather is offering them to God just because he loves him and wants to show affection. It is only on the basis of the sacrifice of Christ that one can come.”

- ❑ Cain established a pattern of worship that reflected *his interests and his life and expected the Lord to except it*; and the Lord did not. This should not shock us.
- ❑ From this passage it appears that Cain was a hypocrite, refusing to approach God through the means He had established.

3. Cursed is the ground

- ❑ Next, after the Fall, the Lord declared, “cursed is the ground...” (Genesis 3:17).
- ❑ Cain seemed to ignore this truth; choosing to offer to God a sacrifice that came from the ground.
- ❑ Cain likely approached the altar in front of the cherubim at the east end of the Garden with great pride in what he was bringing to offer God.
- ❑ However, it came from the cursed ground and what not of the prescription God provided.

4. Cain’s Offering Was Not Done in Faith

- ❑ This was ultimately *why* Cain did not offer an acceptable sacrifice: He did not have faith.
- ❑ Therefore, because Cain had no faith, he *could not* provide an acceptable sacrifice to the LORD.

III. Through His Faith, God Commended Abel as Righteous

- ❑ The author of Hebrews states that through his faith, Abel was commended by God as righteous.
 - ❑ This indeed points to the great doctrine of the Church: justification by faith alone!
 - ❑ The author continues, in **Verse 4**: “And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.”
 - Because of his supreme jealousy, Cain killed his brother Abel. However, this did not silence Abel’s testimony.
 - G. Campbell Morgan states: “It was a great occasion when this first soul representing a fallen race appeared in the unsullied light of the home of the un-fallen. He came by faith, ransomed by love, at the cost of sacrifice.”
- Abel does, indeed, still speak: **Man approaches God only through faith in the substitutionary blood sacrifice that only God can provide – the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- ❑ Yet, the death of Abel actually accomplished nothing. It was the One to whom Abel’s sacrifice pointed whose death opened our access to God.

- Consider once again that Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel went to sacrifice to God and worship Him at the place where the two cherubim were: at the east side of Eden.
- Consider as well that this was symbolized by the great veil in the Tabernacle.
- **Yet, consider finally that when Christ died, he relieved the cherubim from their ancient post, tearing the veil from top to bottom. No longer to the cherubim guard the presence of God with flaming swords, for Christ voluntarily submitted to the sword of God's judgment.**
- **Praise be to God that we are no longer kept from "Eden", the presence of God.** We now boldly approach the throne of God through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.