

# ABEL: A MAN COMMENDED BY GOD

C. Stephen David | *Ekklesia Evangelical Fellowship* | July 16, 2023

## Scripture:

- ❖ **Hebrews 10:39** But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.
- ❖ **Hebrews 11: 1** Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **2** For by it the people of old received their commendation...

**[The first person to begin with ⇒] 4** By **faith** Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which **[faith]** he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his **faith**, though he died, he still speaks.

**Author's aim:** It is to teach his audience how the faith of Abel rewarded him, encouraging his readers to persevere in their faith until they are rewarded.

## 1. FAITH MAKES YOUR SERVICE MEANINGFUL

**Comparison: Hebrews 11:4** By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain...

- Biblical comparison is made for imitation and not to demean.

## Historical account:

- The creation of Adam and Eve [Genesis 1 and 2]
- The fall of Adam and Eve [Genesis 3]
- The children of Adam and Eve: Cain and Abel were the first children of the first parents, Adam and Eve. [Genesis 4]

**Genesis 4: 1** Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." **2** And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. **3** In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, **4** 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, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.** So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

Why did God reject Cain's sacrifice?

- ❖ **Genesis 4: 6** The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? **7 If you do well, will you not be accepted?** And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”

**Character of God:** Genesis 4:7, “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” God is a God of holiness and righteousness. He is not a cheap God who is only interested in offerings and sacrifices despite the sinful condition of the heart.

- ❖ **Isaiah 1:13**, Bring no more vain offerings... **1:16**, Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil...

**Back to the question:** Why did God receive Abel’s offering?

**Donald Guthrie, Bible scholar:** It is often supposed that Abel’s sacrifice was superior because it was a blood sacrifice whereas Cain’s was not. But there was no precedent to blood sacrifices, and there is no evidence to suggest that God had instructed the brothers about what kind of offerings they should make.

- Abel brought an animal because he was a shepherd, and Cain brought the fruit of the ground because he was a farmer.

**Explicit biblical reason:**

- ❖ **Hebrews 11:4 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.

**Note:** The issue was not sacrifices, but faith.

**John Calvin, protestant reformer, held this view:** “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?”

**Don’t underestimate lack of faith:** It is Cain’s lack of reverence and faith in God that led him to envy and murder his brother. Unbelief is the mother of all evils.

**What could it mean when Abel offered sacrifice to God by faith?**

- His **focus** was on God [he was reverentially conscious of God when he offered sacrifice]
- His **goal** was to please God.
- His **confidence** was that God would accept his sacrifice.

**Hebrews 11:6**, And **without faith** it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God **must believe** that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

**Irony:** “Whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists” Why would one draw near to God without believing that He exists? The author seems to indicate more than mere acknowledgement of God’s existence. He seems to be speaking about Coram Deo, consciously living in the presence of God. It is terribly possible to believe in God’s existence and live as if He doesn’t exist.

**Comment:** You can do something good as an empty ritual with no faith [no focus on God, no dependence on God, no goal to please God, no confidence in God’s work]. You can pray without faith. You can read the Bible without faith. You can attend church meetings without faith. You can evangelize without faith. You can do everything in the Christian life without faith.

**Character of God:** God is not looking for meaningless rituals. He is looking for services that come out of reverence and faith.

**A W Pink:** All obedience, service, and worship, must proceed from faith, for “without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb. 11:6): where this be lacking, no matter how exact the performance of our duty, it is unacceptable to God.

## 2. FAITH DECLARES YOU RIGHTEOUS

**Hebrews 11:4** By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, **through which [faith] he was commended as righteous**, God commending him by accepting his gifts.

► **NIV**, “By faith he was commended as righteous...”

**Commended, Commending (to obtain attestation to character):** God attested Abel as righteous because of his faith. Nothing pleases God like faith in Him.

**God commending him by accepting his gifts:** Perhaps by sending fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice.

**Steven Cole:** It would be a huge mistake to conclude that God accepted Abel’s sacrifice on the basis of his righteous life, or that He rejected Cain’s sacrifice because of his evil life. For one thing, our text indicates that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith, not on the basis of his righteous life.

**Justified by faith:** Not only Abraham, but Abel too.

**Righteous:** Right standing before God.

**Observe:** Even in the OT, righteousness was declared based on faith.

**Romans 4:3** For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” 4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...

**Romans 4:20** No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” 23 But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, 24 **but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.**

**Point:** You have your righteous standing before God only through your faith in Christ, now and forevermore.

**Although we are justified by faith and not by works, those who are justified by faith give the best of their works:**

**Genesis 4:3** In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD **an offering of the fruit of the ground**, 4 and Abel also brought of the **firstborn of his flock** and of their fat portions.

- It appears Cain did not bring the firstfruits of the harvest, but a portion of a later harvest.

**Proverbs 3:9**, Honor the LORD with your wealth and **with the firstfruits of all your produce...**

### 3. FAITH MAKES YOUR LIFE MEMORABLE

**Hebrews 11:4** By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which [faith] he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. **And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.**

**How did Abel die?**

- ❖ **Genesis 4:8**, Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

**Why was Abel killed?**

Because God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's.

❖ **1 John 3:12**, We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

- Cain was religious [offered sacrifices] but not obedient to God.
- You can be very religious and terribly disobedient.

**Will the righteous suffer? Will everything go well for the righteous?** [Some say, "Why am I suffering if I have chosen to walk in righteousness?"]

❖ **Matthew 5:10**, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**Note:** This may be an encouragement to the readers of Hebrews how to persevere in their faith despite persecution.

**Hebrews 11:4** 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.**

**How can a dead man speak?** Through his legacy of faith.

❖ **Hebrews 13:7**, Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

**Comment:** Some live and speak even after they die. Some have already died while they are still alive.

**Here is one example:** David Brainerd was born in 1718. He had nine siblings, and they were all orphaned when David was fourteen. He entered Yale University, where he was converted to faith in Christ. Brainerd was so excited about the Lord that he made a critical comment about one of his tutors who didn't share his enthusiasm for Christ. As a result, he was thrown out Yale and all his attempts to be reinstated were futile. He was distraught. But he went out into the woods and began sharing Christ with Native Americans in the Northeast. He battled intense loneliness, and terrible depression. He contracted tuberculosis. He became so ill he had to give up his work after only about three years. The great colonial preacher, Jonathan Edwards, took him in and the Edwards family ministered to Brainerd as he died. Brainerd suffered terribly and died an excruciating death at age 29. At first glance, his life looked like a failure. Orphaned. Thrown out of college. Lonely and short ministry to the Indians. Sickly. Tuberculosis. Dead at 29. During all his missionary labors among the Native Americans, he had seen only a small handful of them converted. But that isn't the whole story.

- Brainerd's life [Jonathan Edwards published his journal] became the best-selling religious book of the century, and it has never been out of print since the day it was published.
- In England, John Wesley published a special edition for his readers.
- Hudson Taylor, David Livingstone, Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury, and Henry Martyn—You can hardly read a biography of any of the great missionaries of this era without coming across the way Brainerd's life had impacted them.
- Brainerd's biography had a great impact on William Carey to leave England and to go to India as a missionary. Today millions are blessed through Carey's work. Carey said Brainerd's life was "almost a second Bible" to him.
- And in the 20th century, Brainerd's life had a tremendous impact on Jim Elliot, who was one of five missionaries martyred by the Auca Indians in 1956. He had been reading Brainerd in the days just before he was slain, and that reading, he said, had become an almost hourly practice.
- Yale University, which expelled Brainerd for his spiritual zeal, later named a building (a missionary center) in his honor, which is there today.

**Point:** Abel and David Brainerd, "He, being dead, yet speaks."

**Concluding words: Sacrifice—11:4** By **faith** Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which **[faith]** he was commended as righteous...

- The first sacrifice offered by people.
- A sacrificial offering is something offered for one's sins.

**Now, we don't need to sacrifice offerings for our sins. Why?**

- ❖ **Hebrews 10:10**, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

**John MacArthur explains:** In Abel's sacrifice, the way of the cross was first prefigured. The first sacrifice was Abel's lamb—one lamb for one person. Later came the Passover—with one lamb for one family. Then came the Day of Atonement—with one lamb for one nation. Finally came Good Friday—one Lamb for the whole world (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Hebrews [Moody Press], p. 301*).

**Invitation to unbelievers:** Repent and believe in Christ.

**Invitation to believers: [1]** Do everything to God with reverence and faith. Avoid meaningless services. **[2]** Give your best to God for the best God did for you, that He gave up His Only Son for our sins. **[3]** Live a life that still speaks after you die. Rejoice in the Gospel of Christ.