

**The Faith of Abel**  
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC  
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.  
August 21, 2022

Text: Hebrews 11:4

Purpose: There is a division among men that seek to honor God the way in which God requests and those that choose to do it their own way. Genuine faith will generate genuine worship, genuine righteousness, and a genuine witness.

One day, Robert decides to go to the local revival and listen to the preacher. After a while the preacher asks anyone who needs to be prayed over to come forward to the front at the altar.



Robert got in line, and when it's his turn the preacher asks: "Robert, what do you want me to pray about for you?"

Robert replies: "Preacher, I need you to pray for my hearing."

The preacher puts one finger in Robert's ear, and he places the other hand on top of Robert's head and prays and prays.

After a few minutes, the preacher removes his hands, stands back and asks: "Robert, how is your hearing now?"

Robert says, "I don't know, Reverend, my hearing ain't until next Wednesday." <sup>1</sup>

We continue our hearing today in the Book of Hebrews exploring the hall of faith listed in chapter eleven. Two weeks ago, we began by looking at the first three verses.



Verses one and two spoke of the nature of faith. Faith is the substance or substance of things hoped for. Our hope is built on Jesus Christ and we lay claim to the promises of God through the sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. As we identify our self with Christ, we exercise our faith in God.

Verse three spoke about the knowledge of faith. “Through faith we understand...” The world will say, “**Seeing is believing.**” But God’s word says, “**Believing is seeing.**” By faith we understand the mysteries of God found only in Christ Jesus. We understand that our sin has been put away and we have eternal life. An unbeliever cannot understand this security we have in Jesus Christ. We concluded last week’s sermon by stating, our faith is the key that unlocks our understanding.

Today, I want us to turn to one of the many examples of faith found in Hebrews chapter 11. The first one we encounter is the man, Abel. To find the story of Abel, we need to turn back to Genesis 4:1-10, 16.

*Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the Lord. Then she bore again, this time his brother, Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time, it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord.*

*Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So, the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”*



*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.*

*Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know, Am I my brother’s keeper?”*



*And He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. (v. 1-10)*

God put a curse on Cain, placed a mark on him, and then ...

*“Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden.” (v. 16)*

What a strange story we find here shortly after the world was created. The first family experienced an awful tragedy – one son murdering the other son. Adam and Eve essentially lost both sons that day because Cain was put away from their presence.

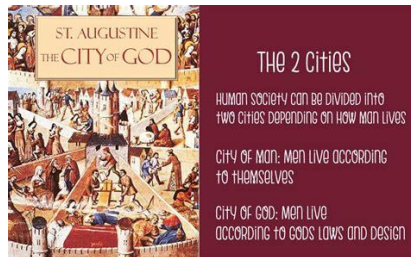
Cain was the son that went into the agriculture business. Abel on the other hand, was involved in raising animals. As we read in the scripture, both were religious men who brought an offering unto God – each appropriate to their profession. Abel brought an animal sacrifice while Cain brought a grain offering. Throughout the centuries, people have tried to untangle why Abel’s offering was acceptable to God while Cain’s was rejected.

God warned Cain, “*If you do what is right, will you not also be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.*” (4:7)



Instead of listening to the Lord, he nursed his anger and it exploded in a rage that killed Abel. The result was that Cain was cursed and put away east of Eden in the land of Nod. What is this story trying to tell us today about the kind of faith that Abel had and what was missing with Cain’s faith and offering?

In St Augustine’s book, *City of God*, the two systems of the world are clearly demonstrated here in this first family. Cain was representative of those that belong to the “City of Men.” They are condemned because they do not come to the Lord in the way the Lord has instructed us to come. Instead, they want what they want on their own terms. Abel is a representative of those that belong to the “City of God.” They hear what God has said, and respond according to the word of the Lord.



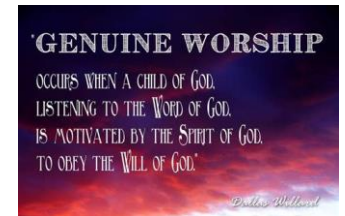
Augustine saw each son as a representative of radically different approaches toward God. The way of Cain was the way of unbelief and self-righteousness, man-made religion. In Jude 11 it warns, “*Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain.*”

On the other hand, Abel came to God by way of faith. Hebrews 11:4 says, “*By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offering. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.*”

Our passage of scripture today illustrates two ways of life. The way of faith or the way of unbelief. R. Kent Hughes in his commentary on Hebrews says that the faith of Abel is demonstrated and characterized by three things demonstrated in this passage of scripture: genuine worship, genuine righteousness, and genuine witness.<sup>2</sup>

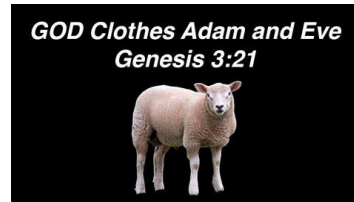
### Genuine Worship

When you read the passage in Hebrews, you see that what Cain and Abel were attempting to do before the Lord was to worship Him. To do this thing called worship, one must do it according to a word from God. You hear God’s command or instruction, and by faith you do as you are taught. Romans 10:17 says, “*Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*”



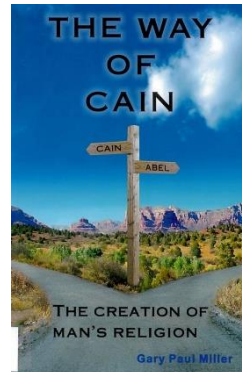
It would appear that God has evidently given clear instructions to Cain and Abel whereby only animal sacrifices were acceptable to God. They probably learned this from their parents, Adam and Eve.

In Genesis 3:21, we find that after Adam and Eve had sinned against the clear instruction of God, God provided garments of animals slain to clothe their nakedness. An animal's blood was spilled in direct response to their sin. It is true, this did not become the norm until the time of Moses, but you find in Genesis 8 and Genesis 15 that an animal sacrifice was offered as atonement for sin.



This practice of bringing an offering unto God probably was practiced for many years, at the appointed times. God apparently has designated a time for offerings to be brought and they understood what they were to do. This time of offering must have occurred several times in their life because when Cain killed his brother, he was already 129 years old.

They understood the importance of the substitutionary atonement offered by the animal sacrifice. For Cain to deliberately ignore God's instruction in this manner only demonstrated a self-willed determination to present his worship in a manner Cain thought best. He went the "way of Cain."



I can hear Cain now ... My fruit and my grain were earned by the sweat of my labor, whereas Abel only watched the sheep. My fruit is beautiful to the eye and sweet to the taste. My offering is far superior. My way is much better.

Cain's offering had become an offering of self-righteous pride. But Abel's offering was a better sacrifice because it was in accordance with God's design for worship. Abel was obedient to what God instructed.

There is a second reason that Abel's offering was accepted and Cain's offering was rejected. It has to do with the attitude of the heart. It only took one word of correction from God to set Cain on edge. He was angry and he was ready to lash out. God knew Cain's heart and told him to be careful because that anger was sitting at the door (like a lion) waiting at his door ready to devour him. God's request of Cain to bring his anger under control was met with silence instead of repentance.



Cain enjoyed his anger and continued to nurse it until it boiled over. I have met several people that have this kind of boiling anger lurking underneath their spirit. They are angry at God for allowing a certain thing to occur in their life. They cannot get past the fact that they had been faithful to God and demonstrated their love for God in many ways, and God responded to their faithfulness by allowing this tragedy to occur. They are angry and they are ready to explode.



Over the past few weeks, I have been thinking about those individuals that are struggling with anger issues related to God. To them I would say, just as God said to Cain, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not let go

of this anger, and turn and worship as you ought to, then sin will continue to sit at your door, waiting to devour you. You must learn to master that anger, or it will overtake you and destroy your life.”

Maybe you are struggling with that kind of boiling anger in your spirit, if you are, repent and turn to God to restore your joy and restore your worship of God.

But Abel came with a different kind of spirit – a submissive devoted heart. Abel brought the first of his flock – the best as an offering. In Proverbs 3:9 it says, *“Honor the Lord from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce.”* 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, *“God loves a cheerful giver.”* That is the kind of heart God is seeking us to develop and honor God.



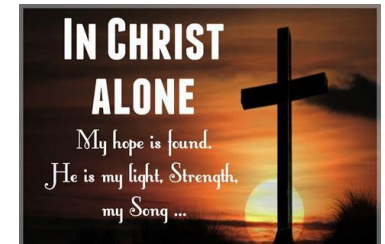
God longs for us to worship Him in the same manner – completely devoted in heart, mind and spirit. As you read through the Bible, you will discover that it is not the offering God desires; it is our heart and our obedience. David said in Psalm 108:1, *“My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing and make music with all my soul.”* Even when Jesus was here on earth, when Mary came to anoint Jesus’ feet with oil, Jesus rebuked the disciples when they tried to stop her from worshipping Christ. (Mark 14:6)



The reason Hebrews begins the “Faith Hall of Fame” with Abel is that this is the key element in our faith – that is

worship. Worship is fundamental to all that we do in life. There are numerous examples in the Bible of people that put worship and adoration of God above all else.

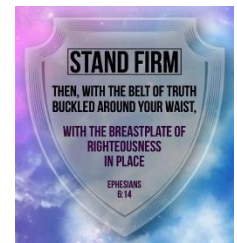
If we could only grasp the idea that we come to God by way of the sacrifice of Christ, then we would take hold of the central theme of worship. It is through Christ alone we are able to enter into fellowship with God. It is only through the sacrifice of Calvary that our sin debt is paid. Christ is my hope, my light, my strength, and my song. It is only by the blood of Christ are we reconciled. We cannot do it by our works, our deeds, our sweat and toil, our financial gains. All of those are the way of Cain – and they all lead to separation from God.



Abel was obedient to God and understood the price that was necessary to worship God. But Abel also understood it was about our heart. We need to bring to God a clean heart and that can only occur when we ask God to create in us a pure heart. Genuine worship can only occur through faith.

### Genuine Righteousness

Now that we understand genuine worship comes through faith, we need to see that the writer of Hebrews shows genuine righteousness is also a result of faith.

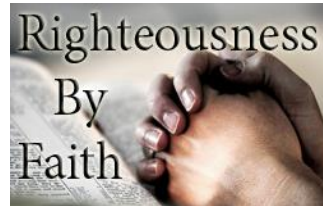


*“By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings.”*

The scripture is not clear how God demonstrated His acceptance of the offering. Some Jewish and Christian traditions say that fire fell from heaven and consumed Abel's offering. This is recorded in five different places in scripture. (Lev. 9:23-24, Judges 6:21, 13:19-20, 1 Kings 18:30-39, 2 Chron. 7:1) Throughout history, great teachers like St. Chrysostom, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, believed fire came down and consumed Abel's offering.

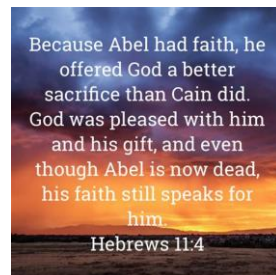
What Abel brought was accepted because scripture says the Lord "*respected*" his offering. In Matthew 23:35, Jesus called Abel righteous.

The connection is this: when there is genuine faith, which leads to genuine worship (being obedient to what God asks), that faith will produce a genuine righteousness that leads to righteous living – in word and in deed. James said "*without works, faith is dead.*" A true living faith will produce fruit – living it out in action. Genuine faith will generate genuine righteousness.

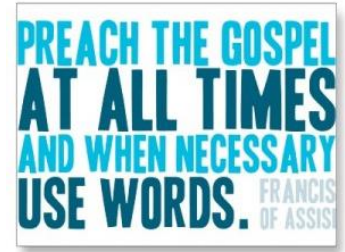


## Genuine Witness

The final manifestation of genuine worship and genuine righteousness is genuine witness. The scripture says, "*And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.*" I find it very interesting that there are no recorded words of Abel in all of scripture, but his witness still speaks. His faith speaks for him.



The story is told of St. Francis asking one of his young monks to go into town and preach. The young monk quickly accepted the offer to go with St. Francis. They passed down the main street in town, turned down many of the side streets, and passed through the houses lying outside of the village. As they approached home, the young monk inquired why they had not stopped and preached to anyone.



To that St. Francis replied, "My son, we have preached today. As we were walking, we were observed by many, our behavior was watched closely, and all who saw us took note of our sermon today. It is no use, my son, to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere as we walk."

How many of us are living a lie? We come to church on Sunday all dressed up and pretty, but through the week we are cursing, berating others, belittling employees, using our positions as places and platforms for a tyrant's pulpit?

Scripture records not a word of Abel, but his life demonstrated genuine worship, genuine righteousness, and it demonstrated a genuine witness.

Ours is but to decide ...

Will we walk in obedience to God or will we stubbornly cling to our way to God?



Will we accept the gift of forgiveness offered by Christ or will we try to bring our sacrifice to win the approval of God?

Will we walk our life's journey by faith – a faith that produces genuine worship, genuine righteousness, and a genuine witness?

If your life is not demonstrating a positive witness to the world, then you seriously need to re-evaluate your faith and see if you are following the way of Abel or the way of Cain.

Are you residing in the “City of Man” – leading to eternal separation from God, or in the “City of God” – leading to an eternity with God? Where do you reside?

## **LET US PRAY**

### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Mikey's Funnies, August 1, 2008

<sup>2</sup> R. Kent Hughes Commentary on Hebrews, Vol. 2, pages 67-72