

Hebrews

A Dead Man Speaks

Hebrews 11:4

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INTRODUCTION:

Since the first couple in human history fell into sin, the most important question for every person to answer is, "How can I, as a sinner, be right before the holy God?" When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, mankind fell into sin. God appointed physical and spiritual death as the penalty for our sin.

Hebrews 9:27 plainly states...

Hebrews 9:27 (NASB95)

²⁷ And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,

Since no one will miss that appointment, it is vitally important to answer the question, "How can faith make me right before God?"

Proverbs 14:12 states...

Proverbs 14:12 (NASB95)

¹² There is a way **which seems** right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

Those words apply to this matter of spiritual life and death. Since the earliest times, there has been a way that has seemed spiritually right. In various forms, it is the way of all of the world's major religions. It is the way of self-righteousness and good works. In one form or another, it believes that if a person is sincere and does his best, God will overlook his faults, accept his good works, and let him into heaven. The Bible calls this "the way of Cain".

Jude 1:10-11a (NASB95)

¹⁰ But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.

¹¹ Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain,...

The Bible is clear: Salvation by human goodness or works is impossible.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB95)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God*; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

So...**What is Faith?** For the new covenant Christian, faith in God means believing in and trusting in the greatest hope of all time—that God became man, lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death for your sins, and rose again to glory so that you could have eternal life by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Abel did not know of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. For him faith was unwavering obedience to what God ask him to do in order to worship Him. "**Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of God.**"

Let's look at the example of Abel and see how faith manifested itself in him.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Hebrews 11:4 (NASB95)

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

Prayer

Here we meet the first man who came to God by faith. This is the man who is called Abel. The whole point of this chapter is to let the Jewish people know that salvation by faith is not something new, it is something very, very old. In fact, it goes all the way back to Abel. He is the first one who exercised faith in this way.

You say, "What about Adam and Eve?" Well Adam and Eve are not examples of faith because they had walked and talked with God in the cool of the day in the Garden before the fall. They had walked by sight. We must walk by faith and not by sight.

Abel, on the other hand, was conceived and born outside Eden after the fall. He had not seen a manifestation of God. Adam and Eve had seen and believed. Abel had not seen and yet believed and that is why Abel is the first on the list of faith examples, the first man of faith. Abel's faith teaches us valuable lessons related to the question of how we can be right with God through faith.

I. The Better Sacrifice of Abel.

Genesis 4:3-5 (NASB95)

³ So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. ⁴ Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; ⁵ but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.

The first question to be asked is "Why did God accept Abel's offering but reject Cain's offering?"

Chapter 4 of Genesis records the first act of worship in human history and the first murder. The act of worship—Cain's and Abel's offerings—follows the account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, their disobedience to God, and the entrance of sin into the human race. Death, the judgment pronounced upon them by God, soon made its entrance in the first family.

Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve, “**in the course of time**” brought offerings to the Lord. Without doubt, they were doing this because God had revealed to them the necessity of a sacrifice. Some wonder how Cain and Abel were supposed to know **what** to sacrifice. The answer is that God must have instructed them concerning the details of acceptable worship, although those instructions are not included in the Genesis narrative.

Abel was a shepherd, and his offering to the Lord was “**the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions**”. Cain was a farmer, and his offering was “**of the fruit of the ground**”. The most evident difference between the two sacrifices is that Abel’s offering was an animal (blood) sacrifice, and Cain’s was a vegetable (bloodless) sacrifice. There may be an additional implication that, while Abel brought “the best portions”, Cain simply brought some of his ordinary crops. Scripture does not give an indication, however, that either of these differences factored into God’s acceptance of Abel and rejection of Cain.

What we know for sure is that the Lord had regard for the offering of Abel but had no regard for the offering of Cain. There was something in Cain’s motivation and heart attitude, and possibly something in his performance, that made his offering unacceptable to God. It was obviously something that he was aware of and could remedy because of what God tells him later when he is disgruntled.

Genesis 4:7a (NASB95)

7 If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?

Abel, on the other hand, had the proper motivation, the proper procedure, and the proper relationship with God. That relationship was based on faith.

Hebrews 11:4a

4 By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain,

Ever since the fall of man, people must come to God in faith.

Hebrews 11:6 (NASB95)

6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Biblical faith never rests on manmade ideas, or on vague speculations. It rests on the revealed word of God. Abel, by faith, had obeyed God’s command. Cain refused to submit to it. Abel’s faith pleased God; Cain’s disobedience displeased God. When the Lord told Cain to “**do well,**” He meant, “Offer the kind of sacrifice that I commanded of you.”

Cain and Abel did not conjure up their own the idea of bringing sacrifices to God! No, God had clearly revealed to them the necessary and proper way to approach Him through an acceptable sacrifice. So Abel’s sacrifice was better than Cain’s because he offered it in obedient faith to what God had clearly revealed. God rejected Cain’s sacrifice because he did not offer it by faith.

We would be greatly mistaken to assume that God accepted Abel’s sacrifice because he was inherently a better man than his brother. Abel brought an animal from the firstlings of his flock because he knew that he was a sinner deserving God’s judgment, but he also knew that God had revealed that He would graciously accept the death of a substitute. Cain proudly ignored God’s revealed requirement and brought an offering of his own

devising. At the heart of Abel's sacrifice was the acknowledgement that he deserved to die for his sin, and that God's requirement for the shedding of blood was just. At the heart of Cain's sacrifice was the pride of saying, "I don't need shed blood to approach God. My way is just as good. In fact, my way is better! This lovely basket of fruit looks nicer than that bloody, dead animal!" Cain's theme song was, "**I did it my way**".

Paul said in I Corinthians...

1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-24 (NASB)

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ...

²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

People who think that they are basically good feel that they do not need a Savior to die in their place. They may appreciate a good example to follow, but the idea of Jesus shedding His blood for their sin offends them. But those whom God has convicted of their sin and whose eyes He has opened to see His absolute holiness and justice, recognize their need for a sacrifice to pay for their sins. They gladly bow at the foot of the cross, acknowledging Jesus to be the Lamb of God who bore their sins.

Thus, faith is always an obedient response to God's revelation and it will **yield righteousness within us** from the blood of Christ.

II. True Faith Yields Righteousness.

Hebrews 11:4b (NASB95)

⁴ ... through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts,...

We do not know **how** God testified that Abel's sacrifice was acceptable, whereas Cain's was not. All that Genesis states is that God had regard for Abel's offering, but not for Cain's.

1 John 3:11-12 (NASB95)

¹¹ For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; ¹² not as Cain, *who* was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

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.

God acquits the guilty sinner on the basis of Christ's death, which satisfied the penalty that the sinner deserves. He places the penalty of our sin upon Christ and the righteousness of Christ within us at the instant we believe in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NASB95)

²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Once the sinner has trusted in Jesus Christ as God's ordained sacrifice for his sins, his life will become progressively righteous in behavior as a result. But such a godly life begins at the point when the sinner trusts in Christ. To reverse this order and say that God declares us righteous on the basis of our good works is to deny the gospel.

III. A Dead Man Speaks.

Hebrews 11:4c (NASB95)

...and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

What is interesting here is that we do not have a single recorded word that Abel said during his lifetime on earth. Abel was the first man in human history to die and even though he is dead, he still speaks to us today because of his faith.

How does he still speak? In several ways:

First, Abel still speaks to us about how God will punish those who persecute His faithful.

Genesis 4:10 (NASB95)

¹⁰ He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground.

God did not let that cry go unheeded!

We see a similar thing in Luke.

Luke 18:7-8 (NASB95)

⁷ now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? ⁸I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly.

In Revelation, John sees a vision of the saints in heaven who have been slain because of their testimony.

Revelation 6:9-11

⁹ When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; ¹⁰ and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" ¹¹ And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.

Abel's blood speaks to us about the fact that although we may be mistreated in this world, God is the righteous judge who will right all wrongs and bring justice to His elect.

Second, Abel still speaks to us by his life, apart from any words. We have no recorded words that Abel spoke, and yet thousands of years after his death, he still speaks. This shows us the power of a godly life, not only in his lifetime, but also on successive

generations. While we should not discount the importance of godly speech, neither should we disregard the power of a godly example, especially in the home. If the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—are evident in your life, then your words will connect with power. But if your life does not demonstrate these qualities, your words will be in vain.

Finally, Abel still speaks to us about the fact that the measure of a life is not necessarily its impact during the person's lifetime, but over history. Viewed from his lifetime, Abel's life was wasted. He died young, without accomplishing anything. But countless generations have looked at his faith and learned that even if we suffer and die for the cause of righteousness, it is not in vain. Cain apparently lived a long and relatively prosperous life on earth. He built cities and fathered many children who were successful in worldly terms. But Cain's life was the wasted one. Abel was the true success.

CONCLUSION:

To understand the story of Cain and Abel, we have to remember that Cain was **not** an atheist. He was a religious man who believed in God. He brought a sacrifice in order to worship God, although it was in his own way. An atheist would not have brought a sacrifice at all. Such a person would probably have shrugged off his brother's sacrifice as a silly, meaningless superstition. But it would not have offended him. What offended Cain was that he self-righteously thought that his sacrifice was good enough, even though it was not fully as God had commanded. When God rejected his sacrifice, Cain became angry and depressed. He refused to listen to God's corrective rebuke, and his anger spilled out on his brother, who had obeyed God by faith.

By bringing his own sacrifice as the way to approach God, Cain became the father of all false religion. False religions reject the cross. It offends them because it confronts their self-righteousness. Those in false religions take pride in their own goodness and their own works. They reject the idea that they are sinners in need of a Savior who shed His blood. Or, if they accept the cross, they still want to add their good works to it as a partial means of salvation. But to add human works detracts from the total sufficiency of Christ's death on the cross and gives sinners grounds for boasting in their works.

It was the religious Pharisees who crucified Jesus. It was the self-righteous Judaizers, those who wanted to include the Jewish rituals in Christianity, who went after Paul because he proclaimed that the pagan Gentiles could be justified by faith alone. The cross wipes out any room for boasting in your good works. Those who take pride in the flesh persecute those who boast only in the cross.

Galatians 6:12-14 (NASB95)

¹² Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. ¹⁴ But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

But, the story of Cain and Abel shows that it is far better to gain God's approval through an obedient faith and lose your life, than to have God reject you and lose your soul.

What a Day That Will Be!