



Light from the Word

The Faith of Abel

Theme verse: *“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.”*¹

Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve, is the first person mentioned in the ‘roll call of faith’ contained in Hebrews 11. Though at first it might seem that relatively little has been recorded about Abel in the Bible, we can gain much from studying his example: *“And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings (firstborn) of his flock and of the fat (choicest) thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.”*² Both brothers made a decision about what to bring as an offering, but unlike Cain, Abel’s choice was made by faith. He believed God, and it was through faith that Abel recognized the principle of giving the best he had to Him. By this, Abel’s gift was a foreshadowing of the type of sacrifice that God truly desired.

Several other differences will be noted in the decisions of the first brothers in their gifts at the altar. First of all, Cain evidently brought some of the harvest from his tilling the ground, while Abel brought a sheep from his flock. Because they were of different occupations, it seems natural that each would bring something to the Lord from that which he had readily at hand. There was nothing particularly wrong with Cain’s choice of gift, since later on the Israelites were commanded to bring meat or food offerings at the various feasts. These “meat (or grain) offerings” were always without blood since nothing was killed, and the purpose was generally that of thanksgiving. On the other hand, Abel’s offering involved the shedding of blood since the

lamb or sheep had to be killed. The purpose of this type of sacrifice was that of a sin offering. In either case, whether a meat or a sin offering, only the best was to be given. *“All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, them have I given thee.”*³ God expects no more from us than what we have, but it gives Him pleasure when by faith we recognize our sin and offer ourselves completely to Him. Abel understood this principle by faith. He acknowledged his sin to himself first, obeyed God from his heart and brought a genuine sacrifice, offered it in faith acknowledging his sin to God, which resulted in bringing delight to God. In like manner, the choices we make should be driven by a deep faith in the high level precepts of His Word. By doing so, our actions will also not only bring pleasure to God, but will increase our own joy. *“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”*⁴

We read further in the Genesis account the main reason why God was not pleased with Cain’s sacrifice. *“And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.”*⁵ In other words, God expected Cain to be an overcomer of sin, rather than allowing sin to have dominion over him. Having committed sin was bad enough, but Cain obviously tried to hide it from God instead of confessing and revealing it. *“The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?”*⁶ The lesson for us is clear: *“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”*⁷ Further, we can be sure that God is a reader of our

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hearts: *“And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.”*⁸

Clearly Abel had at one time or other committed sin as well, since “there is no man that sinneth not”. However, unlike his older brother, Abel’s heart was evidently pure when he brought his gift to the altar. *“But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”*⁹ The concept of freeing oneself from sin on the way to the altar was reinforced by Christ. *“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer*

*thy gift.”*¹⁰ Confessing our faults and praying for one another go hand in hand and will strengthen our relationships. *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”*¹¹ How much better would have been the outcome if only Cain had made this his choice!

Lastly, but certainly not least, Abel was slain by his older brother in a fit of envy. *“And 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 slew him.”*¹² Christ later recognized Abel as being a righteous man who became the first martyr, *“That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.”*¹³ Certainly, it is difficult for anyone to look forward to suffering, even when done for Christ. However, should this become our lot, we should not fear, *“But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings;*

*that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”*¹⁴

In summary, we have learned much from observing Abel’s life. His faith was not only deep, but it was visible to others. In turn, God was willing to give testimony of Abel’s righteousness and gifts with the intent that these lessons would endure to future generations.

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Endnotes:

¹ Hebrews 11:4

² Genesis 4:3-5

³ Numbers 18:12

⁴ Hebrews 11:6

⁵ Genesis 4:6-7

⁶ Proverbs 21:27

⁷ Proverbs 28:13

⁸ 1 Chronicles 28:9

⁹ Romans 6:17

¹⁰ Matthew 5:23-24

¹¹ James 5:16

¹² Genesis 4:8

¹³ Matthew 23:35

¹⁴ 1 Peter 4:13

¹⁵ Hebrews 11:4