



Worshipping by Faith

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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Introduction:

In **Genesis 4:3-5**, Cain and Abel brought sacrifices to God from their field of labor; Abel from his flock, Cain from the fruit of the ground. Without revealed explanation, God accepted Abel's sacrifice, but not Cain's. **Hebrews 11:4** gives us some insight. Abel's sacrifice was accepted because he offered it by faith, implying Cain's was rejected for lack of proper faith. We learn that if we want our worship to be acceptable to God, we must worship by faith. But what exactly does that mean? Consider what is said about Abel, his sacrifice, and faith to learn how we can worship by faith today.

Discussion:

I. God doesn't just accept anything.

- A. In **Genesis 4:3**, Cain offered a sacrifice to God. However, God did not regard it. Please do not make the common mistake of saying it was because it was not a blood sacrifice. God repeatedly accepted agrarian sacrifices. In the Old Law, grain offerings were required (**Leviticus 2:1-16**). When the Jews entered the Promised Land, one of the first sacrifices they were to offer was an agrarian sacrifice (**Deuteronomy 26:1-4**). In **Exodus 23:19**, the Jews were commanded to give God the best of the firstfruits of the ground.
- B. We don't know exactly why God did not accept Cain's sacrifice other than a lack of faith as described in **Hebrews 11:4**. But the key we need to understand is that Cain offered a sacrifice. He offered it to the Lord. The Lord did not accept it. Today, people have this terrible notion that we can do just about anything we want to worship God just as long as God is the one we are trying to honor by it. The very first story about worship demonstrates that just isn't true. Notice that Cain brought the offering to the Lord. He was trying to honor Jehovah God, but his worship was useless. It neither glorified God, nor helped Cain.
- C. This should cause us to take heed. Just because God's name is on our lips doesn't mean we are really praising Him. Just because Christ's name is on our sign doesn't mean what we do in this building magnifies Him. We need to heed the warning of Cain and the example of Abel. Cain's worship was not acceptable. Let's make sure we aren't offering the same kind. So, how do we make sure we are worshipping by faith like Abel? **Hebrews 11:6** helps us answer this.

II. We must believe that He is.

- A. Based on **Hebrews 11:6**, the first step of worshipping by faith is believing God exists. Abel offered a sacrifice because he believed God was real and was really worthy of honor and worship. I've known of people who are attracted to the community and rituals of some churches, but they don't believe in God at all. This kind of ritualistic religion is useless. Worship is only meaningful if we believe in the one we are worshipping.
- B. But we need to go a step further. We must believe in the one true God, not just any old god. Consider Paul on Mars Hill in **Acts 17:22-31**. He was speaking to very religious or superstitious people. They believed in gods. They honored gods. They were so committed that they didn't want to leave any potential god out, so they set up a shrine "To the unknown god" (**Acts 17:23**). In our modern society, we would be told, "To each his own. One god is as good as another." We are told that all the major religions have enough in common that really they are accomplishing the exact same thing. We are told it is arrogant to believe our God is the only one.
- C. We see bumper stickers that say "Coexist" and we hear about tolerance. Obviously, we are going to continue to exist with folks who do not believe in the one true God. We will obviously tolerate all kinds of disagreement in the world. The only way to avoid it is to leave the world, as Paul said in **I Corinthians 5:9-10**. But we must understand that there is only one God. Therefore, there is only one way to get to God. It is not enough to believe in the possibility of God. It is not enough to believe in some god, any god. We must get to know and believe in the one true God or our worship is vain. This modern movement of interreligious ecumenicalism will not help anyone. If we want our worship to be useful to us or God, we must stand on faith in the one true God of the Bible.

III. We must believe He rewards those who seek Him.

- A. The second aspect of worshipping with faith as seen in **Hebrews 11:6** is that we must believe God actually rewards those who seek Him. This statement is packed with implications for us today.
- B. First, we must understand that *reward doesn't come to everyone*. It doesn't even come to everyone who happens to believe God exists. Reward comes to those who seek God, to those who are trying to have a relationship with Him. In **Psalms 14:2-3; 53:2-3**, the psalmist said God was looking among men to see if any had understanding or

would act wisely. This was based on whether or not they seek God. The fool says there is no God; the wise not only believes in Him, he seeks Him. As **Matthew 7:7-8** explains, if we seek, we will find. God wants to be found. He wants a relationship with us. But if we want the good gifts described in **Matthew 7:9-11**, we have to seek.

- C. Second, *look for the reward from God*. Abel wasn't looking for an immediate reward. In fact, he didn't get one. Instead, he got killed by his jealous brother. Too often, people don't worship based on what God says, but based on how others around them will respond. For instance, in **John 12:42-43** some of the Jews believed in Jesus, but refused to confess Him because they wanted acceptance in the synagogue. They were looking for their reward from men. Look at the Pharisees described in **Matthew 6:2-4, 5-6, 16-18**. They wanted rewards from men. Their worship and service were not by faith. Let's face it. When we, like Abel, worship by faith, those who do not will not like us. They may mock us, ridicule us, attack us, berate us, belittle us, and definitely try to stop us. Abel's faith-filled worship cost him his life. That is why we must be looking to God for the reward.
- D. Third, *this is about us seeking Him* and finding Him where He is, not Him coming to our level. It appears that Cain wanted God to come to His level. In some way or another, Cain wasn't willing to seek God. He expected God to seek him. This ties in with **Romans 10:17**. Biblical faith proceeds from the Word of God. We cannot worship God by faith unless we are worshipping Him the way He has revealed. Remember the first attempt David made at moving the ark in **I Chronicles 13:5-14**. They tried to honor God. They put the ark on a new cart. Then they rejoiced before it with all their might. But when Uzzah reached out and touched the ark, he was struck down. Why did this happen? David explained in **I Chronicles 15:12-13**. Because they had not gone back to God's revealed will about how to deal with the ark, all their attempts at honoring God were not really done in faith. We can only truly have faith in what we are doing if we are doing it based on God's Word. That is why **Matthew 15:8-9** explains that worship based on man's ideas and teaching is vain.
- E. Fourth, this ties in with the definition of faith in **Hebrews 11:1**. Faith is the conviction of things not seen. That is a theme throughout **Hebrews 11**. Noah hadn't seen a flood. Abraham didn't see the Promised Land before he left Ur. He also didn't see it inhabited by his descendants. Moses didn't see the reward that would come for abandoning Egypt and casting his lot with God and the Jews. What did Abel not see? He didn't actually see God's acceptance as he was worshipping. God was not visibly with him while worshipping directing him in what to do. If that had been happening, then Cain would have been corrected as the offering was being given. The same is true for us. We don't see God's approval as we are worshipping. In fact, we won't see it at all until eternity. We don't get signs from heaven that what we are doing is right or wrong. We don't receive e-mails in our inbox letting us know that we did it right. We simply have God's Word explaining how we are to serve Him. We have faith that this is the right way and then we carry our faith that what we have done is acceptable. This connects with what **Romans 14:23** says about faith and obedience. *We must have faith that what we are doing is right* even though we don't see God's approval. If we do not have complete faith that what we are doing is right, it is sin for us. Thus, we are only worshipping by faith when we believe what we are doing is acceptable to God. This connects back with what we said above that our faith is connected to God's Word. The only thing we have to let us know God's will on which we can base our faith is God's Word. We need to hang on to it and worship God with full faith and assurance that doing things as the New Testament says is doing things God's way and His way works.

IV. He will accept us and commend us as righteous.

- A. Though Abel is dead, by his faith, he still speaks. What does he say? He says if we worship by faith, we may be hated by men, but we will be rewarded by God (**Hebrews 11:4**). Notice the reward. It doesn't say Abel went to paradise or heaven, though surely that is his destiny. It says he was commended as righteous. The whole point of sacrifice was to be cleansed of sins. When Cain and Abel were sacrificing, sin had entered the world. Sin wanted to rule over them (**Genesis 4:7**). But Abel's sacrifice was acceptable and righteousness was granted to him.
- B. Don't we hunger and thirst for righteousness (cf. **Matthew 5:6**)? God commends us to righteousness as we humbly surrender to Him in faith-filled worship. As **Philippians 3:8-9** says, righteousness comes to us as a gift from God by faith in Jesus. This is not granted to us merely because we have a mental assent to the facts about Jesus. This comes as our faith changes us and molds how we respond to God. When we are people of faith, we worship by faith. That very worship by faith changes us. Through that faith-filled worship, God turns us into righteous people. No, we are not righteous because we got all the forms right. Rather, because we believe God, we strive to do things His way. Through that, He makes us righteous. It is His gift to us, not ours to Him. But God will not grant us the gift of righteousness if we do not offer our gifts to Him by faith. Like Abel, we must worship by faith.

Conclusion:

Cain and Abel were two worshipers. But only one worshiped by faith. One died for his faith. One lived on in torment. One later died and his voice was silenced. But one, through his faith, keeps teaching and keeps speaking. God accepted Abel's gift. God commended him as righteous. But Abel had to worship by faith. How are you worshipping?