

Faith Pulpit

Worship That Pleases God

Genesis 4:3–8 describes this first act of worship recorded in human history. Two brothers, Cain and Abel, brought an offering to the Lord. Each worshipper brought something of his own as an offering to Jehovah. Cain brought some fruit or grain from the ground. Abel brought some lambs from his fold. The Lord respected Abel and his offering, but the Lord did not respect Cain and his offering.

Bible commentators have voiced several opinions as to why Abel's offering was more excellent than Cain's. Some have said that Abel's offering involved the shedding of blood, but Cain's offering did not involve any blood. Others have said that Abel's offering was a lamb which was living, but Cain's offering was the fruit of the ground which was lifeless. That may be true. However, not all the offerings that were acceptable to God were animals.

Moses used the Hebrew word *minha* for both Cain's grain offering and Abel's lamb offering. The word translated "offering" (*minha*) usually refers to grain offerings, not animal offerings in the Old Testament (e.g. Lev. 2:1, 4, 14, 15, which describes the grain offering).

On the surface, both offerings expressed gratitude and devotion to God, but the man who lacked genuine faith could not please God even though his gift was spotless. Why was God pleased with Abel and his offering and not with Cain and his offering? We find the clue in Hebrews 11:6 which says, "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."

Abel pleased God because he came to God in faith. We know this because Abel's name appears in Hebrews 11, the great faith chapter. In fact, he is the first one on the list. Verse 4 reads, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

The Lord will be pleased with our worship and will accept our worship only if we worship Him in faith. What does it mean to worship in faith as Abel did? In examining the Genesis record and the explanation in Hebrews, we see three main truths concerning worshipping in faith.

I. To worship in faith, we must direct our worship to God, not men

A. To direct our worship to God, we must believe in His existence.

Hebrews 11:6 says, "...for he that cometh to God must believe that he is" (that is that God exists). Abel offered the firstling of his flock as an offering to God because he believed in the existence of God. Many churches today go through the motions of worshipping, but the leaders and the lay people do not believe in the God of the Bible. Some even deny His existence and His work of creation. For our worship to be directed to God, we must believe that He exists.

B. To direct our worship to God, we must also have a proper knowledge of His character.

When Abel brought his offering, he pleased God because he had a proper knowledge of God's character. To please God in our worship, we must have a proper knowledge of the One whom we are worshipping. We must realize that God is a holy God. Our worship which involves the preaching of the Word, the congregational singing, the offering, or the special music, is to a holy God. As we worship God, we must think of who He is. We must remember His attributes, and this knowledge must affect our worship. Thus, our worship should be one of awe and praise to God for who He is and for what He has done. In Hosea 6:6, the Lord says, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

Abel did what pleased God. He came to God in faith with his offering. He knew God was a holy and righteous God. Thus, to truly worship God, our worship must be directed to Him, not to men.

II. To worship in faith, we must make sure that our hearts are right with God

A. If our hearts are right with God, we will have a right attitude toward Him.

In writing the book of Genesis, Moses did not record God's command to bring an offering nor the specifications for that offering. Therefore, it is more likely that the only reason God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's offering was because of their attitude in offering it.

When we worship God we must worship Him with a pure heart. We must make sure that we are not harboring sin in our lives that evidence of a rebellious heart. We must not worship with an attitude of self-righteousness or pride. There is no doubt that Cain's attitude was rebellious. When God rejected his offering, rather than trying to remedy the situation and pleasing God, Cain became angry. The Hebrew words used here paint a vivid picture of extreme wrath.

Cain's unrestrained anger showed itself instantly. Furious rage blazed out, revealing his rebellious spirit that was hidden within his heart. Cain's wounded pride produced envy and revenge. He became an enemy of God and then an enemy to his brother Abel. Eventually Cain's wrath led to murder.

God was not pleased with Cain and his offering because He saw what was in Cain's heart. God also saw what was in Abel's heart. Abel came to God in the right attitude of heart for worship and in the only way sinful men can approach a Holy God. Cain did not.

Abel was right with God, and his offering was a demonstration of his faith. Hebrews 11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous." Abel came to God with a pure heart—a righteous heart. God accepted Abel's gifts, and this meant that in God's sight he was righteous.

The Old Testament teaches that God will reject a perfect sacrifice if a person with a rebellious heart offers it. Isaiah 1:11 states, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats."

Furthermore, we must worship God with a humble spirit. Micah 6:6, 8 clearly specifies this:

"Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" The Psalmist says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." (Psalm 51:17).

Thus, when we worship God in our churches, we must worship Him with a pure heart, and we must worship Him with a humble spirit. Our giving and singing should not be to build up ourselves but to bring glory to the Almighty Holy Creator God.

B. If our hearts are right with God, our worship will be to Please Him, not men.

When Abel brought his offering to God, his main concern was to please God, not men. By accepting Abel's offering. God gave witness to Abel's gifts as being within His will.

When we worship to please God, not men, our worship will be according to God's standards, not men's standards. Romans 12:2 tells us that we should not be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may prove what is the good, and acceptable and perfect will of God.

In many churches throughout our land, worship has been lowered to nothing but an entertainment affair to please and attract audiences. The word of God is no longer preached. The services include only

music and dramatic presentations. Our churches are in danger of falling into this trap. We must guard our worship, so that when we preach the Word, when the congregation sings, and when individuals bring special music, we are not just performing but we are actually worshipping.

As we worship, we must come with the proper knowledge of God remembering that He is Holy. We must also come with righteous and humble hearts.

III. If we worship in faith, God will reward us

Hebrews 11:6 says, “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.”

God rewarded Abel by accepting his offering.

Abel’s worship got results. The Genesis record states, “And the Lord respected Abel and his offering.” God looked favorably on Abel and his offering and was pleased with him. Hebrews 11:4 says, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous. God testifying of his gifts.” God accepted Abel’s offering and spoke well of it.

God also rewarded Abel by placing him in the Faith Hall of Fame.

Hebrews 11:4 ends with the phrase, “and by it he [Abel] being dead yet speaketh.” It is true, Abel died, but his death was not the end. He is still speaking through the enduring power of his pattern of faith. God included Abel in the profiles of faith of Hebrews 11. Abel made the “FAITH HALL OF FAME!”

Abel was a righteous man—a man of faith. His worship made through faith should inspire and encourage us. When we worship, we should worship God, not men; and when we worship, we should make sure that our hearts are right with God. This is what it means to worship in faith. If we do, God will be pleased with our worship, and He will reward us for our faith.

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Dr. John Hartog II (D.Th., Grace Theological Seminary and D.Min., Central Baptist Theological Seminary), was a beloved professor, pastor, and scholar who faithfully served the Lord for over 50 years. He earned degrees from Moody Bible Institute, Wheaton College, Grace Theological Seminary, and Central Baptist Seminary. Dr. Hartog was a passionate teacher and pastor, spending much of his life at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, where he taught for 23 years.

Known for his deep love of Scripture and engaging teaching style, he made a lasting impact on students and congregations alike. Dr. Hartog's legacy is one of unwavering devotion to Christ, a love for God's Word, and a heart for ministry. He went home to Heaven on August 18, 2024.