



Daily Verse and Comment

Hebrews 11:4

(4) 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; and through it, though he died, *he* is yet speaking.

Genesis 4:3-5

(3) It came to pass that Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground. (4) And Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock *and* of the fat of it. And the LORD had regard unto Abel and his offering, (5) But He did not have regard unto Cain and his offering. And Cain was extremely angry and his countenance fell.

A Faithful Version

The story of Abel teaches us that the only way to reverse mankind's separation from [God](#) is through a substitutionary sacrifice, performed in [faith](#).

If we speculate that God gave the first family the same basic instructions He later gave to Israel, the details of the sacrifices of Cain and Abel become significant. Abel's offering appears to have been either a [sin offering](#) or a burnt offering, for both of these sacrifices came from the flock and required that the fat be offered, which Abel did ([Genesis 4:4](#)). The burnt offering symbolized a man's *wholehearted devotion to God*, containing even an aspect of atonement within it ([Leviticus 1:4](#)). It had to come "from the herd or the flock" ([Leviticus 1:2](#)), something Abel, being a keeper of sheep, would have had the means to offer.

The [meal offering](#) represented a man's *wholehearted devotion to his fellow man*, but no symbolism of atonement appears within it. It consisted of ground flour, corresponding to Cain's offering "of the fruit of the ground"—some sort of grain.

The sacrificial requirements are significant here because the meal and burnt offerings were always offered together. These two offerings represent the first four commandments (burnt offering) and the last six commandments (meal offering), which clearly cannot be separated. What is more, the burnt offering had to be made *before* the meal offering could be made. We learn, then, that *our relationship with God must be established before we can have truly successful relationships with others*.

So, when we see Cain making a meal offering, the symbolism suggests that, first, he was doing it on the basis of his own merit and righteousness—by skipping any aspect of atonement for sin, essentially saying, "I don't need to be reconciled to God first." Second, he was also implying that he could have a good relationship with his fellow man (represented by the meal offering) *without* first having a right relationship with God (represented by the burnt offering). Thus, Cain represents religion and worship on a person's own terms, according to his own priorities, rather than according to God's instruction.

The first lesson from Hebrews 11 is that [peace](#) with God and access to Him must come through an acceptable substitution for our lives. [Jesus Christ](#) is the *only* acceptable substitution, and thus the *only* guarantee of our access to God, our peace with Him, and the grace (including forgiveness) that He gives.

While this is an elementary Christian concept, a present-day application makes this relevant to us. The New Testament is replete with warnings about false prophets and [false teachers](#), in particular those men who seek a following after themselves. Such men will make "guarantees" about God's protection and favor, as if becoming associated with *them* instantly causes God to look more highly upon a person. God, however, does not work through a system of "salvation by association." Such men have set themselves up as gatekeepers, alleging that they hold the key to a good

relationship with God. They insinuate that our access to God and favor with Him lies in following them—as if the Savior's sacrifice was insufficient.

If something other than the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is being used as the basis for our entrance before God, we are in the same position as Cain, with our offering rejected for trying to worship on our own terms. Ancient Israel and Judah were guilty of this when they idolized the Temple of the Lord instead of looking to the Lord of the Temple ([Ezekiel 24:18-21](#); [Jeremiah 7:4-12](#)). God scattered Israel because of idolatry. He scattered His own people because *His people forgot Him*—because they were looking to something else ([Jeremiah 18:15-17](#)). We can be guilty of the same thing if we are trusting in a church, a human leader, or the reported accomplishments of an organization as the basis of our standing with God.

The lesson from Abel is that our access to God, and thus our peace with Him, is on the basis of Jesus Christ's sacrifice, not the works of any man's hands. Cain attempted to [worship God](#) on his own terms, and God rejected him. It is blasphemous for us to hold up anything other than the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ as our means of access to God and peace with Him. It is equally blasphemous for any man to declare or imply that he can guarantee God's protection, forgiveness, or favor. Moreover, acting as a gatekeeper or guardian of God's favor will greatly inhibit the witness of God that is made simply because the focus is on a man or an organization rather than God.

— David C. Grabbe

To learn more, see:

[First Things First \(Part Two\): The Right Sacrifice](#)

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