



[Hebrews 11:4](#)

(4) 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 through it he being dead still speaks.

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As the Bible records history, Abel is the first human to offer a sacrifice to [God](#). The Bible gives no indication that he was following what was then popular among the children of Adam and Eve, nor that he was following "common sense," human reason, or his feelings. Undoubtedly, God had instructed Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel in His truth. Abel stands out because he offered by [faith](#). He believed the specific instruction given to him, while neither Cain nor anybody else did. His motivation is what set Abel apart; he believed without twisting what God taught.

Recall that [Romans 10:17](#) says that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Faith in God must have a foundation, and listening is the means by which that foundation is formed. At this point, it is important to understand what Paul—and of course, God—mean by "faith." There are two general kinds of faith: "dead" and "living," as James terms them.

When James calls the one "dead," he is in no way saying that whoever has that faith is stupid. In fact, they may be quite intellectual—"smart," as we might say. He means that, in relation to God, they do not have living or active faith. We can illustrate the difference this way: Suppose two people receive exactly the same instruction from the Word of God; both have been informed as to what He requires. The difference between the person with dead faith and the one with living faith is that the latter is influenced to submit to what he has learned. The one with dead faith remains only informed.

Thus, the person with dead faith may enjoy using his biblical knowledge to discuss and even to argue for or against a given concept. However, it remains only information because the influences to submit and do something in relation to God are lacking. He

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cannot honestly be said to believe, even though the information he has may be quite extensive and true. By contrast, the person with living faith believes and submits, making active use of the godly information to change his life.

The person with dead faith hears outwardly; the person with living faith hears outwardly and inwardly and yields to it, believing it. This latter person also has what the Bible calls "the faith." Paul writes in [Galatians 5:6](#) that this faith works by or through love. What is love? [1 John 5:3](#) declares, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." Love is obedience to God.

Thus, living faith is belief in God that keeps the commandments. Living faith produces growth. It is this faith that is in view throughout Hebrews 11. In the case of Abel, the Word of God that he heard is most likely what God spoke to Adam and Eve. Abel, in turn, heard it from them and believed it. Cain heard the same words and was merely informed.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[The Christian Fight \(Part Three\)](#)

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