

More Excellent Sacrifice

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I am going to break into part of a scripture in Matthew 4:10 where Jesus was being tempted by Satan, and when Satan wanted Him to bow down and worship him, He said,

Matthew 4:10 "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.'"

So we see from Christ's words here that the only true object of worship is God. But I have a question I would like to ask everyone. Does God always accept those who come to worship before Him?

Well, let us begin to look at this and see if we can answer this question. Please turn forward if you would in Matthew a few chapters to chapter 7. We will begin in verse 21 here. These are very familiar scriptures here; we have all heard these before.

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness [transgression]!'"

And we know from I John 3:4 that sin is the transgression of God's law. So these are lawbreakers. Now, the people Jesus was referring to here, they actually thought they were worshipping God, and that they were acceptable to Him.

Tomorrow, which is Sunday, millions of people around this globe will be worshipping, professing the name of Jesus. They are going to come together

to worship God. But will He accept them? God will not accept their worship because of one thing, probably more than one, but one particular thing: that they are practicing lawlessness by not remembering the true Sabbath day and not keeping it holy because only God—only God—can set apart time and make it holy, and they certainly cannot. And therefore they are keeping the wrong time, and God is not going to be there with them.

So I would like to rephrase the question just a little bit now because we know that they are violating God's Sabbath law. Does God always accept *our* worship of Him? Those of us who have been called by Him, who know Him and He knows us.

Well, what I want to do right now is I want to go back and let us see if we can begin to answer some of this. And I would like to go back to the first recorded worship service in the Bible in Genesis 4, where we will begin to answer this question with an Old Testament example. Ryan had touched on this a little bit in his offertory sermonette on the first day of Unleavened Bread, and I would just like to say, Ryan, you did an awesome job on that as well.

In Genesis 4, we will begin in verse 1. We are going to go through this, and we are going to kind of break it down a little bit, and we are going to answer some questions here. It says,

Genesis 4:1-2 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord."
Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel.

Now, the phrase here (and I just want to bring this out as kind of a point of interest) where it says she bore again, in the Hebrew it literally means "she added to bear." Now, according to Adam Clarke's commentary, and not that he is an authority on this or anything, but he does have some good insight sometimes. He said,

In most cases where a subject of this kind is introduced in the holy Scriptures, and the successive births of children of the same parents are noted, the act of conceiving and bringing forth are mentioned in reference to each child. Here it is not said that she conceived and

brought forth Abel, but simply she added to bring forth Abel his brother.

So, what does this mean? Is it possible then that Cain and Abel were twins? Very, most likely. Now, I would not say identical twins. They were more like Jacob and Esau, maybe. Because identical twins usually grow up liking the same thing, acting and behaving in the same manner, and many times they even go into the same occupation.

But we see in the last sentence in verse 2 where it says that, "Now Abel was a keeper of sheep." He decided he would be a shepherd. "But Cain was a tiller of the ground." And he decided he wanted to be a farmer. It kind of gives us an indication that they were actually probably nothing alike, that they had actually gone into opposite directions. And as we are fixing to find out, we are going to see that is exactly what has happened to them. In verse 3, it says,

Genesis 4:3 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord.

Well, he was a farmer; that is what he brought, right? Fruit of the ground; that was his occupation.

Now, I want to stop here a minute and bring something out here. The phrase in the process of time, so we can kind of get a little bit of an idea of this.

In the Hebrew, this refers to a specific time, according to the Hebrew scholars. And we know from Deuteronomy 16, I believe it is, where it says three times in a year all males are to appear before the Eternal with an offering. So this was most likely a holy day. I would not say the Passover. I would say probably most likely the holy day in which to bring forth an offering would be like the first day of Unleavened Bread and so on.

So, after Adam and Eve, of course, had sinned, God set in motion His plan for salvation, which the holy days actually depict to us; they paint us a picture. People that do not keep and understand the holy days most likely do not know and understand God's plan of salvation for mankind.

But Cain and Abel must have been instructed then to bring an offering on the special occasions and times that God has summoned them to this special day. So again in Genesis 4, verses 4 and 5, it says,

Genesis 4:4-5 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. [That was his occupation. He was a shepherd.] And the Lord respected Abel and his offering [Let us read this carefully now what it says. It says He respected Abel and his offering, and not just his offering.], but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

Now we see that Cain and Abel, they both came to worship before God. They knew who God was and God knew who they were. This is the beginning of the creation of man.

But why did He accept Abel and his offering and not Cain and his offering? Why did He reject Cain? He rejected Cain, and of course He did not accept his offering. And this is usually where commentaries and commentators (and I have heard many sermons and sermonettes over the years in Worldwide and in Church of the Great God too), they begin to focus on the offering as part of the reason for God not accepting Cain.

But some think that he just brought the wrong offering, not being an animal sacrifice, right? An animal sacrifice for a burnt offering. It does not say that. Abel sacrificed his sheep, so he brought it as an offering.

Now let us just think about these for a little bit. The word used here for offering is the Hebrew word *minâ*, which means gift, offering, tribute, and it is usually bloodless and voluntary. So we have to ask the question: was it the offering God rejected? Well, as far as value goes, do you not think Cain's offering could have very well been more valuable than Abel's? He was a farmer. He might have brought the best he had to Him. It does not say.

And most people want to say, well, it is because he did not bring a burnt offering or an animal for a blood sacrifice. Well, that is not so because this was a gift, an offering.

Let us carry on, and we will see if we can put all this together.

So let us look at the real reason then that I believe—now this is from, let me just say, my perspective; it is from what I have gleaned out of this in my studies over the years and my research, and this is the way I see it—and just understand that how you see it, it will be totally up to you. But let us just look at the real reason that I believe God rejected Cain.

Turn with me over to the book of Hebrews, the 11th chapter. I want to begin here in verse 4 because this is usually a verse where they use to prove that it was the offering. Well, let us just see.

Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain [we are going to understand, hopefully, it is what I want to show you throughout this message, what that more excellent sacrifice really was.], through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of His gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

Now on the surface this verse seems to be referring to the offerings. But I believe the more excellent sacrifice was not the offering; it was the sacrifice of Abel's life.

If you will recall, and I will just read this to you, in Psalm 51, this is the psalm of David's repentance, and breaking in here in verses 16 and 17, David said,

Psalm 51:16-17 For You do not desire sacrifice [speaking of animal sacrifices], or else I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offering. [which would be the case if it was a burnt offering that Abel brought, but I do not think that it was] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.

A contrite heart is a crushed heart. It is a repentant heart. So Abel, I think, like David, had a very repentant heart. And the gifts spoken of here that God was testifying of, were the deeds, the fruits, the works that were evident in Abel's life. And God imputed these as righteousness, not necessarily the offering.

Now let us begin to see if we can actually give the real reason that God rejected Cain. Turn with me over to I John, the 3rd chapter. It is the apostle John speaking here in I John 3, and we will begin in verse 10.

I John 3:10-12 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another [John is speaking here, not necessarily the beginning of the church, but the beginning when man was actually created. Notice what he says in verse 12], not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own works [his deeds] were evil and his brother's righteous.

Now Cain had come to worship the true God, but God did not accept his worship because Cain was yielding to and being influenced by the spirit of Satan. And we know he is the prince of the power of the air who works in children of disobedience. And his heart was also filled with a hidden agenda. He came to worship God like he was righteous, but he was not. He was evil. He was being influenced by the wrong spirit. His hidden agenda here was bitterness and jealous envy for his brother Abel.

Let us go back to the book of Genesis, again in chapter 4. I probably should have told you to stay there, but you can flip back over there, and I want to finish up here in this Old Testament example that we have been looking at here with Cain and Abel.

Genesis 4:6-7 So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

Now the term here "sin lies at the door" it kind of, to me, pictures like a four-legged beast crouched ready to pounce on its victim, sort of like Satan is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. And as soon as you walk through that door, sin is pouncing all over you.

And remember in the book of James, when he said when we give in to our own lusts and desires, where do those lusts and desires come from? They come from yielding to the wrong spirit. And he says that once this develops, then it leads to death. So that is what He is saying here to Cain.

When you walk through that door, sin pounces all over, and it is going to consume you if you let it fester and go on without repentance. I think this is what God was telling Cain. So God was actually giving Cain here, I think, the opportunity here to repent. But he did not and he allowed his bitterness and his jealous envy to fester and it turned into hatred. And his hatred eventually led him to the killing of his brother Abel.

Now this example that we have here of Cain and Abel's worship of God teaches us again that God does not always accept our worship of Him. If we are not yielding to and discerning the spirits, if we are not yielding to the Spirit of God, then we are going to yield to another spirit, and that is going to be the spirit of Satan. Because there is only two. You have got the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. And Satan is ready there to pounce all over us. And if we yield to that, and sometimes, brethren, we do, and we have to quickly shut it off and repent. And if we do not, we are in trouble.

Let us go to the New Testament and see what is required of us today. If you would turn with me to John the 4th chapter. Jesus is speaking here. We will begin in verse 23. He said,

John 4:23-24 "But the hour is coming, and now is [He is saying now is because He is here. He is revealing to us the Father.], when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

So today, we are commanded by our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ to worship God in spirit and truth. So let us ask another question here. What does it mean to worship God in spirit and truth?

Well, first of all, God is composed of spirit. He just told us that: God is Spirit. And we are not; we are still flesh and blood. Now we have a spirit in

us. If you recall back in the Worldwide days, Herbert Armstrong always referred to this as the spirit essence in man. Now this spirit essence is what gives us the ability to think, reason, and create, because God—remember, He created us, mankind, in His image, and we are now being created in His likeness. So this spirit essence gives us that ability to think and reason and create like our Creator. He also said the spirit in man was created incomplete, that it needed another spirit to be connected with, if you remember him saying this, and obviously preferably we want to be connected with God's Holy Spirit.

So if we are not connected to God's Spirit, then we are going to be connected to another spirit. You just do not sit blank. You are going to be connected to one or the other. Sometimes it is a battle; I understand. And what other spirit is it? Well, it is the spirit of Satan, again, the spirit of the prince of the power of the air which is the ruler of this world. We live in this world.

So worshipping God in spirit clearly means that we are to be yielding to and being influenced by His Spirit—and His Spirit only. If we are not yielding to and being influenced by His Spirit, then we are going to be yielding to and influenced by the spirit of Satan. And the works that we produce will be the evidence of which spirit that we are yielding to.

Abel apparently was yielding to the Spirit of God, and he brought forth a more excellent sacrifice in his life. Cain therefore was yielding to Satan's spirit, and he brought forth evil fruits, evil deeds.

So the works that Abel was doing, God imputed it to him as righteousness. Cain, on the other hand, was of course yielding to the spirit of Satan. That is why when he came to worship the true God, God did not accept him. He was producing works that were evil.

It also says we also must worship Him in truth. Having knowledge of the truth is part of this, but we also have to have a heart that is true, a heart that has no guile, no deceit, and no hidden agenda. Remember Jesus said in the Beatitudes, or as I quoted them as being the attitudes to be, He said,

Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

When we come to worship God, we come to see Him spiritually. But if our hearts are not pure, we are not going to see Him. The pure heart is void of hypocrisy. They have room for only one master, and that is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We have only room for one Spirit and that is the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus' Spirit.

Without His Spirit, if Christ is not in us, His Spirit is not in us, we are none of His. And they never try to hide sin from God. They confess and forsake all known sin. In other words, they have a heart that has no hidden agenda.

So we asked the question: does God always accept our worship of Him? I believe the answer is no. And you know why? It is because we do not always just yield to God's Spirit.

I remember talking to John about (and John writing about) this years ago, and he was telling me; he said the problem with people in the church is they are not always yielding to God's Holy Spirit. And I certainly believe that. When we were in the Worldwide, for those of you who were with us back then, it seemed on the surface that we were obeying God and doing His will, right? That is where we learned about the Sabbath and the holy days and keeping God's commandments and doing all those things we are supposed to be doing. You know, we were trying to keep His commandments, so it seemed.

But the hearts of many were filled with hidden agenda apparently, because God showed us that He did not accept our worship of Him. In the end, He spewed us all out of His mouth, like He did the Laodiceans, right? He has also shown us that through repentance, though, in returning to Him that we can be acceptable to Him.

Remember what Jesus said to the Laodiceans over there in Revelation the 3rd chapter, I believe it is, to the letter to the Laodicean church. He says,

Revelation 3:20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. [This is after He spewed them out of His mouth. He is on the outside now; He is not in them. They are yielding to the wrong spirit. He said] If

anyone hears My voice and opens the door [in other words, if you repent very quickly], I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

God will come back to us. He wants us to come to Him. He wants us to repent. God wants everyone to repent—constantly repenting in the heart of repentance, staying near to Him. He said, "I'll come with him and dine with him, and he with Me."

So He is basically saying, "If you do well, if you do My will, will you not be accepted? If you're yielding to My Spirit, will you not be accepted?" Well, yes, we will. But when we yield to Satan's spirit, will we be accepted? No, we will not.

In order for God to accept our worship of Him, we must always be yielding to and being influenced by His Holy Spirit. Now we know that in doing His will and then have a heart that is true and pure and having no hidden agenda (let me mention that again).

When we convert, yes, we have a growing process we have to go through. And we fall in and out, and we do fall sometimes, and brethren, we do sin sometimes; we do sin and fall short of God's glory.

But as it says in one of the proverbs that the righteous man falls and he gets back up seven times, which means that we are pretty good at falling. Seven means perfection, so we are pretty perfect at that. But every time we fall, what are we doing? Are we giving in to the spirit of this world? Well, most likely, because when it comes, we have to resist, as Peter said.

If we resist it, if we can just learn to discern the spirit and listen, and if we can just yield to God's Spirit and resist that other spirit, it will flee from us in an instant. But if we dwell on it long enough, sin is at the door ready to pounce on us. And we do that so well sometimes.

We have to understand this: in order for God to accept our worship of Him, we must always be yielding to and being influenced by His Holy Spirit, doing His will, and having a heart that is true and pure and having no hidden agenda.

I think I am getting close to my time, so we are going to begin to wrap this up here. Turn with me over to Romans the 12th chapter. I want to pick up a couple of verses here, verses 1 and 2, where the apostle Paul is speaking to the Roman congregation.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren [listen to how he talks, and it is like I am telling you, I am begging you], by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, [that is, present your bodies like Abel and be a more excellent sacrifice], holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

And how do we do that? By yielding to and listening to and obeying God's Spirit, His Holy Spirit. And that takes some effort to be able to do because you have to learn to discern, because Satan always appears as an angel of light to us. He tries to deceive. Let us see what he does. He is a deceiver and he is a destroyer. He wants to destroy us with sin. But he says, present your bodies a living, or a more excellent sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service.

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, . . .

I want to inject here Ephesians 2, verse 2; I will just read it to you. It says,

Ephesians 2:2 In which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.

Romans 12:2 . . . but be transformed by the renewing of your mind [and that means by yielding to the Spirit of God and not the spirit of this world], that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

And His perfect will is that we yield to His Holy Spirit.

I am going to go ahead and close out here in Psalm 139, verses 23 and 24. I had already put this together, by the way, and I was supposed to speak, and

Bill, of course, came to my rescue, and I thank him so much for that. But I had put this down, and I thought, well, I am going to go ahead and bring it out again because we are always told and exhorted to examine ourselves before the Passover and try to get our hearts right and make sure we are yielding to the right Spirit.

And this is one of those things that we should probably always be praying about, but we should be doing this on a daily basis, not just once a year at Passover. We should be examining ourselves every day to see if we are still yielding to God's Spirit, not the other spirit.

But David says, and when you get a chance, maybe get down and pray this yourself, in verse 23,

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

The way of yielding to His Spirit.