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Two Brothers . . . One Saved and the other Lost . . . How did it happen?



And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell, Genesis 4:3-5.

Religious controversy is as old as sin! Differing religious views and notions have divided families since the fall of man. At the heart of the controversy is the gospel. Whatever differences men may have on the matter of religion, all men who know not Christ are united in their opposition to Christ and His Word. That which happened in the days of the Saviour's earthly ministry when Herod and Pilate, erstwhile political opponents, were united in their opposition to the Saviour, is seen in the unity of all religious views in their opposition to the gospel.

The very first act of worship was surrounded by controversy, anger, debate and ended in murder!

The substance of the dispute is that which lies still at the heart of religious disputes. It is the question of how a man is accepted of God. Which is the right way to God, the right way to heaven?

Might I say that such is the essence of our controversy with Rome. There may be some who call themselves Protestant who have descended to blind sectarianism and bitter animosity toward someone of the Roman Catholic faith, but the real difference between Bible Protestantism and Rome is solemn and worthy of the most serious consideration. I oppose Roman Catholicism because it preaches a false means of salvation. It is of Cain and it has shown the spirit of Cain in its murder of innumerable believers over the centuries. This is not a charge that may be levelled against the true believer. Those who have targeted Roman Catholics in our Province have done so, not out of any love for the gospel or of the Lord Jesus Himself. Rather, their actions are born of the same spirit of lawlessness that lies at the heart of Romanism, the very system these so-called Protestants claim to oppose! They are of Cain *who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother*, 1 John 3:12.

In the narrative of Cain and Abel's worship and its consequences, there are important truths to note.

I. ALL WORSHIP OFFERED TO THE LORD IS NOT ACCEPTED OF HIM.

There is no doubt that Cain worshipped the Lord. *Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD*, verse 3. Even so, God did not respect his offering, verse 4. Cain was not worshipping an idol. He was not rejected because he was an idolator. That was not the issue. The word respect means that God did not look with approval upon Cain's offering.



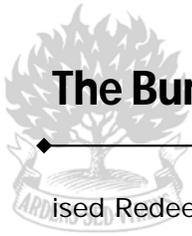
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1. It was the difference in the sacrifices that caused the difference in God's response to the brothers' worship. Both men were sinners, partakers of their father Adam's fallen nature. Both would have received the same instructions from their father about the worship God required. But only one brought the correct offering. Hebrews 11:4 tells what made the difference. *By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.* "By faith" is the key phrase. That means that what Abel did was out of obedience to God's Word. He believed God and acted accordingly. He brought a lamb of his flock, because that was what God demanded. Cain did not. He did not act according to God's Word, but acted according to his own thinking and brought that which he believed God should have been pleased with.

2. Abel's sacrifice was accepted because it spoke to God of Christ. When Adam and Eve had sinned, God had provided them with coats of skin, Genesis 3:21. Their covering cost the life of an innocent victim. It was a wonderful demonstration of the means God would employ to clothe sinful man with the garment of righteousness, required before he could enter heaven. Christ, the innocent and spotless Lamb, would die in the place of the guilty sinner, bearing his burden of guilt and sin. All who believed God's promise of mercy and looked to Christ and trusted in His blood-shedding would be accepted of God, on the basis of Christ's perfect righteousness alone. The slain lamb and its shed blood was the God-ordained means of demonstrating faith in the coming Redeemer promised by God. The person who believed God's Word, regarding the sinner's need of a Redeemer, came to worship God with this symbol of the promised Redeemer as an expression of his faith.

3. Cain was not accepted because he did not bring the God-appointed sacrifice. The person who rejected God's Word and adopted his own notions brought no lamb, but offered that which he believed should make him acceptable to God. *Cain was a tiller of the ground*, verse 2. He therefore brought the best of his own labours to God and expected God to accept him on the basis of them.

How many there are who act as did Cain! They refuse the message that sinners need the washing of the Saviour's blood and can be accepted of God only as they hide in the wounds and sufferings of Christ. Instead they trust in their religious works: their baptism, their confirmation, their attendance at the Lord's Table and their giving of their money to God's house. These are the fruits of their tilling and they are not acceptable to God. Why not? you say. It is because, like Cain's offerings, they come from that which is under God's curse! *And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life*, Genesis 3:17. How could that which sprang from that cursed of God because of man's sin be acceptable to God? Likewise, those who believe that they will enter heaven on the basis of their religious activities insult the Lord. They offer that which has come from their own depraved nature and expect God to accept it as an atonement for their sin. They offer a chief sin and think that it will atone for all other sins! Can a robber make compensation by further robbery? Can a murderer atone for his evil deeds by further murder? Can a person who is a sinner hope to please God by offering, in defiance of His Word and will, that which comes of their own sinful hearts? It is little wonder that Cain was rejected when he offered that which expressed defiance of God's Word and belief in himself, rather than the prom-



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ised Redeemer.

II. MEN RESENT BEING TOLD OF THEIR SIN.

And Cain was very wrath, and his countenance fell, Genesis 4:5.

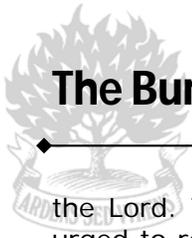
1. Men hate to be told of the unacceptableness of their works. Cain took his vexation at God and His Word out on Abel. *And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him,* Genesis 4:8. Cain sought out Abel to talk about the matter of God not accepting his sacrifice. Note that please. The quarrel was initiated by Cain. I believe it to be illustrative of the fact that Christianity has not initiated religious controversy as is so often charged. Doubtless, Abel explained the need that his brother had of a Redeemer and that Redeemer was the One promised by God. He would have told him that the gifts of his own labours could not atone for his sins. Cain rejected this witness and struck his brother and killed him. *And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous,* 1 John 3:12.

2. Notice that our acceptance with God is essential to our happiness. Men dismiss the need of God. But Cain's countenance fell when he was rejected of God. A great shadow fell upon his soul and was seen on his face. We may find a little diversion for a time in the pleasures of the world, but nothing can compensate for our rejection by God. The fullness of the dreadfulness of being rejected by God will be experienced by sinners only when they are cast into everlasting damnation. It is then that the river of sorrow and grief will flow in full spate over the sinner's soul. The souls of those redeemed by blood are possessed by peace and joy. *Blessed (or happy) is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered,* Psalm 32:1. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,* Romans 5:1. That which will reach its full tide in heaven's glory has truly begun with the child of God.

3. Please notice that our countenance can betray the condition of our soul. The face has rightly been called the mirror of the soul. Cain's certainly was. The darkness within was seen in the brooding countenance without. Christ's face reflected the grief of His soul over man's sin. *For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not,* Isaiah 53:2-3. To a degree, the countenance of the believer ought to show something of the heaven that has begun within the soul. God's grace in Stephen's heart made his face to shine when he was facing death at the hands of the haters of the gospel. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel, Acts 6:15.

III. EVEN IN HIS STATE OF ANGER, CAIN WAS OFFERED MERCY

1. In all, Cain rejected mercy four times in this narrative. First when he came to the altar rejecting the means of salvation God had ordained. Secondly, when he talked with



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the Lord. Thirdly, when he talked with his brother Abel and would doubtless have been urged to repent and obey God's Word. And fourthly, when God spoke to Him after he had murdered his brother. The opportunity was presented to him to confess his sin to God when God asked the question: *Where is Abel thy brother?* verse 9. The Lord knew what had happened but the question was posed in mercy, giving Cain an opportunity to acknowledge his sin. He again refused.

2. His rejection of mercy led him downward. After his first rejection of mercy, he committed murder. Following that, he became blatantly defiant of God and received a mark that sealed his doom. He was *driven out from the face of God*, verses 12-14.

3. It finally led him to hell. It has often been stated that hell is at the end of the Christ-rejecter's life. Hell awaited Cain and he knew it. The history of Cain is summed up for us by the apostle John. *Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous*, 1 John 3:12. All that Cain did, the murdering of his brother, his rejection of God's admonition stemmed from his wicked nature. You share his nature. Its workings may be seen in you in that you are yet a rejecter of Christ's mercy. May your heart yet be turned unto God in repentance.