

Faith and Righteousness

Hebrews 11:4 [NIV] *“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.”*

The writer of Hebrews assumes we accept the book of Genesis as historical fact.

The Garden of Eden was not only a place on the world map but the “fall” was a date in the history of humanity.

The writer of Hebrews is looking for examples of faith, when people did believe God.

Did Adam and Eve believe God?

Genesis 3:21 [NIV] *“The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”*

This is only implicit proof but a fairly strong indication that they were saved from eternal death.

Romans 5:12 [NIV] *“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned”*

After the “fall” of Adam and Eve sin was found throughout the whole human race. All humanity is born into a condition of spiritual death.

Romans 6:23 [NIV] *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

This is why we all die physically.

Romans 3:23 [NIV] *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”*

The account of Cain and Abel is an example of how far humanity has fallen away from what God created us to become, and what any of us are capable of.

The issue is where do we place our trust and faith when it comes the time for us to die and face the judgement of Jesus Christ?

- a) In our own righteousness, even with God’s help.
- b) In another person’s [Christ’s] righteousness being put to our credit.

We are in this account of Cain and Abel brought face to face with the doctrine of justification by faith alone and imputed [credited] righteousness.

What happened to Cain and Abel?

By the fact that both Cain and Abel brought offerings to God implies knowledge of God and first-hand instruction on He being Creator and why they were not allowed into the Garden of Eden, restricted by an angel with a sword.

God was very real to both of them.

Genesis 4:3 [NIV] *“In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.”*

Cain brought the product of his own sweat and toil with the soil.

Made difficult by it being cursed.

Genesis 3:17-19 [NIV] *“To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”*

Cain may have been proud of this offering, expecting to receive praise from God because it had cost him dear to bring it to God.

Genesis 4:4 [NIV] *“But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering,”*

Abel brought an offering that was a gift to him by birth and for which he could claim no praise or honour.

Genesis 4:5 [NIV] *“but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.”*

But much to Cain’s surprise it was Abel’s offering that was accepted but God gave Cain a second chance, this indicates a knowledgeable choice.

Cain now knew what the correct offering was, the sacrifice of an animal.

But he did not breed animals. He would have to go to his brother for this offering, how humiliating!

We also have to make this choice.

a) A substitute, God’s Lamb.

or

b) What we can do, by our own efforts.

Cain made a deliberate choice not to submit to God’s righteousness.

Genesis 4:8-9 [NIV] *“Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”*

Instead Cain killed the one who had already submitted to God’s righteousness, Abel.

We too have killed the One who has submitted to God’s righteousness, Jesus Christ, our potential brother!!

1 John 3:12-13 [NIV] *“Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.”*

The story of Cain and Abel is a warning to us.

Romans 10:3 [NIV] *“Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.”*

This is the same mistake that Israel has made through the history of their family.

Genesis 4:10-16 [NIV] *“The LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.” Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” But the LORD said to him, “Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no-one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.”*

Cain did not get away with this act of rebellion.

A second curse was applied to the land, his livelihood. And he was driven away from his parents and the rest of the family and God’s teaching.

Why did Abel offer a blood sacrifice?

How did Abel and Cain know this was what God required?

Two possible answers:

a) Both Cain and Abel had been taught by their parents about the sin offering that was made for them after their initial sin.

Genesis 3:21 [NIV] *“The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”*

For skins to be made animals had to shed their life blood.

b) God spoke directly to Cain and Abel as they grew older as He had done to their parents.

God has always given sufficient witness to every generation, and it takes no more faith for us to believe scripture than it did for Cain and Abel to believe the Word of God. Both are of the Holy Spirit.

God offered His grace equally to Cain and Abel.

Hebrews 11:4 [NIV] *“By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did...”*

What Abel did was by faith, he believed God.

Abel’s offering prefigured atonement by substitution.

Hebrews 9:22 [NIV] *“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”*

Leviticus 17:11 [NIV] *“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”*

The substitute that God desired as an atonement and reconciliation was what He had created that was nearest to humans, animals whose life was in their blood as our physical life is, not bloodless vegetables.

Cain did not wish to dignify God's method regarding how He was to be appeased.

Psalm 19:13 [King James] *“Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.”*

What Cain did was presumptuous, proud and arrogant, seeking, as his physical parents had, to take the initiative away from his Creator.

Hebrews 11:4 [NIV] *“...By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.”*

Abel was by faith commended as a righteous man.

It was **not** that Abel was righteous in himself or by his physical action but by faith.

Faith is **not** a work it is only an instrument by which we trust in our Creator God.

This is where “*imputation*” comes into the picture.

The moment that Abel put his faith in a lamb not his own efforts his sins were atoned for and righteousness of the Lamb of God was credited to him.

This prefigures our saving and our being credited with the righteousness of Jesus the Lamb of God.

This is the only way we are righteous in God's eyes.

Isaiah 64:6 [NIV] *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”*

Any righteousness prior to Christ's righteousness being put to our credit is like filthy rags in God's eyes.

“*Filthy rags*” Hebrew – menstrual fluid, a soiled sanitary towel.

We all know what a stench any decaying flesh generates. A soiled sanitary towel is decaying flesh and after a short while it will stink.

This is the smell our lives and prayers are in the nostrils of God when we seek to be righteous before Him by our own acts.

Revelation 8:3-4 [NIV] *“Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.”*

In total contrast to the sweet smell of the prayers of the saints.

The Pharisees show us what are these “*righteous acts*”.

Matthew 23:23-29 [NIV] *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's*

bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barakiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

We, by seeking our own form of righteousness, join these self-righteous men who were hypocrites and blinded to what our Creator God is seeking to create in us.

After our justification [being made “just as if we had never sinned”] God expects us to do good works.

Ephesians 2:10 [NIV] *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

These “works” are done out of gratitude after we have put our full trust in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God for our salvation.

God’s Word lists these “good works”

Righteousness:

Romans 6:16 [NIV] *“Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey, whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to **obedience**, which leads to **righteousness**?”* [Greek – “dikaiosus” – credited righteousness].

Holiness:

Romans 6:19 [NIV] *“I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness [Greek – “dikaiosus” – credited righteousness] leading to holiness.”*

Living by the Spirit:

Romans 8:4 [NIV] *“in order that the righteous [Greek – “dikaioma” – worked out righteousness performed by Jesus Christ] requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”*

Galatians 5:25 [NIV] *“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”*

This is how we fulfil the requirements – the work of Holy Spirit in us.

Offering our body as a living sacrifice:

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies [Greek “soma” – body as a whole physical-mental-spiritual] as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

Offering our whole life to God to mould and use.

Walking in love:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8(a) [NIV] *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”*

These are fruits of the Holy Spirit that “rub off” on us as a result of our close union with Him.

Living worthy of God:

1 Thessalonians 2:12 [NIV] *“encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”*

Walking in the light:

1 John 1:7 [NIV] *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”*

Sanctification:

1 Thessalonians 4:3 [NIV] *“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: [Greek – “hagiasmos” – purified and separated for God to use] that you should avoid sexual immorality;”*

Sanctification is a relationship with God into which people enter only by faith in what Jesus Christ has done for us.

Our works never save us but they do bring their reward.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 [NIV] *“For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”*

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the foundation of our salvation but our works build on that foundation. The fiery trials will test the quality of those reward receiving works but the foundation once laid by faith in Jesus Christ will survive any fiery trial.

Philippians 2:12-13 [NIV] *“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*

God “works in” us through the ungrieved Holy Spirit in us and we “work out” in good works of love towards all men, even our enemies.

Revelation 19:7-9 [NIV] *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the **righteous acts of the saints**.) Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”*

“Righteous acts” – **“dikaionoma”** worked out righteousness done by the work of the Holy Spirit in us generating the characteristics of the Creator God. That is the **“fruits”** of the Holy Spirit working **“ungrieved”** and **“unquenched”** in us.

Conclusion

Our justification is by faith in what God has done for us through Jesus Christ, and it is His credited righteousness alone that is acknowledged by God the Father.