

# The Unacceptable Sacrifice

by G.W. North

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*The sermon highlights the importance of faith and obedience in making acceptable offerings to God, using the story of Cain and Abel as an example.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 4:3

**Topics:** "Obedience to God", "Sacrifice"

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## Description

G.W. North explores the story of Cain and Abel, emphasizing that both brothers were initially unaware of what constituted an acceptable sacrifice to God. Cain, a farmer, offered fruit from his labor, while Abel, a shepherd, offered a lamb, which God accepted. North highlights that God's response to Cain was one of grace and concern rather than condemnation, as Cain's failure stemmed from ignorance rather than willful disobedience. Ultimately, Cain's refusal to heed God's guidance led to jealousy and the tragic murder of Abel, who had discovered the true way to God through his sacrifice. The sermon underscores the importance of faith and obedience in our offerings to God, illustrating that the heart behind the sacrifice is what truly matters.

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## Transcript

The story as it is recorded in Genesis reveals that Cain and Abel did not at first know what was acceptable to God. Upon the occasion mentioned they each brought to God the results of their own particular labours. Cain being a tiller of the ground naturally brought of the fruit he had produced; Abel being a shepherd just as naturally brought of the increase of the flock. Each offered his gift to God, who had respect to and accepted Abel's offering, but had not respect for Cain's offering and rejected it. At this Cain was filled with wrath, 'and his countenance fell'. He was evidently expecting God to accept his offering; he obviously did not know beforehand that it would not be received by God, for if he had known that he would not have offered it. He would already have been familiarised by his parents with the dire consequences of deliberate disobedience of God's expressed instructions. If he had persisted in bringing fruit contrary to God's ordinances passed on to him by Adam he would have been guilty of trying to force his own will upon God, and he already knew that was utterly impossible.

Why then did he not bring a lamb or a kid from the flock which crouched around his tent? Simply because he did not know what God wanted. Abel did not know either. None of those four human beings knew; they were each equally ignorant of God's requirements. That is why God spoke to Cain as He did. There was no censure in God's voice, only concern and grace when He said to Cain, 'Why art thou wroth and why is

thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well shalt thou not be accepted?' At that point God did not blame or rebuke or punish the man because He knew that Cain had made a genuine mistake. The man was only punished finally because he refused to obey.

Following his first failure, God showed Cain what was acceptable to Him and invited and exhorted him to copy Abel's example, assuring him that by so doing he would be accepted equally with his brother, but he would not do so. Instead he awaited an opportunity to vent his jealous rage against God and Abel and slew his brother. But not before Abel had discovered and revealed the secret of the way back to God. Adam and Eve did not know it until that moment when Abel their son found it by offering a lamb. Whether the parents ever followed Abel's lead we are not told; we do know however that Abel paid for his discovery with his life. God had to punish the murderer; the mark of God upon Cain was God's testimony against the rebellion and stubbornness of a man who, when he knew the truth, refused to obey God. It was also an act of grace; as yet the legal dictum of 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth' had not been uttered so Cain's life was not forfeit. In mercy the Lord forgave him the crime, but whether he repented and later turned to God with the correct sacrifice we do not know. The whole episode does not make pleasant reading.

It is recorded in Hebrews that 'by faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, so he being dead yet speaketh'. Abel's parents had truly brought sin into the world. Its dreadful consequences must have struck horror and terror into their hearts as they beheld their son lying murdered upon the ground, slain by his own brother, their other son. Although he was born following the advent of sin and his parents' expulsion from the garden, Abel was nevertheless a righteous man. He did not know the righteousness of Christ but God is his witness that he was righteous. God testified to Cain of his brother, saying that he had done well and he and his gifts were acceptable to Him.

Cain and Abel were sons of the same parents (some have suggested that they were twins) and had equal opportunities; what is it that makes one man's gifts more excellent than another's? Primarily the faith of Abel lay in the fact that he made his offering, not in what he offered. Cain also offered, he also had faith; his sin lay in the tragic fact that, despite God's counsel, he still refused to offer the correct sacrifice. Abel's more excellent sacrifice lay in that fact that he brought both a lamb (or kid) and fruit, while Cain brought only fruit. Both are acceptable to God providing they are brought together; this was Abel's excellence; fruit by itself is unacceptable; this was Cain's mistake. What is dead Abel yet speaking to us? To arrive at an answer we must search the scriptures.

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