

Hebrews Chapter Eleven (vv.4-7)

True Faith Sacrifices (v.4)

4 *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 formula used throughout this chapter to speak of those characterised by the faith described in vv.1-3. **Cain**, meaning 'acquired', was the firstborn son of Adam and Eve. He speaks of the grandeur of the flesh as Eve claimed her part in his birth ('The Lord has done His part and I have done mine', Genesis 4.1). Cain followed in the footsteps of his father Adam by becoming a 'tiller of the ground'. He proved to be characterised by evil works and of the 'wicked one' (1 John 3.12, Jude 10-11). In contrast **Abel**, whose name means 'vanity', 'emptiness' and 'worthlessness', was the second born. He represents poverty of spirit (Matthew 5.3) and the condemnation of the flesh coming before God in his own unworthiness. He was characterised by righteousness (Matthew 23.35) and became a shepherd (Genesis 4.2). Both he and his offering were found to be acceptable in the sight of God (Genesis 4.4). Clearly **Cain** and **Abel** stand as the representative heads of two sections of mankind that are spiritually opposed to each other. Cain's order (the first man) pictures rebellious mankind in opposition to God. He indulges in persecution of the righteous (the second man). There are solemn lessons to be learned. Both these boys had the same parents, enjoyed the same privileges, revered God and received revelation from Him, yet the outcome of their lives was so different.

Abel offered to God a 'more excellent sacrifice than Cain'. It is possible these offerings were brought to the Divine presence which barred entrance to the Garden of Eden (Cherubim and a 'flaming sword', Genesis 3.24). These were not sin offerings (Romans 5.13), but rather burnt offerings of worship to God. The distinction between the offerings was **not** their material content but rather the **faith** of the one who offered (and therefore righteousness and obedience). The LXX of Genesis 4.6-7 reads as follows: *And the Lord God said to Cain, 'Why have you become deeply grieved, and why has your countenance collapsed? If you offer correctly but do not divide correctly, have you not sinned?'* There was nothing inappropriate in **what** Cain offered (the Hebrew word *minchah* is used of the meal offering in Leviticus 2). He had sinned in **how** he offered. Abel brought both the 'firstlings of his flock' and the 'fat thereof' (Genesis 4.4). In other words he brought the **first** and the **best** to God; it was **all** for Him. On the other hand Cain brought 'of the fruit of the ground' but there is no indication this was the firstfruits or the best; he held something back. No doubt God's requirements in this matter had been revealed to them and yet only Abel chose to respond in faith. Consequently God attested to his 'righteousness' (his heart was right before God) by recording it in the word of God and 'approving', 'accepting' and 'looking with pleasure' upon his 'gifts'. The plural (gifts) suggests that this was Abel's **practice**. He was constantly offering the first and best to God. Sacrifice is acceptable to God not for its material content, but in so far as it is the outward expression of a devoted and obedient heart. *Proverbs 15.8: The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.*

Abel's proper worship of God came at a cost. His obedience and righteousness attracted envy and hatred. However, even though Abel died, his example of faith yet speaks. God declares through the eternal record of His word that **acceptance** with Him is on the basis of **faith** in connection with **sacrifice**. True faith sacrifices. What is the nature of our sacrifice for God? Do we offer the **first** and do we offer the **best**: of *self* (Romans 12.1), *song* (Hebrews 13.15) and *substance* (Hebrews 13.16).

True Faith Seeks (vv.5-6)

5 *By faith **Enoch** was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. 6* *But without faith it is impossible to please him (at all): for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

About 500 years separate v.4 and v.5. Genesis 5.21-22 tells us that Enoch was 65 years old when Methuselah was born. It was from this point that Enoch walked with God for 300 years until God translated him. Methuselah's name means 'when he dies it shall come to pass', i.e. the flood. Undoubtedly Enoch received revelation from God concerning things to come, and prophesied the same (Jude 14-15). He appreciated that the world in which he lived was under judgment and thus he sought another, that is 'an heavenly' (v.16), walking by faith in the meantime.

Enoch was 'translated' which literally means 'to change place'. Enoch exchanged heaven for earth. Of all the OT saints only Enoch and Elijah were translated that they might not 'see death' (note John 8.51). Thousands shall follow at the rapture, but the Lord Jesus is the only one who ever **ascended** in the virtue of his own inherent power. The fact that Enoch 'was not found' suggests that people searched for him as they did Elijah (2 Kings 2.16-17). Before Enoch was 'translated' he 'had this witness borne to him' (perfect tense) that he 'pleased God'. It was God that testified to his faith being recorded in the Scriptures as an abiding witness. *Genesis 5.24: And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for*

God took him. **Walking** with God is synonymous with being 'well-pleasing to God'. This is only recorded of two others: Noah (Genesis 6.9) and Levi (Malachi 2.6). According to WE Vine it involves: *Enjoyment of communion with God as the habit of life, delighting in submission to His authority, dependence on His guidance, and the consciousness of His approval.* This is the kind of life that Enoch lived by faith, eventually receiving the reward of translation into the intimate presence of God Himself. In our former lives we lived to please ourselves, now we have a new motive; we live to please God (cf. Romans 15.3).

Verse 6 is a summary of the key lessons (for both the Hebrews and believers today) from the lives of Abel and Enoch. **First**, both Abel and Enoch have exemplified that everything God-pleasing in life is a matter of faith. The grammar of the opening phrase suggests that this is a universal and timeless principle. Cain sought to be pleasing to God through his own self-effort, but: *Romans 8.8: So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.* **Second**, those who 'come to God', i.e. approach in worship (see 7.19), as Abel did, must **first** believe that 'He is', i.e. believe in the existence of, not just any god, but **the** true and living God and all that He has revealed concerning His character. **Third**, faith fully believes God is a 'rewarder', literally 'a paymaster' of them that 'diligently seek Him'. This is not simply that God gives rewards, but rather that **He Himself is the Reward**. He rewards by graciously offering Himself to be found and granting access into His favour and presence, something that we *shall* fully realise in a future day (Hebrews 10.34-35) and *has* been realised by translated Enoch. He was one who 'earnestly' desired God. This involves **denial** of *self* and **dependence** on *God* as one who is the source of **deepest satisfaction**. We firmly believe and preach, as Enoch, that the Lord is coming with 'ten thousands of His saints' (Jude 14). Are we walking with the Lord in the meantime? 1 John 3.2-3.

True Faith Serves (v.7)

7 *By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which (i.e. faith) he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.* Noah received warning from God concerning the future deluge (Genesis 6.13-22). Through faith and an attitude of 'reverential fear' Noah obediently prepared an ark 'to the saving of his house' (Genesis 6.18). As a 'preacher of righteousness' (2 Peter 2.5) Noah doubtless condemned the world through his **words** (Noah preached righteousness demanded; Paul preached righteousness offered), but the emphasis here seems to be on his **actions**. His faith in unseen things and consequent obedience in preparing the ark stood in direct contrast to the mocking unbelief and wickedness of the world (Genesis 6.11-13). The very presence of the ark (representing salvation) suggested that the world without was *worthy of* and *subject to* impending judgment. It was also faith which made Noah an 'heir' of 'the righteousness'. Although Noah was righteous and upstanding in **practice** (Genesis 7.1, Ezekiel 14.14), this speaks of being made righteous in **position**. On the basis of his faith, God declared him to be possessor of the righteousness which would yet be secured at Calvary. It is in this sense he is an 'heir of righteousness'. True faith results in practical obedience and service even in the light of ridicule and persecution. Those without Christ are condemned already (John 3.18). Can we claim to believe this without it practically changing the way we live? Noah's faith condemned the whole world system (religiously, politically, economically and socially). Does our daily conduct show that we cannot be friends with this world? James 4.4.

Practical and Dispensational Note

Practical: True faith first *worships* God (Abel), then *walks* with God (Enoch) before *working* for God (Noah). **Dispensational:** **Abel's** sacrifice and death speak of Calvary. Following this, **Enoch's** translation reminds us of the rapture. Believers which are alive and remain shall be caught away *before* the deluge (tribulation). However, **Noah** was preserved *through* the deluge. This speaks of the preservation of the remnant of Israel through the tribulation days. They went out of the ark to inherit a purged earth and Israel shall go through the tribulation to inherit an earth from which the curse has been removed (the millennium).

True Faith Sojourns (vv.8-10)

8 By faith **Abraham**, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. **9** By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: **10** For he looked for a (the) city which hath (the) foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

True Faith Strengthens (vv.11-12)

11 ~~Through~~ (By) faith (he) also (together with) **Sara herself** received strength to conceive seed, ~~and was delivered of a child~~ when **he** was past age, because **he** judged him faithful who had promised. **12** Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

True Faith Sustains (vv.13-16)

13 **These all** died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. **14** For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. **15** And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. **16** But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.