Genesis 4:2-7 (L. S.) 53736

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It has often been said, Man is naturally religious. Cain felt and owned that it was right to bring something to God, and so it is. But it must be something that He can accept, and there must be submission to His judgment. Cain, doubtless, presented a beautiful and costly present to God, the result of his own labors, the fruit of the ground. He came (and thousands have followed in the same path) as though nothing had happened, denying by his offering the fall, and the presence of sin; void of all sense of sin and ruin, he adds, as it were, insult to injury. His offering, beautiful as it might be, was the fruit of a ground cursed because of man's sin. And could God accept this, a denial of his true condition in the sight of God? The offering was rejected, and the offerer too, for this is the point here. It is not the expiation of sin, but the question of the sinner's acceptance, and this is seen all through Genesis. It is always the burnt offering, never the presentation of blood, and that seven times. Abel, as here; Noah offering of every clean beast and fowl; Abraham (chap. 15) offering the heifer, the she-goat, the ram, the turtle-dove, and pigeon. Isaac on the altar, and the ram offered up in his stead. Jacob offered sacrifices on the mount at the close of his meeting with Laban (chap. 31). Israel, in his journey to Egypt, when he came to Beersheba, offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac (chap. 46). And in every case it is immediately followed by divine favor and blessing.

Abel felt and acknowledged his condition as a lost sinner, and his need of a substitute before God, and also God's holy demands. In Hebrews we read, "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," etc. It is not that Abel was personally any better than Cain—they were both sons of the same father and mother, fallen and outcasts—the value and measure of the acceptance was all in the offering. Abel had that divine principle-faith, without which we cannot please God. His sacrifice was "more excellent" by which-not by his faith or personal worth, but by his sacrifice—he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying, not of his faith or himself, but of his gifts. And what were those gifts? The firstlings of his flock, and the fat thereof.

Abel has faith in the love of God, and brings the fat, that which God in all the offerings claimed for Himself, that which gave forth a rich, sweet-smelling savor, speaking to God's heart of a richer, greater sacrifice in the future, when that blessed One, in His deep love for His own, in full and perfect surrender, meeting every holy claim, gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor (Eph. 5:2).

The believer is brought nigh in all this; he stands before God clad in "the best robe," justified, "accepted in the beloved"—"as He is, so are we in this world." Christ is the believer's righteousness, and we are "the righteousness of God in Him." Not only are sins gone, but Christ is there, and the Christian is in Him, his true, unalterable standing before God, where there is no condemnation. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God," and nearer the Christian could not be; Christ's own place and relationship is his, and loved with the same love too, His God and Father ours.