Hebrews 11:4 (H Nunnerley) 174944

Various Aspects of the Death of Christ, Abel's Offering (11:4)

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." (Heb. 11:4).

Faith's worthies are portrayed in that wonderful picture gallery in Hebrews 11. It is noteworthy that Abel's is the first detailed act of faith, Rahab's the last. She was secured from judgment to come, he was accounted righteous before God.

Abel's name is there purely in virtue of the "excellent sacrifice" he presented, and the faith which saw in that slain lamb God's way to justify a sinner.

The initial act of faith is here illustrated. As great stress is laid on the excellency of his sacrifice, we may inquire, what were its special marks?

It was of the flock. It was not an untamed animal intent on doing its own will, for no wild creature could prefigure that blessed One who was led as a lamb to the slaughter, who came not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him.

It was clean. God's command to Noah to take seven of every "clean beast" into the ark proves that very early the distinction between clean and unclean was known. Only a clean animal could symbolize the holy, harmless, undefiled Jesus, whose life was pure, without a spot, as a lamb without blemish.

It was a firstborn. Only a "firstborn" could rightly depict that other "firstborn," who not only was the only-begotten of the Father from all eternity, but who also in time has become the Firstborn from the dead, and the Firstborn of many brethren.

It was a sin offering. This we gather from the Lord's words to Cain, "If thou doest not well a sin-offering coucheth at the door." (This is how it should read. The words for "sin" and "sin-offering" are the same in the Hebrew language). "Couching" evidently points to an animal close at hand, which the evil doer had only to present as an atonement for his guilt. It was a. substitutionary offering, ready to take the guilty sinner's place and suffer in his stead.

The fat being offered separately, shows that the victim had been slain. Its excellency, typified by the fat, ascended as a sweet savor and the entire offering was consumed by fire from heaven.

We gather this from the way God "testified" of the "gifts" of the priestly family (Lev. 9:24). Of Solomon's offerings (2 Chron. 7:1) of Elijah's sacrifice (1 Kings 8:38), and David's in 1 Chronicles 21:26.

Priest, potentate, prophet, and penitent, all received testimony of God's acceptance of their "gifts" by fire from heaven. Is it too much to infer, that when Abel presented his gift, God testified His good pleasure in that which it set forth, by consuming the sacrifice as He did in later days?

It was offered in faith. Clearly then there must have been some word from God intimating that an innocent victim, having no stain or sin-burden of its own, should be slain as substitute for guilty fallen man. For faith to be right must be in God and His word. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Herein lies the difference between Cain's offering and that of Abel. Cain offered in utter disregard of the death-penalty which lay on man. Abel fully recognized it, and presented to God a sacrifice which typifies that one acceptable, and accepted offering, to which all others pointed.

It was on this ground, and this alone, that Abel was accounted righteous; and in this is foreshadowed the death of Christ as the only way of approach to God, and the sole and only, ground on which sinful man can be accounted righteous.

Faith is submission to God's word, Abel illustrates the obedience of faith, he approached God in the appointed way, he did not go about to establish his own righteousness, but submitted himself to the righteousness of God. He is a witness that righteousness is imputed apart from works through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; a righteousness which is unto all and upon all them that believe. Abel, thus justified by faith and justified by blood, is the first of a long line of symbolic testifiers to the immensely important fact, that the sacrifice of Christ is the one exclusive basis of righteousness: the only way man can be just with God.

He also teaches us that justification is not only on the prim/pie of faith, but for the appropriation of faith.

The gospel is a revelation of righteousness, but a revelation which claims the obedience of faith. "The just shall live by faith; it is from faith to faith, on the principle of faith for the acceptance of faith.

Happy the man who has first "submitted" himself to the hand of the blessed God, and learned the joy of His heart as He welcomes the returning prodigal, and clothes him with the best robe, and then learns, that faith, on his side, is only a seal set to the act and deed of another, a declaration that God is true.

It is not “faith’s appropiation” that removes sin from before God, but it is the way by which it obtains that righteousness which love has already provided.

Let us then emphasize the truth here symbolized. Christ’s death is a declaration of the only righteous ground of acceptance for a sinner, and faith in the One who died thus is the only way of justification for the believer.

“The righteousness of God... is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus:... To declare ... at this time His righteousness; that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:22-26).

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