

Cain's Problem with God

By David DeWitt

So it came about...that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell (Genesis 4:3-5). We are told nothing here about any prior instruction given by God for their offerings (it's the word for *offering* not *sacrifice*) or even that they were to bring offerings to the Lord. Nonetheless, these are the first recorded offerings given to God. Both brothers thought they were doing a good thing, so Cain became angry when his was not accepted.



Most commentators downplay the fact that one was an animal offering and the other a vegetable offering, and clearly there was more to it than that. But, even though a vegetable offering is not necessarily inappropriate (Leviticus 2:1, 4, 14, 15), it is also true that *without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness* (Hebrews 9:22), which is why Christ's blood paid for the sin nature we received from Adam (Romans 5:9). So it seems unlikely that this did not have something to do with the animal/blood offering being regarded by God. What we know from Genesis 4 is that God had regard for *Abel and for his offering* but not for *Cain and for his offering*.

There were two elements involved, the man and the offering. The personal element is seen in Cain's angry response. Isaiah 1:11-18 tells us that offering a sacrifice without a clean heart is not acceptable to God. Hebrews 11:4 says, *by faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous*. So apparently Cain's faith had something to do with it. Nonetheless, the fact remains that each brought an offering from their labor and only the animal/blood sacrifice was acceptable.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Genesis 4:6-7). **Cain was angry because God was not pleased with what he thought would please God.** So God gave Cain a chance to *do well*. But that meant he had to humble himself and it probably meant that he had to purchase or request an animal offering from his brother. God warned him he was on the edge of falling off into sin. He had not presented an acceptable offering, but he had not yet disobeyed the word of God.

Sin Is Here Described Two Ways:

1. *Sin is crouching at the door*. Sin is personalized into the form of a demon or an animal crouching ready to pounce on Cain, and
2. *Its desire is for you*. The word *desire* here is the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 3:16 for the curse on the woman desiring a husband who would rule over her.

Cain's assignment was to *master* (it's also the word for *rule over*) the temptation that was trying to master him. It is interesting that God did not tell him that there was something he could do to make the sin temptation go away. **This is a microcosm of the spiritual warfare with our sin nature. It wants to master (rule over) us. We can't make it go away but we can master (rule over) it.**

LESSONS

So it's not about what we think pleases God. The question is, "How would Cain know what pleased God?" Having a conscience, which knows good and evil, humans have God's moral standard *written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them*, (Romans 2:15). But that just means they are without excuse, not that they don't need the Word of God. **Cain thought God would be pleased with a vegetable sacrifice until God said He wasn't.**

We can ultimately only know about what pleases God when He tells us. **In other words, the Word of God trumps everything.** If we think something is good and God says it isn't, then it isn't. The Israelite's conscience may have told them *you shall love your neighbor as yourself* but their conscience would not tell them *You shall not...wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together* (Leviticus 19:18-19). For that they needed to obey the Word of God. If your conscience tells you it's okay to commit acts of fornication, homosexuality, divorce/remarriage or lying, then, *sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it* – **because God says so.**