

## Abel's Sacrifice.

Genesis 4; Hebrews 11.

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(B.T. Vol. 17, p. 321-323.)

If we take the history of the garden of Eden as a whole, we shall see in it a real whole, and in brief a complete picture of the ways of God. Man placed under responsibility and even under law was sinful, and an actual sinner; and he was driven out from the place of sojourn, where God visited him for fellowship. But God did not send him out to begin anew world away from Himself without giving the fullest testimony to the sovereign grace that has met the evil. Man's nakedness was the expression of innocence being gone. Shame and guilt, and a guilty fear of God's presence, were now man's state: God in sovereign grace met this. He clothed Adam with that which came from death, and His eye had His own work before Him. This did not say man was not naked in himself, but that God Himself, having taken knowledge of it in grace, had covered his nakedness. The present state was perfectly provided for in full, and the power of evil judged in the future. Hereafter the power of the serpent's seed would be destroyed.

But man, thus driven out from God, with innocence gone, began a new world; and the question necessarily arose, Can man have to say to God, and how? Now it is clear, that if God wrought in men, He could not for a moment be indifferent to what had happened; and still clearer, that God could not be indifferent to the state of evil which had brought man where he now was, and was expressed by what he was in sin and away from God. That which was the sad effect for man God saw as the evil state in him.

The driving him out of paradise had placed man in a judicial way in this place though not irrecoverably. He was in it morally, and the question arose: Could he approach God? Now he could not really, while insensible to the state he had got into; he would still be as far from God as ever; and in God's public government and testimony, God could not give witness to His so receiving him. And this is the new platform of Cain and Abel — approach to God when in a state which was the result of being driven out from His presence. Do we approach God as if nothing had happened, in connection with the everyday circumstances and duties of the place we have got into, or in the sense of the sinfulness of this state, the sense of our fall, and looking up to God in our consciences as those who have got these by sin? Every christian knows. And here note, it is not committed sin, but the consciousness of our true standing before God. Cain goes with the fruit of his toil (man had been sent forth to be a tiller of the ground) — the actual practical state of man driven out. In Abel faith had its perceptions. Sin had come in, and death by sin: faith recognised it. "Now once Christ appeared in the consummation of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." This was not the clearing of the individual's sins actually committed. These are spoken of immediately after as a distinct subject, adding judgment, but a judgment passed for those that look for Him, seeing He has borne our sins Himself, Who becomes Himself the Judge (Heb. 9: 26-28).

We have four worlds, so to speak, in this aspect: the garden of Eden; a world no longer innocent, but man departed from God and driven out where sin reigns and Satan; a world in which Christ reigns in righteousness; and the new heavens and the new earth, wherein *dwelleth* righteousness. We have an innocent world (now gone) tested without evil in it by simple obedience. The final world as based on righteousness, which in its nature never changes, cannot change in its moral stability.

But the moment sin had come in and characterised the world and the state of man, the terms on which man could be with God must be changed, because God could not change. That a holy God and a sinful creation should be on the same terms as an innocent one could not be. Free and happy communion would be impossible. Cry for mercy there might be — challenge on what ground he was there, but no free intercourse. That God is love does not alter this. His love is a holy love, for He is light; but "men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil" (John 3: 19).

Now I admit and believe that the free sovereign self-originated love of God is the source of all our joy and hopes and blessings, eternal and infinite as they are. But God exercises that love by bringing in a Mediator in death: not here by bloodshedding to meet guilt, but in perfect self-surrender to God in that which was death, as such, and the fruit of sin. Fat was offered (Gen. 4: 4) as much as blood, yet not offered as such for forgiveness but for acceptance in Another, Who gave Himself wholly to God in death which had come in. And mark this was that souls might approach to God: each came with his offering.

Cain came, as if nothing had happened, so much so that he brought to God, as offering, what was the sign of the ruined state into which he had got, but which he did not reckon as rain. There was no faith in it. In Abel's there was. He offered by faith, which recognised that death had come in by sin, but that Another had given Himself for him, an offering made by fire of a sweet savour. For there are two things: "unto Him That loveth us and washed us from our sins;" and "Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." One was to clear foregone sins; the other, the value and preciousness of Him in Whom we are accepted — "accepted in the Beloved." Now this was a question of acceptance in coming; and God did not accept Cain. He did accept Abel; but the witness was borne to his gifts. He was accepted, but God's testimony was to that which he brought, the life of another in all its energies and perfectness given up to God in death.

Another thing we have to remark here; it was not God setting forth anything to the sinner. That was "a mercy-seat (ἱλαστήριον) through faith in His blood." Here it is Abel presenting himself to God, but coming by the acceptance and perfectness of another who had given himself for him. And this is propitiation. Now to say that God could receive a sinner as He received an innocent person is to say that God is indifferent to good and evil. And note here, it was not, by the eye of God resting on an inward change that a difference was made (there was such a change, for faith was working in Abel's heart), but a judicial estimate on God's part of the gifts he brought, Christ in figure, Christ offered in sacrifice; and for this we have the express authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It was a propitiatory sacrifice as ground of acceptance; or the whole basis of the standing of a fallen world is gone — the whole moral basis of the preference of Abel to Cain.

That love, electing love, may have been there is admitted; but the ground of acceptance, as stated in scripture (see Heb. 11), is gone, if propitiatory sacrifice be not accepted. To win secure righteousness before God, and for the believer's acceptance, according to the value that is in Christ, He offered Himself absolutely without spot for God's glory. "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him." Faith believed in it then and found its fruit. Abel was accepted, and distinctively on the ground of what he brought — his gifts. Cain brought no such offerings; he had to be accepted in himself only, and he was not. Faith looks to this sacrifice, and finds acceptance and blessing according to the value of Christ in the eyes of God.

I only add now that God gave Christ to us for this end. He "sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The self-originating work of love is in it, but the effectual work of suffering is to make good

in righteousness that love. God forbid that I should weaken confidence in the Father's love. "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us."

It is certain then, that, man being fallen, Abel sought God's face and acceptance by a sacrifice, to the value of which God bore testimony, "by which he obtained testimony that he was righteous." It was a sacrifice which recognised death as come in, but which, as so presented, bore the character of perfect self-offering to God's glory. Not actual sins were in question, but the state of man and his acceptance on the ground of mediatorial death, in which God's own glory alone was sought on man's part in obedience, and in which the highest gift of grace shone out on God's part in love.

But here, immediately connecting itself with our subject, is another point, less abstract, narrower possibly in effect, but dealing more immediately with conscience, and hence of present necessity. If a man believes in heart (that is, as convinced of guilt) in the Lord Jesus Christ, he will not come into judgment; he knows he is forgiven and justified, he has peace with God, rejoices in hope of His glory, and trusts God for the road auto the end. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity" — not that he has not done any, but that it has been borne by Another. Another has been substituted in his place by grace, Who has taken the charge of it on Himself, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." It is not here the basis on which the race is before God, as in Abel's case, and which as a general principle recognises the whole truth; but actual sins committed, which are dealt with and put away out of God's sight by One "Who was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53: 5).

Now this, call it by any word you please, was One person put in the place of another, and then in such sort taking the sins and their consequences on Himself that they should not come at all upon the person, who was himself guilty, in judgment or penal consequences. Upon all who are not under this substitutionary benefit they do come, and with such God enters into judgment concerning them. For God's people it is said, "according to this time," not what, men wrought, but "what hath God wrought!" (Num. 23: 21- 23.)

Thus substitution is as certain a truth as scripture can afford; that is, one person standing in another's place, Christ bearing his sins in His own body on the tree, bruised for them instead of the guilty one, who is healed by Christ's taking the stripes. For "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53: 6).