



The Way of Cain

Long ago in the garden of Eden, the first man Adam and his wife Eve fell. They had sinned against the most high God by doing the one thing He had commanded them not to do. In so doing these first two people damaged their relationship with God and became aware of their own nakedness.

Although they made an attempt to cover themselves by sewing fig leaves together, when they heard the voice of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid themselves and were afraid. Man, who had been created by God and enjoyed sweet communion with Him, was now hiding himself from God, naked and ashamed.

As we now know this did not come as a surprise to the Lord. He knew beforehand that the man whom He created would disobey His commandment and fall into sin. Since God is not confined by time and simultaneously comprehends both the end and the beginning of everything, He had already prepared the way of salvation.

In this instance, on behalf of these first men, God must have killed some kind of animal since we are told that He made them coats of skin. By taking the life of another creature, God provided Adam and Eve with the covering they so desperately needed.

Now I would like to suggest to you that this animal which God killed was a lamb. Although this cannot be proven I feel it is a good possibility. It harmonizes beautifully with the rest of scripture and God's ultimate plan of redemption.

This act was no doubt pointing toward the time when He allowed His own Son, the Lamb of God, to be slain for a covering for our sins – the hiding of our own nakedness and rebellion against God.

You can imagine Adam and Eve's reaction to this act. These animals were their friends. They spent their time caring for them. Further, they had never witnessed death before. The terrible result of their sin, the finality and ugliness of death, became instantly real to them. Due to their sin, another creature had to die.

Further along in the book of Genesis we have a hint that perhaps it was indeed a lamb which was slain for Adam and Eve. When we examine the scriptures closely, a picture emerges. We are told that Abel was a shepherd while Cain was a tiller of the ground, a farmer.

Since man was not permitted by God to eat meat before the flood (see Gen 1:29,30 & 9:2,3) we may then inquire why Abel was tending sheep. Why did he spend his time caring for animals which were of no food value to him?

The answer is most likely found in the idea that these animals were used for clothing. These sheep must have been raised for their wool or for their skins which would have been used for covering, thus lending support to the idea that it was God who had given them this example.

Both Cain and Abel were probably aware of all that had taken place with their father and mother in the garden of Eden. I am sure that as faithful parents these two shared with their children all that had transpired and attempted to instruct them in the proper way to walk with God.

When first reading the account in the book of Genesis, about how God rejected the offering of Cain, I was often troubled because this rejection seemed arbitrary. I could not understand how He could judge between these men if they were both operating purely from instinct.

However, I now strongly feel that Cain knew as well as Abel the sacrifice that God required. He knew from the testimony of his parents that they had been covered by the slaying of a lamb and that God required the shedding of blood for the expiation of sin.

However, Cain chose to go his own way even though he knew the righteous requirement of God. He deliberately disobeyed it, ignoring the example which God had manifestly provided. Instead he offered something of his own invention, something of his own imagination, something that he himself could produce.

He may have thought along these lines: “Why should I offer a lamb? The vegetables which I have grown are great, there’s nothing wrong with them, in fact they are the best around anywhere. Why can’t I offer to God my best? Shouldn’t that be good enough? No doubt He will recognize this and receive it.”

But, as we read in Genesis chapter 4, verse 5, God rejected the offering of Cain. No matter how good it was, no matter how wonderful it appeared to be, even though Cain brought his best, God was not satisfied. He had already ordained that sacrifice which was necessary. He had already laid down the format for true worshippers to follow and it was only through obedience that His pleasure and favor could be gained.

A MESSAGE FOR TODAY

Now what does this story of long ago speak to us today? How can we believers learn from the experience of these first men and avoid the way of Cain? In the New Testament, just as in the Old, God has prescribed for all believers the proper way of worship. We find in the book of John chapter 4, verses 23 and 24, the following declaration.

Jesus says: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Please notice here the word “must.” The scripture does not say “could” or “should” or even “perhaps ought to” but it specifically states that those who worship God must worship Him in the spirit. Such worship is not optional. Anything less than this falls short of God’s clear commandment.

You see, in the New Testament as well as in the Old, a lamb has been slain for the covering of sins. God has provided a Lamb! And this Lamb is to be our offer-

ing. Nothing else is adequate. No matter how good it may seem, no matter how scriptural it may appear, no matter how awe-inspiring, ornate, musically excellent it might be, no other offering will suffice. Only the Lamb will do.

This fact has an important application to us as Christians. When we come together to worship the Father we must worship Him in the spirit. As we gather together it is essential that we enter into the Spirit of Jesus Christ so that our worship and our praise, and in fact all that we do, originates with Him. He is the One who is to be leading our church meetings. Further, it is this Lamb who should be the substance of them.

But what does “being in the spirit” mean? Does it mean that we are in a certain mood? Could it indicate that we have entered into the emotion of some situation? No. It signifies that we have actually entered into the presence of God through the Holy Spirit. It means that we are full of and being guided by the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

We read elsewhere in the Gospels that wherever two or three are gathered together in His Name, there He is in the midst. Now Jesus does not come into our gatherings as a spectator. He is not coming to hear us go through our ceremonies or “services.” Christ has appeared as our High Priest to lead us in our worship and praise of God.

When Jesus comes into the midst He comes as the One who is going to originate everything. It is He who should be choosing the songs and it is Himself that should be poured out in and through our prayers. It is the Spirit of Jesus Christ that should be emanating from the ministry of the Word.

God is satisfied only with the offering of His Son and it is only when we come together and offer up unto Him that which flows out from Jesus that the Father is pleased. Anything less than this is just vegetables!

Perhaps some believe that the goal for our meetings is that they should be “scriptural.” They imagine that if we simply imitate what we think the New Testament believers did, then God will be satisfied. This leaves so many Christian meetings trying to “do worship” or “have ministry” hoping to somehow stumble across the blessing of God. This is a very hit or miss approach. When things don’t go

well, it is not uncommon for the leaders to blame the pew sitters for lack of enthusiasm or consecration.

But the problem with this approach is this: Which of the thousands of scriptural things does Jesus want us doing right now, today? The early church did many things. The Bible is full of things God might want us to say or do on any given occasion. But how is He leading us right now?

In order to know this, we must be in the Spirit. We must be in intimate, real fellowship with Him. In this way, we can sense His leadership, follow Him in what He is doing and thus reap the satisfaction of true, spiritual worship.

How often we, God's people, have gone the way of Cain (Jude 11)! How many times we have come together and offered up to God that which originated solely from ourselves! Our own ideas, man's inventions – things which have a merely soulful quality – have been substituted in Christ's place. What we have done or can produce ourselves is offered in the place of the Lamb which God has provided. We have offered to God our bunch of vegetables.

We have erroneously supposed that if what we do is good, if it is biblical enough, if it is elaborate enough, if it is melodious enough that God will be satisfied. No doubt we as human beings have often offered God our best. We have done it with the best intentions, humanly speaking. However, with all these things God is not satisfied and He cannot be. He Himself has shown us the Way and we must walk in it.

MANY WONDERFUL WORKS

Oh, the cathedrals which have been built, the liturgies which have been formulated, the musical arrangements which have been made, The dance and mime routines which have been orchestrated, the messages which have been preached, all in the name of worship!

Yet God desires none of these “things.” They, and many other items of this nature, are tremendous human accomplishments. I am not trying to downgrade the

excellence of any of them. Yet their worth is nothing compared to the beauty and glory of what God has provided.

Many of these things are just the works of men, the best which could be made, yet they cannot approach the requirement of God. Men appreciate such things with their soul, their senses, and often mistake this natural appreciation for some spiritual blessing. Yet Luke 16:15 states: “For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

Purely outward things are of absolutely no spiritual value. They do nothing to enhance our worship or to attract the presence of God. The reason God rejects such things is because they are a human substitution for the true offering which He has provided. Consequently, the spirit of man is left without ministry when these things predominate our Christian gatherings.

How many times have you gone away from church “services” unsatisfied? How many times have you sat through messages and meetings only getting a few crumbs from the Master’s table? How often is our worship of God formal, stilted and spiritually dead? All this only serves to prove that we have gone the way of Cain. None of our ideas or inventions, no matter how good or “right” they may be, can ever satisfy God and when God is not satisfied then we cannot be spiritually satisfied either.

Oh, but what a difference there is in the Son! When God’s people come together and open up to Him, allowing His Spirit to move in their midst, allowing the High Priest of our confession to lead in the worship, to lead in praise, to lead in the ministry, how satisfying these gatherings can be! How full of the Spirit and Truth! How anointed and enjoyable such meetings are! Man is satisfied here because God is satisfied having seen and accepted the offering of His Son.

STRANGE FIRE

In the Old Testament we have another example given to us of vain human religion. Nadab and Abihu were sons of the High Priest. They were the first two sons of Aaron and they were consecrated with him unto God for the high priestly

service and ministry unto the Lord. These two had quite a bit of experience with their father in worshipping the Lord and even saw fire fall from heaven upon the sacrifices which were offered (Lev 9:24).

So they began to get the idea that they now had a good grasp on this religion business. They thought that they were now capable of inventing something new for the worship of God. It occurred to them to put some incense in their censors and go, evidently, into the holy temple. The result was disastrous. Fire came down from heaven and consumed them. This was God's reaction to their innovations (Lev 10:1-3).

Perhaps these things should speak to us today. We as men may have plenty of ideas to contribute to church gatherings – dramatic presentations, dance routines, preplanned “worship,” musical performances, traditional observances, many of the props and formats which we find so common in the Christian religion today – all these things just may be strange fire offered before the Lord.

We, God's people, should come before Him in reverent fear. How careful we should be not to go the way of Cain! How essential it is that our worship be something truly spiritual that comes from God Himself welling up within us and pouring out through us! It is not sufficient that when we come together we are simply informed, emotionally stimulated or entertained.

He and He alone is the source of genuine spiritual offering. God may tolerate our religious exercises today. He is not at present sending down fire from heaven to destroy these things that many of us are doing. However, we are told specifically that one day our works will be tried by fire and if we have been building with wood, hay and stubble instead of gold, silver and precious stones, our work will be consumed. We read that the Lord will come suddenly to His temple and will purge the sons of Levi so that their offering may be in righteousness (Mal 3:1-3).

Please do not misunderstand me. God no doubt can lead us in our worship in singing, dancing and many other such things. King David danced before the Lord with all his might (II Sam 6:14). Deborah, Moses and many others composed songs of praise.

However they did these things because they were filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit. They did not do them because they thought that it might be “appropriate,” “sacred” or “inspirational.” They did not compose songs and invent dance routines to fulfill their obligation on a particular Sunday morning. That which originates with God and the inventions of man can appear very similar. They may even take the same outward form. Yet there is a universe of difference.

The question is not really about the form at all but about the source and substance of these things. If the source is not God, no matter how wonderful it is, no matter how doctrinally correct it might be, no matter how good it might seem, it is rejected by Him. On the other hand, anything which is inspired by the Holy Spirit is important and should be included in our worship.

This reminds me of a trip I took to Romania during the time of Soviet domination. In one of the churches we visited, there was not simply one preacher or one message. The pulpit was open to all to minister, following the leading of the Holy Spirit. Many different men rose up in their turn to share what God had given them.

That evening, one brother stood up to read a poem which God had inspired him to write. In spite of the language barrier, it was easy to sense the anointing on that poetry. God had given that poem to that brother and so it was a great blessing to all.

Those hearing him became enthused. They too sensed the anointing of God on what he read. They enjoyed it so much, they wanted more. So, following their urging, he began to read other poems which God had given him previously.

With this introduction of human leadership and desire, the presence of God began to gradually slip away. What had begun in the Spirit, fell into the flesh. Yesterday’s manna did not nourish anyone.

How we, God’s children, need to learn to distinguish between the holy and the profane, the clean and the unclean (Ezek 22:26)!

It is sad but true that many Christians have never learned to discern between the soul and spirit (Heb 4:12). Many have spent so little time in the presence of

God meditating upon His Word that they have no experience of His Spirit-sword dividing asunder that which is natural and human from that which is spiritual.

Too often we have not grown in our discernment to the place where we know what it is that God is requiring. And in so doing, we have failed to meet His criterion – worship in spirit and truth.

There is a tendency among some men to appreciate things with which they have grown up or which have been in existence for a long time. Others like innovations in their worship. However, everything must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit and He alone must be supreme in all that we do.

Further, since Jesus is a living Person, we may expect that His leading will continually change. Just as our relationships with other people are in constant flux, so too God is always new every morning (Lam 3:22,23). Therefore, we must be in constant communion with Him so that we can sense and follow what He is doing today.

It is possible that many people reading this chapter do not understand what I am saying and may therefore become offended by it. If this is your situation, I beg you not to be put off but rather to come before God and ask Him to fill you mightily with His Holy Spirit.

Read the passage in Luke which declares how much the heavenly Father desires to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Lk 11:11-13). He yearns that we would know the difference between what is spiritual and what is natural, that we could present offerings which are acceptable and pleasing unto Him.

God loves us very much. He has poured out His Spirit. He has offered up His only Son. God has held nothing back from us which is necessary for true worship and a pure relationship with Him. How we as men need to avail ourselves of all that God has provided!

Oh that we would have the discernment to know that which originates from the soul and that which comes from the Spirit! It is in our spirit that we are linked to God (I Cor 6:17). And it is only through the Spirit that we can offer up the sacrifice that is acceptable.

In order to have genuinely spiritual meetings, we like our godly predecessor Abel must be laboring during the week on that which God has provided. If we come into our church gatherings empty-handed, if we have not been before the presence of the Lord, if we have not fed in His Word and sensed His Spirit moving within us, we will have nothing to offer. If we have not “raised up the Lamb” during the week, how can we bring Him as an offering?

Many Christians in this situation are tempted to resort to offering vegetables. Lacking perhaps spiritual experiences, lacking that intimate relationship with God Himself, they are left with no lamb and can only offer that which has grown up from the ground – something earthly, something natural. These things are spiritually unsatisfying.

The fact that the Father is actually out seeking men and women who will worship Him in the Spirit should really make an impression on us.

He is right now looking for them! His heart is today yearning for true worshippers who will offer up the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of their lips, those who will yield to Him that which God has wrought in them through Jesus Christ.

Oh how we need to pray, how we need to seek His face that this kind of worship would be our experience! It can't be difficult. It mustn't be, because Christ died that it could be so. Nothing has been withheld from us. God's own offering is completely at our disposal.

Therefore, let us come to Him and fill ourselves with the Lamb of God so that when we gather together and He comes into our midst we can offer up a sweet-smelling savor, holy and acceptable unto God. May we be as Paul says, those of “... the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philip 3:3).

Brothers and sisters, I pray earnestly that these things will become your reality.

By David W. Dyer

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