

THE GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES

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contents

Ch 01.1 The Scope of Hebrews Eleven	1
Ch 01.2 Reckoning by Faith (Verse 3)	5
Ch 01.3 Faith (cometh) by hearing	8
Ch 01.4 Hearing (cometh) by the Word of God	11
Ch 02.1 The Two Ways of Access	14
Ch 02.2 The Two Ways of Worship	19
Ch 02.3 Abel's Faith: The Witness God Bore	22
Ch 02.4 Abel's Faith: The Witness Abel Obtained	26
Ch 02.5 "The Blood of Abel" and "The Way of Cain"	31

1. The Scope of Hebrews Eleven
2. Reckoning by Faith (verse 3)
3. Faith (cometh) by Hearing
4. Hearing (cometh) by the Word of God

- * 1. Abel: Faith's Worship of God
1. The Two Ways of Access
 2. The Two Ways of Worship
 3. Abel's Faith: The Witness God Bore
 4. Abel's Faith: The Witness Abel Obtained
 5. Abel's Faith: "The Blood of Abel" and "The Way of Cain"

Ch 01.1 The Scope of Hebrews Eleven

We trust that our readers are by this time duly impressed with the fact that we must not give an interpretation of any passage of Scripture, or even a chapter, apart from its context.

We have learnt also that the Scope of the passage must be gathered from its Structure. In other words, we must know what it is all about before we can find a clue to the meaning of the words: and we can find this out only by getting the Structure of the whole context.

As our subject here consists of a complete chapter, will be necessary for us to see the exact place in which it stands in relation to the Epistle as a whole. We must therefore give the Structure of The Epistle to the Hebrews as a whole: --

- A i. ii. Doctrinal Introduction.
- B iii:1 -- iv:13. The Mission of Christ.

C iv:14-16. General Application.

("Having therefore.") Boldness of access to God in heaven.

B v:1 -- x:18. The Priesthood of Christ.

C x:19 -- xii:29. Particular Application

("Having therefore.") Boldness of access to God in heaven.

A xiii. Practical Conclusion.

The first thing we learn from this Structure is that the chapter we are to consider has not been "rightly divided" by man.

Its subject does not begin at the first verse of chapter 11, but at the nineteenth verse of the previous chapter (chapter 10), the member of which it forms part. That is to say, it begins at chapter 10:19 and ends with chapter 12:29.

Hebrews 11 therefore comes in the middle, and forms part of a larger portion of the Epistle. Consequently no exposition of it can be complete which treats it as beginning only at chapter 11:1. We must go back to chapter 10:19 if we would see the part it bears in relation to the whole.

The commencement of this member, C, is marked off by the catch-words "Having therefore;" these are the same words which commence the corresponding member C (chapter 4:14-16). The former of these two members (4:14-16) contains the conclusion which follows from the establishment of the argument concerning The Mission of Christ (chapter 3:1 -- 4:13); while the latter (chapters 10:19 -- 12:29) contains the conclusion which follows the argument concerning The Priesthood of Christ (chapter 5:1 -- 10:18).

It will be necessary now for us to note the Structure of the second of these conclusions, so that we may, by its being broken up, see what is the scope of the whole, and what is the special place of the chapter we-are to consider.

Each of the large members given above has its own proper and peculiar Structure, and is capable of being expanded, and of having its various-sub-members exhibited to the eye. The sub-structure of C (chapter 10:19 -- 12:29) is as follows:

C Particular Application of chapter 5:1 -- 10:18.

D x:19-25. Exhortation to draw near to God, and to "hold fast the confession of our faith without wavering," because Christ the High Priest is accessible in heaven and "faithful that promised."

E 10:24-25. Duties as brethren, to endure exhortation.

F 10:26-31. Warning in view of God being "the living God."

G a 10:32-37. Exhortation to patience, in view of the promise.

b 10:38,39. Living by faith.

G b 11:1-40 Examples of living by faith.

a 12:1. Exhortation to patience in view of the examples of faith in the promise.

D 12:2-3. Exhortations to look away from the above examples to Jesus, the Foremost and Last "example of faith," because He endured, and is accessible in Heaven.

E 12:4-54. Duties as sons, to endure chastening.

F 12:25-29. Warning, in view of God being "a consuming fire."

From the above Structure we see the true place of chapter 11.

We see also the true place of the member "G b," and the relation in which it stands to the context.

The Scope of the whole passage is an exhortation to patient endurance in view of the promises. This exhortation is based on the faithfulness of the Promiser (10:23), and the examples of faith are shown in those who "lived by faith" (chapter 11.)

The pivot on which the whole turns is the quotation from Habbakuk 2:4, "The just shall live by faith."

This is quoted three times in the New Testament, and each time the emphasis is on a different word:--

Romans 1:17. "The just shall live by FAITH." (Hebrew: The just shall live in (or by) his faith [or faithfulness].

Galatians 3:11. "The JUST shall live by faith."

Hebrews 10:38. "The just LIVE by faith."

In the first of these (Romans 1:17) the subject is Faith or Faith-principle as being the principle of Justification, in God's Gospel, which is there being revealed.

In the second (Galatians 3:11) the subject is Justification, which is by Faith-principle in contrast with law-principle.

In the third (Hebrews 10:38) the subject is Living by faith in God's promises, so as to be able to wait and watch with patient endurance.

This is the subject of Habbakuk 2:1,3,4, which begins "I will stand upon my WATCH, and set me upon the tower, and will WATCH what he will say unto me ... For the vision is yet for an appointed time... But at the end it shall speak, and not lie: Though it tarry, WAIT for it; Because it will surely come, it will not tarry ... The just shall LIVE through his faith."

This context is clear. Faith in God's word can alone enable us to wait with patience for the fulfilment of His promise.

This is the burden of the context of Hebrews 11, and hence, in Hebrews 10:37, the third verse of Habbakuk 2 is quoted as well as verse 4, while, in Romans and Galatians, this verse (verse 3) is not quoted; because patient waiting is not the burden and object of the context in those two quotations of Habbakuk 2:4.

The exhortation (Hebrews 10:32-37) is to patient waiting through faith: "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." Then it goes on to quote Habkakuk: "for yet a little while," etc.

The whole burden of Hebrews 11 is the patience of those who endured by faith, "not having received the promise" (verse 13); and of those who, "having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise" (verse 39).

Now we are prepared to understand and appreciate (1) The Definition of Faith in verses 1-3, and (2) The Exemplification of Faith in verses 4-39.

In Hebrews 11:1 faith is defined as being

"The FOUNDATION of things hoped for,

The CONVICTION of things not seen."

There is no question as to the meaning of the word rendered "substance" in the A.V.; which, in the margin, gives "ground, or confidence," as an alternative.

In the R.V. it is rendered "assurance," with "giving substance to" in the margin. The word is hypostasis, a setting or placing underneath. Hence, its primitive meaning is foundation. The rendering "substance" comes from the Latin, sub stans (standing under). In the Papyri it is used of title deeds.

We all hope for many things, but the question is, What foundation or ground have we for our hope? What are our title deeds? All depends upon this.

As to our hope for eternity, it all rests on the faithfulness of God's promise. If there be no God; or, if His promise be not true, then we have no foundation whatever for our hope; all is baseless. Everything, therefore, depends upon the fact that God has spoken, and that what He has said is true.

Hence, the definition of faith in Romans 10:17:

"Faith cometh by hearing, And hearing [cometh] by the word of God."

If we have heard nothing, there can be nothing to believe. There is neither place nor room for faith. We may think it, or imagine it, or hope for it; but we cannot possibly believe it, because we have not heard anything about it. Our hopes and thoughts and imaginations are all vain, being without any "foundation."

Hence, of Abraham's faith, the "father of the faithful," it is said, "Abraham believed God" God had spoken; Abraham had heard; and he believed God.

What he had heard came "by the word of God: and his faith came by this hearing."

Abraham believed what God had said; God had "caused him to hope;" and hence, believing God, his faith in God's Word was the foundation or ground of that for which he hoped.

None can hope in vain who believe God.

This is why the common question, Do we believe? is so senseless. The real question is, not Do we believe? but WHAT do we believe? or rather, WHOM do we believe?

We believe many things that man says, and that man promises. But the question is, are they true?

It is not a question of the sincerity with which we believe, but of the truth of what we believe.

The more sincerely we believe what is not true, the worse it is for us. This holds good in every department of life. If what we hear be not true, then, to doubt it, means our safety.

When we give ear to man, we can never be certain that what he says is true. But when we give ear to God, we can set to our seal that "God is true" in what He says; and that "He is faithful" in what He promises. Faith is hearing God and believing what He says. This is the simple definition. But there are various expressions connected with this faith.

It is used with the preposition "in". This means that our faith rests in the truth of what is said (Mark 1:15, etc.). It is the same when used with the Dative of the person.

It is used with "upon", which means that faith rests upon what we hear; and that what we hear is the foundation upon which our faith rests (Romans 9:33; 10:11, etc.).

It is used with "unto", which means that faith goes out to, and is directed to Him of whom, or that of which we hear (John 2:11; 3:16, etc.).

There can thus be no mistake as to the meaning of the first part of the definition of Hebrews 11:1.

As to the second: -- Faith is said to be "The CONVICTION of things not seen."

The A.V. renders this "evidence," while the R.V. renders it "proving," with test" in the margin.

The word is elengchos, a proof, that by which anything is proved or tested; logical proof,

proof that conveys a satisfying conviction to the mind. Hence, this is the best meaning to give the word here. It is the conviction produced by demonstration.

In John 8:46 the Lord says, "Which of you convicteth Me of sin?" (not "convinceth," as in the A.V., but "convicteth," as in the R.V.); so in John 16:8, "When He [the Holy Spirit] is come, He shall convict the world in respect of sin," (not "reprove," as in A.V. margin, convince), but convict, or bring in guilty. None could do this of Christ; but the Holy Spirit does this of the world. He brings it in guilty, and convicts it of sin. Why? For this very reason: "Because they believe not on Me."

This is the great sin. And this brings us back to our subject.

God hath spoken; and the sin is defined as not believing what He hath said: for He was the Living Word, and through Him we believe in the Living God.

Hence the opening words of Isaiah chapter 1, which is the great indictment of Israel's sin:

"Hear, o heavens,
And give ear, o earth:
For Jehovah hath spoken."

This is the great fact for us who possess the Word of God. GOD HATH SPOKEN.

Do we believe what He hath said? This is the one abiding question. He has given to us, and made us exceeding great and precious promises. Do we believe Him? If we do, then, this faith is the "foundation" of all we hope for. It is the "conviction" of what we have heard but do not see. Thus Faith is the opposite of sight. Man says that "seeing is believing." This is one of his many fallacies. Faith is the demonstration to us of what we do not see. Hence, we live in, and by, this faith, "we walk by faith, and not by sight" (II Corinthians 5:7).

What we see is what we know.

What we believe is what we hear.

Hence the examples of faith given us in Hebrews 11 are those who, having heard God, believed what He said. Every instance of faith in this chapter comes under the category of "things hoped for," or of "things unseen."

Noah believed the truth of "things not seen as yet" (verse 7).

Others by faith saw the promises "afar off" (verse 13). Moses "endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (verse 27).

This is faith. This was Abraham's faith. He "rejoiced to see Christ's day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). But he saw it, by faith, "afar off".

Ch 01.2 Reckoning by Faith (Verse 3)

Having given the true definition of faith, the Apostle proceeds to give examples of it; showing how men of God in past days lived by it: i.e., how they conducted their lives according to it.

Those whom he calls "the elders,"¹ in Heb. xi. 1, he speaks of as the "great cloud of witnesses" in ch. xii.

The scope of the whole passage (of which this chapter forms part) is, as we have seen, an exhortation to patience in view of the great tribulations these Hebrew believers were passing through, and of the faithfulness of God to His promises which He had made to them.

God's word was the foundation of all that they hoped for; His faithfulness was all that they had to rest upon.

He points his readers back to the great cloud of witnesses² who had borne such wondrous testimony to the power of a living faith in the living God: to those who had borne witness, not only in their faithful life, but in their martyr-death.

The word rendered "obtained a good report," in Heb. xi. 2 and 39, and "witnesses," in Heb. xii. 1, are cognate.

In the former chapter it is the verb, and in the latter it is the noun. There is no word in the original about "good."

Verse 2 tells us that by (or through) this faith [of theirs]; or by such a faith as this, they were made witnesses (by God), or became witnesses (for God), and could thus be called, in chap. xii. 1, "a great cloud of witnesses," by faith in the promises which they had received from God, and believing what they had "heard."

They were enabled to bear such wondrous witness; and were strengthened to suffer, and conquer, and to wait patiently for the fulfilment of the promises which they saw, by this faith, "afar off."

It was this, and "by such faith as this," that their example was so necessary, and was such an encouragement for those to whom the Apostle was writing. The scope of the whole section is (as we have seen), an exhortation and warning against apostasy; and the words immediately preceding are, "We are not of those drawing back to destruction, but of faith, to the saving of the soul."

What it is to be thus, "of faith," is the subject of what follows in chapter xi. Faith has to do with that which is "not seen." The things we hope for are "not seen": as it is written: "Hope that is seen is not hope: for what any one seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for what, we do not see, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. viii. 24,25). It is to this patient waiting under trial that these Hebrew believers were being exhorted.

Faith is thus the opposite of sight (II Cor. v. 7). This is the essence of the whole of chapter xi. It begins, in verse 3, with the statement that the events which we see going on around us spring from things that do not appear, but from the fact that God rules and overrules, and that He has prepared and ordered the ages.

The word rendered "worlds" is not used of the created world, which is cosmos, or of the inhabited world, which is oikoumene; or of the ploughed and trodden earth, which is ge, but it is aion, age, which is here in the plural, and means ages, or dispensations. This is its proper rendering.³ It is by faith we perceive (nooumen) that the events we see happening around us do not happen by chance.

Even worldly wisdom can see this and say that "there is a hand that shapes our destinies"; that "things are not what they seem"; and that "we cannot judge by appearances."

We see Babylon replacing Israel, Medo-Persia rising up in the place of Babylon; Greece succeeding Persia; Rome succeeding Greece. To the human eye, all these things are seen merely as historical events, but faith can see beneath the surface. It can perceive what the human eye cannot see. It can see the things that are invisible. It can see the "things not seen." How? By "hearing," i.e., "by the word of God." And here, note that the word rendered "word" is not Logos (as in Psalm xxxiii. 6. Sept. xxxii. 6), but Rhema; i.e., not the creative Word, but the revealed words. By believing the prophetic words we grasp the fact that these ages were all foreknown to God, and all perfectly ordered by Him.

This is the force of the word rendered "framed," as may be seen by studying all its occurrences.⁴ It will be at once observed that in no other place is it rendered "framed," while all the other renderings taken together show that the best meaning to give the word in Heb. xi. 3 would be prepared, as in the previous chapter (Heb. x. 5). So that the sense of the verse would be, that while the events which we see with our eyes taking place around us do not

happen by chance, as judging by appearances, or from the outward phenomena, they seem to do; but are prepared, ruled or over-ruled by God, who has, in His own ordering, "the dispensation of the fulness of times" (Eph. i. 10); and orders all "according to the purpose of the ages which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. iii. 11, compare R.V).

It is by faith in what God has revealed in the "faithful sayings" of the prophetic word that we perceive and "understand" this great fact which, to the outward eye of mortal man, is neither seen, nor understood, nor even acknowledged.

The rendering of the third verse, according to this, would be as follows:--

"By faith we perceive (by the word of God) that the ages were prepared, so that, the things we see, come to pass not from things that appear." That is, as we said above, as we walk by faith and not by sight, we understand that we cannot and must not judge by the outward appearances, because in one of His weighty "words" God has told us that He "seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (I Sam. xvi. 7).

It was by such a faith as this that these elders knew that things were not what they seemed, and therefore did not judge by sight of the outward eye.

Though the Flood appeared to be delayed, and the unbelief of others seemed to be encouraged by it, Noah did not judge by those appearances, but believed the words of God as to "things not seen as yet."

It was by such faith as this that Abraham and Sarah, though at first staggered by the words of the angel, yet as soon as they "understood" that they were "the words of God" they considered not the outward appearances of their natural physical condition, but waxed "strong in faith," and believed God as to what they could not see.

It was by "such a faith as this" that Joseph did not consider the circumstances as they appeared to him in Egypt, but believed God as to their going up thence at the set time that He had prepared, even to the very year. It was by "such a faith as this" that Moses was not deceived by the outward splendour of his royal surroundings in the Court of Egypt, but voluntarily surrendered all; refusing the treasures; choosing the sufferings; and esteeming reproach for Christ as better than all. For he judged and "endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (verse 27).

But we must not anticipate.

The whole chapter and all its parts must be studied in the light of this third verse. It does not carry us back to Creation, and divert our thoughts into such a totally different channel; but, it lays the foundation in no uncertain way for all that is to follow.

This foundation has been hidden from the readers of the Word...

(1) By rendering aioness "worlds" instead of ages.

(2) By rendering hatartizo "framed" instead of prepared as in Heb. x. 5; "framed" being a rendering which is not given it in any other of the thirteen passages where it occurs.

(3). By rendering gegonenai "made" instead of happened, or came to pass, which is its usual meaning. There are words for creating and making, but this is not one of them.

It will be seen that verse 3 is not written to teach that there are "more worlds than one;" or that they were created out of nothing; but it is written to give us, at the outset, the secret of the elders' wondrous witness, which consisted in this; that they walked "by faith and not by sight"; and that, therefore, they did not look on the outward appearance or judge by outward phenomena; but, understanding that the ages and dispensations were all prepared by God, they rested on the prophetic Word, and believed that He was overruling all for the accomplishment of His own counsels in them and through them.

1The word is used in its Hebrew sense ancients (zekutnim). See Isa. xxiv. 23, which thus implies the resurrection of those who are referred to, i.e., not older in age, but people who

lived in olden times.

2The word is *martus*, and is always used of a judicial witness, or deponent; i.e., one who witnessed with his lips and not with his eyes. Hence the word comes to be limited, to-day, to the greatest of all such witness, a martyr's death.

The word for eyewitness is quite different. It is *epoptis*, a looker on, spectator.

3This is the sense in which *aion* is used in this Epistle (as elsewhere). See Heb. i. 3, where the verb *poieo* is used in the sense of appoint, as in chap. iii. 2. See also Heb. vi. 5, where it is used of "the age to come"; and Heb. ix. 26, where the first word "world" is *cosmos*) and means the created world, and the second is this word *aion*, age.

4*Katartizo* occurs in the following passages, and is rendered mend in Matt. iv. 21. Mark i. 19. Perfect (perfected, made perfect, be perfect, &c.), in Matt. xxi. 16. Luke vi. 40. II Cor. xiii. 11. I Thess. iii. 10. Heb. xiii. 21. I Peter v. 10; fitted, Rom. ix. 222; restore, Gal. vi. 1; framed, Heb. xi. 3; and perfectly joined together, in I Cor. i. 10; prepared, Heb. x. 5.

Ch 01.3 Faith (cometh) by hearing

In our last paper on this chapter we saw that the third verse was not a digression from the subject which the chapter had introduced, but it laid the foundation still deeper.

In verse 1 we have the definition of faith -- as to its nature.

In verse 2 we have fact that it was by the exhibition of such a faith as this that the elders obtained a good report. Having borne such witness themselves, they obtained witness from God, and thus became a great cloud of witnesses (ch. xii. 1) for our example and encouragement.

In verse 3 we are told that faith, in its nature, always has regard to the things which are not seen: and that those who exercise such a faith as this do not walk by sight; they do not judge by outward appearance, and they "understand" that the things we see do not happen from chance or from things of which the outward human eye takes cognisance.

But this to a certain extent is negative.

Before we pass on to the first example of these elders -- to the faith of Abel -- we must go deeper, and seek for some positive information as to the origin of "such a faith as this."

This is something beyond the definition of faith or its nature, characteristics, results, and manifestations.

Whence does it come?

To this question there is only one answer,

IT COMES FROM GOD

We read in Eph. ii. 8: "For by grace ye are saved through (i.e., by means of) faith: and this not of yourselves. [It is] God's gift; not of works, in order that not any one might boast."

This language is unmistakable, and will be thankfully received by those who do not stumble at the freeness of that grace (Matt. xi. 6).

If we go further, and seek to know how this gift comes from God, then we find the answer in Romans x.17, and here we have no verb. The A.V. and R.V. both supply the verb "cometh" in italics; and probably no better could be supplied.

The see the argument of the context of Romans x.17 we must go back to verse 13 ff.

"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe on Him of whom they have not

heard? And how shall they hear apart from one proclaiming? And how shall they preach if they be not sent? According as it standeth written, 'How seasonable [are] the feet of those announcing glad tidings of good things.'! [Isa. lii.7]. But not all obeyed the glad tidings. For Isaiah saith [ch. liii.1] 'Lord, who hath believed our report?' So then, faith [cometh] by hearing [the report], and the hearing [cometh] by means of the word of God."

Thus the manner in which faith cometh is graphically explained and illustrated. It believes that which comes from God. Hence it comes as "the gift of God."

In this seventeenth verse (of Rom. x.) there are three words which call for further notice.

The word rendered "hearing" is not the sense of hearing, or the act of hearing, but it is the matter which is heard. Hence in verse 16 it is rendered "report." "Who hath believed our report?" i.e., what they have heard from us.

The word is akoe. And what they had heard was concerning Christ, as is clear from the concluding words of the previous chapter (Isa. lii. 15). "That which they had not been told them shall they see (or perceive). And that which they had not heard shall they consider."

That which they had been "told" was about Christ,¹ and it came from God.

In Hab. iii. 2, we have the same word: "O Lord, I have heard Thy speech"; i.e., what Thou hast said. The Heb. is Thy hearing. (See margin).

In Gal. iii. 2., the Apostle asks, "Received ye the spirit? (i.e., the New nature) by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" i.e., by believing what ye heard from God through me (compare v. 5).

The next sentence tells us that, that which faith ("such a faith as this", Heb. xi. 2) believes cometh by hearing the "word of God".

The word rendered "word" here is not logos but rhema. This is important, and significant: for these words must be distinguished from each other.

The former means a word which is made up of letters; while the latter is an utterance which is made up of words. Hence it means saying, and includes the whole of what is spoken.²

Finally the word "by" in Rom. x.17 is not the same in both parts of the verse: "Faith [cometh] out of hearing." Here the word is ek, from or out of, denoting the source whence it comes. But when it says: "Hearing [cometh] by means of what God has said," the word is dia with the Genitive case, which denotes the cause, or instrumentality. We have no need to alter the translation so long as we understand and remember the significance of the two words, thus rendered "by".

From all this we learn that the faith that saves comes from God, because there can be no such faith at all apart from what He has spoken.

He is the first great cause of faith. Unless He had spoken there could have been no place for faith.

Now from Heb. i.1 we learn further that God has spoken "at sundry times and in divers manners." Or, according to the R.V., "by divers portions and in divers manners."

We may render the opening words of Hebrews thus: the Epistle begins: "In many parts and in many ways, of old, God, having spoken to the fathers by the prophets, at the end of these days He spoke by His Son."³

This statement finds its illustration and explanation in our chapter.

God spoke to Abel, to Enoch, to Moses's parents, to Rahab and others, of which speaking we have no historic record given. We know that He must have spoken, or there would have been nothing for them to believe.

Furthermore, what He spoke to each was not the same; God spoke of many matters, as well as at many times and in many parts, and many ways.

What God spoke to Noah He spoke not to Abraham. He did not tell Noah to get him out of his own country and go into another. Nor did He tell Abraham to prepare an ark.

God spoke on many subjects, and each one who heard His words, and believed what He said, exercised saving faith and pleased God. For "without faith it is impossible to please Him."

We all love to be believed in what we say; and there is no surer way of giving offence to others than by disbelieving their word.

Now had we been called to make a list of the elders of old who had "such a faith as this," it is certain that we should not have selected the names as given to us in this chapter. We should probably have left out some whose names are here given; and we should have included others which the Spirit of God has omitted.

Our list would differ, because our object in forming the list would not be the same as the Divine object.

God, in His infinite wisdom, has caused the Chronological order to coincide with the Experimental order.

The Chronological or Historical order in which these elders lived, coincides with the Experimental order in which they are presented to us, because that is the order in which we are to learn the great lessons thus set before us.

Abel's faith is put first, not merely because he lived before the others, but because he believed God as to the first great fundamental truth that comes before all others: peace with God; access to God; worship of God; and all this through the blood of an accepted substitute.

We will not anticipate what we have to say on this; but mention the great salient points which distinguish this first group of three.

Enoch's faith comes next, not because he lived (for other of the Patriarchs must have had "like precious faith"), but because we are to learn the experimental truth that "two cannot walk together except they be agreed" (Amos iii. 3); and that we walk with God unless we can worship Him. We must know what it is to have "peace with God" before we can enjoy "the peace of God." Hence Atonement comes before Communion. Worship comes before Walk.

Noah's faith comes next, not because no others after Enoch believed God, but because we are learn, experimentally, that we cannot witness for God, unless we know what it is to walk with God.

It was because of this great eternal principle that we read of the Lord Jesus, that "He ordained twelve that they should BE WITH HIM -- and -- that he might send them forth to preach" (Mark iii. 14).

None can be "sent forth" by Him till they have been "with Him." We must know what it is to walk with God, before we can witness for God.

Thus, this first group of three elders lays down for us these three eternal principles. They are "written for our learning."

In Abel we have faith's WORSHIP.

In Enoch we have faith's WALK.

In Noah we have faith's WITNESS.

This order cannot be reversed or changed without disaster. Many try to walk with God who do not know what it is to enjoy peace with God: hence they try to be saved by their walk, instead of by faith through God's grace. Many try to witness for God who do not know what it is to enjoy a "walk with God."

But all this is doing; and it ends in death.

It is works, and not grace.

It is sight, and not faith.

Let us learn these great lessons which lie at the threshold of Hebrews xi. so that we may better understand the examples and illustrations that are given.

Before we consider these we have to look at the second part of Romans x. 17.

We have learned that "faith [cometh] by hearing." We have yet to learn that hearing [cometh] by means of what God has spoken.

1 Hence the various reading in Rom. x. 17, which the Revisers have adopted, and hearing [cometh] by the word concerning Christ". This reading is support by Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregeller, and Alford.

2 See Luke i.38; ii.29; iii.2; v.5. John iii.34; v.47; vi.63,68. Acts v.20. II Peter iii.2.

3The Article not being necessary after the Preposition en, by.

Ch 01.4 Hearing (cometh) by the Word of God

In speaking of old times to the fathers by the prophets, God spoke in many parts and in many ways. He spoke in command, in warning, in exhortation, in reproach, in encouragement, in judgment, in prophecy, in promise, and in grace

Of those who heard, "some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not," some obeyed and some were disobedient.

God also spoke at many times and on many subjects: and the faith of each one who believed what He said was exercised in a different direction.

In the case of Enoch we are not told what God said to him. From the remote context, the last Epistle of the New Testament (Jude 14), it would seem that it was about the coming of the Lord with all His saints. Whatever it was, Enoch believed God; and from the still remoter context, the first book of the Old Testament, we learn that His faith in this blessed fact resulted in His walk with God (Gen. v.21).

In the case of Abraham, God spoke in command and in promise. The command was to leave his own country; and the promise was that he should have a son.

In the case of the parents of Moses, God must also have promised a son; and must have so described him, that, when the child was born, they knew that it corresponded with what God had said.

In this way each speaking of God was the occasion of hearing, the hearing of faith.

The responsibility of each was to believe what was heard. The record concerning Abraham "the father of the faithful" is that, "by the hearing of faith... Abraham believed God, and it was accounted (or, imputed) to him for righteousness" (Gal. iii.5,6).

This must be the experience of all true believers. They must "believe God," and not man. They must believe what God says and has said; and not the traditions of men.

To "believe God" is not necessarily to believe or rehearse a "Belief."

The popular question, "Do we believe?" is thus seen to be as absurd as it is meaningless.

If we answer this by asking, "Believe what? Believe whom?" the emptiness of the question is at once exposed.

These are the questions for us to-day.

"ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD."

Do we believe God?

God has told us that there is "no good thing" in man (Rom. vii.18). Pulpit, Platform and Press, with one voice declare that there is some good thing in man. Whom do we believe?

God has told us that He created the heavens and the earth and all that is therein (Gen. i., Isa. xlv.18). Man tells that it was all evolved, apart from God. Whom do we believe?

The Lord Jesus said "no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My

Father" (John vi.65). Man says every man can come. Whom do we believe?

The Lord Jesus said, "God is spirit: and they that worship Him MUST worship Him in spirit" (John iv.24). Man says that worship must be by "acts of worship" which the flesh can perform. Whom do we believe?

The Holy Spirit declares that "there is one Body" (Eph. iv.2-4). Man makes and insists of having many bodies. Whom do we believe?

The Holy Spirit gives the solemn charge by Paul. "Preach the word... for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine" (II Tim. iv.2,3). That time has come, and man says that "Preachers must find something that man will endure," and "must preach something other than 'the Word.'" "We can afford to pay for it, why should we not have it?" Whom do we believe?

God declares that these last times are "perilous times" when "evil men and deceivers shall wax worse and worse" (II Tim. iii.1,13). Man says the times were never more full of promise for good; and are getting better and better every year. Whom do we believe?

"The spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and teachings of demons" (I Tim. iv.1). Man, in these "latter times", tells us on every hand that these are not "spirits" (i.e. evil angels) or "demons," but the "departed spirits" of human beings and we are exhorted and invited on every hand to "give heed" to them. Whom do we believe?

God said to our first parents "ye shall surely die" (Gen. ii.16). The old serpent said "ye shall not surely die" (Gen. iii.4). And all his "ministers" today with one voice repeat that lie, and teach it as God's truth. Their creed is expressed for them in the words --

"There is no death,
What seems so is transition."

Whom do we believe?

The Prophetic word declares concerning the resurrection of "the rest of the dead" that they "lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (Rev. xx.5). Man declares they are alive all the time without any resurrection. Whom do we believe?

The Holy Spirit declares that this world is a dark place, and that, the prophetic word being the only light in it, we "do well that we take heed" to it (II Pet. i.19).

The vast majority of preachers declare that the prophetic word is the "dark place" and we do well to avoid it. Whom do we believe?

God declares that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (I John i.9). The majority of Christians, though they habitually say with their lips, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," yet refuse to believe God, and tell us that "no one can ever know that he is forgiven." Thus, they "make God a liar," and say, practically, "Lord, I am not going to believe what Thou sayest in I John i.9, until I have some evidence in my own feelings, that what Thou sayest is true!"

They thus believe their own feelings, but refuse to believe God's pledged Word.

Which are we believing?

These examples might well be extended, and other illustrations might be found (notably I John v.12). For, inasmuch as Isaiah lv.8 is true, and man's thoughts and ways are the opposite of God's, we may always ask: Whom do we believe?

This was the question for Israel at Kadesh-Barnea. Moses had told the people how God had said: "Go up and possess the land which I have given you, but ye rebelled against the commandment of the Lord, and ye believed him not, nor hearkened to his voice" (Deut. ix.13).

We seldom think of the awe-inspiring solemnity of the words: "So we see that they entered

not in be cause of unbelief" (Heb. iii.19).

God spoke to Israel and said: "Go up and possess the Land. Go up over the hill-country of the Amorites." It was a solemn moment; ever to be remembered.

"TO-DAY, IF YE WILL HEAR HIS VOICE"

They heard His voice that day. He said: "Go up. Enter into My rest. Yet, in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God" (Deut. i.32).

As those words of Psalm xcv. (called the Venite) are sung week by week (generally as rapidly as the words can be got out of the mouth), how few stop to think of the solemnity of their meaning! "Forty years long was I grieved with that generation!"

Yes! Forty years of wandering. And why? Because they believed the evil report of ten men, instead of two who witnessed to the truth of God's good report which HE HAD ALREADY GIVEN OF THAT LAND.

True, they did enter at last. After long years of wandering they crossed the Jordan on the East when they might have entered by the hill-country of the Amorites from the South 37½ years before!

And when Peter made the proclamation in Acts iii.19-21 and called on the nation to "Repent;" and gave God's promise that He would send Jesus Christ, and times of refreshing should come from the presence of the Lord; the people were at another Kadesh-Barnea! They were, again, face to face with another command, and promise of the Lord. And a way was open over (as it were) "the hill-country of the Amorites." This was the Parousia or Coming of the Lord, made known to faith in the first and earliest of all the Epistles of Paul, and made known by a special revelation in I Thess. iv.13--v.11.

This was something better than "the hill country of the Amorites," and it was far, far better than crossing by Jordan. For, this would have been a going up indeed! It was entering the heavenly Canaan without going through Jordan, "the grave and gate of death" to resurrection. This was a hope for those who were alive and remained.

That is why the Apostle could say: "WE, which are alive and remain": for, how was he to know but what the nation would Repent; and that he would really be among those who were alive, and would go up over the hill-country, yea, in the clouds of heaven, without dying, or crossing Jordan?

As I Thess. iv. was the Kadesh-Barnea of believers in that day, and Israel as a people did not thus "go up." So is Phil. iii.10,14,20,21, our Kadesh-Barnea "to-day, if we will hear His voice."

Thousands of Christians refuse to believe His voice. They agree in affirming that the only way of entering Canaan is by crossing the Jordan, the river of death. Some few of them go on to believe that it is by death and resurrection. But how few believe that "God has prepared some better thing for us."

In writing to the believers in Thessalonica in A.D. 52, while Peter's offer of the kingdom, made in Acts iii.19-21, was still before the nation, and before its formal withdrawal, in Acts xxviii.23-28, nothing could be added to the revelation then made in I Thess. iv.

But after that withdrawal of the offer from Israel, and the sending of the Salvation of God to the Gentiles, the question is, was any further revelation to be made? Had God exhausted the riches of His grace and of His glory? Had He nothing more to make known to His children?

May we not gather our answer to these questions from our Lord's words in John xvi.12, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

Why could the disciples not bear them at that time? Because He was still alive. The corn of wheat had not yet fallen into the ground and died (John xii.24). Because He had not yet risen again from the dead. On those facts rested important doctrines. Until therefore the events had taken place, those doctrines could not be made known.

Was it not even so in the case of I Thess. iv? Had not certain events to take place before any

fresh revelation of truth would be made known? Had not the formal withdrawal of Peter's offer to take place? and then, would not the way be open for further revelations to be made? Ought we not, reasoning from John xvi.12, to look for something fresh from the treasures of God's grace and glory? Surely we ought. And, if we do, we find that, when the Apostle was in prison in Rome, those revelations were given to him; secrets hidden from men for generations, and "hid in God," were made known: The great mystery or secret concerning Christ and the Church.

In that Roman Prison precious secrets were revealed for the Apostle's, and for our own comfort and faith and hope. And the question again arises:

DO WE BELIEVE GOD?

Shall we be like Israel at Kadesh-Barnea? Shall we believe God speaking through Paul as He spoke through Caleb and Joshua? Or shall we believe the majority, as Israel believed the majority of the spies?

Shall we say that when Paul wrote I Thess. iv. God had nothing fresh to reveal, in the face of the fact that up to that time we have not a breath of the mystery? Not a word as to the revelation and teaching given to us in Ephesians?

Did Paul himself know anything about it until he was inspired to inscribe it in his book and his parchments (II Tim. iv.13)?

Does not this tell us that the objects of our faith are WRITTEN DOWN in the Scriptures of truth, and not handed down by the traditions of men?

And did the Epistle to the Ephesians contain all that God had to reveal?

Is there nothing new in Philippians?

What is the resurrection and translation in Phil. iii.10, at which the Apostle so desired to arrive?

What is the "prize" of the "calling on high" (v. 14). The A.V. and R.V. have obscured this by translating it "high" as though it were an adjective; whereas it is an adverb, and should be rendered upward (as R.V. margin) or on high. Was not the Apostle's goal conformity to Christ in glory?

Is this the same as I Thess. iv? or, Is it something additional? The whole context seems to show that the Apostle was reaching forth to something set before him, and forgetting the things behind him. He did not reckon that he had laid hold of it; but he pressed toward the goal. He had not already reached it, but he was following on so that he might lay hold of that, for which he was himself laid hold of by Christ Jesus

If we read carefully verses 10-15, may we gather that we have some fresh revelation of glory hinted at? and, Is it because we have been trying to identify it with I Thess. iv. that the passage (Phil. iii.) has always been more or less of a difficulty with all of us?

If, then, Faith cometh by hearing, what God hath spoken, let us "to-day hear His voice," that we may enter into His rest.

Ch 02.1 The Two Ways of Access

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God Himself bearing witness to his gifts: and by it [i.e., by means of his faith which led to his martyrdom] he, having died, yet speaketh."

As "faith [cometh] by hearing " (Rom. x.17), Abel and Cain must both have heard what sacrifice they were to bring.

As hearing [cometh] by, and consists of, what we hear through the Word of God, Abel and Cain must both have heard from God.

Otherwise it would have been by fancy, and not by faith; and there would not have been room, either for obedience on the one hand, or for disobedience on the other.

We find further particulars on this matter in the history, as recorded in Gen.

iv.

But first we have to notice the place where the history is written.

In the first chapter of Genesis we have the creation of man.

In the second chapter we have man in communion with God.

In the third chapter we have the Fall of man; and, at the end (v.24), we see man driven out from the presence of the Lord God.

In the fourth chapter we have the way back made known. This is the first thing that is revealed after the Fall. It stands on the forefront of revelation. It is no mere fragment of Hebrew folk-lore to be dismissed as an "old-wives'-fable." But it takes its place here, in God's revelation, as being the first and earliest event, not only in Chronological or Historical order, but as being the first in Experimental order also. It is the first great lesson that is written down in the Scriptures of truth -- " for our learning."

God must have spoken (as we have said) to Cain and Abel, concerning the manner in which He would be approached. He must have spoken of the way in which those who had been driven out might return back, and have access to Himself.

The lesson which is taught us by this first example of faith is that, Abel believed that which he had heard from God on this all important subject, and Cain did not believe God.

It is worthy of remark that in the Historical order in Gen. iv.3,4, Cain is mentioned first, and in the Experimental order in Heb. xi.4, Abel is mentioned first.

Cain is mentioned first, in the history, for he was the elder. He brought his "offering unto the Lord." He was not godless, as is often represented. On the contrary he was most "religious," and the offering which he brought cost him much more than Abel's did. He sought access to the same Lord and looked for the same blessing as Abel did.

But the point is, that the way back which he took, was his own way: while the way which Abel took was God's way, which He had revealed and laid down.

Cain had heard the "report" as well as Abel, but he did not believe God. He invented what he must have supposed to be a better, or more excellent way.

"Cain brought of the fruit of the ground, an offering unto Jehovah " (Gen. iv.3). But, that ground the Lord God had just before put under the curse for man's sin, and had said to Adam "cursed is the ground for thy sake" (Gen. iii.17).

Cain, therefore, brought, as his offering to the Lord that which He had pronounced to be cursed."

Abel, on the contrary, brought of the firstlings¹ of his flock, and the fat thereof.

What was it that made Abel's a more excellent² sacrifice than Cain's?

Commentators have speculated much, and differed widely as to this. A variety of causes has been assigned.

But there is no room for more than one interpretation the moment we remember what the words "by faith" mean.

They mean that God had spoken; that Cain and A bel had heard; that Abel obeyed God and Cain did not!

The whole matter is perfectly simple. And the lesson it brings home to our hearts to-day is just as simple and clear.

It was a question, as we have seen, of believing what had been spoken as to

THE WAY BACK TO GOD

God's way back (which Abel took) was by sacrifice, by the death of a substitute, by the blood of Atonement.

Man's way back (which Cain invented) was "without blood"; and a way which he had devised out of his own heart. But, "without the shedding of blood is no remission of sin" (Heb. ix.22).

Cain might have brought his sin offering just as easily as Abel. It lay at his door (Gen. iv.7). (See R.V. margin); it was ready to his hand. If he "did well" he needed no sin-offering; and he would have been "accepted." If he did not well, and sinned, then God would have had respect to his offering as He had to Abel's.

No! it was the "New Theology" of his day: and it consisted in not believing what God had spoken; and in inventing a "New" way of his own.

In this lay his sin.

This is why God "had not respect" to his offering, however much Cain may have worked to produce it. The "sweat of his brow" could be no substitute for the "blood of the lamb."

In all this we are shown the great fact that there never have been but these "two ways" in the world's history.

However many and however various may be the religions of the world, all may be reduced to these two. Whatever may be the excrescences and excentricities of man's imagination, there is always this "reversion to type" (as Evolutionists say).

Here we have the typical embryo of all the subsequent "History of Religions."

Man may hold his "Parliament of Religions," but when all his talking is done, there is a reversion to type, and we come back to these two primal facts, and to these two ways.

One is God's way, the other is man's,
One is by faith, the other is by fancy,
One is of grace, the other is of merit,
One is of faith, the other is of works,
One is Christianity, the other is Religion.

The one rests on what God has said, the other rests on what man thinks.

The one rests on what Christ has done, the other rests on what man can do.

These two words sum up and embody the two ways -- "DONE" and "DO."

As to what man is to "do" there is no end to the variety. In no sphere is evolution seen to such a remarkable extent.

Evolution is a solemn fact, but it is seen only in human affairs, because man has departed from God.

Nowhere else is evolution seen. Outside human affairs the evidences of evolution are non-existent: but it is, undeniably, the order of this present evil world where evil is found; for evil, like evolution, is not found outside man's world. There is no escape for man but God's appointment for him, and that is death. This is why it is Christ's work to "deliver us from this present evil world" according to the will of God, our Father" (Gal. i.4).

Evolution consists in unbelief and in departure from God. Hence it is that we see its germ first exhibiting itself specially in the religious sphere of human affairs. In the Divine sphere, whether in the animal or vegetable kingdoms, we look in vain for any trace of its action.

We see it working in the medical, legal, military, naval, artistic, and in every department of the scientific spheres, but it is in the religious sphere that it was first seen; and it is in Genesis iv., in the history of Cain and Abel, that God shows us its beginning. Jabal and Jubal, and Tubal-Cain and a generation of artificers soon followed in "the way of Cain" (Gen. iv.20-22).

"The way of Cain" was the first step in the evolution of Religion. Its developments and ramifications are to-day innumerable.

But in the way of Abel there has never been any evolution. Substitution and the shedding of blood remain the only way for "the remission of sins" to this present moment; and will remain the same to the end.

These are the Two Ways which are set before us here in Cain and Abel.

In the one no change has ever taken place; it is the only way back to God. Christ suffered "the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God" (I Pet. iii.19) This is its end, and it is headed up in Christ. In the other, there has been nothing but change. Evolution has run its constant and persistent course, and will continue so to do until it reaches its end in the deification of man, and is headed up in Antichrist.

All who are in "the way of Cain" are labouring on behalf of man, and for man's improvement. They are ready with their own ideas as to what man must DO to be saved.

Whatever may be the varieties evolved from man's imagination they are all one in asserting that man MUST do something. Whatever their differences or their controversies, they all agree in that. Man must DO SOMETHING.

Man must be something, feel something, experience something, give something, pay something, produce something. He must be called and "registered" something³. He must DO something.

They all insist on the last, however they may differ about the others. Where they do differ is only in what the something is to be. It is this which accounts for the vast number of different systems of religion which have been evolved in the world's history. All these are rightly called Religions. Even the Christian Religion is only one of them; and has as many Sects and Divisions as any of the others.

However many may be these differing forms, they are all one in Doing, while in true Christianity they are all one in Christ only.

Christianity is of God; and consists in a Person -- Christ; Religion is of man, and is carried on for man, and in his interests. It consists of men's Forms, and Rites, and Ceremonies, Articles, Creeds, Confessions, Doctrines, and Traditions, Churches and Chapels, and Synagogues, Halls, and Rooms.

If your something does not agree with that of others, then be careful, or you may be killed, as Abel was, by one of these Cains. For there is nothing in the world so cruel as Religion.

It was Religion that murdered Abel. It was Religion that killed the Prophets, Crucified Christ⁴, and produced the noble army of Martyrs.

It was Religion and the strife of religious sects that delivered Jerusalem to the sword and power of Rome.

It was Religion that afterward wrested Jerusalem from Rome, and terrified Europe by the threatened advance of the Saracen's sword.

It was Religion that deluged the Holy Land with the blood of the Crusades.

It was the Religion of Pagan Rome that cried the Christians to the Lions.

It was the Religion of Papal Rome that gave Christians to the Stake; that invented all the tortures of the Inquisition; that sent forth Armadas with its instruments of torture, and has even since been engaged in foul Conspiracies, Plots, and Knavish Tricks in order to obtain and secure its ascendancy.

It is Religion to-day that lies at the root of, and pervades the world's political strife: and it is in the struggle for Religious supremacy in Rome Rule and Education that the greatest bitterness, envy, hatred and malice, and all uncharitableness, are manifested and exhibited in the political controversies in the present day.

The question of I John iii.11,12, brings out the contrast between Christian love and Religious

hate.

This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain [who was] of that Evil one, and slew his own brother. And on what account slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

Cain's works were evil, because they were his own, and of the Evil one, who (in the previous chapter) had ruined his parents by the same unbelief in God's words. Abel's works were righteous, because they were "by faith," and according to what God required.

Hence Cain's hatred, and hence Cain's murder.

It will be found that Religion has shed more blood, and produced more sorrow and crying than all the wars and desolations caused by the politics and dynasties of the world put together. There have been, and still are, the wars of Creeds, as well as of Races.

There is more in the Margin of Gen. iv.10, than appears on the surface. The words of the Lord to Cain are full of significance: "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's bloods crieth unto me from the ground." We must need explain this plural, "bloods."

In the ancient Jewish Commentary [The Mishna. Sanhedr. Cap. iv.,5.] we read: "He says not blood, but thy brother's bloods, i.e., his blood, and the blood of his posterities, his seeds."

The Targum of Onkelos explains it as "the voice of the blood of the generations which were to come from thy brother."

The Jerusalem Targum says "the voice of the blood of the multitude of the righteous who were to arise from Abel thy brother."

It seems, almost, as though the Lord Jesus meant the same when He said: "That upon you might come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias."

Whether these interpretations be correct or not, the fact remains most solemnly true that all these various Religions are one, in origin, in character, and outcome, and also in cruelty.

In the vital matter of Salvation they unite, and are ONE, in saying with one voice: -- SOMETHING in my hand I bring.

Whereas, in true Christianity, which is Christ, the convicted sinner proclaims the existence of the great dividing gulf, and says: --

"NOTHING in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling."

This puts nothing between the sinner and the Saviour; whereas it is the essence of all Religions to put something, whether it be a Priest, or Sacraments or Creeds, or Ceremonies of some kind or other. Something has to be said, or done, or believed, or felt, without which, they, as one Creed puts it, "Cannot be saved."

This is the first great lesson which we learn from Abel's faith: -- "The Two Ways of Access."

In one of those two ways, each one who reads these lines, stands, to-day.

Either he is trusting to something instead of Christ, or to something in addition to Christ; or, he is trusting wholly in the merits of that Substitute whom God has provided, even the precious blood of that Lamb which "speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. xii.24).

Footnotes:

1 This was the law of redemption, which was afterwards laid down in the Israel's legislation. See Exod. xiii.12; xxxiv. 18-20. Num. iii.46,47; xviii. 15,16, etc.

2 See Heb. iii.3, and compare Matt. v.20; vi.25; xii. 41,42. Mark xii.33; Luke xi.31,32; xii.23.

3 This is according to English Civil Law, and it is carried out except when a census is made. Then, Religious enmity and hatred step in, and will not allow it lest it should be shown that one predominated over the other. Without a census, each may make its own boast.

4 It was not the ungodly rabble, but the Chief Priests and the leaders of the religious party.

Ch 02.2 The Two Ways of Worship

The Faith of Abel shows that, beside the Two Ways of Access to God, there are Two Ways in the Worship of God.

Both are "by Faith;" In both, we see that faith cometh by hearing, and the hearing cometh from what God hath spoken.

As there are only Two Ways of Access, one the true way, and the other the false way, with many varieties, so there are only Two Ways of Worship; and the False way with as many varieties and differences, each claiming to be the right way.

It is as important for us therefore to learn the true Way of Worship, taught us by this aspect of Abel's Faith, as it was to learn the lesson of the True Way of Access; especially in the present day when Ritual occupies such a large place in public opinion, and in the conflicts and controversies which rage between the opposing Religions, and clamouring Sects.

In both cases, believing, or not believing what God has spoken lies at the foundation of all.

As to the only way of Access, and the only offering that was to be brought, the command of God must have been the same for Abel and Cain then, as it was for Israel afterward when the law was put into writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the pen of Moses. The Book of Leviticus (which is the book of worship) opens with the words, which give it its name in the Hebrew Canon.

"AND JEHOVAH CALLED

and spake unto Moses out of the Tabernacle of the Congregation saying, Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them, IF ANY MAN of you bring an OFFERING UNTO JEHOVAH ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd and of the flock."

Observe, that the command was not that they should bring an offering, but that, if any man brought one, the command was as to what he should bring.

This agrees with, and explains Jer. vii.22-24: "I spake not unto your fathers nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices;

"But this thing commanded I them, saying

OBEY MY VOICE

and I will be your God, and ye shall be my People, and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But

THEY HEARKENED NOT

nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward."

This is precisely what took place at the gates of Eden. There the Lord God spoke. Cain and Abel heard. Abel believed what he heard. Cain (like Israel afterward) hearkened not nor inclined his ear, but walked in the counsel and imagination of his own evil heart. This is the essence of the whole matter.

God spoke. He spoke to Israel "out of the Tabernacle," to all who would approach Him there; and laid down, as He had a right to do, how He would be worshipped.

It is the same principle which prevails to day.

Man himself acts on this principle. If any seek him it is he who appoints the time and place and determines as to when and where he will be seen.

So, God laid it down from the first that, if any man would bring an offering to Him, it must be such and such an one, and it must be offered in such and such a way.

"And He (the offerer) shall put his hand upon the burnt offering; and IT SHALL BE ACCEPTED FOR HIM to make atonement for him" (Lev. i.4).

But Cain hearkened not to the voice of God; and, instead of bringing what God had appointed, he brought an offering out of "the counsel and imagination" of his own evil heart (Jer. vii.24).

And, not only so. Not only was it something, other than what God had approved, but it was the product of that which God had laid under a curse: "cursed be the ground for thy sake" (Gen. iii.17).

So that there was a double affront in Cain's offering and being not "of faith," it was "sin" (Rom. xiv.23).

Hence, it standeth written:

"Jehovah had respect
Unto Abel and his offering;
But unto Cain and his offering
He had not respect."

And to-day, the Question comes to us: --

To what will Jehovah have respect?
What offering will He accept?

Not the blood of bulls and goats; for all these types have been fulfilled in the antitype. Now, Christ's blood is that which speaketh better things than that of Abel; no one can be accepted but through its merits.

And as to worship: What is it that Jehovah now accepts? What voice do we hear coming from Him who tabernacled among men? What does the voice say which we are to obey? What are the words to which we are to hearken?

They come from the true Tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. And God, who in times past spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by HIS SON: and the Son hath said:

"God is spirit
and they that worship Him
MUST
worship Him in spirit
and in truth."

These are the words to which we are to hearken, as written down for us from the lips of the Son, in the Scriptures of Truth.

We have no liberty; no choice in this matter. It is useless to follow the counsels and imaginations of our own hearts. That one short word "MUST" settles everything.

It tells us that God will not "have respect" to anything but what is spiritual in our worship of Himself.

The SON, who hath spoken from heaven, has declared that "the flesh profiteth nothing" (John vi.63).

It is useless therefore for us to bring unto the Lord anything that is of the flesh; or anything

that the flesh can do.

It must all be "spirit"!

The flesh is under the curse. "The mind of the flesh is death" (Rom. viii.6).

To bring anything, therefore, of the flesh, or that the flesh can do, is to be exactly like Cain, when he brought the fruit of the ground, of which God had said: "cursed be the ground."

All the senses are of the flesh. The mind of the flesh is sensual.

"The works of the flesh" are the opposite of "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. v.19-25).

"They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with its affections and desires."

Acceptable worship therefore, MUST be the "fruit of the Spirit" and not "the fruit of the ground": or in other words, not the works of that flesh, which is under the curse.

We cannot worship God, Who is spirit, with our eyes, by gazing on a sacrament or anything else.

We cannot worship God, Who is spirit, with our ears, by listening to music, however beautiful it may be, or whether "rendered" by ourselves or others.

We cannot worship God, Who is spirit, with our noses, by smelling incense, or anything else.

We cannot worship God, Who is spirit, with our throats by singing hymns or Anthems, Solos, Quartets, or Choruses.

The only singing that goes beyond the ceiling or roof and enters heaven "MUST" be of the spirit, and from the heart. The command is "singing and making melody

IN YOUR HEART

to the Lord."

Singing, not to one another, not to an audience, not to a congregation, but "TO THE LORD."

What is needed in true worship is not "an ear for music," but a heart for music.

If we are "filled BY the Spirit," our singing will be of the Spirit, from the heart. For "that which is born (or produced) by the Spirit, is spirit." (John iii.6).

We shall say with Mary,

"My SOUL doth magnify the Lord

My SPIRIT hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

Nothing short of this is the worship to which God will have respect.

All else is waste of time, waste of trouble, waste of money, waste of strength, waste of breath; and,

"IT PROFITETH NOTHING"

It is useless for any one to say "I like such and such a service." "I like to hear, or to do, this or that." "It creates such nice feelings in me." Or, "I dislike this or that in Divine Service."

It matters nothing whatever what any one may like or dislike, think, or feel. It is not a question of what I may like or dislike: The question is

WHAT does GOD LIKE?

What does God require?

To what will God "HAVE RESPECT"?

Divine Service is supposed to be, on the face of it, service or worship rendered to God.

It is for Him to say therefore what He desires.

Public worship is not a Service offered to or for the public, but by the public, for or to God.

It does not matter, therefore, how beautifully a Solo, or an Anthem or a Hymn may be "rendered" (that is the correct expression); but it does matter whether God will "have respect" to it.

It does not matter how beautiful the voice may be to which we hearken, but it does matter whether we hearken to God's voice, and whether we obey HIS voice.

The SON of God hath spoken (John iv.24). We have heard His words.

The one question is Do we believe Him? Do we remember that "whatsoever is not of faith, is sin" (Rom. xiv.23).

WILL WE OBEY?

Will we worship "by faith," as Abel did? or will we worship by works as Cain did?

Do we desire to obtain God's approval with Abel? or, do we desire to hear God's words to Cain "cursed art thou from the earth" (Gen. iv.11).

When Cain saw that God "had not respect" to his offering, he was "very wroth." And there will be many who read these words, who will be also "very wroth "; and wroth with us for writing them.

For this cuts at the root all man's accepted traditions, his cherished practices, and his boasted capabilities .

It cuts off from him the praise and applause of man. It writes folly on his vain counsels and imaginations. It makes an end of his attainments and ambitions.

He may, and doubtless will, go on in "the way of Cain," just the same. But it all counts for nothing. "It profiteth nothing." It is "labour in vain."

God has no respect to it.

It would be folly for us to dwell on the faith of Abel, without seeking to learn this great lesson which is thus "written for our learning" and stands on the very forefront of God's revelation, in Gen. iv.

If we learn not the "obedience of faith" in this matter, it is vain for us to go further with our studies of this subject of Faith. For it all turns on this:

DO WE BELIEVE GOD?

He hath "in these last days spoken unto us by His Son."

His Son hath said: "They that worship Him MUST worship Him truly in spirit."

Do we believe what He has said?

This is the one final question, the true answer to which does away with all that passes as "current money with the Ishmaelite merchantmen," who make a gain out of so-called, "public worship," to day, just as the Ephesian silversmiths made theirs out of the shrines of their goddess Diana.

It puts an end to all the tricks and contrivances of the Christian "Religion," all the new fashions, and modern methods, bands and songs and solos, and orchestral services, cantatas, which are all to do with the "Flesh," and are all for the praise and glory of the choir; and no longer, as the simple worship of our fathers was -- "to the praise and glory of God."

This is the lesson of Abel's faith, as it touches on the one and only true way in the worship of God.

Ch 02.3 Abel's Faith: The Witness God Bore

By which [faith] he obtained witness that he was righteous, God bearing witness to his offering" (Heb. xi. 4).

Here we have two statements in one, for it is the same verb in each clause. The A.V. renders the first "witness" and the second "testimony."

The R.V. renders it: " Through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous,

God bearing witness in respect of his gifts." On this, there is a marginal note: "over his gifts. The Greek Text in this clause is somewhat uncertain."

The uncertainty referred to is about the word God": as to whether it should be the Genitive case, or the Dative: i.e., whether it should be as it stands in both Versions, or whether it should be bearing witness by his gifts to God." (Lachmann, & Tregelles).

But the scope of both the clauses is the same. It is the witness that Abel obtained and that God gave. God gave it... not Abel obtained it by."

In other words, Abel obtained the witness, because God gave it. He received what God gave.

How this was done is not explained in the history of Gen. iv. There, the whole act is condensed and summed up in the words "God had respect to" his offering: but we are not told how God manifested this respect.

It must have been shown in such a way that there could be no mistake about it; and that Cain could just as evidently see it, as Abel; and knew that the opposite was true in his case; and that to his offering, which he brought, God "had not respect."

It is the word upon (which the R.V. margin renders over), which gives us the key to the solution, by reminding us of the subsequent fact revealed in connection with all Sacrifices: viz., that those which God accepted were never consumed by fire emanating from this earth, or kindled by fire made with hands"; but by God-made fire descending from heaven.

In Gen. xv., 17, Abram, in his deep sleep, saw a smoking furnace; which, beside being typical of Israel's affliction in the "iron furnace" of Egypt, was doubtless the material agency by which the sacrifices, which Abram had so carefully prepared and arranged, were consumed.

In Gen. xxii., 6,7, when Abram "took the fire in his hand" we have the Figure Metonymy, by which the fire" is put for that which would set light to the wood which was consumed; as when we say we light the fire" we do not light the fire but we set fire to the wood. If the fire is literal then the "hand" is literal, and Abraham took the fire in his natural hand": which is absurd.

In Lev. ix., 24, on the occasion of the first formal offering on the Altar of burnt-offering, we read: "There came a fire out from before the Lord,¹ and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering, and the fat, which when all the people saw, they fell on their faces."

When Gideon prepared his offering in Ophra "the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up a fire out of the rock and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes" (Judg. vi., 21).

This was no fire kindled by Gideon, or "made with hands" of man. It was supernatural fire produced by the miracle wrought by Jehovah's messenger, to show that He had accepted Gideon's offering.

When Manoah made his offering and offered it upon a rock unto the Lord, the angel did wondrously, and Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground" (Judg. xiii; 19, 20).

Here again was miraculous fire from the Lord, consuming and accepting their offering. It was no fire kindled by human hands.

When David offered his offering on the altar which he built on the site purchased from Ornan the Jebusite, The Lord answered him by fire upon the altar of burnt offering" (I Chron. xxi., 26).

At the dedication of the Temple, when Solomon had ended his prayer, we read that the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house... and when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down,

and the glory of the Lord upon the house, that they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground, upon the pavement, and worshipped (2 Chron. vii., 1-3).

When Elijah would offer a sacrifice away from the Temple where Jehovah had caused His name to be placed, and where the fire which had fallen from heaven was kept continually burning,² fire had to fall from heaven specially for the occasion. After the prophets of Baal had in vain tried to produce the phenomenon by appeals to their god, and after Elijah had soaked the wood and the offering with water we read: "Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces, and said: The Lord, He is the God; The Lord, He is the God" (I Kings xviii., 38, 39).

Add to all these examples the words of Psalm xx, 3, "The Lord remember all thy offerings and accept thy burnt sacrifice." Here, in the margin of the A.V. we read, against the word "accept," that the Hebrew means "turn to ashes."

Why? Because this was always the way that Jehovah did accept offerings made to Him. By "fire from heaven" He turned them to ashes, and thus showed that He had "respect" unto them, and accepted them as the substitute of him who offered them.

How else did Abel "obtain witness that he was righteous"?

How else did God testify of his gifts?

How else did Cain know that God "had not respect unto his offering"?

Surely there can be no doubt whatever as to the force of the word upon, for it was the fire that descended upon the sinner's substitute instead of upon the sinner; upon Abel's lamb instead of upon Abel.

Thus the doctrine of substitution was the very first doctrine taught to mankind; the first that is recorded in the Scriptures of truth; the first with regard to which man was required to believe what he had heard from God.

God had spoken. What he had said may be summed up in the words afterwards recited to Israel, "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. ix., 22). "It is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul" (Lev. xvii., 11). "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. vi., 23).

This was the pronouncement for the sinner in Gen. iii., 17. And it is in Gen. iv. that we have the further revelation that God provided a substitute whose death He would accept in the sinner's stead.

That is why the acceptance must be God's own act.

All that the sinner could do was in faith to bring his offering and lay his hand upon it and confess it as his substitute. (Lev. i, 4.) It was for God to give His testimony that He had accepted it.

It is even so to-day.

It is ignorance of this great first lesson that is the source of much of the quite modern evangelistic phraseology of the present day.

Man's conventional talk of this twentieth century (of the present era) is about the sinner's acceptance of Christ. God's Word, for nearly sixty centuries has been about the sinner believing what He had said.

God has spoken. He has told us that He cannot and will not accept the fallen sons of men in their sins. In ourselves we are not only ruined sinners because of what we have done, or not done; but we are ruined creatures because of what we ARE. The question is, Do we believe God as to this solemn fact?

What God accepted was Abel's "gifts" (Heb. xi. 4); Abel was accepted only in his gifts (Gen. iv. 4).

So, God has told us that He can accept us, as such, only in the merits and Person of that perfect Substitute -- His Christ -- whom He has provided. Do we believe Him as to this?

If we do we shall by faith lay our hand on Him, confess our belief in God as to our own lost and ruined nature, and as to Christ as God's provided Salvation; knowing that, by this faith, God pronounces us righteous, accepts us in the person of our Substitute; and declares us as accepted in the Beloved," because God accepted His one offering when He raised Him from the dead.

Christ's resurrection is the proof and evidence that God has accepted Christ. Christ risen is the sinner's receipt which God has given to show that He has accepted Christ's payment of the sinner's debt.

There is no other receipt.

Christ's blood is not the receipt. That is the payment.

The sinner's faith is not the receipt. It is no use for a man to go to his creditor and say he believes he has paid what he owes. He must produce the receipt.

What is the receipt which we can produce to God which will prove that our debt is paid?

Nothing but the blessed fact that God's Word assures us that He has accepted payment on our behalf in the person of our Substitute, when He raised Christ from the dead.

We are to believe what He says when He assures us of this, and He is pleased to accept us in Him.

It is always the Creditor who accepts the payment which the debtor makes. And, when payment has been once accepted, no further demand can be made upon the debtor.

This is how Abel was accepted; and this is how the sinner is saved to this day.

By the same faith in what God has said, we lay our hand on that Lamb of God as our substitute; and we obtain God's witness that we are righteous. God bears His testimony to this in that He raised Christ from the dead, and has accepted the believing sinner IN HIM.

It is not a question of whether the sinner accepts Christ, but whether he believes God when he says that He has accepted Christ.

It may be said that, the same thing is meant, in modern phraseology; then, Why not say so? Why not keep to Scripture language? Why alter it? Why make it all to stand on what man can DO, instead of believing what God has SAID. Why make it all turn on man's accepting, instead of man's believing?

God has shut up the sinner as to the uselessness of his bringing any thing of his own by way of merit.

It is useless for him to bring or plead any substitute other than that one whom God hath appointed. It would be the same as saying it is not necessary.

It is useless to bring anything in addition thereto, for it would be the same as saying that it is not sufficient.

In either case it would be a proof that God's command had been unheeded; that His word had not been believed; and that His provision had been slighted and rejected.

All are to-day either in Abel's way, or Cain's: in God's way, or man's.

All are trusting either to that Substitute whom God has provided, or they are labouring to provide one for themselves.

This is why such stress is laid on this matter of faith, in Rom. x. "The righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise... But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thine heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach [is nigh thee]: that, if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus [as thy Substitute] and shalt believe in thine heart that GOD HATH RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD thou shalt be saved."

Thus it is that "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing [cometh] by the Word of God" (Rom. x., 6-11, 17)

But instead of believing the report of what God has said, sinners are taught to-day to believe

in what they can do. As though they were the Creditor, and would fain make God their Debtor!

And all this, because they do not see or understand that all is of God"; and all is of
GOD'S FREE GRACE

There is no merit in faith, of itself. It is not considered as merit among men, when one man believes what another man has said. How then can there be any merit in believing what God has said? It is our first bounden duty, without which all is "sin."

But, instead of this, the sinner tries to make God believe in him; and that it is possible for him to DO SOMETHING.

In his blind ignorance he practically tells God that he, the sinner, is pleased to accept the payment which Christ has made to God!

But all this is only salvation "by works" in its most subtle form. So subtle that thousands are misled on the very threshold of their way back to God.

Hence it is that while the multitude are still taught to do something, many would shrink from doing certain things as "works"; and would be ready to confess, and say: "not the labour of my hands." Yet they do not see that this acceptance of Christ is a work, after all: when it is thus put in the place of believing God.

True, it is "not the labour of my hands." Nothing "made with hands" can obtain a footing in God's new creation, where "all things are of God": for new creation ground is the ground of resurrection.

Though they would shrink from making a god with their hands, they make their god out of their own heads, and out of the imagination of their own hearts.

But "the God of our Salvation" is the God who hath spoken unto us by His Son, and left to us the simple duty of pointing the sinner to what He hath said.

This is why we are to "Preach the Word." This is the first great lesson of Holy Writ.

It is the oldest lesson in the world.

And, it is to show us that to believe God in this matter of substitution is the only way of salvation, the only way for man to be just with God; for "The just, by faith, shall live."

Footnotes:

1Compare chap. x., where Nadab and Abihu used, not this fire from the brazen altar to kindle the incense in their censers, but took other fire: i.e., emanating from this earth, or kindled by man's hand. This was called "strange fire," and the consequence was that, "there went out a fire from the Lord and devoured them and they died before the Lord (Lev. x., 2).

When we reflect that the incense of worship on the golden altar must be kindled with fire taken from the brazen altar of atonement we can understand the sin of offering in worship to-day the "strange fire" of that which is produced by the flesh, and not by the Spirit of God."

2It is in imitation of this that the Church of Rome pretends to keep the perpetual light before their altars, in spite of the fact that it is kindled by man's hands and consumes nothing but their own pretensions.

Ch 02.4 Abel's Faith: The Witness Abel Obtained

Though rendered "obtained witness" and "testifying," the verb is the same in both clauses.

"By means of which [faith] he was borne witness to as being righteous; God bearing witness to His gifts."

We have spoken of the witness which God gave; we have now to speak of the witness that

Abel obtained: viz., that he was righteous.

We have already emphasised the fact that both Abel and Cain had heard what God had spoken, as to what both men were, by nature, in His sight. Both were exactly the same; both were equally begotten by Adam "in his own likeness" (Gen. v. 3).

They were "sons of men" and not (as Adam had been) sons of God: that is to say, sons of Adam, and Eve, as fallen. There was "no difference" (Rom. iii. 21).

It is true that Adam had stood in a different category. He had been created (not begotten) in "the likeness of Elohim;" and created in Paradise: but these had both alike been begotten in Adam's own likeness; and were begotten outside Paradise.

From this point therefore our object-lesson begins. This is why it is the first great lesson set before us. This is why it stands on the forefront of God's revelation.

There had been "some good thing" in Adam, though he was human. But there was "no good thing" in Cain, or Abel. "That which is begotten of the flesh IS (and remains) flesh." And even Paul in later days had to learn the all-important lesson, and confessed "I know (as a solemn reality¹) that there does not² (as a matter of fact) dwell in me, that is, in my flesh, good" (or with A.V. "any good thing").

Thus, boldly and plainly is man's gospel of humanity, and the "Divine immanence" in man, set aside as having no part or place in God's sight.

All who are born in the fallen likeness of our first fallen parents, are born with "no good thing abiding in them."

It is not a question here, or indeed elsewhere, about what man has done. It is wholly and altogether a question only of what man IS.

The most ungodly man that ever lived will regret, and repent, and be very sorry for many things he has done, or left undone. The vast majority, to-day, will own that they are sinners.

But, this is only a very small part of the whole matter; so small as to be hardly a part at all.

It is an ancient Pagan confession to say "humanum est errare," "it is human to err." It is equally human to regret it.

But, here, it is a question NOT of what man had done. Very probably both Cain and Abel had sinned, but it was a question of what they WERE, by nature.

As it was with Isaiah, when he saw himself in the presence of God, and in the presence of all that was thrice "Holy"; so it will ever be with all who thus become acquainted with the true character of their human nature. Isaiah's words were

"I AM

undone." It was not like our "general confession": "We have left undone those things we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done."

There may be all this and more; but there is something behind, and something beneath, and something far beyond all this, and that is:

"THERE IS NO HEALTH IN US."

This is the confession that, we are not only lost sinners; but that we are fallen creatures.

We are not only "sons of men," begotten by Adam, but we are born of Eve. She it was who was in the Transgression. Adam was not (I Tim. ii. 13, 14).

So that we are doubly ruined: ruined sinners, and ruined creatures. Ruined, not because of what we have DONE, but because of what we ARE.

If we had never done anything, good, bad, or indifferent, we should still have no right to re-enter the garden, or to go into the presence of God. We should have no "right to the tree of life," but should be subject to death. We should still need at least a forensic righteousness: that is to say, we should need to be acquitted; to be pronounced "not guilty;" and to be put into a position where our sins would not be imputed to us (Ps. xxxii. 1, 2).

But this is, surely, very different from having a Divine righteousness imputed to us!
The one is negative, and the other is positive.

What we have to ask is: Was the righteousness of Abel the same as that of Abraham's? We read that Lot was "a righteous man" (I Pet. ii. 7, 8), and yet he is not included in this chapter.

Abraham himself, from the time of his call in Gen xii., was surely, as righteous as Lot who left him and went toward Sodom. Surely he was, like Abel, forensically, that is, judicially acquitted. In Gen. xiii. God made him further promises, and in Gen. xiv. God had been with him, prospered him, and sent Melchisedek to bless him. But it is not till Gen. xv., that we read of a very different righteousness, which was imputed to him.

This was no mere negative blessing of non imputation of sin. It was no mere pronouncement of "not guilty," but it was the positive reckoning to Abraham, as actually having righteousness imputed to him.

It was on the occasion of God making a further promise of a son, in his old age, and under very special circumstances which were all contrary not only to reason, or to sight, but to all the laws of nature.

THEN, it is written, "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness." What this meant for Abraham in the way of blessing in God's sight we are not told. But it must have been a distinct advance in Divine favour; and it accounts for much that we read of Abraham which we do not find in the case of others who are mentioned in this chapter.

This positive reckoning of righteousness is revealed only in connection with Christ in the Gospel. This is why Paul announces his readiness to preach this good news in Rome.

For this readiness to announce this good news he adduces four reasons: each introduced by the word for:

1. FOR I am not ashamed of the Gospel.
2. FOR this reason: It is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes God.
3. FOR this further reason: viz, that in this Gospel a righteousness is revealed "from faith to faith": i.e., God has made fresh revelations for the objects of man's faith; and has revealed how man may not only be acquitted but justified.
4. FOR, the conclusive reason which constitutes this as being such good news: that, not only is a righteousness from God revealed, but wrath from God is revealed also, from which this gospel brings the good news of complete deliverance.

This is a righteousness revealed in the Gospel. It is more than a forensic righteousness. It is something given and received by imputation on the principle of faith. And it is this righteousness, which is imputed to believers now. It is not God's attribute of righteousness; nor is it His acting in conformity with that attribute; but, it is something which He imputes or reckons to the believer. In other words, it is imputed righteousness.

In Rom. iii. 25, 26, we find both aspects of the word righteousness, with reference (1) to the time past (in the Old Testament), and (2) now "at this time" (in the Gospel).

(1). As to the time past, God was acting righteously in passing over sins, in His forbearing grace, i.e., in judicially acquitting those who believed Him when He spoke at sundry times and in divers manners."

(2). As to the present, "at this time." He declares that He is equally just in justifying: i.e., in actually imputing righteousness to him who believeth in Jesus;" who believeth what He has made known about the Saviour.

Hence in 2 Cor. v. 21, we advance to a further revelation, viz., that those who believe God now in what He has revealed of Christ are made Divinely righteous in Him.

Therefore to believe God in what He says now, in His Gospel, concerning His Son, is not only to be saved from wrath by His power, not only to be acquitted as "not guilty" but to be accounted as positively righteous, by His grace.

Romans iv. is therefore a distinct advance in the argument and treats of this imputed righteousness.

But all is by faith; i.e., by believing what God has revealed.

Abel believed God, and he was judicially acquitted. God bore witness to his gifts by accepting the death of the substituted lamb, instead of the death which Abel deserved as a sinner. Hence Abel was righteous; and stood judicially acquitted before God.

But this brings us to a further question, as interesting as it is important. Why is this righteousness, whether forensic or imputed, all made to depend on our believing what God says? Why was not some other condition laid down by God? Out of all the many things which God might have required of man, why is "faith" singled out as the one and only ground of justification, and this, for all time, from that day till now? Is not this question worth asking?

From Gen. iv. we see the condition in action; and in the Epistle to the Romans we see it stated and defined. Moreover a reason is given that "it is of faith that it might be by grace," but nowhere is any explanation given as to why it should be so, and why faith should be the reason why man should be either judicially acquitted of his sin; or why Divine righteousness should be imputed and reckoned to him.

THE EXPLANATION

is not given in so many words; but it is placed very clearly before us on the opening pages of the second, third and fourth chapters of Genesis.

Faith is made the condition, because unbelief was the cause of Man's Fall, of Sin's entrance, and of Death's appointment for man.

This lies on the surface of the history.

Eve fell by not believing what God had said. She tampered with the words which God had spoken.

She dealt with those words in the only three ways in which man can deal deceitfully with them.

(1) She omitted the word "freely" in Gen. iii. 1. (See Gen ii, 16).

(2) She added the sentence "neither shall ye touch it" in Gen iii. 3. (See Gen. ii. 17).

(3) She altered the certainty "thou shalt surely die," (Gen. ii. 17), into the contingency "lest ye die" (Gen. iii. 3).

Satan's two assurances,

"Ye shall not surely die,"

"Ye shall be as God,"

were believed; and God's words, having been omitted, added to and altered, were in the end not believed.

Thus, by believing Satan's words, was sin brought into the world, "and death by sin." Hence, only by believing God, can man regain life, and sin be put away.

(1) Only by believing God in what He has thus revealed about man himself, can the sinner be acquitted, and pronounced "not guilty," and, in this sense (forensically) righteous.

(2) Only by believing God in what He has revealed concerning Christ, can man be reckoned as being actually righteous, in Christ, and as having a divine righteousness actually imputed to him.

This is

THE REASON WHY

believing what God says is made to be one necessary condition of justification.

Man MUST BELIEVE GOD in what He says in His Word; and he must believe ALL that God says.

In what sharp contrast does this set all that goes to make up religion! Religion occupies man entirely with himself: with what he has done, with what he can do, and with what he must do. God would occupy man with HIMSELF, and with what He has said.

This it is which gives its character to all "religion" in the present day; "Man's Day." Man is exalted, and God set aside. Man's doings are substituted for man's believing. This is why, on all hands, man's words are substituted for God's words. And as the importance of man's works increases in his estimation, so God's Word decreases.

This is why, in the religious world the two great questions which occupy man are: (1) what he must do to be righteous, and (2) what he must do to be holy. It is all "DOING," from first to last, instead of believing God.

But the modern, social gospel of humanity is the gospel of the Old Serpent. It is based on faith indeed; but it is faith in the devil's two lies

"Ye shall be as God"

"Ye shall not surely die."

So subtle is the poison of the Old Serpent, that not only does man, to day, in this his "new theology" not believe God's words; but he does not believe in God's Word. This is why he puts forth his utmost efforts to get rid of all that is supernatural in the Scriptures of truth.

Here God steps in with His irreversible decree. He lays down the one indispensable condition on which He will ever have any respect to man's doings: or alter His sentence of death on account of man's own self-undoing.

MAN MUST BELIEVE GOD

Here, in Abel's faith, we have the Way back to God's favour unalterably laid down at the fountain-head of God's revelation of Himself, and of humanity.

The only way of access to God is "by faith," i.e, by believing what He has said.

Whosoever does that; and takes that first simple step, stands judicially acquitted, as Abel stood.

Whosoever believes what God has further promised, in, by, and through Christ, "his faith is counted (reckoned, and imputed) to him for righteousness," as it was to Abraham. "Now, it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but FOR US ALSO, to whom it shall be imputed if we believe in Him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered on account of our offences, and raised on account of our justifying " (Rom. iv. 22-25).

Abraham and David believed God concerning His promises in Christ. Hence it is written that righteousness was imputed to them (Gen. xv. 6 and Rom. iv. 3); Ps. xxxii. 2 and Rom. iv. 6). God preached, before, the Gospel unto Abraham (Gal. iii. 8), David spake of Christ (Acts ii. 31); and both believed God.

DO WE?

Do we believe what God has said about ourselves as ruined creatures; and, are we thus pronounced righteous being judicially acquitted?

And, do we go on to believe all that God has said about His promises in Christ, as risen from the dead? and are we thus justified on that account, our faith being reckoned to us for righteousness, yea, a Divine righteousness which is imputed and reckoned to us, so that we are made Divinely righteous in Christ?

These are the questions which are solved by the consideration of Abel's faith. It leads us on from "non-imputation of sin," to the imputation of righteousness.

It takes us beyond the doctrine of substitution; beyond the sacrifice of an animal for man's sin; and leads the sinner, into the far higher doctrine of his identification, as a saint with

Christ.

The one remaining question is: Do we go on "from faith to faith"? (Rom. i. 16, 17).

Abraham went on. In Gen. xii., xiii, and xiv. he believed God in many things about himself. But in Gen. xv. he went on from faith to faith. He believed God, in another thing: viz., about the promised Seed! It was this faith that was imputed to him for righteousness. Do we thus go on to believe God?

We may believe what He has revealed of Christ in Romans, Corinthians, and Galatians but, do we go on "from faith to faith," and believe God in what He afterwards revealed concerning Christ in Ephesians. Philippians and Colossians, and thus "give glory to God"?

Is not all this something far beyond mere theological reasonings and scholastic arguments as to what is "the righteousness of God?"⁴ and about the "law-keeping righteousness of Christ," which were very rife among Brethren a few years ago? Those controversies created much bitterness, and left much confusion behind. But, our subject takes us far beyond all this and reveals to us the blessed fact that Christ Himself, in all that He IS, and HAS, and HAS DONE, is, of God, made unto us who believe Him, "RIGHTEOUSNESS"

Instead of rejoicing in this blessed fact, and praising God for all the great things He has done for us, many of His children are engaged in a kind of post mortem controversy; and are dissecting Christ's life and sufferings. Hence, instead of "holding the Head" and living in the "bond of peace," they are biting, rending and devouring each other, the "members."

Oh that we may go on "from faith to faith," and believe God in all that He reveals to us as to our identification with Christ, in having His righteousness, His holiness, His perfections, reckoned to us; and all of His boundless grace!

Footnotes:

1The verb is oida and it means to know, as a matter of absolute knowledge. Not ginosko, to get to know, by effort or experience.

2The negative is ouk and denies objectively and absolutely, as a matter of fact. It is not me which denies subjectively, and hypothetically. Moreover, the negative ouk here, is connected with the verb "dwell," and not with the noun "good": "There does not DWELL any good"; not "there dwells not good (or any) good."

3There is no article here, in the Greek.

4 As though the definite article were used in the Greek of Rom. i. 17 and 2 Cor. v. 21.

Ch 02.5 "The Blood of Abel" and "The Way of Cain"

We have seen, in our last chapter, why Faith, i.e., believing what is heard from God, is the only ground of acceptance with God, and the only ground of being judicially acquitted in His sight.

The blood of Abel yet speaks to us.

This is the last of these Divine words written for our learning concerning Abel.

"HIS BLOOD YET SPEAKETH"

This is not the crying of his blood to God. This is the speaking of his faith to us. "By it (i.e., by this faith) though he is dead he continues to speak" (v.4).

spacer spacer The cry of his blood from the ground was for vengeance on Cain (mentioned in Gen. iv. 10).

This, is a speaking, in the Scriptures, for our learning.

His faith speaks to us to-day. "It" tells us that it is not something else as a substitute for

faith: "it" tells us that it is not something in addition to faith.

It is not works. It is not feelings. It is not experiences. It is not repentance. It is not love. But it is faith and faith only.

It is not reasoning, or intellectual assent to something about God. But it is believing what He has told me about myself, not only as a ruined sinner but as a ruined creature; not only about what I have done. but what I am. It is believing what He has told me about Christ, the Saviour Whom He has provided, and anointed, and given and sent; and that this Saviour is able to save.

Faith has to do with what we hear from God; not with what we feel in ourselves. Our feelings do not connect us with God, but only with ourselves. Whatever they may be, they do not affect our relation with God, or alter our standing before Him.

They are only human at the best. But, Faith is Divine and has to do with God.

Faith, of course. produces its own feelings, but only as its own precious fruit; but feelings will never produce faith. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God" (Rom. v. 1).

This "peace" is felt. It is the blessed feeling of "peace with God." But it comes from faith in what God has said; and not from any feeling that originates in ourselves.

Thus, the blood of Abel continues to speak to us, though Abel is dead.

But the blood of Christ speaks also. It speaks of "a better thing¹ than that of Abel" (Heb. xii. 24).

If Abel's blood cried for vengeance, Christ's blood speaks of peace.

If Abel's blood speaks of non-imputation of sin, Christ's blood speaks of the imputation of righteousness.

If Abel's blood speaks of judicial acquittal, Christ's blood speaks of a Divine justifying.

This, surely, is "a better thing."

Abel had to do only with a good thing -- the type, but we have to do with the "better thing" -- the antitype; we have that which the type prefigured, even the precious blood of Christ. If the former was able to procure a forensic righteousness, the latter is surely able to procure a righteousness which is Divine. Thus the faith of Abel continues to speak to us.

But Cain also speaks. He spoke to Abel. What he actually said seems to have dropped out of the primitive Hebrew Text. The Hebrew verb in Gen. iv. 8 is not "talked with" but "said," and ought to be followed by what he said. But the words having dropped out, the rendering "talked with" is only a make-shift due to the accident. Correctly rendered the printed Hebrew Text reads, "Cain said unto Abel his brother, and it came to pass, etc." In the A.V. there is a colon after the word "brother." In some of the MSS. there is a break; in others there are asterisks * * * indicating the omission.

But the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Jerusalem Targum, the Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate versions contain the actual words, which originally stood in the primitive text.

What Cain "said unto Abel" was "Let us go into the field."²

It was part of Cain's plot, to get Abel to go alone with him into the field; and when there, together, "he rose up against him, and slew him." His words, and actions, show the deliberateness of his plans.

The carnal mind of a ruined creature at once displayed its enmity. "He was very wroth" when he saw that God did not accept his offering by consuming it with fire from heaven.

While Abel's faith filled Abel with peace, Cain's unbelief filled Cain with "wrath."

Here we have part of "the way of Cain." Here we have, on the forefront of the Bible, the manifestation of what "religion" really is.

Cain was a religious man. He came to worship Jehovah. He brought his gifts and his offering. He brought it "unto Jehovah." but his works were evil; and he slew his brother (I John iii. 12).

This is the essence of all "religion" from that day to this.

This is "the way of Cain": and all who possess religion instead of Christ (Who is, in His own blessed Person, the essence and centre of true Christianity) are treading in that "way" to-day.

All religions are alike in this. And the "Christian Religion," as such, is no different in its spirit, and manifestations.

Speak of Christ, to anyone who has only "Religion," and at once his countenance will fall, as Cain's did (Gen. iv. 5).

But, with Cain, the Lord at once put the matter on its true ground. "If thou doest well shalt thou not be accepted?" (Gen. iv. 7). This is rendered in the Septuagint translation "if thou offer correctly."

This is what it means. "If Cain offered correctly;" (i.e. what God had told him, he would have done "well," and his offering would have been accepted.

There was "no difference" between the two men. All the difference lay in their offerings, which proved that the one believed God, and that the other did not.

Abel "did well" because he believed, and hence, obeyed God -- Cain did "not well;" because he did not offer correctly, though a sin-offering lay at the door ready to his hand.

He was without excuse.

Oh! how many millions have since trodden "the way of Cain."

They are like Paul himself, who at the very time when he was most religious was all the while "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious" (I Tim. i. 13): at the very time when he was as "touching the righteousness which is in the law blameless" he was "persecuting the Church." If any one ever had a standing in the flesh, and in religion, Paul could say "I more" (Phil. iii. 4-7)

All such are like the Athenians who were "very religious" (Acts xvii. 22 R.V. margin).

It is not a question of earnestness, or zeal, or even of sincerity. Sincerity will not help us, unless, what we sincerely believe, is what God has spoken.

Man, with all his religious zeal, loves to offer God something. As one once remarked, "It seems so mean" not to do so!

Hence it is that so many strive to present to God "the labour of their hands;" and, being ignorant of what God has said, or not believing it, their one great effort is not only to improve themselves but to improve the world.

They see that all is not what they would have it to be; but, instead of believing God as to His remedy for it, they seek to substitute their own.

Even where their religion includes a belief that Christ is coming again, they think the world is not yet good enough for that, being ignorant that God has said it is not yet bad enough for His judgment (2 Thess. ii. 3).

Hence, man still treads to-day "the way of Cain," and follows him when he "went out from the presence of the Lord" (Gen. iv. 16). Man cannot endure that presence. He seeks to get as "far off" from God as he possibly can (Eph. ii. 13).

His one effort is to make that "far country" as delightful, and himself as happy, as possible. Like Cain, he builds his cities, and multiplies his luxuries.

The busy labours of "artificers in brass and iron" drown the cries of Abel's blood (Gen. iv. 22).

The noisy handlers of "the harp and organ" stifle spiritual worship and drown the voice of Abel's faith (Gen. iv. 21). So that man, to-day, is surfeited with music not only while he eats and drinks, but even while he worships!

Such is "the way of Cain." It is the way of persecution, but not of peace. It is "the way of religion" but not of Christ. It is the way of death, and not of life.

Yes, man, like Cain, is "very religious." But notwithstanding all, the earth which Cain sough.

to beautify was stained with his brother's blood.

And, as then, so it is to-day, the world which the Churches are seeking to improve, is stained with the blood of Christ.

As the blood of Christ speaks of a better thing than that of Abel for the believer; so it speaks also of a more terrible vengeance for the unbeliever.

It is in the last Epistle in the Canon of the New Testament that we read of "the way of Cain," and it is there associated with "the error of Balaam," and "the gainsaying of Korah" (Jude 11).

This connection is full of significance. These three downward steps are thus put together for our comparison and contrast: and they speak to us, if we have ears to hear.

Unbelief characterises all three.

The first is unbelief as to the WAY of access which God revealed: "the way of Cain."

The second is unbelief as to the WORKS of our lives which God requires: "the error of Balaam."

The third is unbelief as to the WORD which God has given: "the contradiction of Korah."

The first is necessarily followed by the second, and these are consummated by the third.

"The way of Cain" was not believing God's Word as to the way in which He would be worshipped (Gen. iv.).

"The error of Balaam" was despising God's Word, and following the counsel which Balaam gave, as to the idolatrous licentiousness of life, and the sin which brought down the plague and judgment of Baal-peor (Num. xxv. and xxxi. 16).

"The gainsaying of Korah" was the contradiction of God's Word (Num. xvi.) The word rendered "gainsaying" (antilogia) means contradiction. And though connected with "the way of Cain" in Jude 11, it occurs three times in this Epistle to the Hebrews (viz., in Heb. vi. 16; vii. 7, and Heb. xii. 3). It is "the contradiction of sinners against Christ."

So the third and last of these three stages amounts to the contradiction of the Living and the written Word of God. It is exactly what we see to-day in the contradictions of the "Higher" Criticism, and in the blasphemies of the "New Theology."

The entrance on "the way of Cain" is a deliberate going. "They have gone" (R.V. they went).

Into "the error of Balaam" they rush (A.V. they ran." R.V. "they ran riotously").

In "the contradiction of Korah" they perish!

This is the end!

Though they pursue their own separate courses, to a certain stage, there is an evolution from one into the other, and they end alike in judgment.

Cain's was a punishment greater than he could bear (Gen. iv. 13).

Balaam's was a plague from the fierce anger of the Lord (Num. xxv.)

Korah's was the pit which opened its mouth and shut them up in the blackness of darkness for ever (Jude 13).

What a solemn lesson for all who refuse to believe God.

What an end to "the way of Cain."

What a contrast between the two ways.

The one is God's revelation; the other is man's imagination.

The one begins with God; gives peace; and ends in glory.

The other begins with man; goes on to persecution; and ends in the pit!

Footnotes:

1 All the Critical Greek Texts and R.V. read the Singular: "thing" instead of the plural "things."

2 The Jewish Commentators, of course, enlarge on this, and tell us a great deal more. Some indeed give us the whole conversation, which, strange to say, is largely imbued with later errors about the future state, and smacks of Babylonish tradition. With all this we have nothing to do: we only note the

correction needed, and which is supplied by some of the Documentary evidence.