

S T U D Y G U I D E



Worship

by R.C. Sproul



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An Honorable Offering

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

The first biblical instances of worship can be traced back to the opening chapters of Genesis. The immediate fellowship with God enjoyed by Adam and Eve included worship. The first signs of liturgical form in worship are found in the records of the offerings brought before God by Cain and Abel. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul uses the story of Cain and Abel to introduce the concept of worship.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to explain what the Bible does and does not say about why God accepted Abel's offering while rejecting Cain's
2. To be able to understand the basic place of faith, honor, and sacrifice in the worship of God

QUOTATIONS

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.

—Hebrews 11:4

The light of nature sheweth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might.

—Westminster Confession of Faith, Ch. XXI:I

LECTURE OUTLINE

A. Introduction

1. In this series, we will be looking at the biblical roots for worship and determining whether we can discern those elements of worship that have been prescribed for us by God Himself.
2. In the middle of the twentieth century, a French Roman Catholic theologian by the name of Yves Congar wrote a book entitled *The Church From Abel*.
3. Congar attempted to prove that the church is not something that began in the New Testament, but that began as soon as creation was established.
4. Congar began his study with Abel rather than with Adam and Eve because of the record of the first forms of liturgy that are found in the biblical account of Cain and Abel.

B. Cain and Abel

1. The account of Cain and Abel is found in Genesis 4:1-16.
2. Cain, who was a farmer, brought an offering of the fruit of the ground, while Abel, who was a shepherd, brought an offering of the firstborn of his flock.
3. The Lord approved of Abel's offering but did not accept Cain's.
4. Cain was infuriated, and in a fit of jealousy he murdered Abel.
5. This is the first homicide recorded in Scripture, and it reflects the radical expansion of wickedness that flows out of the nature of humanity after the Fall.
6. This murder occurred because of hostility that was incited over the issue of worship.

C. Why God Accepted One Offering, but Not the Other

1. The Bible doesn't specifically tell us why Abel's offering was pleasing to God while Cain's was not.
2. We know that both men were engaged in worship, and we know that one man's worship was unacceptable to God.
3. When we examine this passage and the rest of the Old Testament, we begin to get an idea of how seriously God responds to worship.
4. We see that God is not necessarily pleased with any kind of worship that man can imagine.
5. There are times when God is angry with the offerings of His people Israel, and there are times when God completely rejects the outward religious observances of Israel.
6. Fallen man is inclined toward religion and religious practices, but God is not interested in religion as such.
7. We need to recognize that we can have a religion that is not acceptable to God.
8. Some speculate that Abel's offering was acceptable because it was the blood sacrifice of an animal, whereas Cain's offering was of produce.

9. The Bible doesn't tell us this, but the Bible does say that the blood of bulls and goats has no intrinsic value.
10. The only blood sacrifice that can truly function as an atonement is the sacrifice of Christ.
11. Some would argue that Abel's offering better anticipates the perfect sacrifice of Christ.
12. But Cain and Abel each had different occupations, and each brought a portion of what he owned from his possessions.
13. We must resist the temptation to assume that God would accept only an animal sacrifice.

D. Offered in Faith

1. Cain's offering was brought while sin was crouched at his door.
2. According to Hebrews 11:4, it was "by faith" that Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.
3. Scripture mentions only one thing as a possible ground for God's approval of Abel's sacrifice: that Abel made his sacrifice by faith.

E. Worship as Sacrifice

1. In Genesis 4, in the initial stages of the Old Testament revelation, we find worship being described in terms of offering—an offering of sacrifices to God.
2. If we look carefully at this concept of sacrifice in worship in Israel, we see that the sacrifice God is looking for is the sacrifice of praise.
3. The central element of worship in the Bible is the giving of adoration to God.
4. Worship involves the honoring of God, the blessing of God, and the esteeming and reverencing of God.
5. The sacrifice is offered simply as an outward sign of a heart that is filled with awe and reverence and respect toward God.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In the middle of the twentieth century, a French Roman Catholic theologian by the name of _____ wrote a book entitled *The Church From Abel*.
 - a. Etienne Gilson
 - b. Francois Wendel
 - c. Yves Congar
 - d. Henri de Lubac
2. The account of Cain and Abel is found in _____.
 - a. Genesis 3
 - b. Genesis 4
 - c. Genesis 5
 - d. Genesis 6

3. The only thing that Scripture mentions as a possible ground for God's approval of Abel's sacrifice is what?
 - a. Animal sacrifices were esteemed higher than sacrifices of produce.
 - b. Abel made his sacrifice by faith.
 - c. Abel was without sin.
 - d. Abel offered his sacrifice willingly.
4. If we look carefully at this concept of sacrifice in worship in Israel, we see that the sacrifice God is looking for is the sacrifice of _____.
 - a. Bulls and goats
 - b. Our minds
 - c. Blood
 - d. Praise

BIBLE STUDY

1. Read Genesis 4:1–16. Outline the passage. What are the two main sections of the text, and what is the main theme of each section? What crucial act divides these two main parts? Why is this act significant? What is the significance of the contrast between what is said about Cain in verse 1 compared to what is said about him in verse 16?
2. Are sacrifices and worship acceptable to God regardless of the state of a man's heart? What does Proverbs 21:27 teach us?
3. How do each of the following texts of Scripture inform our understanding of God's view of sacrifices?
 - a. 1 Samuel 15:22
 - b. Isaiah 1:11–17
 - c. Hosea 6:6
 - d. Micah 6:6–8
4. What does Hebrews 11:4 contribute to our understanding of the events recorded in Genesis 4?
5. What kind of sacrifices does God require of the New Covenant believer, according to Hebrews 13:15–16?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain what the Bible does and does not say about why God accepted Abel's offering while rejecting Cain's.
2. What are some of the basic principles of faith, honor, and sacrifice in the worship of God that you learned in this lecture?

3. How important to God is right worship with right motives?
4. In the Old Testament law, especially in the book of Leviticus, we read God's commands concerning the several sacrifices involved in Old Covenant worship. It is clear that God commanded these sacrifices. Granted that this is true, why does God say in Hosea 6:6, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice"?

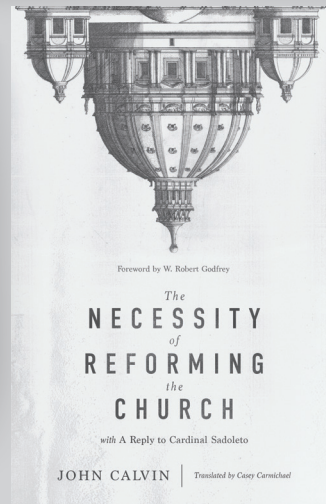
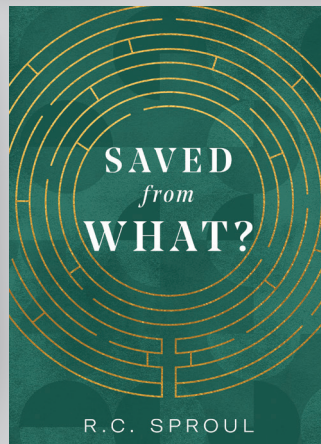
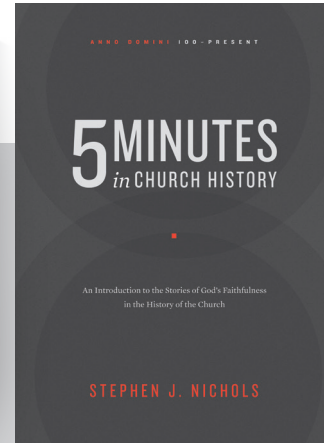
APPLICATION

1. Is your worship of God a mere external ritual? Are the words, songs, and prayers coming from your mouth but not from your heart? If so, meditate on the Scriptures covered in this lesson. God is not pleased by a mere external show of piety. He sees the heart. The next time you gather with the church for worship, take the time beforehand to prepare your heart. Spend time in prayer and praise even before you meet for corporate worship.
2. Worship is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God. Too many people reject God-centered worship because they do not "get anything out of it." Those who think like that are entering worship with the wrong mind-set. We should enter worship prepared to sacrifice, to give, to serve. Consciously strive to make worship a time of giving—giving honor and praise to God.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Old, Hughes Oliphant. *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship*, pp. 1–8

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