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R. C. SPROUL

How Should I Worship?

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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Chapter One

An Honorable Offering

In the middle of the twentieth century, a French Roman Catholic theologian named Yves Congar wrote an essay called “Ecclesia ab Abel”—that is, “The Church from Abel”—that attempted to show that the church was not started in the New Testament but rather began as soon as creation was established. Congar argued that worship took place with the original creatures that were made. Yet a better title might have been “Ecclesia ab Adam,” which goes back not simply to Abel but even further to Abel’s father

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and mother, Adam and Eve, who enjoyed fellowship in the immediate presence of God. That fellowship certainly included worship, which involves ascribing worth, excellence, majesty, and honor to our Creator.

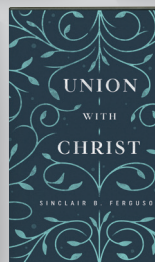
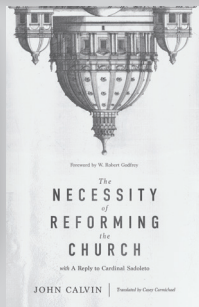
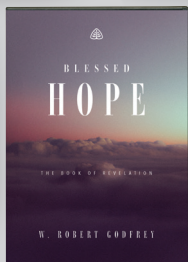
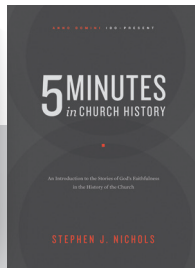
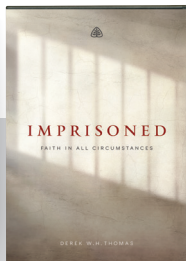
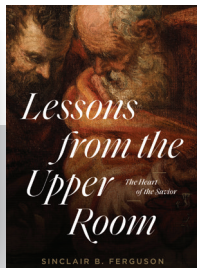
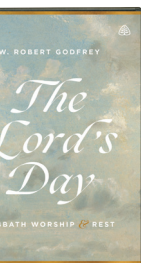
Congar started his study with Abel because of the record in Genesis of the first forms of liturgy or worship. Let's look now at Genesis 4:

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.” (vv. 1–11)

This is the record of the first homicide, which was also fratricide—the murder of one’s own brother. This radical expansion of wickedness that follows the fall of Adam and Eve teaches us something of the degree of treachery of which human beings have been capable since their fall from their created state. This murder was incited over a state of hostility between the brothers, the hostility that Cain felt for Abel. What precipitated this incident? It had to do with worship, with God’s acceptance of the offering brought to the altar by Abel and His rejection of the offering presented by Cain. As a result, Cain became furious. Overcome with jealousy, he rose up and murdered his own brother.

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