

TEENS ASK: WHY DID GOD FAVOR ABEL OVER CAIN?

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THE BIG IDEA:

God is just.

**The actual question was stated as such: "Cain killed Abel because God favored him (Abel). Isn't God not supposed to favor people?"*

The story of Cain and Abel (the sons of Adam and Eve) is found in Genesis 4. An interesting account takes place between these two brothers who both bring offerings to God; one offering is accepted and one is rejected. As a result, Cain (whose offering was not accepted) "rose up against his brother Abel and killed him".

The issue of why Cain's offering was rejected and Abel's was accepted is quite debated in Christian circles. From the account (Genesis 4:1-16), we can propose at least three options as to why God responded as He did:

First, God may have accepted Abel's offering because it was a blood offering while Cain's was not. In the Old Testament, the shedding of animal blood was an extremely common practice that symbolized that "the wages for sin is death" (Romans 6:23). It represented the seriousness of sin and the slaughtered animal was a sacrifice to cover the sin. This great symbolism ultimately was fulfilled in Jesus, who came as "the lamb" who "shed his blood" on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, it may be said that Abel's offering was a sacrifice pleasing and acceptable to God because of the shedding of blood, while Cain's offering was unacceptable because there was no shedding of blood.

The weakness to this argument is threefold: (1) some offerings in the Old Testament did not require the shedding of blood, such as the grain offering in Leviticus (2:1-16; 6:14-18; 10:12-13). Also, (2) the sacrificial system followed in the Old Testament was not yet in place, so there was no way for Cain and Abel to know what kind of sacrifice God wanted. Lastly, (3) it seems unfair that both Cain and Abel would be expected to give blood offerings since one worked with animals and the other with fruit.

A second option is that the Bible states that Abel's animal offering was "of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions" (Genesis 4:4). The firstborn is considered to be the animal of highest value, and its fat portions are considered valuable as well. Abel's offering was definitely a financial sacrifice. On the other hand, the Bible says nothing about the quality of Cain's offering: "Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground" (Genesis 4:3). We might assume that Abel's offering was of high value, while Cain's was not.



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The weakness of this argument is that we are injecting our own thoughts into what the Bible plainly does not say. It is a leap to insert into the text what is not there. It is always far better to follow what is said than to impose our own ideas.

The third and final option is that God accepted Abel's offering and not Cain's because of their motive and the condition of their hearts. God says to Cain that "...sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is to rule over you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:7). Thus, we can deduce that God saw in Cain's heart sin and wickedness, and thus his offering was rejected not on the basis of the offering itself, but rather by terms of the purity of the person who gave it. Obviously, Cain did have sin in his life as he quickly went out and murdered his own brother!

This option seems most acceptable and is the position I personally hold. The words of God to Cain state clearly our Lord's expectations: "If you do well, will you not be accepted?" (Genesis 4:7). The rhetorical response of course is yes, and so we can say with certainty that God accepts the heart that is good and pure, but not the heart that is evil and full of corruption and sin. God was completely just in dealing with Cain and Abel, just as he is just in dealing with us. God does not show favoritism.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Is my heart pure and acceptable to God? Do I need to repent of sin in my own life?
2. How can I rule over sin in my life, since it seeks to rule over me?
3. What sacrifices (time, money, energy, friendship, comfort etc.) am I giving to God? How can I do more for Him?