

Gaining Approval

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We would all like to know that God approves of us but how can we be sure that we are pleasing to Him? When we examine the Bible, and particularly the book of Hebrews, we find that it is impossible to please God without faith. We read, 'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.' Heb 11:1-4.

The word 'gifts' in this verse is the same word, '*doron*', which is used almost exclusively through the New Testament epistles for 'offering'. Faith is not just the positive protestations of highly proactive people. That would mean that God is disengaged from the average person so that the rich just get richer, the strong get stronger, and the poor are cast off. That would be a ludicrous proposition. It would mean that we are only ever the outcome of the advantage or disadvantage that we have experienced through the course of our lives.



There would be no divine initiative toward you or me to bring us to the place where we need to be.


Because of his faith, Abel obtained a good report from God, a testimony that he was righteous. This means that he was justified. God approved of everything that Abel did because it was the expression of his identity and predestination. He was saying, 'Good on you; keep moving!' Abel offered a better sacrifice than his brother Cain. For whatever reason, God did not approve of Cain or his offering. He said to the young man, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?' Gen4:6-7.

God testified about Abel's gifts, about who he was! Our testimony involves more than our public confession of Jesus Christ, although this acknowledgement is implicit to our testimony. God has a particular set of attributes and He makes statement concerning Himself in the Scripture. But He also has a statement about you and me. He testifies about us! He has given us a 'name' which includes everything about us: our temperament, abilities, gifts, grace capacities and our predetermined works. He wants our offering to be consistent with the 'name' that He has given us. Abel did well because he offered in faith, in accordance with his unique name as a son of God.

There is an interesting verse in the Psalms that reads, 'Gather My godly ones to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice'. Psa 50:5. We enter a covenant or agreement with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit when we make offering by faith. He becomes our ally and we find ourselves in the ultimate safe place where nothing can touch us, regardless of our circumstances. We are untouchable and unassailable; but not in the sense of an independent and lawless recalcitrant who is doing their own thing.

When we make covenant with God by sacrifice, our mistakes and successes are no longer of any moment; the Lord is only concerned with our 'sonship' which is His testimony concerning us. God was pleased with Abel because he offered in faith. In the book of Exodus in the Old Testament, we read that no one should appear before Him empty-handed. Ex 23:15, 34:20. And we read in the book of Hebrews that it is impossible to please God without faith and that 'he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him'. Heb 11:6.

In the original text, 'reward' is actually translated as 'wages'. So we should read, 'He is a payer of wages to those who diligently seek Him'. That is an interesting transaction. When we offer in faith, God attributes to



us something commensurate with the offering we are making. He adds something substantial so that our gift increases and multiplies. That is the miracle of offering. However, we cannot protest that we are offering in faith when we are just doing the thing that we approve in accordance with *our* expected outcomes and aspirations. Our offering needs to be in accordance with the 'name' He has given us.


'By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God so that what is seen was not made out of the things that were visible.' Heb 11:3. In like manner, when we offer, something is attributed to us out of the things which are invisible; out of the things which do not exist. That is the miracle of offering! It brings something from nothing. 'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.'

In the book of Hebrews Chapter 11, there is a long list of men and women, Noah, Abraham and Sarah to name a few, who gained God's approval and a 'good testimony' through the exercise of their faith. They all died without receiving the promises but they obtained an eternal reward. Heb 11:16, Heb 11:39. We begin to see a definite connection between 'approval' and 'reward' in these Scriptures. And if we leave out the arbitrary distinction between Hebrews Chapters 11 and 12, we

read that this group of faithful men and women have become a 'great cloud of witnesses' who surround us. Heb 12:1. It is interesting to note the similarity between the words 'testimony' and 'witness'. Witnesses bear testimony to a fact or event. The witnesses described here are those, who through offering and suffering have obtained a reward that is completely commensurate with the will of God for their lives. Therefore, God testified about them. They fulfilled their 'name', their works and inherited their 'sonship' in accordance with the promise of the everlasting covenant wherein God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit agreed together to bring many sons to glory. Heb 2:10-11, 13:20-21.

It should be our goal to come to this same place through offering where God testifies about our 'gifts'. The apostle Paul said, 'Don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner'. 2 Tim 1:8. Paul was imprisoned both figuratively and literally to the testimony of the Lord concerning him. It completely governed the pathway of his life.

We can conclude from Hebrews chapter 11, that faith is the means of gaining God's approval. Faith is 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'. Heb 11:1. At the beginning of the next chapter, we see the process finished. We perceive a great cloud of



witnesses who bear testimony to the reward of faith. As we study the Scripture, in particular Psalm 50 and the books of Malachi and Hebrews, we will find that there is an interesting interplay between offering, covenant and testimony. To the degree that we offer rather than trade, we attain wages and eternal reward. God testifies about our gifts. We fulfil our 'name' and inherit our sonship. Over the years, I have watched people offer and attain, but I have also observed those who don't offer and don't attain. So, because they don't attain, they don't offer. It is an ever-tightening circle. Those who offer catch the miracle of multiplication; those who don't offer get tighter and tighter and more afraid to offer. They think they will suffer lack. Somewhere, you have to cross the threshold and begin to offer and prove God.


'By faith the men of old gained approval.' Heb 11:1. They were not sitting before God with confused and peculiar machinations about whether God was for them, with them or against them. They moved forward proactively in faith, in the knowledge that God was with them. That is the attitude and behaviour that offering produces.

When we offer, our self-worth is no longer dependent on our success. In fact, our monumental failures may be our best teachers. We are not approved on the basis of how well we do. A bad outcome is irrelevant when our

offering is in harmony with our predestination and we are having a go!

However, there is a line between striving for a good product and a 'slap dash' approach. This is the dilemma for those who oversee or deacon a project or event. If they lean too far one way and make excellence the primary goal, the identity and predestination of those involved will be compromised to achieve a good outcome. Alternatively, if there is no endeavour to present what is 'good and acceptable' before the Lord, we are in danger of presenting a 'defiled' offering. Rom 12:1. Mal 1:7, 8.

In the book of Malachi, we read an admonition to a group of people who had lost sight of what it meant to offer. They had spent seventy years in Babylon and were completely secularised by the time they returned to their homeland. So the Lord broke in on them through the prophet Malachi and said, 'You are robbing Me, the whole nation of you'. And with some confusion, they asked, 'How are we robbing You?' And God replied, "In tithes and heave offerings ... Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this ... if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. And I will rebuke the devourer for



you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes,” says the LORD of hosts.’ Mal 3:8,10-11.

Each component of offering has a clear and definitive purpose. In the Old Testament, the tithe provided for the needs of the priests who served in the temple. In the church today, the tithe puts food into the houses of the messenger group who labour in word and doctrine, to feed the people who gather in His house. Those presenting heave offerings in the Old Testament lifted up a bull’s shoulder or thigh to the Lord. When we present a heave offering today, we come under the burden of the Lord’s work to allow it to progress. The Lord asks us to prove and test Him in our tithes and heave offerings. If we offer in faith in accordance with our name, He will pour out a blessing until it overflows and He will rebuke the devourer so that our fruit will remain. Mal 3:11.