

Why did Yahweh reject the sacrifice of Cain? A Theological Reflection on Gen. 4:1-16 and its implication for Contemporary Christians in Nigeria

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Abstract. In any sacrifice, three parties are of paramount importance. These include the deity to whom sacrifice is offered, the worshipper who offered the sacrifice either all alone or with the assistance of the priest as the intermediary, and the victim for the sacrifice. The sacrificial material otherwise called sacrificial victim is so important because it is a means to an end, it is an instrument by which the covenant relationship is established and upheld. Nevertheless, in the Old Testament, the purpose of the sacrifice dictated the sacrificial material(s) to be used. However, the account of the sacrifice of Cain and Abel in Gen. 4 looks paradoxical as Abel's sacrifice was accepted by Yahweh while that of Cain was rejected! Why was this so? What was it about Cain's offering that made it unacceptable and that of Abel acceptable most especially when one considers the fact that both bloody (animal) and unbloody (grain and wine) were commanded and common in the Old Testament. More importantly, what is the implication of Cain's unacceptable offering for Christians today? What lessons can both church leaders and members learn from this incident in this era where church members are being coerced or forced by church leaders through various unwholesome methods to give/donate sacrificially without minding the means, the readiness and the mental attitude or heart

disposition of the giver/donor? Indeed, what constitute sacrifice for today's Christians and how can Christians today offer an acceptable sacrifice? These and many other questions were answered in this research paper.

Key words: Sacrifices/offerings in Old Testament, Cain, Abel, Genesis 4, Bloody sacrifice, Unbloody sacrifice, Acceptable sacrifice.

1. Introduction

The story of Cain and Abel records the first ever offering made to God in the Bible. However, the first question that quickly rises to the surface when reading Gen. 4:3-7 is: what was wrong with Cain and his offering? Why did God reject it? God in many parts of the scriptures is portrayed as just and fair and this same view is shared by majority of the Christian world over and other religions. But when confronted with a story such as that of Cain and Abel, we instantly face a startling and controversial question created by gaps in the narrative and which can very well shake the foundations of many people's faiths: is God really fair and just, or does He simply play with humanity at His own whim? God's seeming capriciousness in rejecting one sacrifice over the other creates a

theological problem as raised above. The problem is compounded by Abel's murder. Since Cain's act of fratricide is precipitated by God's unexplained rejection of the sacrifice which resulted in Cain's anger, God becomes complicit in the act. These problems opened the door for ancient interpreters to subject the story to various interpretations in a way that exonerated God of appearing capricious and, by extension, complicit in Abel's murder. This article attempts a re-reading of the story and the lessons therein for today's Christians.

2. The Concept of Sacrifice in the Old Testament (OT)

Sacrifice, by way of definition is a gift given or offered by an inferior to a superior. It is a tribute paid by the dependant to his lord, and offering to deity, with or without blood (Abe, 2004). In its simplest form, it may be defined as "a gift to God". It is a presentation to deity of some material object, the possession of the offerer, as an act of worship (Orr, et.al, 1939). It may be to attain, restore, maintain or to celebrate friendly relations with the deity. It is religion in action in early times, almost the whole of religion – an inseparable accompaniment to all religious exercises (Orr, et.al, 1939). The idea and practice of sacrifice are as old as man himself though later, sacrifice became divinely instructed and made a vital aspect of world established religions, including the Jewish religion (Abe, 2004). Thus, sacrifice is universal, a religious act which varies from one religion to another.

Figuratively speaking, sacrifice was also applied to the offering of prayer, thanksgiving, penitence, submission, or the like (Orr, et.al, 1939). The offering of sacrifice is the destruction or surrender of something valued or desired for the sake of something regarded as having a higher or a more pressing claim (Orr, et.al, 1939). In the Hebrew Bible, sacrifice is known as qorban, meaning "to draw near" (Adelakun, 2009).

Sacrifice in the Old Testament was a means by which man was enabled to approach God (Adelakun, 2009). It forms the core of the Old

Testament Levitical cultus. Indeed, there are five basic Levitical offerings in the Old Testament: the burnt offering, meal offering, peace offering, sin and guilt offerings (Kidner, 1952). Each offering had its particular purpose and was intended to facilitate man in his relationship with God (www.jewfaq/qorbanot.htm). Sacrifices in the Old Testament were either bloody or unbloody. A very good example of both bloody and unbloody sacrifices in the Old Testament was that of Abel and Cain (Abe, 2004).

Burnt offering was the oldest and commonest sacrifice and represented submission to God's will (Adelakun, 2009). Its Hebrew name, olah means "that which ascends" (Kidner, 1952). It is the upward, or Godward offering or that which goes up in smoke to the sky. An olah was completely burnt on the outer altar and no part of it was eaten by anyone. This was perhaps the best and most solemn of the sacrifices, and symbolized worship in the full sense, i.e. adoration, devotion, dedication, supplication and at time expiation (www.bible-history.com/sibe). A meal or meat offering (minchah) was a gift or presentation which at fist applied to both bloody and unbloody offerings (Gen. 4:5), but in Moses' time confined to cereals, whether raw or roast, grinds to flour or baked and mixed with oil and frankincense. These cereals were the produce of man's labour with the soil and this represented the necessities and results of life, if not life itself. A portion of it was burnt on the fire of the altar while the rest was eaten by the priests (www.bible-history.com/sibe). A Minchah symbolized the devotion of the fruits of man's work to God. It also described a gift or token of friendship (Is. 39:1), an act of homage (I Sam 10:27; I Kings 10:25), tribute (Jud 3:15, 17ff), propitiation to a friend wronged (Gen. 32:13, 18) to procure favour or assistance (Gen. 43:11ff; Hos. 10:6). A peace offering (Zebhachin/Zebbach Shelamim) was a sacrifice made to express thanks or gratitude to God for his blessing and mercies (Adelakun, 2009). It was offered to express or promote peaceful relations with the Deity, and almost invariably accompanied by a meal or feast, an occasion of great joy (Adelakun, 2009). Peace offering was of different kinds such a Zebhachim ha – todhah, "thank offering", Zebhach Nedhabhah, "free –

will offerings”, and Zebhach Nedher, “votive offerings”, which were offered in fulfillment of a vow (www.bible-history.com/sibe).

The sin offerings are designated by hatta’t and were offered to expiate some sin committed inadvertently. Such sins were called unintentional or unwitting sins (www.bible-history.com/sibe). It was an expression of sorrow for the error and a desire to be reconciled with God. A sin offering could only be offered for sins committed unintentionally and not for sins committed deliberately. A guilt offering (asham) was a special kind of offering introduced in the Mosaic Law (Lev. 5:7; 1-7) and concerned with offences against God and man that could be estimated by a money value and thus covered by compensation or restitution accompanying the offering (Abe, 2004). Such offences include: a breach of faith, deceit, robbery, oppression, lies, falsehood and so on (www.bible-history.com/sibe). Apart from the offering to be offered for these sins, there was to be a full restitution or restoration with an additional fifth of the value of the damage (Abe, 2004).

According to the Jewish tradition, sacrifice was believed to have been instituted by God (cf Lev. 17:11) as a provision of mercy intended to enable man draw near to God, not to keep him away (Abe, 2004). However, by the sixty century B.C, sacrifices were primarily performed by priests in the temple. The efficacy of sacrifice in restoring a broken relationship was held seriously in the ancient Jewish tradition, not because blood had magical power in itself, but because God had provided the symbolic means by which guilt was pardoned (Guthrie, 1981). Nevertheless, the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. by the Roman army brought an end to the sacrificial rites in Israel though the practice was briefly resumed during the Jewish war of 132 – 135 A.D. but was ended permanently after the war lost (Adelakun, 2009). The reason was that the temple in Jerusalem was the only place where worshippers could make sacrifices. Consequently, the destruction of the temple signified the end of sacrifice. Orthodox Jews still believe that when Messiah comes, a place will be provided for sacrificial purposes.

This is reflected in their daily prayer services where they prayed for the restoration of the temple and the resumption of its rituals, including the rituals of sacrifice (www.jewfaq/qorbannot.htm).

3. The Sacrifice of Cain and Abel

The account of the sacrifices of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1ff) which is the first example of the sacrifice in the Bible shows that the ceremony dates from almost the beginning of the human race. For instance, there were sacrifices and sacrificial systems in Egypt probably from the beginning of the 4th Millennium B.C. (www.jewfaq/qorbannot.htm). Besides, there were many centers of worship such as Eridu, Nippur, Erech etc in Babylonia from the year 300 B.C or thereabouts (www.bible-history.com/sibe). Similarly, among the nomads and tribes of Arabia and Syria, sacrifices had been common for millenniums before Moses. All these buttressed the fact that sacrifices had been a common practice among the people of Ancient Near East before that of Cain and Abel and even before the Mosaic legislation of it in the Priestly code. However, the concern of this article is the sacrifice of Cain and Abel and the question begging for an answer is “why did God reject Cain’s offering?” Was it because, as some presumed, Cain did not offer a bloody sacrifice? (Stewart, 2015). If not, what was the reason for God rejecting Cain’s offering? In addition what lesson can Christians learn from this Old Testament historical narrative?

4. The Passage (Gen. 4:1-15)

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man”. 2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain “Why are you

angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it” 8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field”. And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. 9 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know, he replied. “Am I my brother keeper?” 10 The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. 11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me”. 15 But the Lord said to him, “Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over”. Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. 16 So Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Talking about Cain and Abel, the very first piece of biographical information about them that is provided in the scriptural passage quoted above, aside from the obvious fact that Cain was the eldest is: “Abel was a keeper of sheep/flocks but Cain was a tiller of the ground” (Gen 4:2). The elder was named Cain which when it is interpreted signifies a possession; the younger was Abel which signifies sorrow (Stewart, 2015).

It is obvious from the passage that both Cain and Abel came together to offer an offering before the Lord. They were evidently following a particular time schedule for sacrifice before the Lord as stated in v.2. Cain brought “the fruit of the ground, an offering unto the Lord” and Abel brought “the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof”. And the Bible says: The Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect (4-5). Here, God was displeased, not only with Cain, but with his offering too. And on the other hand, God was pleased with Abel and his

offering. Why? Below are the scholars’ likely reasons why God rejected Cain’s offering.

Non-blood sacrifice: Some scholars are of the opinion that the offering of Cain was rejected because it was unbloody (Maxey, 2006). Candlish, for example, wrote: “To appear before God, with whatever gifts, without atoning blood, as Cain did was infidelity” (Waltke, 1986). Such scholars believed that Cain brought the fruit of the cursed ground, the works of his hands as offering whereas animal sacrifices had been instituted before this time, that is, when God made animal skins for Adam and Eve after they had sinned (Gen. 3:21). It is argued that there could be no atonement for sin apart from the shedding of blood. But what indication is there in the text that this was a sin offering? It is crystal clear however from the text that the offerings of Cain and Abel were neither sin offering nor guilt offering which according to Mosaic legislation involved shedding blood for removal of sin (Robert, 1979). This is because the most inclusive term for presentations to God on the altar is qorban, “offering” from a root signifying “to bring near” is not used in the Cain and Abel story. Rather, the narrator designates three times (vv.3, 4, 5) the brothers’ offering by minchah, a grain offering, a gift or presentation of man’s work to God (Morris, 1965). The unusual element in the story from a lexical view point is not that Cain’s offering is bloodless but that Abel’s is bloody. In any case, by using minchah, the author of Genesis virtually excludes the possibility that God did not look on Cain’s offering because it was bloodless. Maxey while quoting from Rothkoff said: “The terminology used with regard to the patriarchal age is that of the Torah as a whole; it is unlikely that the same words in Genesis mean something different in the other books of the Torah” (Maxey, 2006). Thus, Cain and Abel each brought a “gift” (Minchah; Gen. 4; 4ff), which was usually of a cereal nature as brought by Cain (Lev. 2 et al) but could also refer to an animal offering (I Sam 2:17, 26:19).

So far, the lexical study for the term designating Cain’s offering gives no basis for thinking it was rejected because it was bloodless. In fact, of the many expressions for presentations to God,

which were available to the author, he could not have used a more misleading term if this was his intended meaning. Therefore, both offerings were proper for the two brothers as there is nothing in the text to suggest that the type of offering was the reason for God's rejection or acceptance.

Poor quality and quantity: Another possible reason suggested by the scholars for the rejection of Cain's offering is that the fruit he brought was not the best the land had produced (Maxey, 2006). It is emphasized that Abel brought the first fruits of his flock and from their fat – the best that he had. Cain, on the other hand, merely brought ordinary fruit to the Lord – possibly of poor quality. By offering the firstborn, Abel signified that he recognised God as the author and owner of life in common with the rest of the ancient Near East. The Hebrews believed that the city, as lord of the manor, was entitled to the first share of all produce. The first fruit of plant and the first born of animals and man were his (Maxey, 2006). Abel also offered the “fat” which in the “P” material belonged to the LORD and was burned symbolically by the priests. This tastiest and best burning part of the offering represented the best. The writer of the epistle of the Hebrews buttressed this point when he said: “Abel offered to God a **better** sacrifice than Cain” (Heb. 11:4). “And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering; but for Cain and his offering He had no regard” (Gen 4:5). Was Abel's sacrifice “better” than that offered by Cain because he offered the first fruits of his flock and also the fat?

There are some scholars who feel the Greek word *Pleion* (Abel offered to God, a better sacrifice than Cain” – Heb 11:14) is the key. *Pleion* which literally means “more, grater” can be used with regard to quantity and quality (Waltke, 1986). Thus, although it may mean “greater in number” it may also mean “greater in value” (Maxey, 2006). The word is however, frequently used to express ‘higher in value’ and ‘greater in worth’ (Maxey, 2006). In regards to Abel's offering, the qualitative rather than quantitative significance of *Pleion* was attested to by many scholars while some opined that Abel's sacrifice was *Pleion*, fuller than Cain's, it

had more in it (Maxey, 2006). Such a theory, however, seems to suggest that God's concern was far more for the size of the gift, a view that is very much in conflict with the overall teaching of the inspired scriptures on how God, perceives Christian giving. It is not **quantity** of gift, but **quality of giver**, with which the Lord has always shown the greatest interest as reflected in the account of the widow's two mites and Jesus assessment of the various givers in Mark 12: 41 – 44. Therefore, Cain's offering was not rejected based on quantity and or quality of his offering but based on the condition of his heart – “And God had no respect for Cain and his offering” (Gen. 4:4) (Ellicott, 1990). But, if we study this view closely, there is some degree of truth in it for Abel gave God the first fruits of his flock and also the fat showing to God that He is special and He is the greatest priority in his life.

The choice of occupation: Some scholars have sought to suggest that the offering of Cain was rejected, by God because he chose to cultivate the ground. Their argument is based on the fact that God cursed the ground as a result of the fall in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:17) (Cutar, 2008). Some suggest that Cain was defying God by choosing to raise crops on the cursed ground (Maxey, 2006). This view neglects to consider the reminder of the passage – Gen. 3:17-19, where God clearly informs Adam and Eve that they would labour over the land and “eat of it”. God fully purposed for mankind to fill the land, he simply informed them that it would not be easy work. In fact, both the ground needed to be worked for food (Maxey, 2006). Contrary to what some have said, there is nothing inherently better about tending sheep than working the ground even the scripture gives no indication that one occupation was superior to another. Thus, “It is neither justifiable nor necessary to trace difference of moral character in the different callings which the young men selected, though probably their choices were determined by their talents and their tastes” (Stewart, 2015). “In Cain, one sees a rough, strong nature, which took the hard work as he found it, and subdued the ground with muscular energy while in Abel; one sees a nature more refined and thoughtful” (Ellicott, 1990). Therefore, we should not look

for the answer to the acceptance and rejection of the offerings in the various occupations the two practiced.

God's sovereign choice: Moreover, some Bible interpreters in their interpretative approaches to the theological problem created by the story of Cain and Abel in Gen. 4 see the acceptance of one offering and the rejection of other as the sovereign choice of God. God merely chose to accept Abel's offering and reject Cain's with no explanation given (Ellicott, 1990). The proponents of this view often based their argument on a biblical text which says: "I myself will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you, and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion" (Stewart, 2015). This view is not satisfactory, because it is not internally consistent with the rest of Scripture because it presents God as an arbitrary dispenser of justice but if nothing else; God is always portrayed as acting in wisdom, mercy and truth never arbitrary in judgment.

Cain's sinful life: Some Bible scholars in their attempts to interpret the story of Cain and Abel believe that Cain led a bad, sinful life while Abel led a righteous and that accounted for the acceptance of one and the rejection of other (Exodus 33:19 (NASB)). Cain was described as someone who was wicked, led a bad life, under the reigning power of the world and the flesh; and therefore his sacrifice was abomination to the Lord ... God had no respect to Cain himself, and therefore no respect to his offering" (Cutar, 2008). But the problem with this view is that it is not mentioned or implied in the text. In fact, there was no mention of Cain leading a wicked life before he brutally murdered his brother. Thus, to state that Cain had always been a wicked man even before the fratricide and consequently the rejection of his offering seems like a weak argument from a biblical standpoint.

Attitude Problem: The last view for consideration in this research paper interprets the rejection of Cain's offering as problem with this attitude rather than the specific offering that he brought (Cutar, 2008). In other words, such

scholars argue that God was not so much concerned with the type of sacrifice or the quality of the offering rather, His main concern was with the attitude of Cain. Cain's offering was rejected because of his impure heart, not because it was the fruit of the land rather than a blood sacrifice (Stewart, 2015). He may have brought the very best that he had, but he did so with entirely the wrong attitude. Abel on the other hand offered his sacrifice before God perhaps with a humble heart and with an attitude of repentance, meekness and zeal and that could have given Abel a slight edge over his brother, Cain. Although, the text was directly silent about the heart condition of the two brothers or their attitudes toward God but one can infer or make scholarly guess in the light of the statement in Gen. 4:4, 5. Whereas the text explicitly characterizes Abel's offering, and more or less infers Cain's, it dwells on Cain's character, and more or less infers Abel's (Stewart, 2015). Definitely, something is wrong with the character of Cain for it is not quantity or type that matter most to God, but the quality or heart of the giver.

5. Cain's Characterization in the Text

Robert Alter (1981), greatly improved scholars' interpretation of the narrative by analyzing and classifying the following techniques used by a story – teller for communicating his meaning. These include: statements by the narrator himself, by God, the heroes or heroines, by verbal clues, by juxtaposition of material, by characterization, and by consequences of actions. This research paper employed the techniques of verbal clues and juxtaposition of material to discover the blemish in Cain's offering. The other techniques expose the deformity in his character. The Lord said he is unacceptable: "If you (Cain) do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (Gen. 4:7). To this he added: "Sin is crouching at your door". After sin so dominated Cain that he killed Abel, the Lord cursed Cain: "You are under a curse" (v.11). One should note here how the narrator characterizes the sulking Cain as sinner unworthy to worship. Moreover, Cain's visible behaviour confirms the Lord's privileged assessment of his heart. Cain's anger against

God is written large on his face (vv.5-6), and he progress in sin from deficient worship to fratricide (v.8) (Waltke, 1986). Similarly, Cain's speech in the text reveals his unregenerate heart. His sarcastic question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" exposes both his callousness against God and his hate of his brother made in God's image (v.9). Furthermore, Cain calls into question God's wisdom, justice and love and attempts to justify himself, claiming: "My punishment is more than I can bear. You are driving me from the land today, and I will be hidden from your presence" (vv.13-14). Even after God mitigates his sentence (v.15), he fails to respond to God's grace (v.16). As a consequence of his action, Cain became a man without a place, an outcast from God's presence, from the ground, and from his fellow man (vv.14-16).

In view of the discussion so far, I will like to submit that most of the scholars' views or interpretive approaches discussed above assumed that the reason for Cain's rejection and Abel's acceptance resides with the gift rather than with the giver; with the offering, rather than with the one presenting it. But I will like to say that God focused not on sacrifice being presented before Him, that is, its material composition, but rather focused on the heart of the two brothers as they presented their sacrifices before Him. Witnesses from the New Testament (NT) passages shed more light on this.

6. The New Testament witnesses

The New Testament validates our conclusion drawn from the text. Jesus characterized Abel as righteous man when God spoke well of his offerings" (Heb. 11:14). Therefore, what made Abel's sacrifice to God 'Pleion', more in sense of 'superior', than the sacrifice of Cain, was Abel's faith. That is stressed and not the fact that Abel offered a bloody and Cain a vegetable sacrifice, or that Abel offered, firstlings and Cain not first fruits, on which some have laid stress by emphasizing these differences. The writer centers everything on Abel's faith in contrast to Cain's lack of faith (Waltke, 1986).

Furthermore, John in his epistle characterized the deeds of Abel while Cain on the other hand, was of the evil one, and that his fruit came from a corrupt tree (I John 3:12). Sin was crouching at the door of Cain's heart, having a great desire, and Cain had failed to master it, thus leading to sinful actions (Gen. 4:7. Jude, the brother of Jesus Christ, characterizes such a walk in life as "the way of Cain" (Jude 11). The way of Cain according to Maxey (2006) is the way of brotherly hatred, not brotherly love; of anger, envy and self-centeredness; of insufficiency of faith and indifference; of right actions prompted by wrong motives; of murderous intent. Cain's attitude/deed, can better be described further as a religion without relationship; a sacrificial show without a sanctified spirit. It is little wonder that later Jewish tradition represents these two brothers (as seen in the Targum of Jerusalem) as ancient types of faith and unbelief (Maxey, 2015). Cain offered sacrifice, but in a faithless spirit" (Ellicott, 1990).

7. Cain's Unaccepted Sacrifice: Lessons for Today's Christians

Christ's unique sacrifice put an end to all forms of the OT sacrifice. By his sacrifice, the NT was established. The nature of the sacrifice was characterized by willingness, holiness or purity and complete obedience (Maxey, 2006). It was then a free-will offering, a perfect and complete sacrifice; a sufficient and all-embracing expiation sacrifice to atone for the sins of the entire world (Abe, 2004). The church of Christ therefore accepts the unique offering made on her behalf in an act of faith as final and commemorates it and lives the life of the sacrificer, who himself was the sacrificial lamb, the propitiation for sins of mankind. In other words, Jesus' sacrificial death does not allow Christians to offer other sacrifices, be it community or individual ones. But today's Christians are still under obligation to give one offering or the others to enhance the growth of the church physically and spiritually. These offerings vary from one church to another but mostly include: tithe, general and personal thanksgiving offering, special thanksgiving offering, votive offering, special/occasional levy, donation and so on.

Most church leaders today have equally designed various offerings just to generate funds either for themselves or the church. But in all, emphasis is placed on the quantity of the offering rather than the quality of the offerer: thus it is common nowadays to hear the leader saying “you have to give an offering that will provoke God to action”, “Give sacrificially” and the rest like that. In fact, special recognition/respect and honour were accorded the highest giver while many church members have been siphoned of their valuables by church leaders all in the pretense of giving the best to God. Today, most churches pay no serious attention to the quality or character of the giver but rather focus on the gift presented. Hence the need for today’s Christians to learn one or two lessons from Cain’s unaccepted offering so that they can offer an acceptable offering to God in the course of rendering their services to God.

The most important lesson that today’s Christians should learn from God’s rejection of Cain’s offering and His acceptance of Abel’s is that God, to whom all offerings are being presented focuses on the heart of the giver rather than the sacrifice/offering being presented before Him. In other words, God’s focus is not first on the quantity of gift but the quality of giver. This same truth is buttressed by Jesus Christ in Mark 12:41-44 on the account of the widow’s two mites and his (Jesus Christ) assessment of the various givers in the temple. Similarly, Cain may have brought the very best that he had, but he did so with entirely the wrong heart. Cain’s heart was not right with God. This is compared to a Christian giving a large sum of money to the church with a grudging heart. It is not gift as much as the giver, which concerns God. Apostle Paul when commenting on the offering on the offering of the Macedonians to the famine relief fund commended them because “they first gave themselves to the Lord” (2 Cor. 8:5). It is therefore the gift of one’s heart that is ultimately significant to God. This is a lesson for both church leaders and members as they worship/serve God with their various offerings. “Abel’s sacrifice represents acceptable, heartfelt worship; Cain’s represents tokenism” (Abe, 2004).

Moreover, Christians in their attempts to offer one thing or the other to God should know that

God deserves the best of what they have. However, offering God the best or good quality depends on the quality or the heart condition of the giver as discussed above. “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous” (Heb. 11:14). Thus, the quality of the offering is a product of the heart quality of the offerer. While the emphasis of this paper is not on the material contents (quantity) of the offerings being presented by Christians today, nevertheless, it is admonished that Christians (especially those who have) should offer their best to God as Abel did by offering the “firstlings” and the “fats” compared to Cain who just offered “an offering unto the Lord (Gen. 4:3-4). Every Christian should give to God what belongs to God (Matt. 22:21) but this must be done in faith with a willing and cheerful heart and in accordance with one’s ability (financially/materially).

Church leaders should also learn how to show serious and genuine concern for the heart or salvation of their benefactors and or church members. The ultimate concern of a church leader should not be on what a particular church member or any other person will give but how such a person can present an acceptable gift by first presenting himself/herself to God. This is inevitable because deformity in the character of the giver, irrespective of the amount of money or worth of the materials given, will lead to God’s rejection of the offerer and his/her offerings. It is a pity today that church and her leaders welcome and sometimes coerced all sorts of people with various kinds of “unholy offerings/sacrificial materials” to donate to the church. Thus, “offering sacrifices” to God among Christians today has become an all comers affairs! The church and her leaders should therefore be on guard, against this act. The church should learn how to pray and trust God for divine provision instead of getting money from all manners of people through various unwholesome methods to finance church programmes/projects. Such givers are being cajoled into believing that they are offering an acceptable sacrifice to God unknowing to them that it is not so much about the gift but about the giver that concerns God. “The sacrifice was accepted for the man and not man for the sacrifice” (Maxey, 2006).

8. Conclusion

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but He loves him who pursues righteousness”. (Prov. 15:8-9). God saw beyond the offerings of Cain and Abel. He knew the intents of hearts of these two men. It was not the offering itself that was the problem, but rather the heart of the one making the offering. Elsewhere in Bible, Yahweh rejected the gifts of Korah (Num. 16:15), Saul’s men (I Sam 26: 19), and apostate Israel (Isa. 1:13), not because of some blemish in their offerings, but because of their deformed characters. Cain’s flawed character led to his feigned worship, his rejection and the final rejection of his offering. Had his heart been right with God, he would have offered not a token gift, but one from the heart, and along with Abel, both Cain and his gift would have been pleasing to God.

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