

# TRUTH ON TOUGH TEXTS

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FROM SOLA SCRIPTURA PUBLICATIONS

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## THE WAY OF CAIN

JUDE 11; HEBREWS 11:4

**W**HEN WE HEAR THE NAME CAIN, MOST OF US PROBABLY think immediately of the first murderer and his heinous crime. But there is more here. The Hebrew is *Qayin*, which as most scholars agree is a play on the verb *qānāh*, “to buy, purchase, acquire, or possess.” This seems all the more apparent in what Eve herself said of Cain: “I have gotten [i.e., acquired, *qānāh*] a man from the LORD” (Gen. 4:1).

It did not take long, however, for that blessed acquisition to take a turn for the worse, long before Cain’s murder of his brother Abel, in fact. Jude alludes to Cain’s real problem when he writes of apostates: **Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain** (v. 11). The Greek behind **way** is *hodos*, which literally refers to a road, highway, or street, but metaphorically to a course of conduct or way of thinking. So what was Cain’s way of thinking? What is **the way of Cain**?

To answer that question, we must turn to our second text (Heb. 11:4): **By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.** The first thing one should recognize about this great chapter—often called “The Hall of Faith”—is that those listed here were not “larger than life” characters or a “special breed” of people. They were ordinary men and women who simply believed what God said and obeyed. They took God at His Word and did things exactly how He prescribed. Each of them encourages and challenges us to serve in the same way. In each, in fact, we observe four elements: God *spoke* by His Word; each person was *stirred* in the heart; each one *submitted* in obedience; and God *spoke* again in approval.

**Abel**, of course, is the focus here as one who demonstrated true, biblical faith, but he also serves as a contrast to and understanding of **the way of Cain**. Condensing the above four elements, let us observe three principles: the requirement, the response, and the result.<sup>1</sup>

### The Requirement

We see the requirement that God gave both **Cain** and **Abel** in the word **sacrifice**. Some Bible teachers insist that God rejected Cain’s sacrifice because it was not blood. This is based primarily on viewing Genesis 3:21 as God teaching Adam that blood had to be shed for sin, knowledge that must

have then been handed down to Cain and Abel. While we respect this view and its defenders, we humbly submit that it reads something into the text that is not actually stated there. The Hebrew, in fact, for the “offering” both men brought (Gen. 4:3–5) is *minchāh*, which does not refer to blood at all (it’s always used in Leviticus for bloodless sacrifice); nor did it have anything to do with sin or its atonement. It simply refers to the general idea of a gift. (We should also note that an offering of the fruits of the ground would in the future be prescribed under the Mosaic Law [e.g., Ex 23:16; 34:22].) **Sacrifice** in our text, then, is *thusia*, which is used differently depending upon the context. So, the offering each man brought was appropriate to his vocation and could have been accepted equally as an expression of worship and gratitude to God for His bounty.

### The Response

We read of both men’s response to God’s demand in the words: **Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.** In light of the above, the problem here was not in the *gift* but in the *giver*. It was not about *what* they brought but about the *way* they brought it. It wasn’t about the outward, rather the inward. Cain’s offering was not accepted because it wasn’t the “first fruits” (the first and best) in contrast to Abel bringing the “firstlings” (Gen. 4:4; note also, **fat** is *hēleb*, which literally means “best”; e.g., Gen. 45:18, “fat of the land”). Most importantly, Abel’s offering was by **faith alone**; Cain’s was not. So, while **Cain** demonstrated *personal works*, **Abel** expressed *pious worship*. Or as the Apostle John put it: “Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous” (1 Jn. 3:12).

How significant it is that this first example of faith in this great chapter is about worship! This underscores, indeed, that worship is God’s primary requirement of man. Oh, yes, Cain, like many today, believed *in* God, but he did not *believe* God. True worship, as Abel illustrates, involves a real sacrifice and genuine faith.

Let’s go a little deeper here by considering three principles about worship:

*First*, we must come to the place of worship. Some scholars speculate that an altar might very well have existed near the east side of the Garden of Eden where God had placed the

cherubim to guard the entrance (Gen. 3:24). In any case, there obviously was a prescribed place simply because Cain and Abel knew where to find God's presence. Similarly, Christians today have a place of corporate worship. While it is certainly true that each of us is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19–20) and can worship anywhere, Scripture repeatedly emphasizes the need for God's people to gather for worship (Acts 2:46–47; Heb. 10:25).

*Second*, we must come at the proper time of worship. It is important to note the phrase "in process of time" in reference to when Cain and Abel brought their offerings (Gen. 4:3). This can also be literally rendered "at the end of days." Worship was, therefore, at the end of a certain period of time. Some view this as a reference to the Sabbath, the end of the week, the seventh day. But this assumes that the Sabbath had been established at this time for observance, which the text nowhere indicates. It far more likely refers to the end of the year (the same expression appears in Judges 11:4, where a year is clearly meant). This would have been the time of ingathering when an offering was made in thankfulness for the bounty God had given (cf. Ex. 23:16).<sup>2</sup> We, too, have a proper time of worship. The time of corporate worship is clearly delineated in the NT as the first day of the week (Jn. 20:19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10;).

*Third*, we must come to worship in the right way. As noted earlier, **Cain** and **Abel** were very different in the way they came to God. Cain was self-serving; Abel was God-exalting. Cain approached with works; Abel approached by faith.

It is troubling, indeed, how many in our churches parallel Cain. They come to serve themselves, always looking for what the church can offer them. Many also think they can worship in whatever mode and with whatever method they choose. Also like Cain, when confronted with their sin, they get angry and even vengeful. Some (perhaps many) are not believers at all and are simply relying on their own works. "Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me" (Is. 29:13; cf. Matt. 15:8).

So, what is **the way of Cain**? *It is the way of self-will, works, religion, and unbelief.* The only similarity between Cain and Abel was that they had the same parents. In every other way possible, they were as different as night and day, light and darkness, works and faith.

## The Result

Finally, we read that because he **offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain . . . Abel . . . obtained witness that he was righteous.** John Calvin well summarizes **Cain**: "Cain conducted himself as hypocrites are accustomed to do; namely, that he wished to appease God, as one discharging a debt, by external sacrifices, without the least intention of dedicating himself to God."

So, because God, of course, knew Cain's heart, He did not have "respect" for the offering he brought (Gen. 4:5). "Respect" is the Hebrew *shā'â*, a verb that means to look at with interest but never with a casual or disinterested glance. In the present context, it means to look at with approval—God approved of Abel but not of Cain. The same idea appears in Isaiah 17:7–8, where "God says that the time is coming when a 'man will regard his maker' and no more have regard for the

altars which his hands have made."<sup>3</sup> Tragically, instead of obeying God, Cain chose a religious act.

Oh, but what a wondrous difference we see in **Abel**! God accepted Abel's sacrifice because it was brought by faith. His sacrifice was **more excellent**, our text declares. This is one word in the Greek (*pleiōn*), which is used figuratively here to mean more, greater, higher, and to indicate worth, importance, and dignity. In light of the overall context of the Book of Hebrews, we could translate this word as "better," for this is the key word in the book. Christ was better than the angels (1:4), He is a better hope (7:19), the better Mediator of a better covenant and better promises (8:6), Christians have a better country awaiting us, that is, heaven (11:16), and we also await a better resurrection (11:35).

Further, the result of Abel's faith was that he **obtained witness that he was righteous.** **Obtained witness** is *martureō*; its original use was the legal sphere. A witness would give solemn testimony of what he knew and offer evidence. God, therefore, testified of Abel, and what evidence did He cite? Abel simply believed what God said. Even more significantly, God testified that Abel was **righteous**. Here is an early and wondrous illustration of justification alone, a doctrine that is at the very core of biblical theology. Justification is the declarative act of God, as the Judge, whereby He declares that the demands of justice have been satisfied so that the sinner is no longer condemned. It is a declaration, not of *innocence*, but of *satisfaction*.<sup>4</sup> Think of it! God was satisfied with **Abel**. And while he is long **dead**, he still speaks to us today of living faith. In contrast, but just as vividly, **the way of Cain** remains as one of the chief demonstrations of the way of self-will, works, religion, and unbelief.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article was adapted from the author's new book, *Seek Him Early*, which is announced later in this issue.

<sup>2</sup> John Gill, *Exposition of the Entire Bible*, here cites the view of Aben Ezra (Abraham ibn Ezra, 1089–1167), one of the most distinguished Jewish rabbis of the Middle Ages. He was a poet, grammarian, and commentator.

<sup>3</sup> Gleason Archer, Laird Harris, and Bruce Waltke, *Theological Word-book of the Old Testament* (Moody, 1980), entry #2429.

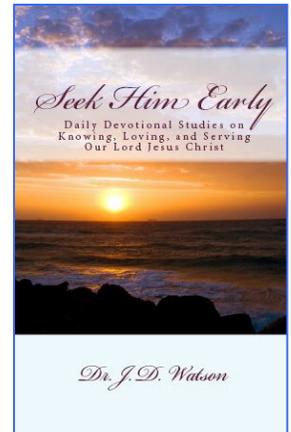
<sup>4</sup> See the author's, *Salvation Is of the Lord: An Exposition of the Doctrines of Grace By a Former Arminian* (Sola Scriptura Publications, 2015), 120–122. In part:

"In its bare essence, justification is a legal (or forensic) term. It means 'to declare or pronounce righteous and just, not symbolically but actually.' Justification does not imply that there is no guilt. On the contrary, we are worthy of death. We who were once under condemnation are now declared to be righteous because of Christ. Justification is the declarative act of God, as the Judge, whereby He declares that the demands of justice have been satisfied so that the sinner is no longer condemned. In the strict sense of the word, justification does not *make* us righteous, nor does it change our behavior, for these are accomplished by *regeneration* and *sanctification*. While all three of these work together, they are still distinct. On the other hand, justification is more than just pardoning the sinner, as a judge would pardon a criminal. Again, justification is a declaration, not of *innocence*, but of *satisfaction*."

# ANNOUNCING A NEW BOOK

## *Seek Him Early: Daily Devotional Studies on Knowing, Loving, and Serving Our Lord Jesus Christ*

**P**ASTOR Watson's publishing endeavors began with his two daily devotionals, published by AMG Publishers: *A Word for the Day* and *A Hebrew Word for the Day*. This new daily devotional truly comes from the depths of his heart. Endorsed by Phil Johnson, Joel Beeke, Todd Friel, Paige Patterson, and many others, it is divided into the three distinct parts specified in the sub-title (each encompassing four months of devotional/theological studies). The reader is first encouraged to know the Lord in a personal way, then to love Him more passionately than ever before, and finally to serve Him with the right motive and method. Each daily reading is between 450–500 words in length, meaty, theological, and homiletical. Like its predecessors, each day also includes a "Scriptures for Study" section, which lists other related verses for you to explore and lends itself to personal journaling. In addition to this issue's article, here are a few other samples (see even more at <http://SolaScripturaPublications.blogspot.com/>):



**JANUARY 1**

### Seek Him Early

*... early will I seek thee ... (Ps. 63:1)*

**I**N keeping with the title of our book of meditations, we first consider David's deep desire as he wrote while in the wilderness of Judah. Not only was he acutely aware of his need to commune with God, but he also recognized the need to do so **early**. How important it is to seek God's face before we face the day! Before we go out into the *world* alone, we need to get with *God* alone. Before we encounter the difficulties of life, we need an encounter with our Lord. The Hebrew (*šāḥar*, 7836H) includes not only the idea of "early" but also diligent search (Is. 26:9; Prov. 8:17).

*First*, we note David's *problem*. Verse 1 goes on to declare: **my soul thirsteth for thee**. That metaphor is rooted in reality. Israel is a very arid land, so as an outdoorsman and soldier, David well understood thirst. It is estimated that a person can live only about three days without water. Severe thirst causes the lips to crack, the stomach to cramp, and the body to ache. As dehydration continues, results include increased heart and respiration rates, spastic muscles, shriveled and wrinkled skin, and renal problems.

Far worse, David therefore tells us, is *spiritual* thirst. An aching *soul* is a much more severe condition than an aching *body*. This picture was so graphic for David that he wrote elsewhere: "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Ps. 42:2). Can we each say that we thirst for communion with God? Can we say with David, my soul thirsts for God?

*Second*, we see God's *provision* in verse 5: **My soul shall be satisfied**. To be in God's presence is food and drink to a dying man. The Hebrew behind **satisfied** (*šābā'*, 7646H) means to have enough of something, or even more than enough, as Israel had more than enough to eat in the wilderness (Ex. 16:8, 12). Further, the expression **marrow and fatness** pictures the finest foods one would expect to savor at a feast. Likewise, when we come before the Lord through His Word and prayer, we will feast on enticing entrées, savory side dishes, and delicious desserts we have never tasted before. We will eat to our fullest but will not be able to take it all in.

*Third*, we finally note David's *praising*. No host or hostess wants to hear the expression, "I hate to eat and run, but I have to be going." Well, David wasn't going anywhere. **My mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips** he writes in verse 5 and then adds in verse 7: **Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice**. As baby birds hide under their mother's wings for safety and solace, David could **rejoice** under God's **wings**. He knew that nourishment was nothing to be rushed, so he lingered there to praise the Host and rejoice in the bounty.

**Scriptures for Study:** What did Job testify in Job 23:12?  What does Amos 8:11 declare about thirst?

**JANUARY 11**

### Oh, the Depth! (1)

*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Rom. 11:33)*

**L**OCATED in the western Pacific, the Mariana Trench is the deepest part of the world's oceans. Its known depth is nearly seven miles (more than a mile deeper than Mt. Everest is high). Amazingly, despite the staggering pressure at this depth (almost eight tons per square inch, or more than 1,000 times the standard atmospheric pressure at sea level), as well as the numbing cold (just above freezing), living creatures have been discovered. Darkness, however, is total for no light can penetrate such a depth. Compare this to our text for a moment.

First, the *depths* of God. **Depth** translates *bathos* (899, English “bath” and “bathysphere”). It is used in the literal sense only in the Synoptic Gospels to indicate not only the depth of the sea (Lk. 5:4; it is also used in this way in the Septuagint [Ex. 15:5; Neh. 9:11; Zech. 10:11]), but also the depth of soil (Matt. 13:5; Mk. 4:5). Its other six occurrences are figurative and mean greatness, immensity, profoundness, inscrutability, and complexity. Significantly, it is closely connected to another word, *abussos* (12, English “abyss”), meaning bottomless or unfathomable (e.g., Rev. 20:2, 10).

What wondrous truth, then, is Paul telling us? Simply that the **depth** of God and the spiritual **riches** found in Him are bottomless and unfathomable. Additionally, in marvelous contrast to the pressure, cold, and darkness of the abyss, the deeper we go into the depth of God the less life’s pressures affect us, the warmer we feel, and the more light we see.

(1) We marvel at the depth of His *person*. As we meditate on God’s attributes in the studies to come, His depth will become evident. Indeed, traits of His nature—such as omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence—are unfathomable; they are “bottomless” in that we can never reach their limits because there are none. Further, aspects of His character—such as holiness, justice, mercy, love, and grace—are inscrutable, beyond our capacity to grasp in their fullness.

(2) We are awed by the depth of His *power*. In Genesis 1, we read “And God said” ten times as He brought into being what had never existed before: light, atmosphere, land, plants, heavenly bodies, animals, man, and procreation.

(3) We stand amazed by the depth of His *preservation*. He not only *created* all things, but He also *carries* them along, “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3). What holds an atom together? It is “nuclear force” or “atomic glue,” the scientist confidently asserts. Ah, but who made the glue (Col. 1:17)?

(4) We are struck speechless by the depth of His *providence*. He reigns “over all” (1 Chron. 29:11, 12), bringing every event into servitude to His sovereign preference, purpose, and plan. *Soli deo Gloria!*

**Scriptures for Study:** Read the following verses, noting what God is controlling in each one: Job 9:5–7; Psalms 22:28; 147:9.

**JANUARY 12**

## Oh, the Depth! (2)

*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Rom. 11:33)*

**I**N addition to our text, 1 Corinthians 2:9–10 declares: “But as it is written [Isa. 64:4], Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” Both texts lead us to two other observations.

*Second*, we note the *dilemma* of the task. Paul uses two words here that further demonstrate the depths of God. One is **unsearchable** (*anexereunētos*, 419), that is, not able to search out. The other is even more graphic: **past finding out** translates a single Greek word (*anexichniastos*, 421), the root of which means “a track or a trail.” The only other place this word appears in the NT is in Ephesians 3:8: “That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” According to the Septuagint, it was also one of Job’s favorite thoughts, as he declared of God, “Who doeth great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number (Job 5:9; 9:10).

But Paul adds something else: God’s **ways** are **past finding out**. **Ways** is *hodos* (3598), which literally refers to a path, road, or street and so figuratively to one’s manner of life, the way he does things, his morals, doctrine, teaching, and so forth. So, what picture does Paul paint? That the depths of God, all that He is and does, are incapable of being traced out, as impossible to search out as is the expert mountain man who leaves no trail or trace in the wilderness.

What a dilemma, indeed! But never has there been a *sweeter* dilemma! No, we cannot discover all that God is because it is undiscoverable. We cannot learn everything because it is unlearnable. But does that discourage the search? Certainly not! Why? Because a single hint leads to a clue, the clue guides us to the next discovery, and the discovery spurs us on to look for a breakthrough. Yes, it is **past finding out**, but it is not *past looking for*. The search will never be in vain.

*Third*, the above also encourages us in the *dedication* of our search. Men have invested millions of dollars and even years of their lives searching the ocean’s depths. Some have done so simply for the treasure, but others have had a nobler motive—they just wanted to solve a mystery, such as the discovery of the *Titanic* in 1985, which rests more than 12,000 feet beneath the waves.

Should we be any less dedicated to searching out the things of God? While those who are of the world usually search for things with a motive of money or other gain or advantage, the Christian searches for *true riches*, real wealth. What could possibly be of more value than the **riches** of God’s **wisdom and knowledge**, for, “In [Him] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

**Scriptures for Study:** What does Matthew 6:19–21 say about riches? 📖 What are “the riches of [God’s] grace” in Ephesians 1:3–14?

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