

Lecture XI

"The Offerings of Cain and Abel, and the Origin of Animal Sacrifices Considered"

Part II

by

Christopher Benson, M.A.

(Fellow of Magdalene College and Vicar of Ledsham, Yorkshire)

"In process of time it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD [Yahweh]. . . . And Abel he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof." (Genesis 4:3,4)

Such was the first recorded act of worship among mankind, such the first recorded sacrifice which was laid upon the altars of the Almighty. A bloody and a bloodless offering were both presented before the Lord, and the bloody was accepted and the bloodless despised. "The LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect."

To those who suppose that sacrifices were instituted from the very beginning by the Deity himself and prescribed as a mode of atonement immediately after the fall, there can be but little difficulty in explaining and accounting for the preference thus shown. They have but to remark that the offering of Abel was in strict obedience to the divine command and the respect he obtained becomes sufficiently justified. They have but, on the other hand, to observe how Cain substituted a vegetable for an animal sacrifice and infer from this direct violation of a positive ordinance of God that his presumptuous disobedience to Heaven's decree was the natural and necessary cause of all the disrespect and disapprobation with which his religious services were received.

Simple however as this representation of the case may be, and easily as it may elucidate every obscurity which attends this memorable transaction, we should never for a moment permit ourselves to forget that it is with the truth, and not with the simplicity of the principle which he assumes as the basis of his reasoning, that an impartial enquirer is principally concerned. A mind of piety may often be tempted to embrace hypotheses and acquiesce in conclusions because of their manifest usefulness in removing difficulties and illustrating the equity of God's government of the world. A religious heart will often accept the excellence of an opinion for an evidence of its correctness, and pleased with the advantages derived from its admission feel little inclination to investigate severely its claims.

But a solid judgment and a cautious understanding should ever be on its guard against a delusion so soothing and so consistent with the humility of a finite reason. Did a reverential

submission to the revealed declarations of the will of the Almighty pervade, in any considerable degree, the world in which we live, [and] were all or even most men poor in spirit and not proud in thought, then indeed the mode of proceeding to which I have alluded might be more readily allowed to continue without check, because a really religious enquirer would seldom if ever be led into any serious error by its adoption. But surrounded as we are by men anxious to discover and able to detect our very smallest deviation from the essential rules of right reasoning, and to turn the mistakes of the advocates of the Bible into an argument against its inspiration or truth, we never can be too careful of the positions we assume or the means by which we defend or explain the difficulties of Scripture.

It was under the influence of considerations like these that I felt it a duty in the preceding Discourse to scrutinize with such strictness the arguments upon which the supposed divine institution of sacrifices before the Mosaic Law is founded and maintained. It was with this view that I endeavored to show, that as it is universally allowed that no positive injunction for the practice of sacrifices is expressly recorded by Moses in the book of Genesis, so neither can any sufficient reason be assigned why he should have omitted all mention of a command so interesting in a religious point of view, if it had actually been given at that early period of the world. Neither the conciseness of his ante-diluvian history nor the subsequent institution of sacrifices in the wilderness, which he has so carefully and minutely detailed, seems to afford anything like a decisive proof that Moses intentionally suppressed the fact of their previous establishment by God.

In the same spirit of rigid and impartial inquiry, we must now proceed to examine into the other arguments by which theologians have attempted to prove that his silence may be accounted for and explained. These arguments may be arranged under two distinct heads: first, those which endeavor to show that the divine institution of animal sacrifices after the fall is implied, though not expressed, in the Mosaic narrative; and secondly, those which are founded upon circumstances altogether independent of that narrative.

I.

[Divine Institution is Implied]

1. Now the first of those remarks from which divines have labored to infer the divine institution of animal sacrifices in the very first ages of the world is too weak almost to require a refutation. The familiarity, they observe, with which the mention of the sacrifices of Cain and Abel is introduced evinces a pre-existing practice. Familiarity of expression undoubtedly implies a pre-existent practice, a practice admitted and consequently existing before the period at which the expression was used. Had Abel, therefore, himself been the historian of the incident, much force might have been due to this remark, and we should have been authorized in some measure to assume that he spoke of what was neither a new nor a singular mode of worship among men.

But the whole weight of this inference is destroyed the moment we reflect that Moses, and not Abel, was the author of the book of Genesis, and that to the Israelites, and not to the ante-diluvians, was the narrative addressed. The familiarity of the manner, therefore, with which the mention of sacrifice is introduced marks merely the intimacy of Moses and the Israelites with the idea and use of that religious ordinance. This is an intimacy which it would have been strange

indeed if they had not imbibed [learned] from their residence in Egypt, the establishment of the Passover, and the multitude and variety of their legal offerings. But it is an intimacy which cannot be made to imply, in the smallest degree, the existence of a divine command for such offerings so soon after the fall.

2. If the preceding argument be destitute of all strength, that which we are next to consider is so full of uncertainty and doubt as to be equally useless and inapplicable. "In process of time," we read in our English Bibles, "it came to pass that Cain brought an offering unto the LORD." But this we are told is an incorrect translation of the Hebrew expression, which ought not to have been rendered "*In process of time*," but "*At the close of the appointed season*." Admit the truth of this remark in its fullest extent, and still it will be found incapable of establishing the point it is intended to prove. It will still be a matter of doubt for what purpose this season had been appointed. And those who assert that it was the season which had been already appointed by God himself for the celebration of sacrifices as an act of worship and propitiation for sin, assume the divine institution of that rite whose divine institution is the subject of debate.

The real truth, however, is that this is not the proper mode of translating the original words but only the interpretation which is put upon that translation by those who defend the divine origin of sacrifices. The true rendering is universally admitted to be that which is found in the margin of our own authorized Version--After days, or "at the end of days, it came to pass that" Cain and Abel brought their offerings to the Lord. And so general is this phrase, so indefinite in its meaning and so capable of being molded into any form which the prejudices and preconceived opinions of the expositor may require, that both the divine and human institution of animal offerings have been alike attempted to be supported by a reference to its authority.

Warburton believed that human reason alone had dictated the slaughter of victims as an act of piety at God's altar; and considering that the phrase *at the end of days* was equivalent to the words *in process of time*, maintained that Moses himself must have intended us to infer the human origin of sacrifices from his narrative.¹ Others, as we have seen, have conceived the historian to speak of some appointed season at the close of which the two brothers appeared with their sacrifices, and hence would infer that the rite of sacrifice had been previously commanded by God. Nor is this all. There are still others who, with Kennicott², maintain that the expression was intended to imply the end of a certain and determinate number of days, and consequently insinuate that it was the conclusion of the week and in the solemn and appointed day of holiness and rest that these acts of worship occurred.

Thus as each man's sentiments have been previously formed has he contrived to force a confirmation of their truth out of the mouth of Moses; and to prove, by an adaptation of Scripture to his pre-determined notions, that the sacred writers themselves have given authority to his views. Strong indeed must be the faith, or weak the arguments, of those who amid such a variety of contending interpretations can be induced to rest much upon the looseness of such an indefinite and perhaps casual expression.

3. The consuming of Abel's sacrifice by fire from Heaven has been insisted upon, in the third place, as affording not only a strong but a decisive proof of the primitive and divine institution of

1 Div. Leg. lib. ix. chap. ii; Vol. III, p. 661. 4to.

2 Two Dissertations, p. 178.

animal sacrifices. But we have already seen that the question--whether the respect shown to the offering of Abel was shown by fire or by some other demonstration of the Almighty's approbation--is a question as much controverted, and as dubious, as the divine institution of sacrifices itself. This dubious fact can never, therefore, be brought forward with the force of a conclusion deduced from undeniable premises. But even were the fact completely established, it must be still evident to every impartial mind that the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice by fire can prove no more than its acceptance by any other mode. And it is equally clear that the approbation of an act of piety after it has been performed has no necessary or essential connection with the previous existence of a positive command for its performance. The acceptance, therefore, of Abel's sacrifice, however displayed, marks only the fact of its having been grateful to the Being it was intended to please.

4. I feel the dryness and the dulness of these details. I lament every moment and every line which, in this sacred place, is not calculated to influence the devotional principles of the soul or directed to the moral and religious edification of man. I turn, therefore, with pleasure from arguments which are founded only upon critical considerations to one which, in some slight degree at least, is connected with the nature and obligation of those duties which we owe to our Creator.

"Nadab and Abihu," we are told, "offered strange fire before the LORD which he commanded them not. And there went out a fire from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD" (Lev. 10:1,2). The ark of God shook as it was carried by oxen from Gibeah, "and Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God" (2 Sam. 6:6,7). Uzzah was smitten because without authority he presumed to stay up the tabernacle of God's dwelling by his fleshly arm. Nadab and Abihu were devoured because they appeared to perform their services unto the Lord with fire which he commanded them not. These were awful visitations, and impress upon us as strongly as it is possible for the language of fact and example to speak, the sinfulness and the hatefulness of every species of will-worship in the eyes of the Almighty, when offered under similar circumstances.

Is it then possible to suppose that God would have deviated from his established plan and have accepted the offering of Abel had it really been the dictate of his own unassisted will? Had the firstlings of Abel's flock been slaughtered at God's altar, without a direct and positive command for such a sacrifice, would not Abel's arm, like that of Uzzah, have been stretched forth to slaughter them without authority? And would not Abel, like Nadab and Abihu, have offered that before the Lord which the Lord commanded him not? And would not then his act of will-worship, like theirs, have called down the vengeance rather than the approbation of the Deity?

We think not, because the circumstances of the cases are materially different. When Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before the Lord, it was after another fire had been provided by God himself for their use, and after he had commanded that "the fire should ever be burning upon the altar and should never go out" (Lev. 6:13). When Uzzah was visited for having presumed to support the tottering ark, it was because, as a Levite, he ought to have borne it with his own and his brethren's strength and thus have prevented the danger into which, from being dragged by oxen, it had fallen. In both these cases, therefore, there was a positive irreverence in the act; and in both, the individuals who were the objects of God's wrath had the light of a previous revelation

which might have taught them the impropriety of the conduct they pursued.

But Abel, so far as we can perceive, had no revelation to teach him the mode in which he should worship the Almighty. And if his reason or imagination suggested to him an offering of the firstlings of his flock as the most acceptable and reasonable service his piety could present, we may call it a species of will-worship if we choose, but we never can consider it as an act blameworthy or irreverent, nor [can we] ever fairly compare it with the acts of Nadab and Abihu and Uzzah. In fact, it would seem always to require the existence of a previous communication of God's will before any act of will-worship can be justly censured with severity.

We condemn without hesitation the deluded disciple of Popery for his "voluntary humility and worshiping of angels" and images. And we feel that our condemnation is merited and right; for the Papist, like every other believer in Jesus, has the principles of the Gospel before his view, from which, if he had chosen to be instructed, he might have learned a better and a holier object of worship. We cannot, therefore, but blame his "show of wisdom in will-worship" and his presumption in "intruding into things which he has not seen" (Col. 2:18,23); because it implies a desire to be wise at least above--if not contrary to--what is written, and to make that worship which is "after the commandments and doctrines of men" of equal avail with those services which have been ordained by the Almighty himself.

But when we turn to the misguided acts of devotion upon which the unenlightened Indian is taught to depend for salvation, it is with very different feelings and thoughts. When we behold him emaciating his body and distorting his limbs and inflicting upon himself every varied suffering which a superstitious imagination can suggest, and when we find him resting on these vain services as expiating his crimes or recommending him to the favor of his God, we regret his blindness more than we condemn his willfulness. If he be sincere in devotion and righteous as far as his religious knowledge extends, we pity his errors. But never for a moment [do we] think of placing him in the same rank with the Papist, who presumptuously deforms the beauty of that holiness he has been taught by inventions and perversions of his own.

There is, therefore, a manifest difference between the voluntary services of those who add without authority to a system of religion they have already received and those who only endeavor to supply the want [lack] of such a system by the suggestions of their own reason and piety. What is presumptuous in the one is reverential in the other; and to this latter class the service of Abel belongs. The acceptance, therefore, of his animal sacrifice by God does not necessarily imply that God had previously commanded such an offering to be made, because it is very possible that if it was a reasonable service and offered in the sincerity of devotion, it might have been acceptable although only the spontaneous dictate of his religious feelings.

Such are the usual arguments by which it has been attempted to infer from the narrative of Moses that sacrifices had been instituted by God before Cain and Abel brought their respective offerings. They are arguments, however, which are so far from being conclusive upon the point, that they do not even afford presumptive evidence of any considerable weight. Let us proceed, therefore, in the next place to examine whether a divine command for the practice of animal sacrifices immediately after the fall may not be gathered from circumstances independent of the book of Genesis.

II. [Circumstances Independent of the Book of Genesis]

The circumstances generally referred to for this purpose are three: first, the universal prevalence of animal offerings; secondly, the declaration of St. Paul that Abel's offering was made acceptable by his faith; and, thirdly, the alleged impossibility of accounting for the origin of animal and bloody sacrifices from the unassisted dictates of reason alone.

1. Now in examining the first of these circumstances, we must undoubtedly allow that the universal prevalence of animal sacrifices forms one of the most remarkable features in the religious history of man. In every age and every nation of the world--ignorant or enlightened--the same shedding of a victim's blood is found to have been adopted and relied upon as a mode of conciliating an offended [Deity], or acknowledging the dependence of the offerer upon the power and kindness of a protecting Deity. Some common origin there must, therefore, necessarily have been for this invariable uniformity of religious rites. And as it would be unnatural to conceive that the reason of the most distant and dissimilar nations should have uniformly conducted them to the very same mode of worshipping the God whom they adored, we must, of course, look for that origin in some period which preceded the first general dispersion of the human race. Thus much the universal prevalence of animal sacrifices undeniably implies.

But we press the matter too closely, and we make a conclusion far too positive and precise when we pronounce the uniformity of the practice to have been founded upon a divine command. The general notion of the acceptableness of sacrifices certainly proves the general acquaintance of mankind with some fact which unequivocally demonstrated the approbation of God to such a mode of approaching his presence and his altar. But it does not certainly prove that the reason of that approbation was the obedience of the worshipper to a divine injunction. If we can discover among the earlier records of the human race the history of some transaction which tradition might have handed down to every succeeding age, and in which the sanction of Heaven to the practice of sacrifices of blood was distinctly and solemnly displayed, we have at once done all that is necessary to account for the universality of that religious ordinance without resorting to any assumed command from God.

Now such a transaction may easily be found in the proceedings of Noah when he came forth from the ark. Impressed with the wonders of his salvation from the flood, and conscious of his unworthiness of the least of the mercies he had received, Noah removed the covering of the ark and went forth and "built an altar unto the LORD, and took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a sweet savor; and the LORD said in his heart, 'I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake. While the earth remains, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.' And God blessed Noah and his sons" (Gen. 8:20,21,22 and 9:1).

Of the solemnity of this rite and the solemnity of its acceptance by Jehovah, it was impossible that the sons of Noah could have been either ignorant or unmindful. The blessing, and the sacrifice which called down the blessing, would naturally be fixed in their own thoughts and communicated to their posterity; and in every future exigence mankind would naturally recur to the same means of obtaining favor with the God of all power and goodness. In this course, therefore, we find the Patriarchs persevering; and this course was also pursued by each of the

other families by whom the whole earth was divided after the flood.

In the sanction, then, by which these burnt-offerings of Noah were so preeminently honored, and in the force and authority of his example, we find an easy and satisfactory account of the origin of a similar custom in every nation of the world. And why, with this plain and simple explanation of their prevalence before our view, we should unnecessarily presume that they were founded upon the tradition of a positive command for the practice when no such command can be found, seems difficult to conceive. The tradition of this fact is fully sufficient for the purpose and cannot be denied. The supposition of a divine command is at least doubtful and consequently can never be urged to the satisfaction of a skeptical mind.

The universality, therefore, of the practice of sacrifices affords no additional argument for their original institution by God after the fall. The prevalence of the rite, the sameness of the manner, and the merit attributed to their use may be referred with equal justice, and still greater propriety, to another and undoubted source--to the sacrifice of the second universal father of mankind [Noah] and to the signal blessing and approbation which that sacrifice obtained.

2. But of all the arguments independent of the book of Genesis which have been produced for the original institution of animal sacrifices by God, that which is deduced from the words of St. Paul appears to be possessed of by far the most plausibility and force. For does not that Apostle say that "by faith Abel offered a more excellent and acceptable sacrifice than Cain?"

In like manner then as Noah, Abraham, *and the rest* are represented by the same Apostle as acting in consequence of a divine command, placing an entire reliance in the promise of him who commanded; so Abel, in the sacrifice which he offered, must be supposed to have acted under the same impression, believing what God had promised, and therefore sacrificing what God had ordered.³

Here it is assumed that every individual who is praised for his faith in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews demonstrated their faith by an obedience to some positive command. Now if this could be fully proved--if it could ever be clearly shown that *all* those individuals whom the Apostle describes "as actuated by the divine principle of faith, rendered themselves thus renowned by a belief of something declared, and in consequence of such belief the performance of some action enjoined them by God,"⁴ I know not how we could resist the inference which has been drawn. But such is very far indeed from being a true representation of the case.

Noah, no doubt, "being warned of God prepared the ark" which God had commanded him to prepare. Abraham, no doubt, when called to go into a strange land, "by faith obeyed the call" and went into the land into which God had commanded him to go. But of the rest of the faithful who are praised, it is certain that many acted without any command having been specially given to direct their proceedings. Thus "by faith Moses, when he was come to years" and had time and understanding to reflect upon the duties which belonged to his station, "refused" any longer "to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," though we know of no divine command that he should refuse to be so called. Thus "by faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not when," without any special injunction from God, "she received the spies in peace." Jephthah too is

³ Magee on Atonement, Vol. II, p. 224.

⁴ Kennicott's Two Dissertations, p. 213.

accounted among those who were distinguished by their faith, though most assuredly his rash vow was uttered without any direct or divine command. At any rate, therefore, the assertion that faith was the ground of the acceptance of Abel's offering does not necessarily imply any pre-existing divine institution of sacrifice.

But not only is this assertion of St. Paul an inconclusive argument for the existence of a previous command from God for the practice of sacrifices of blood. If we consider carefully the manner in which he has reasoned with regard to Enoch, we shall perceive that the faith of Abel may more naturally be inferred from the mere respect which was shown to his offering than from his obedience to a pre-existing institution. For of Enoch the Apostle observes that "by faith he was translated that he should not see death; and was not found because God had translated him. For before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:5,6).

In other words, since Enoch was translated because he pleased God, and since without faith it is impossible to please him, it necessarily follows that Enoch was translated because of his faith. His faith, therefore, is to be deduced from the fact of his translation. Such is the argument with regard to Enoch. And from the manner in which the same writer has just before spoken of Abel, it does certainly seem highly probable that he intended a similar course of argument to be applied to him. For of Abel, as of Enoch, he says, that he "obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts" (Gen. 4:4). But without pleasing God it is impossible to obtain witness from him that we are righteous, and "without faith it is impossible to please him."

Consequently, as the faith of Enoch is to be inferred from the mere fact of his translation, so may the faith of Abel be, in like manner, deduced from the mere acceptableness of his sacrifice to God. The works of Cain then were wicked, because desecrated by infidelity; and he was rejected because through unbelief he had not done well. His brother, on the other hand, through belief had done well, and his works were righteous because mixed up with faith. And both this faith and this lack of it may be proved from the different manner in which the two offerings were received.

So far then everything is clear. And though it is not explicitly stated either by Moses or St. Paul in what respect the faith of Abel was superior to that of Cain, and whether in nature or degree, yet neither can this be regarded as a matter of much difficulty to determine. Doubtless, besides a general belief in the proposition that "God is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him," a proposition which seems to have been held by both the brothers in common, we may fairly suppose that the faith of Abel comprehended also a firm reliance upon all the promises and revelations which had hitherto proceeded from God, and, consequently, a belief in that particular promise which assigned to the seed of the woman the office of crushing the serpent's head.

For while we deny that the faith of *all* the worthies enumerated by St. Paul was displayed by their obedience to some special command, we freely admit that they *all* acted in that manner which they believed would be most acceptable, and founded their actions and belief upon some pre-existing revelation or promise. Thus "by faith Sarah received strength to conceive, because she judged him faithful who had promised" that she should be "delivered of a child when she was past age" (Heb. 11:11). Thus "by faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of

the children of Israel and gave commandment concerning his bones" (Heb. 11:11), in a steady belief that God would fulfill his promise and put the descendants of Jacob in possession of their appointed inheritance. Thus also "by faith did Rahab receive the spies in peace," believing that the Israelites would obtain that victory which God had promised them over the inhabitants of Canaan. And thus shall we find in every instance of faith alluded to by St. Paul, that there was a distinct belief in some preceding promise or revelation, either of a particular kind as in the cases already detailed, or of a more general nature as in the faith of Enoch.

Since then it is certain that the promise of a redemption and a Redeemer had been already communicated to man, and that even before the sacrifice of Abel he had received a revelation of a future deliverance, we are directly and undeniably authorized to assert that it was for his faith in that peculiar and benevolent declaration of God's will--a faith as clear as the obscurity of the terms of the promise allowed and as full and firm as the nature of the case required--that "the LORD had respect unto him and to his offering." And from the same principles we as clearly infer, on the other hand, that "unto Cain and to his offering the LORD had not respect," because he was deficient or devoid of that excellent gift.

The Deist may ridicule the principles upon which this solution is founded if he will, but he cannot deny that they are principles distinctly laid down by revelation. He may deride the merit of faith as a reason of man's acceptableness in the sight of his Creator and refuse to yield his assent to the proposition that "without faith it is impossible to please God." Upon this ground we fear not his objections, and we are ready to meet him whenever the occasion seems to demand the discussion. But our present object requires not that we should enter into so large a field of doctrinal investigation.

Our only object at present is to show that the respect with which the offering of Abel was received is not a circumstance upon which any argument can be founded against the internal credibility of the book in which it is found. It cannot, we maintain, be considered as inconsistent either with the dictates of reason, or the attributes of the Deity, or the general tenor of revelation; because the approbation of God was not bestowed upon Abel on account of the sanguinary [bloody] nature of his sacrifice or any frivolous or arbitrary distinction, but on account of a great and estimable religious qualification which he possessed. It was because he was endued with that virtue of faith, which from the beginning to the end of revelation is almost beyond all others conspicuous in the Saints, and [is] laid down as an indispensable requisite for obtaining the favor of God.

This we have already shown by proving first that the narrative of Moses undeniably implies that the offering of Abel was accepted and approved because he had done well; and then by demonstrating, in the method pointed out to us by St. Paul, that the qualification which entitled him to that character was his religious faith, the very quality in which Enoch was translated, through which Noah was saved, for which Abraham was blessed, and by which the Christian is justified. At least, then, the Deist must allow that Abel's offering was not accepted for any improper reason but in exact conformity with the general representations of Scripture upon the means by which men incur the displeasure or win the favor of the Almighty.

The respect, therefore, which was shown to the sacrifice of this faithful man, and the preference he obtained over the less faithful Cain, can never be condemned as inconsistent with the wisdom

and holiness of God or as unworthy to be recorded in a divine revelation, until it has first of all been proved that the doctrine of our acceptance through faith is either irrational or unrighteous. But irrational it never can be proved so long as it is allowed that our conduct is materially affected by the nature of the principles we embrace, nor unrighteous so long as we hold that "faith without works is dead," and exhort every man to "add virtue to his faith" and show forth the soundness of his belief by the fruits of righteousness in his life.

Such are the observations we would urge upon those who would falsely assert that the preference shown to Abel was an arbitrary and unfounded preference, or with equal injustice insinuate that it was the cruelty of his offering which made him acceptable to God. Such are the arguments by which we would endeavor to convince them of the injustice of the censures which, whether in poetry or prose, they have so often urged against the Scriptures as stigmatizing the Lord of all mercy as delighting only in the sanguinary [bloody] services of his creatures and as capable of being appeased by no shrine without a victim and no altar without gore. Such also are the arguments by which we would endeavor to prove that St. Paul did not intend to imply (by referring the acceptance of Abel to his faith) that sacrifices of atonement by blood had already been instituted by God.

If then that opinion is still to be maintained, it must be maintained upon the ground of the impossibility of accounting for the origin of animal sacrifices by reason alone, which is the last of those circumstances which have been urged in defense of the supposition of a divine command for such offerings. The examination of this point will consequently form the subject of the next Discourse, in which I shall bring this lengthened discussion to a close by endeavoring to establish the two following positions: First, that considering the circumstances in which Abel stood, an offering "of the firstlings of his flock" was neither an unnatural nor an unreasonable service; and secondly, that considering the recorded declarations of the Almighty to our first parents after their transgression, such an offering was perhaps the most proper method he could adopt of demonstrating his faith in the promise of some future deliverance from the consequences of the fall.

Lecture XI from *On Scripture Difficulties* by C. [Christopher] Benson (Cambridge: Printed by J. Smith, Printer to the University, for Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy, London, 1843). **Note:** The text has not been modified, except that punctuation and KJV-era pronouns and verb forms have been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.