Two Religions: Works and Blood by Paul Ellis

Travel around the world and you would be forgiven for thinking there are thousands of religions and belief-systems. But in reality there are only two religions:

1.    religion based on works

2.    religion based on the blood of Jesus

People waste years studying different religions trying to figure out which one is best. But when you strip away all the packaging it’s actually a fairly simple choice: it’s either your works or his blood. Still, dealing with simple choices has never been humanity’s strong point. Just look at the history of religion…

***The dummies’ guide to religion***

From the time of Cain men have been trying to impress God with the fruits of their labor. And from the time of Cain God has been rejecting their offerings:

“The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.” (Gen 4:4-5)

Abel, you will recall, offered the firstborn of his flock while Cain brought a fruit basket. Why was Abel’s offering accepted while Cain’s was rejected?

“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous….” (Heb 11:4 NKJV)

Both Cain and Abel had faith, but Abel’s faith led to a more excellent sacrifice. Malcolm Smith, author of [*The Lost Secret of the New Covenant*](http://www.amazon.com/Lost-Secret-New-Covenant/dp/157794495X), writes that “Biblical faith never initiates an action; it is a responsive act of trust in a word from God” (p.105). What was Abel responding to? He was responding to the sacrificial gift God had given to Adam and Eve in the Garden. No doubt Abel learned from his parents how God had shed the blood of animals to hide their nakedness. By faith, Abel trusted that a blood sacrifice of this nature would make him pleasing to God and it did.

Abel’s faith was a response to what God had done, but Cain’s faith was in the work of his own hands. Abel considered what God had done, but Cain wanted God to look at what he had done. Big mistake. Instead of adopting God’s definition of an acceptable sacrifice, he tried to forge his own religion and was rejected. Cain got angry and went into a sulk. Look carefully at what God said next:

“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.” (Gen 4:7)

Cain had worked hard to please God. His offering was paid for by the sweat of his brow and the toil of his hands. It was a costly sacrifice, but it was a useless and unacceptable one nonetheless. God in his mercy pointed Cain back in the right direction, but Cain didn’t repent. Instead he murdered his brother and the rest is history.

***Two brothers, two religions***

Religion based on human effort was, and continues to be, unacceptable to God. You can toil and serve and bring costly sacrifices every day of your life and it will change your standing before him not one bit. He is a just God and you are a born sinner. You cannot buy your salvation with acts of charity. You cannot bribe your way into the Book of Life with your acts of righteousness. Don’t get angry like Cain, just repent and put your faith in the blood sacrifice given by God.

Of course this does not mean you should go out and slaughter some poor sheep! The blood of animals does nothing to take away our sins (Heb 10:4). Before the cross these things only had value because they pointed ahead to [the blood of Jesus](http://escapetoreality.org/2010/07/01/nothing-but-the-blood/). We live after the cross. The Lamb of God has come and his one-time sacrifice was more than enough to account for all the sins of the world (Heb 9:26).

Jesus once said:

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you,” (Jn 6:53).

Do you hunger and thirst for Christ and his righteousness? Or are you satisfied by the fruits of your own labor? Jesus made it plain that religion based on works is unacceptable to God and leads to death. But faith in his blood leads to eternal life and favor with God.

***Two preachers***

Just as there are only two religions, there are two kinds of preacher; those who say we are qualified by works and those say we are qualified by the blood of Jesus. These two preachers may look the same, but their messages could not be more different. Consider the following 10 contrasts…

The Works-Preacher says, you have to do stuff to stay saved. Make a mistake and you’re lost for eternity.
The Blood-Preacher says, Jesus’ blood has obtained your eternal and complete redemption (Heb 9:12). Nothing can separate you from the love of God.

WP: Don’t touch! Don’t handle! Touch no unclean thing and be holy.
BP: You are sanctified by the blood of the covenant (Heb 10:29), that is, by Jesus’ blood (Lk 22:20). We separate ourselves from unclean things not to become holy but because we are already holy and what fellowship does light have with darkness?

WP: You have to overcome in life’s trials and dress yourself in white clothes, otherwise he will blot out your name.
BP: It’s not about you. Jesus is your victory! Wash your filthy self-righteous clothes in the cleansing blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14). Rejoice, because he promised to never blot out your name.

WP: Say your prayers and have a quiet time every day. If you don’t remain in him, he’ll lop you off and throw you into the fire.

BP: Jesus said, “Whoever drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him” (Jn 6:56). Your “remaining” has nothing to do with having a quiet time. God has reconciled you to himself through Christ. Your reconciliation is something he did, not you. When you apprehend who he is and how much he has already blessed you, a healthy appetite will motivate you to discover more of him in his word.

WP: Beware of sin! It desires to be your Master.
BP: We are called to be Christ-conscious, not sin-conscious. His sacrifice did away with sin (Heb 9:26). We have been set free from our sin by his blood (Rev 1:5). Live free from fear and condemnation.

WP: When you sin, you need to confess to get forgiven again.
BP: You were forgiven 2000 years ago (Col 2:13). Jesus said your forgiveness is [not based on confession](http://escapetoreality.org/2010/02/18/completely-forgiven-why-confession-is-bad-for-you/), but his blood (Mt 26:28). His blood is a necessary and sufficient condition for your complete forgiveness (Heb 9 & 10).

WP: When you sin, you need to confess to get clean again.
BP: The blood of Jesus cleanses and keeps on cleansing you (1 Jn 1:7).

WP: Confession is good for clearing a guilty conscience. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine you and point out your shortcomings.
BP: The blood of Christ has cleansed your conscience so that we may be free to serve God (Heb 9:14). Because of Christ’s perfect sacrifice, the Holy Spirit chooses to remember your sins no more (Heb 10:17). He will only ever convict you of your righteousness in Christ (Jn 16:10).

WP: God is holy and lives in unapproachable light. Don’t even think about drawing near.
BP: You who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13).

WP: No one can see the face of God and live. Better stay safe and hang back.
BP: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus… let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled by the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” (Heb 10:19-22)

***Pastor Cain vs Pastor Abel***

Who are you listening to? Where is your faith? Is it in death-dealing works of religion? Or is it in the life-giving blood of Jesus Christ? Are you striving to earn God’s favor or are you resting in the finished work of the cross?

It makes no difference whether you’re Catholic or Protestant, Episcopalian, Baptist or a member of the Western Branch of American Reform Presbylutheranism. If you are standing on the blood of Jesus, then you are completely forgiven, you are acceptable, and God’s favor rests on you!