

Text: Genesis 4:1-16

Title: "The Way of Cain"

Time: Sunday, December 16, 2007 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Stories of shocking murders pelt the news. I found one website that detailed a string of 39 school shootings in the United States since 1996. This list did not include the most recent one in Las Vegas, where six kids were shot as they got off a school bus. Evidently, they were involved in an argument over a girl.

On one of the TV news shows this past week, a journalist brought in a psychologist to discuss this disturbing trend in our society. When asked to explain what could bring a child to the point of murdering his classmates, the psychologist answered feebly, "No one knows the answer to this question." We wonder why we are in the trouble we are in as our culture forsakes the truth of the Bible for this return to paganism.

The Bible makes clear that shocking murders are nothing new, and that the causes of these murders are no mystery. The Bible calls the life that leads to violent murder "the way of Cain." The book of Jude explains, "Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. . . But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain" (Jude 8, 10-11a).

In Genesis 4 we have laid out before us the origin of the way of Cain. Here we learn much about the kind of life that leads to the violent murders we are seeing in our day. It turns out that the characteristics of this life are shared by far more than those involved in the 40 school shootings of recent days. I want us to see 4 characteristics of this kind of life.

I. The way of Cain ignores that life is a gift from God (vv. 1-2).

A. Because life is a blessing from God, childbearing is designed for the bonds of marriage (v. 1a).

Application: Note that the text plainly says that Eve was Adam's wife. The word "to know" here is a euphemism for mating. This kind of knowing, which leads to conceiving and bearing of children, should only be done under the bonds of monogamous heterosexual marriage and within the context of a family. The way of Cain begins with a defilement of the flesh that refuses to adhere to the principle that God's gift of sexual pleasure is designed for God's institution called *marriage*. Remember that Jude mentioned that the defilement of the flesh is where the way of Cain starts. Those engaged in violence this way have lost their innocence in this regard, and the guilt of this plagues and depresses them.

B. Because life is a blessing from God, the formation of the child in the womb is His work (v. 1b).

Application: The text says that Eve formed Cain, and the Bible clearly teaches that we are formed in our mother's womb: "For You formed my inward parts; you wove me in my mother's womb" (Ps. 139:13). According to this verse, that was me being formed in my mother's womb for those nine months. It was not a tissue mass forming there that could be discarded at the discretion of others. The right to life is inalienable, meaning that it is non-transferable, and this is so because life is a gift from God. God is the sole authority when it comes to giving and taking life.

Remember that Jude mentioned the rejection of authority related to the way of Cain. The decision as to whether a human being lives or dies is simply not ours to make. When we claim that decision for our own, we usurp God's authority, and cheapen the value of human life.

C. Because life is a blessing from God, man did not evolve from primitive cavemen who were engaged in cannibalism or the survival of the fittest (v. 2).

Application: The description of Cain and Abel as farmer and shepherd certainly contradicts evolution's description of early man. Yet our society teaches its kids that they descended from the same ancestors as apes, and then it objects for some reason when they act like apes. Remember what Jude said about the way of Cain? "Like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed."

The way of Cain ignores that life is a blessing from God, that childbearing should happen in marriage, that the unborn are persons formed by God, and that man is not an animal. This ignorance is well-known in our day.

II. The way of Cain inhibits true worship (vv. 3-7).

Illustration: True worship has been a matter of some debate among Bible-believing Christians in recent days. Rick Warren and Bill Hybels are two key leaders of a church-growth movement that has emphasized what they call purpose-driven and seeker-sensitive ministry. The emphasis behind these efforts focuses on answering the question "What kind of worship pleases man?" rather than the question "What kind of worship pleases God?"

Recently, Bill Hybels' Willow Creek Church published a book titled *Reveal: Where Are You?* in which the results of this new approach are assessed by that church's leaders. Bob Burney (crosswalk.com) wrote an article on the book that he entitles, "A Shocking 'Confession' from Willow Creek Community Church." The article says in part the following:

"For most of a generation evangelicals have been romanced by the 'seeker sensitive' movement spawned by Willow Creek

Community Church in Chicago. The guru of this movement is Bill Hybels. He and others have been telling us for decades to throw out everything we have previously thought and been taught about church growth and replace it with a new paradigm, a new way to do ministry.

“Perhaps inadvertently, with this ‘new wave’ of ministry came a de-emphasis on taking personal responsibility for Bible study combined with an emphasis on felt-needs based ‘programs’ and slick marketing.

“The size of the crowd rather than the depth of the heart determined success. If the crowd was large then surely God was blessing the ministry. Churches were built by demographic studies, professional strategists, marketing research, meeting “felt needs” and sermons consistent with these techniques. We were told that preaching was out, relevance was in. Doctrine didn’t matter nearly as much as innovation. If it wasn’t ‘cutting edge’ and consumer friendly it was doomed. The mention of sin, salvation and sanctification were taboo and replaced by Starbucks, strategy and sensitivity.

“Thousands of pastors hung on every word that emanated from the lips of the church growth experts. Satellite seminars were packed with hungry church leaders learning the latest way to ‘do church.’ The promise was clear: thousands of people and millions of dollars couldn’t be wrong. Forget what people need, give them what they want. How can you argue with the numbers? If you dared to challenge the “experts” you were immediately labeled as a ‘traditionalist,’ a throwback to the 50s, a stubborn dinosaur unwilling to change with the times.

“All that changed recently.

“Willow Creek has released the results of a multi-year study on the effectiveness of their programs and philosophy of min-

istry. The study's findings are in a new book titled *Reveal: Where Are You?*, co-authored by Cally Parkinson and Greg Hawkins, executive pastor of Willow Creek Community Church. Hybels himself called the findings 'earth shaking,' 'ground breaking' and 'mind blowing.' And no wonder: it seems that the 'experts' were wrong.

"The report reveals that most of what they have been doing for these many years and what they have taught millions of others to do is not producing solid disciples of Jesus Christ. Numbers yes, but not disciples. It gets worse. Hybels laments:

"Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data actually came back it wasn't helping people that much. Other things that we didn't put that much money into and didn't put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for.'

"If you simply want a crowd, the 'seeker sensitive' model produces results. If you want solid, sincere, mature followers of Christ, it's a bust."

Application: The point of worship is the pleasure of God, not man. Our passage makes this clear, and yet it is what the way of Cain was unable to practice. We learn 4 important traits of God-pleasing worship from this passage.

1. God-pleasing worship must involve a righteous heart (Heb. 11:4). God is not impressed by the outward appearance and our forms of worship. God expects a righteous heart. The only way we can worship with a righteous heart is by the exercise of faith. Saving faith is what separated Abel's offering from the worship of Cain.

2. God-pleasing worship must involve our best gifts (vv. 3-4). The text is clear that Abel brought a gift to God from the first-

lings of his flock, and that he took the best part of these firstlings to offer to God. Worshiping God is not about giving Him what happens to be left over after we have gotten all that we want out of life. It is about giving Him our best. Anything less dishonors Him and characterizes the way of Cain. This is why we dress differently when we come to worship the Lord. It is also why we do our best at our ministry responsibilities. We seek to glorify Him with our best as we gather for worship.

3. God-pleasing worship must involve our countenance (vv. 5-7a). Did you notice that God spends a lot of time talking to Cain about what his face looks like? My pastor in South Carolina used to talk about how Christians can sometimes look like they have been raised on persimmons. I still don't know what a persimmon is, but evidently if you have been raised on them you have trouble smiling. We ought to communicate our love for Christ with our countenance. It's no good to get all dressed up and then frown the whole time we are worshiping the Lord.

4. God-pleasing worship must involve recognizing and dealing with sin (v. 7b). Remember what Burney said about seeker-sensitive worship: "The mention of sin, salvation and sanctification were taboo and replaced by Starbucks, strategy and sensitivity." We ought not demand that our worship be full of good-feeling and void of any mention of sin or call to repentance. It turns out that sin is one of the big themes of the book of Genesis. If we can't preach on sin here, we are not going to be able to preach the book of Genesis. But we can preach sin here, and we are going to preach the book of Genesis – why? Because God-pleasing worship must involve recognizing and dealing with sin.

The way of Cain inhibits true worship, and to the degree inhibitions distract us from true worship this morning, it is the way of Cain within us that needs correction from the Lord.

III. The way of Cain hates his brother (vv. 8-10).

Application: Note the emphasis throughout the passage on "Abel, his brother" (4:2, 8, 9, 10, 11). Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" incriminates him. Note 1 John 3:10-12. The answer to Cain's question is that we are to love our brothers in the Lord. To do less is not only to fail to be your brother's keeper; it is to live the way of Cain.

A somewhat disguised version of Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is the question, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus' answer was the parable about the Good Samaritan (in John 8:48, those who were angry enough with Christ to kill Him called him a Samaritan – this was a racial slur).

God holds men responsible when they hate their brother. Defenseless victims always have a voice that the Lord hears. Passages that describe God as the avenger of innocent blood include: Gen. 9:5, Ezek. 24:6-9, Ps. 9:12. And the commentator Leupold references here the blood on the hands of the watchman (Ezek. 3:18, 33:6). We hate our brother and neighbor when we fail to warn them of God's judgment to come.

IV. The way of Cain refuses to repent (vv. 11-16).

Application: Notice how God patiently pleads with sinners, "Come let us reason together! Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat of the good of the land. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it" (Isa. 1:18-20). Yet Cain's concern was the injustice of God's punishment, not the greatness of His mercy, nor the heinousness of his own sin.

Cain worried that others would want to kill him because they were likely other offspring of Adam and Eve who would have personally mourned the loss of Abel, their brother.

Conclusion: When we follow the way of Cain, we not only fail to see the importance of the cries of Abel's blood, we also fail to see the importance of the cries of the blood of Christ. See Heb. 12:24. Whereas Abel's blood cried out for justice and the condemnation of Cain, the blood of Jesus cries out for mercy and the forgiveness of all of us who have followed in the way of Cain.

And so the author of Hebrews says the cry of Christ's blood is better. Can we with him see just how much better, because we too have been forgiven and rescued from the way of Cain we have walked?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching