

I know some people who have just enough religion to be dangerous. Don't you? They have enough religion to satisfy them, and maybe even to impress those around them, but not enough religion to make a difference in their lives. Of course, they don't need more religion--they need Christ. But the point is--a little religion is a dangerous thing.

Frankly, I find it easier to work with someone who knows nothing of the truths of the Bible than with a person who has had a veneer of exposure--especially if the religious person has learned the religious rituals and become a "cultural Christian." A cultural Christian allows his culture to define his Christianity. A cultural Christian is a dangerous commodity. Patrick Morley defines cultural Christianity this way (Man in Mirror, 33):

"Cultural Christianity means to pursue the God we want instead of the God who is. It is the tendency to be shallow in our understanding of God, wanting Him to be more of a gentle grandfather type who spoils us and lets us have our own way. It is sensing a need for God, but on our own terms. It is wanting the God we have underlined in our Bibles without wanting the rest of Him, too. It is God relative instead of God absolute."

Those are powerful words.

What does a cultural Christian look like? This evening, we are going to do a character study of a man who had enough religion to be dangerous. His name was Cain. We read about him in Genesis 4.

Proposition: By looking at the contrast between Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:1-12, we can learn how to avoid the pitfall of being a cultural Christian.

I. Abel: A Man of God

- A. He exhibited proper faith.
- B. He exhibited proper action.

II. Cain: A Man with Enough Religion to be Dangerous

- A. Cain had privileges (1-2).
 - 1. He was raised in the same home with Abel.
 - 2. He received the same privileges Abel did.
- B. Cain had a severe problem (3-12).

Cain went on a downward spiral in sin...

 - 1. He disobeyed God (3-5).
 - Result: God rejected his offering.
 - 2. He got angry and depressed (5b).
 - Result: God gave him the opportunity to change (6-7).
 - 3. He killed his brother and lied about it (8).
 - Result: God judged him (9-12).
 - 4. He became suicidal (13-14).
 - Result: God demonstrated mercy (15-16).

Lessons about Depression: There is hope!

- 1. The depressed person is not a "victim."
- 2. The depressed person is a responsible person.

3. The depressed person can reverse the spiral by God's help.

Lessons:

1. Being God's kind of person involves more than knowing what's right.
2. Being God's kind of person involves more than doing what's right.
3. Being God's kind of person involves faith, action, and motive.

I. Abel: A Man of God

Last week we saw the consequences of sin in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, cherubim preventing their return. Adam had changed the woman's name to "Eve" in 3:20, which means "life" or "living."

Genesis 4 begins with this announcement, "And Adam knew Eve his wife (the Hebrew word indicating intimacy; hence the NIV, "Adam lay with his wife")." Eve conceived and bore a son named "Cain," which means "to get."

Notice Eve's faith-cry in v 1, "I have gotten a man from the LORD." Was Eve saved? What did it even mean to be "saved" then? Eve didn't know of Jesus or the Cross, though she had a somewhat veiled promise in 3:15. There would be no sacrificial system until the 15th century B.C. She knew God was holy. She knew God judged sin. She knew He had been merciful to her. She knew God provided for her need of clothing, and now had given her a son. Eve was saved by faith alone, just as we are. Faith is more than a mere mental agreement with some facts about God. Faith is an allegiance to a personal God, and belief in His promises. Eve exhibited that.

In v 2, she bore a second son, Abel. The two brothers were very different--in occupation--Cain worked the soil, and Abel kept flocks. And different in spirituality.

V 3 "And in the process of time (how much time we're not told) it came to pass that Cain brought..." And v 4, "And Abel, he also brought..." Abel was a man of God. Two things stand out about Abel.

A. He exhibited proper faith.

Remember, mankind had been cut off from God in ch 3. But Abel believed in God. He longed to be right with God. He desired to please God. He exhibited faith in God.

For this reason, Abel was included in Hebrews 11. In fact, Heb 11:4 tells us more about Abel than Genesis 4 does. There we are told he was commended as a righteous man, a man of faith, one who though now dead, still speaks.

B. He exhibited proper action.

The proper action was this--he worshipped God. We have been created to worship God, to give God the best from our lives. Abel backed up his faith with action. Abel is a model for us of a man of God. In stark contrast stands Cain.

II. Cain: A Man with Enough Religion to be Dangerous

Cain was not a secular man. He had a religious side to him. Abel brought an offering. So did Cain. The punch line for Cain comes in v 5, "But unto Cain and to his offering he (God) had not respect." What went wrong with Cain?

A. Cain had privileges (1-2).

By occupation, Cain worked the soil. There was nothing wrong with his occupation. Remember, Adam worked the soil, too. Cain had a lot going for him.

1. *He was raised in the same home with Abel.*
2. *He received the same privileges Abel did.*

The same parental love, the same teaching, the same opportunities. There is no indication from the text that Cain's problem was his environment or lack of education or any of the other maladies blamed for our social ills these days. Cain had lots of privileges.

So what went wrong with Cain?

B. Cain had a severe problem (3-12).

Cain provides us with a classic case study on "depression." Cain was not a victim of a chemical imbalance. He was a man who didn't do what God had said, and plummeted into the pits of depression.

Cain went on a downward spiral in sin...

1. *He disobeyed God (3-5).*

V 3 says Cain brought a grain offering to God. But God rejected it (5).

Result: God rejected his offering.

Why did God accept Abel's offering, but not Cain's? There have been various suggestions. Some have proposed that the problem was that Cain's sacrifice was not a blood sacrifice--but even in Israelite worship later, God accepted grain offerings. Others suggested that shepherders were more acceptable to God than farmers. One ancient Jewish interpretation says Cain's problem was that he failed to observe proper ritual when he brought his offering. The fact is that none of these suggestions have biblical support.

Don't miss the obvious in the story. The point is that two brothers did the same thing, outwardly. They both brought an offering, a gift, to God. And the text doesn't indicate that Cain brought his leftovers, either. Both men brought their best to God. Both participated in worship. Outwardly, both did the same thing. The only difference was something only God could discern, because He knew their hearts. The difference was a matter of inner attitudes (Aalders, 121).

Hebrews 11:4 teaches that the difference was one of attitude. Abel brought his offering in "faith." Cain did not.

Please don't miss this. What Cain did was not wrong. Why he did what he did was wrong--his motivation. Cain's problem is one the Bible attacks from Genesis to Revelation. God takes no pleasure in outward forms of worship when our hearts are corrupt.

So God rejected Cain's offering. How did Cain respond to God's rebuke?

2. *He got angry and depressed (5b).*

V 5b says, "And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell." His face was downcast (NIV). Literally, "his face slumps." What a vivid picture of depression. A depressed person is not something who is "down" but is one who is "down and out." By the way, depression and anger often go hand in hand. They did with Cain.

What should Cain have done when God rejected his offering? He should have found out WHY his offering was unacceptable, and changed! How do we know?

Just listen to the questions God asked Cain in response to Cain's depression. In v 6, "Why are you angry?"--a good question for a depressed person. "Why is your countenance fallen?" In other words, "Cain, snap out of it!"

The second question in v 7, "If you do well, shall you not be accepted?" That is, "Cain, if you do RIGHT, you will be lifted up (lit. Hebrew)."

And the third question (7), a warning, "And if you don't do well, sin lies at the door." Do you see what God was doing with Cain?

Result: God gave him the opportunity to change (6-7).

What a merciful God! God didn't want Cain to fail. True, God knew what Cain would do, yet he warned him. In fact, in v 7, He told Cain, "Cain, you have the capacity to master this problem that is about to engulf you. Snap out of your depression. Your depression is due to sin. Deal with your sin, or your sin will deal with you." That's the sense of v 7 (which is difficult to translate, but summed up well in the NIV, "Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.")

Key: Great Christians aren't perfect. But when they get off track, do you know what they do? They admit it, go back to the spot in the trail where they got lost, and ask God to show them where they should have gone. For example, Moses killed a man, but through it learned to wait on God. John Mark quit once, but through his failure learned how to be faithful. God gave Cain the same opportunity to change.

By the way, how do you "master" sin? God says by doing what is right. That's how we get rid of bad habits. We replace them with good habits.

How did Cain respond to God's counsel? He didn't say a word. He responded with action, tragic action.

3. He killed his brother and lied about it (8).

Had Cain heeded God's counsel, he could have broken the downward spiral into sin. But he didn't. His disobedience, which led to anger, which resulted in depression, sent him into a deep brooding, until the unthinkable happened.

V 8 "And Cain talked with Abel his brother." What did they talk about? About their offerings? About God's rebuke of Cain? We're not told. Whatever it was it led to drastic action.

V 8b "And it came to pass...Cain rose up and slew him." Cain committed cold-hearted, pre-meditated murder. He killed his brother. Why? Why did Cain take out his anger on Abel? Abel hadn't done anything but live a godly life. True, but years later, Paul would write, "All who live godly lives will suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12)." It's a lot easier and safer (or at least we may think it is) to take out our anger on a man than on God. 1 John comments on Cain (3:12), "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and killed his brother. And why killed he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

Here is the first murder in the Bible. It happened because a man didn't control his temper. Listen. Anger will destroy us if left unchecked. It'll cause a lot of pain for those near us, too. Cain faced stiff consequences for his outburst.

Result: God judged him (9-12).

God confronted Cain in v 9, "Where is Abel, your brother?" Cain lied, "I know not; Am I my brother's keeper?" Notice the hiding and hurling, just like Adam and Eve did with God in ch 3.

God continued the interrogation in v 10, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."

In the city of Jerusalem today, there is a holocaust museum that contains the remains of a few of the six million Jews who were put to death by the Nazis during World War II. There are several shocking exhibits, including lampshades made of human skin

and soap made of human fat. The relics are a vivid reminder of man's inhumanity to man. Outside the building is a simple plaque inscribed with a brief quotation from Genesis 4:10: "Listen! Your brother's blood cries out..." (Youngblood, 74)

God judged Cain for his crime. V 11 "And now art thou cursed from the earth..." The curse was twofold (12). First, though Cain would continue to till the ground, it wouldn't produce crops for him. And second, he would be a restless wanderer. With this curse, God allowed Cain to reap the consequences of the course he chose. He hit him where he hurt--his significance was wrapped up in his work.

How did Cain respond?

4. *He became suicidal (13-14).*

V 13 "And Cain said to the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear." Cain became despondent. Those are suicidal words, "My punishment is more than I can bear. I might as well not live."

Now Cain has hit rock bottom in his downward spiral. His depression started when he sinned against God and refused to change. Then he got angry and became melancholy. He refused to heed God's warning. He brooded, and vented his anger by slaying his brother. He lied to God, and then, upon hearing God's judgment, he became suicidal. What did God do?

Result: God demonstrated mercy (15-16).

We'll see how next week. But before we leave Cain, let's consider some application.

What does Cain's example teach us about dealing with depression?

Lessons about Depression: There is hope!

Ranking first in the list of 20th century American problems is marriage. A close second is depression. The term used 100 years ago was melancholy, now it's depression. What is depression? It's more than being discouraged. "Depression is that debilitating mood, feeling or air of hopelessness which becomes a person's excuse to cease from handling life (Biblical Counseling, p. 95)."

Does the Bible give answers for dealing with depression? Yes. From Cain's example, three lessons stand out that give us hope in dealing with depression.

1. *The depressed person is not a "victim."*

According to the Bible, Cain was not a victim. He was a responsible person. Yet in our day, depression is viewed as a disease, something you "get" helplessly.

According to the National Board on Mental Health, here is how modern psychology says to deal with basic depression. One, electric shock treatments. Two, anti-depressant drugs. And three, psychotherapy once a week for at least a year (at \$90 per session). This is the world's remedy for basic depression (not to mention more serious "bi-polar disorders" which is the term that has replaced what was once known as "manic-depressive").

A good friend of Sherry and me has struggled with depression. She sought non-biblical counseling and was labeled a "victim." She spent weeks in psychiatric hospitals, poured literally thousands and thousands of dollars into psychiatric counseling, tried one anti-depressant drug after another, and today is no better off than when she started. The best non-biblical counselors can offer her is to teach her to "cope."

You see, if we call someone a victim, we can try to teach them to cope, but can offer them no true hope. God didn't deal with Cain as a victim.

2. The depressed person is a responsible person.

When Cain became despondent, what did God do? He treated him as a responsible person. He asked him (NIV, 6-7), "Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"

When in counseling training, one of my instructors mentioned that depressed people are the most difficult people to help. For one reason, their motivation level is so low. Remember, there is no better counselor than God. God's counsel is perfect. Yet Cain did not change. He refused to change. Did God fail? Does biblical counseling ever fail? No. Cain failed because he refused to do what God counseled him to do.

3. The depressed person can reverse the spiral by God's help.

With God, there is hope. It may not be easy, but the downward spiral can be reversed, by God's help. Please don't miss this. For Cain, what was the original cause of his depression? He didn't do what God said. It went downhill from there.

If you are struggling with depression, or know someone who is, I feel for you. I am so glad to be able to tell you there is hope. The best the world can do is help a person cope. God's Word offers us true hope.

Lessons:

What do we learn from Cain? Cain was a man who had just enough religion to be dangerous. From his negative example, we can draw three important conclusions.

- 1. Being God's kind of person involves more than knowing what's right.*
- 2. Being God's kind of person involves more than doing what's right.*
- 3. Being God's kind of person involves faith, action, and motive.*