

WHY DO MEN HATE?

by Ray C. Stedman

History, as we know it, is the story of the wars, battles, and bloodshed of mankind. History is the space in which Cain's ax ultimately becomes machine guns and napalm, hydrogen explosions and guided missiles. Why is this? Why has humanity throughout the entire space of its history wrestled unendingly with this terrible problem of human hatred and bloodshed? There are many shallow answers which have been given, but these superficial answers -- economics, adventure, greed, power politics -- all have long since been shown to be insufficient, though you still hear them echoed from time to time. But Scripture says that the key to our twentieth-century dilemma lies in this story that took place at the dawn of history, the story of two brothers, Cain and Abel.

Let us read the account, from Genesis 4.

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. {Gen 4:1-8 RSV}

Here we have what is obviously a highly condensed account. This story undoubtedly covers a span of many years -- perhaps a total of more than thirty or forty years, or even as many as a hundred. We are not told how old the two were when Cain slew Abel, but undoubtedly they had grown into manhood and most likely were in their early thirties. The story begins with the birth of Cain and the joy of his mother, Eve, and it centers on three highly important matters: the naming of the boys; the offerings which each presented; and the reaction of Cain to God's rejection of his offering.

Let us begin with this name, Cain. It is a very significant name because, as the account tells us, it means "gotten," and comes from the Hebrew word *qanah* which means, "to get." You will recognize it as the derivation for our English word, "begotten." We speak of begetting our children, and this comes from the name, Cain. The text says Eve named him Cain because, as she said, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord."

That latter phrase is a bit weak in translation. It is not merely "with the help of the Lord" (which is true of every birth), but what Eve probably said was, "I have gotten a man, even the Lord." By that she was unquestionably referring to the great promise that had been given wherein she was told that she would bring forth a seed who would bruise the serpent's head. She seemingly understood from that that the seed would be a divine Being, so when her first child was born -- a male -- she felt perfectly justified in naming him, "Gotten." "I have gotten a man, even the Lord."

This is very characteristic of predictions in the Bible. They do not often include a time element in them -- most of them are indeterminate as to time -- and it is apparent that Eve had no idea how long it would be before this promise would be fulfilled. Remember that Jesus said to his disciples, "The times and seasons are not for you to know for the Father has put them in his own power," {cf, Acts 1:7 KJV}. We never can know precisely when these great events are going to be fulfilled, though, as the Scriptures indicate, we often can know when they are approaching fulfillment, as in the case of the second coming of the Lord.

But now when the second child is born an ominous element begins to enter the story, for the name of this child is Abel, which means "frail." This suggests that already the physical effects of sin were becoming apparent in the race. The second child born into history was a frail, sickly child and so bore the name Abel. But, regardless of whether this was physically true or not, it is certainly suggestive that there was a difference in the attitude of the parents toward the children. Adam and Eve regarded these boys in two different ways: Cain was the strong one; Abel the weaker. It would be very natural for them to favor Cain as the firstborn, the stronger of the two, and born as we would say today, "under a lucky star," a child of destiny, one designed perhaps to fulfill great promise. Perhaps this strong hint of favoritism, found here at the beginning, offers an explanation for what follows in the story. Already, here at the very birth of these two boys, the seeds of arrogance and conceit have been planted in the heart of Cain by his unsuspecting parents, simply by the way they treat their children. How significant that is -- and how frightening! Sometimes seeds can be planted in early childhood that will come to fruit many years later, and bring heartache and despair to parents. (The interesting thing here is that it is not the neglected child that suffers most, but the favored one. I will leave that for all amateur psychologists to chew on.)

But now the scene shifts to a much later time. The boys are grown and are supporting themselves. Cain is a rugged farmer, a tiller of the soil. But that work is obviously too hard for Abel, and he becomes a keeper of the sheep. This is interesting because it indicates that from the earliest dawn of history mankind has understood and been involved in agricultural and pastoral pursuits. He was not, as sometimes we gather from dioramas in our museums, originally a hunter only.

We are now told that in the course of time both Cain and Abel brought an offering to God. There are two things strongly implied by this account. First, it is clear that there was a prescribed time indicated for the bringing of an offering. The phrase which in our version is translated, "In the course of time" is, in the Hebrew, "At the end of days." This is a strong suggestion that there was a definitely prescribed period. Perhaps it was once a year, at the end of days, i.e., at the end of the winter season, just before spring.

Second, it is clear from this account that a prescribed place existed for this offering. They were to bring it "before the Lord," a definite place where they were to appear in the presence of the Lord. If you link this with the closing words of Chapter 3, there is a clear suggestion that when God set the cherubim and flaming sword at the gateway to Eden, he thereby created a mercy seat. It is most interesting to note that in the making of the tabernacle, many centuries later, when the divine pattern was given to Moses it included a mercy seat with cherubim, whose wings would meet over the mercy seat. There was the place where offerings were to be placed. The Day of Atonement was consummated at the mercy seat when the high priest brought in a lamb for all the people, once a year. Perhaps this traces from this earliest account of an offering. Thus it is very likely that at the gateway of Eden was a mercy seat, where once a year Adam and Eve and their children were to come with an offering for the Lord.

This is indicative that Adam and Eve had passed on to their boys what they knew and had learned of God, and had trained them to worship. Man, in his primitive condition, was not, as we are sometimes told, groping blindly after God, seeking through centuries of patient endeavor to find his way to an understanding of divine truth. Mankind began on that level. Paul makes this clear in Romans. Man, who knew God, who knew who he was, departed from that knowledge and turned to idolatry. Thus he traces the degeneration of the race.

Now the offerings Cain and Abel bring to God reveal a significant difference between the two men. Cain's offering of fruit was instantly rejected; but Abel's offering of a lamb was instantly accepted. How that rejection and acceptance were indicated we are not told, though perhaps we might find a clue in the story of Gideon, and, later in the Scriptures, the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel. Remember that, when these men offered to God, fire came down from heaven and consumed the offering, and this was the indication of its acceptance by God. We can, of course, make much of the fact that Cain ought to have known better than to bring an offering of fruit unto God. He surely knew from Adam, his father, that God had cursed the ground, and to offer the fruit of a cursed ground to God was obviously to insult him. Also I think we can justifiably say that unquestionably Adam and Eve, and Cain and Abel, knew the most basic truth which the Word of God labors to get across to us, and which runs through the entire length of Scripture. It is given to us in Hebrews: "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins," {cf, Heb 9:22}.

Why is that so important? Primarily because it is designed to teach us something crucial. All these symbols of the Old Testament are designed to teach us important things. What is it that this teaches us? --"without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." It is designed to teach that the problem of sin is no light matter. It cannot be handled by a good resolution or an earnest resolve. It is not settled by simply deciding to turn over a new leaf, or to change one's attitude. It is something that is embedded in the race and touches the springs of life. It can only be solved by death. That, of course, is what ultimately explains the cross of Jesus Christ; why, in his coming, he could not merely teach us good things but he had to die to deal with the problem of sin. But I do not want to dwell on this now because it is not the heart of this story, although I think it is clearly here.

The account says that Cain was angry at God's rejection of his offering and his countenance fell. Obviously he came expecting God to accept his offering. Perhaps he was very pleased with himself. Perhaps he felt that his offering of fruit and grain was much more beautiful, much more aesthetically pleasant, than this bloody, dirty thing that Abel put on the altar. But when the smoke rose from Abel's offering and his own remained untouched, Cain's smile changed to a frown. He was angry and resentful, and the whole appearance of his face altered.

How well we know this feeling! And for the same reason, jealousy. He was jealous because his brother was accepted and he was rejected. As the New Testament tells us, he was angry, "because his own deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous" {cf, 1 Jn 3:12}, and so he was filled with jealousy. Is it not amazing the things that make us jealous? We are jealous because our neighbor has a bigger car than we have, or his child plays with a doll that can talk, while our children have to play with some cheap little doll. Our fellow worker has a desk that is nearer to the window than ours. Or perhaps he gets a longer notice of commendation in the company paper than we do, or his picture is larger. We get angry if his name is in larger print, or he has softer carpets on the floor, or has two windows instead of one, as in our office. It is amazing how petty these matters are that cause us to be filled with jealousy and resentment and to rankle with a feeling of envy.

Basically behind it is exactly the same reason why Cain was angry. He did not like the way God was acting, that is the whole point. He did not like what God had chosen to do for Abel. With him it was not a question of being upset, theologically, because fruit was not as good as a lamb. There is no implication of that in this story. Looking at it later we can see such implications, but that was not what was troubling Cain. What bothered him was simply that God did not conform to his idea of rightness. When God presumes to cut across the grain of our expectation we are all offended, aren't we? We are quick with the question, "How can God do a thing like this? Why does God permit this?" It is all because we want our thoughts to be the program on which God operates. When he presumes to do anything else, how angry we get with him! Oh, it is true that, in a church service, we can all nod our heads at Isaiah's words, "God's thoughts are not our thoughts nor his ways our ways," {cf, Isa 55:8}. But when he actually begins to act on that basis, how upset it makes us. We feel that he has betrayed us, played us false in some way.

But notice God's grace. He does not flare back at Cain with thunderbolts of judgment. He simply asks him a question, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?" That is the best question to ask a jealous, resentful individual. "Why? Think it through, now, why are you so angry? Why are you filled with resentment against this person? What is it?" I have learned that when men and women ask me, as they sometimes do, "Why does this have to happen to me? What have I done that I should have to go through this thing?" the only proper answer is, "Why shouldn't you? These things happen to everyone, and to anyone; why shouldn't it happen to you? Why should you escape? Why should you resent it? Why should you assume that you have special privilege or an immunity to the normal problems, injustices and trials of life?"

That is a hard question to answer, isn't it? But notice that God goes on to light a lamp of warning before Cain. He says, "If you do well, will you not be accepted?" Do not read into that the idea that God is simply saying, "Well, Cain, just do your best. Try hard to please me, and everything will be all right." It has a specific meaning, here. It means, "If you bring the accepted offering; if you will go to your brother and trade some of your grain for one of his lambs and bring that lamb, whose blood is to be shed for the remission of sins, indicating that you understand at least something of the problem that sin proposes, then you too will be accepted. It is not too late. I'm not going to judge you now. You can go back and repent, you can change, and,

if you so do, well, you will be accepted, just like Abel, for I am no respecter of persons." It is truth that I deal with, says God, and I don't care what kind of a past a person has who determines to act in truth and honesty, I will accept him.

But if not, then look out! Beware! "If you let this moment pass," says God to Cain, "if you refuse, now that it has all been made clear to you, to repent, to go back and bring the right offering; if you proudly refuse to do that, watch out, because sin is couching at the door of your life like a lion, ready to jump on you, to seize you and destroy you." Thus God is saying to Cain and to us; "Don't treat jealousy or resentment lightly, because it is not a light thing. Let it fester and soon you will find yourself in the grip of a power greater than you can handle, and you will do things that you didn't ever think you would do."

Have you found that out? How often have I found it to be true! Let resentment against God fester in your heart; get upset because of what he does or allows to happen in your experience; get angry or jealous at some other individual; stuff it all down inside and fondle it and play with it, and sooner or later you will say something that you didn't intend to say, or do something that you didn't intend to do. You will go farther than you ever thought you would go, and will catch yourself doing things that you never would have otherwise done.

This is what happened here. Cain disregards God's warning, he refuses to repent, he nurses his jealousy and soon his mind conceives a diabolical plot, a way to get even. How powerfully it makes its appeal to him. "Ah, now I've got him," he thinks. That brother of mine who thinks he's so good, thinks he's so holy, now I've got him! With a disarming smile he comes to Abel and says, "Brother, let's go out into the fields and talk." And there the murderous ax rises and falls, and Abel sinks to the ground with a smashed skull, murdered by his brother's hand.

What makes a man kill his brother? During the Vietnam war, a national magazine published a photograph of a Vietnamese officer executing a captured Viet Cong. When that picture appeared someone wrote a letter to one of the editors commenting on it. The writer said, "What a terrible thing! What a brutal thing! There stands that turtle-headed little man, pointing a pistol at this man's head and shooting him in cold blood. How can a man do a thing like that!" In a few days a very provocative and perceptive reply appeared. Someone wrote in to say, "The reader asks, 'How can a man do a thing in cold blood like that. What causes a man to act like that?' The answer is: the same thing that causes someone to call another person 'a turtle-headed little man!'"

It is true, isn't it? It is the same thing. Do you notice how often Scripture links these two together: insult and murder? There are those scorching words that come from the lips of Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount,

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." {Matt 5:21-24 RSV}

John tells us that if we hate our brother we have murdered him, in God's sight {1 Jn 3:15}. And that is really true. What it is really telling us is that we refrain from killing the ones we resent only because we fear the reprisal that would come to us. It was a very frequent thing in the days of the Old West that when someone took a dislike to someone, or felt a momentary irritation he simply drew a gun and shot him. Why? Because there was no law to take reprisal against him. He could immediately express what he felt in his heart. Where there was no law that would cause him to think twice about it he simply expressed it immediately by killing another individual.

See how far removed are our thoughts from those of God? What we regard as trivialities, as peccadillos, trifles, he sees as monstrous, terrible things threatening our peace, our health, and life itself. So he tries to warn Cain. "Cain, you don't know what you are doing. Let this thing rankle in your heart and before you know it you will have killed your brother." Remember in the New Testament in the letter to the Ephesians, the

Apostle Paul says, "Do not let the sun go down upon your wrath, and thus give the devil an opportunity," {cf, Eph 4:26b-27}. There he is, waiting like a roaring lion, couching at the door, ready to spring on you if you give him an opportunity. What is the opportunity? Allowing your wrath to last beyond the setting of the sun, to carry it over into another day, to form a grudge, a permanent dislike for an individual. When you do that then the door is wide open and nothing can stop Satan from seizing you, gripping you, and beginning to poison your life and destroy you, either suddenly or secretly.

"But," says the New Testament, "be at peace with one another." Do not even let your worship delay you in making peace. If you bring your gift and there remember that your brother has something against you -- or you have something against him -- leave your gift and go to your brother. Be reconciled, then come and settle things with God. That judges me! Does it not judge you? In the light of this story, how much of the evil of our day springs out of these seeds of dislike for one another and of refusal to repent when the grace of God warns us of the power we are dealing with?

How about you, here in this place? Are you angry with someone? Do you harbor a grudge in your heart? Are you holding resentment against another individual? Are you seething with hurt feelings because of something someone has said -- perhaps years ago, or even weeks ago? What about it? If you do well, if you bring the offering that God has provided, if you offer the forgiveness which he makes possible, you will be accepted. Peace will flow again into your heart and life, and with it, health and strength. But if you allow it to fester, to lie there unsettled, it will master you.

Prayer:

Our Father, you who know our hearts, deal earnestly among us that we will not lightly put these things aside and treat them as only a Sunday morning message which stirs us a bit but doesn't really change us. Help us, Lord, to realize that the wolves are now howling in the cellars of our nation's soul because of the unjudged dislikes of Christians toward one another, the unsettled resentments that have grown into family feuds that have gone on for weeks and months and years. God grant to us grace to deal with this matter in the way that has been so abundantly provided by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on our behalf, so that we may be tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us. We pray in his name, Amen.

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