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A HOUSE DIVIDED, Part One

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I'll bet you've seen those license plates that are half in, say, Auburn colors and half in UGA colors with the inscription, "A House Divided." Now, I'm not a sports fan; in fact, I didn't watch the recent Superbowl. I haven't watched a Superbowl in my entire adult life; it's just not very important to me. I realize, though, that it definitely is important to many people, including some of you. You might motivate me to play football if it's a video game, but I just tend to be too clumsy to enjoy the real thing. But I digress. I know that college sports are extremely important to many people, and rivalry between the big teams is very high. I find it interesting that some families carry this rivalry into the family relationships, which I'm sure plays out in amusing ways when the favorite teams are on the same field, or in contention for the same bowl game. I can almost hear people betting on who will be doing the dishes for a month if the other team wins.

A family can survive or perhaps even thrive on that sort of rivalry; but this morning we are going to talk about a much larger, all-encompassing rivalry. There is a divide in our nation, our churches, and even our families that goes back to the foundation of human society. In effect, we have what Francis Schaeffer describes best as "two humanities." As we discussed before, Cain attempted to come to God in his own way, while Able came to God in God's prescribed way.

Therefore, since Cain, everyone in the world stands either in the place of Cain or the place of Abel. From this point on in the flow of history there are two humanities. The one humanity says there is no God, or it makes gods in its own imagination, or it tries to come to the true God in its own way. The other humanity comes to the true God in God's way. There is no neutral ground.¹

We are going to see this divide deepen and widen, becoming a permanent part of humanity, as we continue through Genesis chapter 4. For now, though, let's consider God's dealings with Cain immediately after the murder of his brother Abel. God has made provision for Cain's repentance, which Cain has refused both *before* and *after* the murder. Now he stands before God, having refused His mercy up to this point. God must judge Cain; but even in His judgment for this heinous act, and after Cain had refused to repent, we see the mercy of God toward Cain. Look with me at Genesis 4:10-12:

And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;

When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

God doles out Cain's punishment. Capital punishment was not instituted until sometime later; God actually commands capital punishment in Genesis chapter 9 as a means of protecting human life. God

¹ Francis Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 115.

instead issues a set of circumstances that will continually be a reminder to Cain and all of his contemporaries of the awful consequences of sin. The very fruit of the ground that Cain had used as his own imagined offering to the Lord will now be much harder for him to cultivate and grow. It will be to him as though the very earth itself remembers Abel's blood—and the man who spilled it.

Some of you may have come from farming families, but you know this to be true about farmers whether or not you come from a farming family: farming requires *stability*. The farmer spends years working the land, making it as productive as possible. Modern farming methods, such as crop rotation, soil conservation, and fertilization, make large yields possible. Even before these advance, though, farmers found ways to make the soil yield more. You may recall the story of Squanto teaching the pilgrims to plant fish heads with the kernels of corn. There is evidence that ancient farmers utilized some very advanced techniques very early in human history, and we find this in many places across the world. In fact, what's unfortunate is that over time people actually *lost* the technology, only to be rediscovered in modern times. The point is that *farmers need stability*. They need the ability to work the land and enrich it, unless they use "slash and burn" techniques such as they do in the Amazon rainforests. For Cain, though, the land would actually *refuse* his best efforts. The ground he worked would become unyielding, and the harvests he reaped would be meager. He would therefore be unable to settle in any place long as the land he worked became increasingly impoverished.

You know, many people will put up with an undesirable person if they are wealthy. It's not right, but that's human nature for you. We overlook character flaws, rudeness, whatever the problem may be, if the person has economic resources from which we think we can benefit. Cain will not have those resources. He will be reviled by other humans both for his notorious crime and his inescapable poverty. He will be a fugitive and a vagabond. Truly, "the way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15).

Cain realizes his predicament in verses 13-14:

And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.

Cain does not say that his punishment is *unfair*, but rather that it is *more than he can endure*. We should note that the word *punishment* here is normally translated *iniquity*: *My iniquity is greater than I can bear*. It seems that maybe Cain finally "gets it." He finally sees that he has brought this on himself. He seems to be acknowledging that this hard life to which he is doomed is his own fault. It is very possible that Cain may yet repent, although there is no record of his actually doing so. Remember, though, that God's goal in discipline is *restoration of fellowship*.

He's come to the bottom now and he realizes that life is going to be hard from here on out. How can he live under this punishment—separated from God and separated from all human affection? God makes a gracious promise in verse 15:

And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

The Bible declares that God gave Cain a protective mark. The nature of this mark is never revealed. We

simply are not told anything more about it. It was sufficient for Cain's contemporaries, though. As the centuries wore on and the human population grew, the people who met Cain would have been instantly aware of who he was, what he had done, and that he was protected by God. God simply would not allow a "double jeopardy" penalty against Cain. He had settled the punishment against Cain, and it was a just punishment. Anything more that a human might add to that punishment would have been an affront to God and a severe injustice to Cain. Therefore God made it known that no more punishment against Cain would be accepted.

The next verses have been the subject of much criticism:

And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.

In the famous Scopes "Monkey Trial," ACLU attorney Clarence Darrow posed the question to William Jennings Bryant, "Where did Cain get his wife?" Bryant was stumped, and the media declared the Genesis record to be indefensible. The assumption is that Cain went somewhere else, found people there, married a wife and had a son. That is most certainly *not* what the Bible says, though.

If we look strictly at the biblical record, we can easily discern what happened. If we peek ahead to Genesis 5, we find that Adam was 130 years old at the birth of his third son, Seth. Cain and Able were already adults, and Cain had already murdered Able. We also know from Genesis 5 that Adam and Eve had *numerous sons and daughters*, most of whom are unnamed. In the first generation, brothers married sisters. We look at this today as disgusting, as well we should by today's standards; but in the early generations of humanity there was no prohibition against that. In fact, it was the only way for humanity to continue. I will say pointedly that in evolutionary schemes of human development, brother-sister partnerships are also necessary. We should note that the Bible *does* prevent brothers and sisters from marrying, but not until Leviticus 18, which was given in the time of Moses. You may remember that even Abraham had married his half-sister (several hundred years before the time of Moses). Until that point in human history, the human gene pool was still relatively intact and a brother could marry a sister without fear of producing deformed children. Today we need to marry someone outside of our own gene pool because we are almost certain to have the same genetic defects as our close family relations. The real problem with Cain's wife lies not with the Bible, but with our interpreting the Bible through *our own cultural frame of reference*. There was no reason Cain should not marry his sister; the idea just sounds horrific to us. Keep in mind that Adam actually married someone closer to himself than a sister!

Another issue is that people assume Cain moved away and found someone to marry. The Bible says no such thing. It seems certain that Cain was already married and took his wife with him. The significance of the verse here is not on the marriage, but on the *conception of a son* through that marriage.

One minor thing to consider is that foreigners would have no real reason to want to murder Cain as vengeance for Able. The people who would be most affected would be the people who knew and loved Able, namely his family. Cain was afraid of revenge from his family members, not strangers in a distant land. The point then is that *there were no strangers* at this moment of pronouncement. God set a mark on Cain to protect him from his and his brother's kindred. Cain lived many hundreds of years, and

those who came along in later generations heard his tale and knew the penalty, as we see here later in this very chapter.

The last thing that confuses the modern reader is this mention of a city. You have to understand that a “city” was simply a walled encampment. Cain leaves the area of his immediate family and moves eastward to “Nod,” which simply means *wandering*. Cain’s nomadic life began in the land of *wandering*. There he had a son and built a “city.” Actually, the Hebrew verb here is indefinite, so we would most properly say that he *was building* a city. There is no mention that he completed it. His son’s name means “dedication” or “commencement,” probably signifying the beginning of his new life.² It may be that his attempt to start building a city was in defiance of God’s pronouncement that he would be a vagabond and a fugitive. We are not told that he finished building it. It is very likely that he had to move on as the ground manifested the punishment God had told him would come upon him.

The rest of this chapter deals with the two humanities: the line of Cain and the line of Seth, Abel’s replacement. From this point onward, there will be those who follow the self-interested religion of Cain and the godly religion of Seth. It is interesting to note, as Francis Schaeffer does, that the first murder happened precisely at the point of not believing God. Whatever else we may believe, no matter how true or rational or noble it may seem, places us in the line of Cain.

I’m going to pause this sermon right here and address a philosophical question that is entirely relevant at this point. The philosophical question was proposed in this form by Blaise Pascal, and is therefore known as “Pascal’s Wager.” There is a great deal to consider regarding Pascal’s Wager, but I will state it as concisely as possible. It is an argument intended for skeptics. It goes something like this: If you believe in God, and you are right, then you go to heaven when you die; but if you believe in God, and you are wrong, then nothing happens when you die. Therefore, since you cannot prove or disprove either position by reason alone, you might as well choose to believe in God since you have nothing to lose if you are wrong.

If you believe in God only as a bet, that is certainly not a deep, mature, or adequate faith. But it is something, it is a start, it is enough to dam the tide of atheism. The Wager appeals not to a high ideal, like faith, hope, love, or proof, but to a low one: the instinct for self-preservation, the desire to be happy and not unhappy.³

The atheists, of course, realize this. George Smith famously said,

What have we got to lose? Intellectual integrity, self-esteem, and a passionate, rewarding life for starters. In short, everything that makes life worth living. Far from being a safe bet, Pascal’s wager requires the wager of one’s life and happiness⁴

You might be surprised to find that here I am in total agreement with the atheist. Yes, faith in Christ requires that we give up our pride and self esteem. It requires that we trust God with the totality of our

2 See Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 144.

3 Peter Kreeft, “The Argument from Pascal’s Wager.” Available online at <http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics/pascals-wager.htm>

4 George H. Smith, *Atheism: The Case against God* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1979), 184. Quoted in “Playing the Odds” by Farrell Till, *The Skeptical Review Online*, March-April 1991. Available at <http://www.theskepticalreview.com/tsrmag/2front91.html>

beings—our life and happiness. It requires that we set aside our own beliefs about our innate goodness and accept God's true goodness instead. Cain was unwilling to trust God in this fashion. We must trust the provision that God has made for us in order to find our greatest fulfillment in this life *and* the life to come. Jesus put it this way in Matthew 16:25-27:

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

The call to faith in Christ is not a call to settle on whether or not believing in Him yields the least or greatest benefits. It is not a call to a fake profession of belief so that we can avoid some punishment when this life is over. It is a call to trust what God has to say about the human condition and His own efforts to restore us to fellowship with Him, for both the present *and* eternity. Therefore, if you ever encounter an atheist, do not fall back on the line of reasoning which says, "Well, what if I'm right and you're wrong?" *It is the weakest thing you can say to an atheist.*

I repeat the words of Francis Schaeffer here:

Therefore, since Cain, everyone in the world stands either in the place of Cain or the place of Abel. From this point on in the flow of history there are two humanities. The one humanity says there is no God, or it makes gods in its own imagination, or it tries to come to the true God in its own way. The other humanity comes to the true God in God's way. There is no neutral ground.

I ask you today, are you, like Cain, relying on your own beliefs, your own merits, your own reason, your own faith? Or are you, like Abel and Seth, relying on God's revealed word? I close with the words of Jesus from John 14:1-6:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.