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## PROGRESS WITHOUT GOD

Genesis 4:16-26

By

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February 18, 1996

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Genesis Lesson 12

Progress Without God  
Genesis 4:16-26

There are three great enemies of the believer: The world; the flesh; and the devil. In the early chapters of Genesis, these three enemies are introduced to us in reverse order: The devil (chap. 3; the temptation and fall); the flesh (4:1-15; "sin crouching at the door"); and, the world (4:16-26; where we see the descendants of Cain making progress, but it is progress without God).

We live in a world of dizzying technological progress. In my own lifetime (I'm dating myself!), TV has gone from a novelty owned by a very few Americans, with a narrow selection of shows (almost all wholesome), to a domineering presence in almost all American homes, where it spews forth sensuality, violence, and anti-family programs which we watch for an average of over three hours per day per person. Somehow, I made it through college without the photocopier machine. I was through seminary and several years in the ministry before the personal computer became available. The last few years have brought the fax machine, the computer modem, and the Internet.

If you go back to my grandparent's childhood years (100 years ago), it was a whole different world. There were no paved roads or cars, no airplanes (let alone space travel--my grandfather died insisting that men on the moon were just a TV fantasy). The telephone and electric light bulb were new inventions. Most modern household appliances did not exist. Even the radio was still future. Medical knowledge was in its infancy compared to today.

As Christians, we are called to live in this world and to use the things of the world, and yet not to be conformed to its man-centered ways. It's easy to get squeezed into this world's mold, so that God subtly gets squeezed out. To make progress without God is to be like the man who climbed the ladder of success only to discover that it was leaning against the wrong wall. Someone has said, "Is it progress if you get a cannibal to use a knife and fork?"

Progress without God leads no where; true progress comes only through submission to God.

In Genesis 4:16-26 we see, in Cain's descendants, the world caught up with progress without God. But at the end of the chapter there is a glimmer of hope in the descendants of Seth, a remnant of people who call upon God. These two strands of people--the worldly and the godly--write human history. They teach us that

...

Progress without God is illusory;  
progress with God is true progress.

1. Progress without God is illusory (4:16-24).

After murdering his brother, Cain refused God's offer to repent. Instead, he "went out from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod [= wandering]" (4:16). To go out from the presence of God means that Cain turned his back on God. He and his wife had children and grandchildren, he built a city, his descendants developed a number of innovations, and life went on. It sounds a lot like our world. There is progress; but it is only apparent progress, because it is progress without God.

Before we go farther, we need to answer the questions you're all wondering about: *Where did Cain get his wife?* and, *Where did the people come from to populate a city?* With regard to Cain's wife, Genesis 5:4 states that during Adam's long life, he had many sons and daughters besides those named in these chapters. Someone has conservatively estimated that in his 930 years (which I take literally) Adam could easily have over a million descendants. So Cain (probably before murdering Abel) married one of his sisters (or nieces), who went east with him. God had not yet forbidden incest, which later in human history would cause genetic problems.

With regard to the question of where the people came from to populate Cain's city, the term "city" need mean nothing more than a walled enclosure with a few houses. Even in David's time (ca. 1000 B.C.), the capital city of Jerusalem encompassed only about ten acres. So we're not looking at a Phoenix! The people who lived in Cain's "city" were probably his descendants.

While Cain himself defied God, his descendants weren't all angry rebels. The names of several of them contain the root "El," the Hebrew word for God, which would indicate that they had a form of religion (4:18). But the implication is that they did not know the living God. He was not central to them. They focused on the business of raising families, founding cities, pursuing careers, and developing cultures and inventions.

- A. Cultural and technological advances promote the illusion of progress.

These people saw a number of beneficial advances. The population was growing. Families developed. Cities, where people banded together in a common endeavor, were now possible. Others domesticated livestock (4:20). Culture was advancing, as Jubal invented stringed and wind instruments (4:21). Tubal-cain began to make and use various bronze and iron implements. It all had the look of progress.

Sounds like our world, doesn't it? There were children, cities, culture, and careers. We get married, have children, build "planned communities," take the kids to music lessons, and pursue our careers. But when you do all these good things apart from the presence of the Lord, they become only the illusion of progress. The world tries to fill the emptiness of life without God with all these good gifts which God has given for the human race.

In fact, each of them can turn into a nightmare without God. Children can become brazen murderers, like Lamech (4:23-24). Cities can become hopeless jungles of poverty and violence. Culture--music, literature, and films--can be used to glorify filth. Careers can be used to further greed in the selfish scramble to the top. Inventions have brought us to the brink of destroying the human race. The problem isn't in these cultural and technological advances. The problem is when these things are done apart from the presence of God. Progress without God is only illusory.

- B. Man's spiritual and moral failure expose the illusion of progress.

Derek Kidner (*Genesis* [IVP], p. 78) observes: "Cain's family is a microcosm: its pattern of technical prowess and moral failure is

that of humanity." The spiritual and moral failure shows itself in four ways:

(1) *Defiance of God.* God told Cain that he would be a wanderer because of murdering Abel. But Cain went out and built a city to thumb his nose at God. But even if he settled in a city, Cain couldn't escape the inner restlessness. Perhaps building a city was his attempt to protect himself apart from God's protection, since he feared that he would receive the same treatment he gave his brother.

By naming the city after his son, it's likely that Cain was also defying God. God had said that death was the penalty for sin. Cain attempted to thwart the curse by making a lasting name for his family line by naming his city after his son. The psalmist, in talking of the foolishness of those who live without God, says, "Their inner thought is, that their houses are forever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they have called their lands after their own names. But man in his pomp will not endure; he is like the beasts that perish" (Ps. 49:11-12).

Defying God is more stupid than trying to stop a speeding freight train by standing in front of it. You can't win against God! Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). You can either do it voluntarily now, or against your will in hell. But you cannot defy God and win. The spiritual and moral failure of the fallen human race is also seen in its ...

(2) *Pride.* As we saw last week, Cain was proud. He wanted to come to God on his terms, not on God's terms. He wanted God to accept him on the basis of his best efforts. But no one can come to God on human merit. We can only come through the sacrifice God has provided, which robs us of our pride.

Cain's pride was like a snowball, picking up mass as it rolls downhill. By the time it got to Lamech, it was an avalanche. Lamech not only sinned, but sinned boastfully. Verses 23 & 24 record the first poem or song in history. It is a "macho" song of the world's first Rambo boasting in his strength. He calls his wives together and tells them how tough he is. The words may mean that he has already killed someone, or they may be the threat that if

anyone messes with him, he will kill them. He is not simply saying that he will defend himself if he is attacked. Rather, he's saying that if even a boy provokes him slightly, he will kill him.

But there's more: not only is he boasting of himself over other men, but he is boasting against God. He refers to God's promise to protect his ancestor, Cain, by punishing sevenfold. He is saying that he can take care of himself far better than God took care of Cain--seventy-sevenfold! This shows that he knew of God, but he chooses to exalt himself above God. What blasphemy and arrogance!

When a society or individuals in that society start boasting about sin, it has hit the bottom. I'm afraid our society is there. We flaunt sin on TV, and even Christians watch the filth until their noses grow accustomed to the stench. But God hates sin. Sin put Jesus through the agony of the cross. While we must show compassion to sinners (because we, too, are sinners needing mercy), we must never boast in the sin. The spiritual and moral failure of this early civilization is seen in their defiance of God and in their pride. Also,

(3) *Polygamy and sensuality.* Lamech took two wives. This is the introduction of polygamy in the Bible. While God tolerated polygamy, it was never endorsed, and the problems it caused are sufficient reason to conclude that it never brings about God's purpose for marriage. Even though this was a drastic departure from God's plan in giving one wife (and not more) to Adam, there is no indication that Lamech sought the Lord about doing it. He just did what he felt like doing.

The names of his wives and daughter reveal the sensual emphasis of this man. The names must be significant, since the Hebrews to whom Genesis was written would not have known these women, and nothing else is said of them. Adah means "the adorned," or "beautiful one"; Zillah means "the shaded," perhaps from her hair, or "tinkling," perhaps from the sound of her voice. The name of the daughter, Naamah, means "lovely. The emphasis was on the lust of the flesh, on outward beauty and sensuality, not on the inner person or character.

Like no culture in history, we are bombarded with sensuality and appeals to the flesh. But as in this early culture, so today, this moral cancer is covered with the veneer of progress: "We're free from the Victorian ideas of sexual purity. We're free from the restrictive divorce laws which kept our parents bound in unhappy marriages." And so we cast off God's plan for moral purity, for marriage and the family under the banner of progress. The final indicator of the spiritual condition of these people is ...

(4) *Perversion of culture into violence and selfish ends.* It is not accidental that the development of bronze and iron implements (4:22) is followed by Lamech's boast about murder (4:23-24). The development of bronze and iron implements was good for society. Many useful tools could help man cultivate the land and perform other tasks. But the same knowledge was used to develop swords and spears to kill. And so Lamech takes the good thing developed by his son and uses it wrongfully to defend his pride. The lyrics of the first song in history promoted violence! "Gangsta Rap" is as old as human civilization!

In our culture, inventions which could benefit man are twisted to promote destruction. The arts and music, which can be a wholesome expression of human creativity, are perverted into pornography and the degradation of people made in the image of God. And it's all tolerated under the false covering of progress and free speech.

That's the world system! It's making great progress in many areas, but it's progress without God. And so good things, legitimate things, are twisted and used for evil ends. The illusion of progress is promoted by the cultural and technological advances; but that same illusion is exposed by the spiritual and moral failure crouching behind it all. It would be depressing if the chapter ended there. But thankfully it does not. It ends with a glimmer of hope:

2. Progress with God is true progress (4:25-26).

By inciting Cain to murder Abel, Satan tried to thwart God's promise to bring a deliverer through the seed of the woman. But God raised up another seed in Seth, whose name means "appointed." Through Seth's descendants we read, "Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord."

Compared with building cities, founding cultural enterprises, and launching industries, “calling on the name of the Lord” doesn’t sound much like progress. It is not that those things are to be abandoned by God’s people. All too often Christians have let the world set the pace in the arts and sciences. Christians ought to be leading the way in every wholesome aspect of human enterprise. But the point is that if God is not at the center of such enterprise, it will be morally bankrupt. What looks like progress will not be progress at all. True progress has God at the center. Note three things about progress with God:

A. Progress with God requires believing God’s promises.

When Eve gave birth to Cain she thought he was the promised deliverer. She said, “I have gotten a man, the Lord” (4:1). Even though she was mistaken, it was a statement of faith. God had promised a deliverer through the seed of the woman. Eve believed God’s promise. But she gave birth to a murderer, not to the Savior. She could have grown disillusioned with God and said, “I believed God once and He let me down. Why should I believe Him this time?” But she didn’t. Rather she said, “God has appointed me another offspring [lit., “seed”] in place of Abel; for Cain killed him” (4:25). It’s interesting that Eve recognized Seth as the replacement for Abel, not for Cain. She knew that God could not use Cain to fulfill His promise of the seed. And her faith was rewarded, although not in her lifetime. In the fulness of time the promised Seed was born of a woman whose genealogy is traced through Seth to Adam (Luke 3:38).

You can’t make true progress in life until you take God at His word concerning His promise of the Savior. Jesus Christ, miraculously conceived in the virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit, is the eternal God in human flesh. God told Adam and Eve that they would die if they ate of the forbidden fruit. They ate; they instantly died spiritually, by being separated from God. They began to die physically. But God showed them through the death of the animals whose skins He used to clothe them that He would accept the death of an appropriate substitute. Jesus Christ is that substitute, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. You cannot come to God based on your own merit or works, as Cain tried to

do. You can only come to God by trusting in the Substitute He has provided as the penalty for your sin. True progress starts there.

B. Progress with God requires acknowledging man's frailty.

In biblical times, names were important. Seth named his son Enosh, which means "frail one" or "mortal." Instead of boasting about his strength, as Lamech did, Seth readily acknowledged his weakness by naming his son, "Frail One."

You cannot make progress with God until you learn how weak you really are. The problem with most Christians is not that they are weak, but rather that they think they're strong. Until you know your weakness, you will trust in yourself, which is a sure route to spiritual failure. But as you become aware of the awful depravity of your heart, it drives you to trust completely in the Lord, who alone is your strength. When you are weak, then you are strong. That leads to the final aspect of progress with God:

C. Progress with God requires dependence upon the Lord.

"Then men began to call on the name of the Lord". This may have been the beginning of public worship. The "name" refers to all that God had revealed about Himself. While the significance of the name "Yahweh" was not revealed to God's people until Moses (Exod. 3:13-15), God's character as the personal covenant God was known. Seth's descendants began to call upon God as the personal, caring God, trusting fully in Him. If you are not growing in dependence on the living God, you're not making progress in anything that counts for eternity.

### Conclusion

Samuel Morse, inventor of the telegraph, was a man who acknowledged his own weakness and God's strength, and thus trusted in the Lord. He was a pioneer in human progress. One day a friend said to him, "Professor Morse, when you were making your experiments, did you ever come to a place of not knowing what to do next?"

"More than once," Morse replied, "and whenever I could not see my way clearly, I knelt down and prayed to God for light and understanding." Then Morse added, "When flattering honors came to me from America and Europe on account of the invention

which bears my name, I never felt I deserved them. I had made a valuable application of electricity, not because I was superior to other men, but solely because God, who meant it for mankind, must reveal it to someone, and was pleased to reveal it to me."

In May, 1844, the first message to be sent over the telegraph, dispatched by Morse himself between Washington and Baltimore, was, "What hath God wrought!" That was true progress, because God was at the center of Morse's life.

Someone has said, "I would rather fail in a cause that will someday triumph, than triumph in a cause that will someday fail." How about you? Where are you putting your energy and time: into progress in the things of this world, or into true progress with God? Progress without God is no progress at all. The only progress that counts is progress with God at the center of our lives.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why are Christians often not on the cutting edge of science and the arts? Is it wrong for Christians to devote their lives to excellence in these areas if it is not directly evangelistic?
2. Some Christians have the notion, "Jesus is coming soon and the world is going to burn, so why work to improve things?" Is this a biblically tenable position? Why/why not?
3. How can we keep God at the center of our lives in the midst of the pressures of our families, careers, etc.?
4. What is "worldliness"? What does it mean to be "in the world" but not of it? See John 17:14-19.

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