

Genesis 6:1-22

by John Calvin

The sermon discusses the corruption of humanity, the consequences of that corruption, and the warning of the deluge, with a focus on the righteousness of Noah and the mercy of God.

Scripture: Genesis 6:1-7, Hebrews 11:7, 2 Peter 2:5

Topics: "Faith And Obedience", "Persevering In Trials"

Description

John Calvin preaches about the faith and obedience of Noah in building the ark amidst great challenges and opposition, highlighting his unwavering trust in God's promises and his complete submission to God's commands. Despite facing ridicule, threats, and immense labor, Noah's faith remained steadfast, serving as a powerful example of obedience and perseverance in the face of adversity. Through Noah's story, we learn the importance of trusting in God's word, obeying His commands, and persevering in faith, even when the world around us opposes and challenges us.

Transcript

1. And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them,

1. Et fuit, quum coepis sent homines multiplicari in superficie terrae, filiaeque natae essent eis:

2. That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.

2. Tunc viderunt filii Dei filias hominum quod pulchrae essent: et acceperunt sibi uxores ex omnibus quas elegerant.

3. And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

3. Et dixit Jehovan, Non desceptabit Spiritus meus cum homine in saeculum, eo quod sit etiam ipse caro: et erunt dies ejus centum et viginti anni.

4. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

4. Gigantes fuerunt in terra in diebus illis: et etiam postquam ingressi sunt filii Dei ad filias hominum, genuerunt eis: isti sunt potentes, qui a saeculo fuerunt viri nominis.

5. And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

5. Et vidit Jehova quod multa esset malitia hominum in terra et quod omne figmentum cogitationum cordit eorum tantumodo esset malum omni die:

6. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

6. Tunc poenituit Jehovam quod fecisset hominem in terra et doluit in corde suo.

7. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

7. Et dixit Jehova, Delebo hominem quem creavi, a superficie terrae, ab homine usque ad jumentum, usque ad reptile, et usque ad volatile coeli: quia poenitet me quod fecerim ea.

8. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

8. Et Noah invenit gratiam in oculis Jehovae.

9. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.

9. Istae sunt generationes Noah. Noah vir justus, perfectus fuit in generationibus suis: cum Deo ambulavit Noah.

10. And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

10. Genuit vero Noah tres filios, Sem, Cham, et Jepheth.

11. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.

11. Et corrupta erat: nam corruperat omnis caro viam suam super terram.

12. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.

12. Et vidit Deus terram, et ecce, corrupta erat: nam corruperat omnis caro viam suam super terram.

13. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

13. Dixit itaque Deus ad Noah, Finis universae carnis venit coram me: quia repleta est terris iniquitate a facie eorum: et ecce, ego disperdam eos cum terra.

14. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.

14. Fac tibi arcam e lignis gopher, mansiunculas facies in arca, et bituminabis eam intrinsecus et extrinsecus bitumine.

15. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of : The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits.

15. Et haec mensura qua facies cam: Trecentorum cubitorum erit longitudo arcae, quinquaginta cubitorum latitudo ejus: et triginta cubitorum altitudo ejus.

16. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it.

16. Fenestram facies arcae, et in cubito consummabis eam superne: ostium vero arcae in latere ejus pones: inferiora et secunda, et tertia facies in ea.

17. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

17. Et ego ecce ego adduco diluvium aquarum super terram, ut disperdam omnem carnem in qua est spiritus vitae sub coelo: omne quod est in terra morietur.

18. But with thee will I establish my covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

18. Et statuam pactum meum tecum, et ingredieris arcam tu, et filii tui, et uxor tua, et uxores filiorum tuorum tecum.

19. And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female.

19. Et ex omni vivente, ex omni carne, bina ex omnibus introduces in arcam, ut viva serventur tecum, masculus et foemina erunt.

20. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive.

20. Ex volatili secundum speciem suam, et ex animali secundum speciem suam, ex omni reptili terrae secundum speciem suam, bina ex omnibus ingredientur ad te, ut viva conserventur.

21. And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them.

21. Et tu cape tibi ex omni esca quae comeditur, et congregabis tibi, eritque tibi et illis ad vescendum.

22. Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

22. Et fecit Noah juxta omnia quae praeceperat ei Deus, sic fecit.

1. And it came to pass , when men began to multiply . Moses, having enumerated in order, ten patriarchs, with whom the worship of God remained pure, now relates, that their families also were corrupted. But this narration must be traced to an earlier period than the five hundredth year of Noah. For, in order to make a

transition to the history of the deluge, he prefaces it by declaring the whole world to have been so corrupt, that scarcely anything was left to God, out of the widely spread defection. That this may be the more apparent, the principle is to be kept in memory, that the world was then as if divided into two parts; because the family of Seth cherished the pure and lawful worship of God, from which the rest had fallen. Now, although all mankind had been formed for the worship of God, and therefore sincere religion ought everywhere to have reigned; yet since the greater part had prostituted itself, either to an entire contempt of God, or to depraved superstitions; it was fitting that the small portion which God had adopted, by special privilege, to himself, should remain separate from others. It was, therefore, base ingratitude in the posterity of Seth, to mingle themselves with the children of Cain, and with other profane races; because they voluntarily deprived themselves of the inestimable grace of God. For it was an intolerable profanation, to pervert, and to confound, the order appointed by God. It seems at first sight frivolous, that the sons of God should be so severely condemned, for having chosen for themselves beautiful wives from the daughters of men. But we must know first, that it is not a light crime to violate a distinction established by the Lord; secondly, that for the worshippers of God to be separated from profane nations, was a sacred appointment which ought reverently to have been observed, in order that a Church of God might exist upon earth; thirdly, that the disease was desperate, seeing that men rejected the remedy divinely prescribed for them. In short, Moses points it out as the most extreme disorder; when the sons of the pious, whom God had separated to himself from others, as a peculiar and hidden treasure, became degenerate.

That ancient figment, concerning the intercourse of angels with women, is abundantly refuted by its own absurdity; and it is surprising that learned men should formerly have been fascinated by ravings so gross and prodigious. The opinion also of the Chaldean paraphrase is frigid; namely, that promiscuous marriages between the sons of nobles, and the daughters of plebeians, is condemned. Moses, then, does not distinguish the sons of God from the daughters of men, because they were of dissimilar nature, or of different origin; but because they were the sons of God by adoption, whom he had set apart for himself; while the rest remained in their original condition. Should any one object, that they who had shamefully departed from the faith, and the obedience which God required, were unworthy to be accounted the sons of God; the answer is easy, that the honor is not ascribed to them, but to the grace of God, which had hitherto been conspicuous in their families. For when Scripture speaks of the sons of God, sometimes it has respect to eternal election, which extends only to the lawful heirs; sometimes to external vocations according to which many wolves are within the fold; and thought in fact, they are strangers, yet they obtain the name of sons, until the Lord shall disown them. Yea, even by giving them a title so honorable, Moses reproves their ingratitude, because, leaving their heavenly Father, they prostituted themselves as deserters.

2. That they were fair . Moses does not deem it worthy of condemnation that regard was had to beauty, in the choice of wives; but that mere lust reigned. For marriage is a thing too sacred to allow that men should be induced to it by the lust of the eyes. 259 For this union is inseparable comprising all the parts of life; as we have before seen, that the woman was created to be a helper of the man. Therefore our appetite becomes brutal, when we are so ravished with the charms of beauty, that those things which are chief are not taken into the account. Moses more clearly describes the violent impetuosity of their lust, when he says, that they took wives of all that they chose; by which he signifies, that the sons of God did not make their choice from those possessed of necessary endowments, but wandered without discrimination, rushing onward according to their lust. We are taught, however, in these words, that temperance is to be used in holy wedlock, and that its profanation is no light crime before God. For it is not fornication which is

here condemned in the sons of the saints, but the too great indulgence of license in choosing themselves wives. And truly, it is impossible but that, in the succession of time, the sons of God should degenerate when they thus bound themselves in the same yoke with unbelievers. And this was the extreme policy of Balaam; that, when the power of cursing was taken from him, he commanded women to be privily sent by the Midianites, who might seduce the people of God to impious defection. Thus, as in the sons of the patriarchs, of whom Moses now treats, the forgetfulness of that grace which had been divinely imparted to them was, in itself, a grievous evil, inasmuch as they formed illicit marriages after their own host; a still worse addition was made, when, by mingling themselves with the wicked, they profaned the worship of God, and fell away from the faith; a corruption which is almost always wont to follow the former.

3. My Spirit shall not always strive . Although Moses had before shown that the world had proceeded to such a degree of wickedness and impiety, as ought not any longer to be borne; yet in order to prove more certainly, that the vengeance by which the whole world was drowned, was not less just than severe, he introduces God himself as the speaker. For there is greater weight in the declaration when pronounced by God's own mouth, that the wickedness of men was too deplorable to leave any apparent hope of remedy, and that therefore there was no reason why he should spare them.

Moreover, since this would be a terrible example of divine anger, at the bare hearing of which we are even now afraid, it was necessary to be declared, that God had not been impelled by the heat of his anger into precipitation, nor had been more severe than was right; but was almost compelled, by necessity, utterly to destroy the whole world, except one single family. For men commonly do not refrain from accusing God of excessive haste; nay, they will even deem him cruel for taking vengeance of the sins of men.

Therefore, that no man may murmur, Moses here, in the person of God, pronounces the depravity of the world to have been intolerable, and obstinately incurable by any remedy. This passage, however, is variously expounded. In the first place, some of the Hebrews derive the word which Moses uses from the root 260 נָדַן (nadan) which signifies a scabbard . And hence they elicit the meaning that God was unwilling for his Spirit to be any longer held captive in a human body, as if enclosed like a sword in the scabbard.

But because the exposition is distorted, and savours of the delirium of the Manichees, as if the soul of man were a portion of the Divine Spirit, it is by us to be rejected. Even among the Jews, it is a more commonly received opinion, that the word in question is from the root דָּוַן (doon .) But since it often means to judge , and sometimes to litigate , hence also arise different interpretations. For some explain the passage to mean, that God will no longer deign to govern men by his Spirit; because the Spirit of God acts the part of a judge within us, when he so enlightens us with reason that we pursue what is right.

Luther, according to his custom, applies the term to the external jurisdiction which God exercises by the ministry of the prophets, as if some one of the patriarchs had said in an assembly, 'We must cease from crying aloud; because it is an unbecoming thing that the Spirit of God, who speaks through us, should any longer weary himself in reproofing the world.' This is indeed ingeniously spoken; but because we must not seek the sense of Scripture in uncertain conjectures, I interpret the words simply to mean, that the Lord, as if wearied with the obstinate perverseness of the world, denounces that vengeance as present, which he had hitherto deferred.

For as long as the Lord suspends punishment, he, in a certain sense, strives with men, especially if either by threats or by examples of gentle chastisement, he invites them to repentance. In this way he had

striven already, some centuries, with the world, which, nevertheless, was perpetually becoming worse. And now, as if wearied out, he declares that he has no mind to contend any longer. 261 For when God, by inviting the unbelievers to repentance, had long striven with them; the deluge put an end to the controversy.

However, I do not entirely reject the opinion of Luther that God, having seen the deplorable wickedness of men, would not allow his prophets to spend their labor in vain. But the general declaration is not to be restricted to that particular case. When the Lord says, 'I will not contend for ever,' he utters his censure on an excessive and incurable obstinacy; and, at the same time, gives proof of the divine longsuffering: as if he would say, There will never be an end of contentions unless some unprecedented act of vengeance cuts off the occasion of it.

The Greek interpreters, deceived by the similitude of one letter to another have improperly read, 'shall not remain:' 262 which has commonly been explained, as if men were then deprived of a sound and correct judgment; but this has nothing to do with the present passage.

For that he also is flesh . The reason is added why there is no advantage to be expected from further contention. The Lord here seems to place his Spirit in opposition to the carnal nature of men. In which method, Paul declares that the

'natural man does not receive those things which belong to the Spirit, and that they are foolishness unto him,'

(1Co 2:14.)

The meaning of the passage therefore is, that it is in vain for the Spirit of God to dispute with the flesh, which is incapable of reason. God gives the name of flesh as a mark of ignominy to men, whom he, nevertheless, had formed in his own image. And this is a mode of speaking familiar to Scripture. They who restrict this appellation to the inferior part of the soul are greatly deceived. For since the soul of man is vitiated in every part, and the reason of man is not less blind than his affections are perverse, the whole is properly called carnal. Therefore, let us know, that the whole man is naturally flesh, until by the grace of regeneration he begins to be spiritual. Now, as it regards the words of Moses, there is no doubt that they contain a grievous complaint together with a reproof on the part of God. Man ought to have excelled all other creatures, on account of the mind with which he was endued; but now, alienated from right reason, he is almost like the cattle of the field. Therefore God inveighs against the degenerate and corrupt nature of men; because, by their own fault, they are fallen to that degree of fatuity, that now they approach more nearly to beasts than to true men, such as they ought to be, in consequence of their creation. He intimates, however, this to be an adventitious fault, that man has a relish only for the earth, and that, the light of intelligence being extinct, he follows his own desires. I wonder that the emphasis contained in the particle **בְּשָׂרָא** (beshagam ,) has been overlooked by commentators; for the words mean, 'on this account, because he also is flesh.' In which language God complains, that the order appointed by him has been so greatly disturbed, that his own image has been transformed into flesh.

Yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years . Certain writers of antiquity, such as Lactantius, and others, have too grossly blundered in thinking that the term of human life was limited within this space of time; whereas, it is evident, that the language used in this place refers not to the private life of any one, but to a time of repentance to be granted to the whole world. Moreover, here also the admirable benignity of God is apparent, in that he, though wearied with the wickedness of men, yet postpones the execution of

extreme vengeance for more than a century. But here arises an apparent discrepancy. For Noah departed this life when he had completed nine hundred and fifty years. It is however said that he lived from the time of the deluge three hundred and fifty years. Therefore, on the day he entered the ark he was six hundred years old. Where then will the twenty years be found? The Jews answer, that these years were cut off in consequence of the increasing wickedness of men. But there is no need of that subterfuge; when the Scripture speaks of the five hundredth year of his age, it does not affirm, that he had actually reached that point. And this mode of speaking, which takes into account the beginning of a period, as well as its end, is very common. Therefore, inasmuch as the greater part of the fifth century of his life was passed, so that he was nearly five hundred years old, he is said to have been of that age. 263

4. There were giants in the earth . Among the innumerable kinds of corruptions with which the earth was filled, Moses especially records one in this place; namely that giants practiced great violence and tyranny. I do not, however, suppose, that he speaks of all the men of this age; but of certain individuals, who, being stronger than the rest, and relying on their own might and power, exalted themselves unlawfully, and without measure. As to the Hebrew noun, נְפִלִים (nefilim ,) its origin is known to be from the verb נָפַל (naphal ,) which is to fall ; but grammarians do not agree concerning its etymology. Some think that they were so called because they exceeded the common stature; 264 others, because the countenance of men fell at the sight of them, on account of the enormous size of their body; or, because all fell prostrate through terror of their magnitude. To me there seems more truth in the opinion of those who say, that a similitude is taken from a torrent, or an impetuous tempest; for as a storm and torrent, violently falling, lays waste and destroys the fields, so these robbers brought destruction and desolation into the world. 265 Moses does not indeed say, that they were of extraordinary stature, but only that they were robust. Elsewhere, I acknowledge, the same word denotes vastness of stature, which was formidable to those who explored the land of Canaan, (Jos 13:33.) But Moses does not distinguish those of whom he speaks in this place, from other men, so much by the size of their bodies, as by their robberies and their lust of dominion. In the context, the particle וְגַם (vegam ,) which is interposed, is emphatical. Jerome, after whom certain other interpreters have blundered, has rendered this passage in the worst possible manner. 266 For it is literally rendered thus, 'And even after the sons of God had gone in to the daughters of men;' as if he had said, Moreover , or, 'And at this time.' For in the first place, Moses relates that there were giants; then he subjoins, that there were also others from among that promiscuous offspring, which was produced when the sons of God mingled themselves with the daughters of men. It would not have been wonderful if such outrage had prevailed among the posterity of Cain; but the universal pollution is more clearly evident from this, that the holy seed was defiled by the same corruption. That a contagion so great should have spread through the few families which ought to have constituted the sanctuary of God, is no slight aggravation of the evil. The giants, then, had a prior origin; but afterwards those who were born of promiscuous marriages imitated their example.

The same became mighty men which were of old 267 The word 'age' is commonly understood to mean antiquity : as if Moses had said, that they who first exercised tyranny or power in the world, together with an excessive licentiousness and an unbridled lust of dominion, had begun from this race. Yet there are those who expound the expression, 'from the age,' to mean, in the presence of the world : for the Hebrew word עוֹלָם (olam ,) has also this signification. 268 Some think that this was spoken proverbially; because the age immediately posterior to the deluge had produced none like them. The first exposition is the more simple; the sum of the whole, however, is, that they were ferocious tyrants, who separated themselves from the common rank. Their first fault was pride; because, relying on their own strength, they arrogated to themselves more than was due. Pride produced contempt of God, because, being inflated by

arrogance, they began to shake off every yoke. At the same time, they were also disdainful and cruel towards men; because it is not possible that they, who would not bear to yield obedience to God, should have acted with moderation towards men. Moses adds they were "men of renown;" by which he intimates that they boasted of their wickedness, and were what are called, honorable robbers. Nor is it to be doubted, that they had something more excellent than the common people, which procured for them favor and glory in the world. Nevertheless, under the magnificent title of heroes, they cruelly exercised dominion, and acquired power and fame for themselves, by injuring and oppressing their brethren. And this was the first nobility of the world. Lest any one should too greatly delight himself in a long and dingy line of ancestry; this, I repeat, was the nobility, which raised itself on high, by pouring contempt and disgrace on others. Celebrity of name is not in itself condemned; since it is necessary that they whom the Lord has adorned with peculiar gifts should be preeminent among others; and it is advantageous that there should be distinction of ranks in the world. But as ambition is always vicious and more especially so when joined with a tyrannical ferocity, which causes the more powerful to insult the weak, the evil becomes intolerable. It is, however, much worse, when wicked men gain honor by their crimes; and when, the more audacious any one is in doing injury, the more insolently he boasts of the empty smoke of titles. Moreover, as Satan is an ingenious contriver of falsehoods, by which he would corrupt the truth of God, and in this manner render it suspected, the poets have invented many fables concerning the giants; who are called by them the sons of the Earth, for this reason, as it appears to me, because they rushed forward to acquire dominions without any example of their ancestors.

5. And God saw that the wickedness of man was great . Moses prosecutes the subject to which he had just alluded, that God was neither too harsh, nor precipitate in exacting punishment from the wicked men of the world. And he introduces God as speaking after the manner of men, by a figure which ascribes human affections to God; 269 because he could not otherwise express what was very important to be known; namely, that God was not induced hastily, or for a slight cause, to destroy the world. For by the word saw , he indicates long continued patience; as if he would say, that God had not proclaimed his sentence to destroy men, until after having well observed, and long considered, their case, he saw them to be past recovery. Also, what follows has not a little emphasis, that 'their wickedness was great in the earth.' He might have pardoned sins of a less aggravated character: if in one part only of the world impiety had reigned, other regions might have remained free from punishment. But now, when iniquity has reached its highest point, and so pervaded the whole earth, that integrity possesses no longer a single corner; it follows, that the time for punishment is more than fully arrived. A prodigious wickedness, then, everywhere reigned, so that the whole earth was covered with it. Whence we perceive that it was not overwhelmed with a deluge of waters till it had first been immersed in the pollution of wickedness.

Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart . Moses has traced the cause of the deluge to external acts of iniquity, he now ascends higher, and declares that men were not only perverse by habit, and by the custom of evil living; but that wickedness was too deeply seated in their hearts, to leave any hope of repentance. He certainly could not have more forcibly asserted that the depravity was such as no moderate remedy might cure. It may indeed happen, that men will sometimes plunge themselves into sin, while yet something of a sound mind will remain; but Moses teaches us, that the mind of those, concerning whom he speaks, was so thoroughly imbued with iniquity, that the whole presented nothing but what was to be condemned. For the language he employs is very emphatical: it seemed enough to have said, that their heart was corrupt: but not content with this word, he expressly asserts, "every imagination of the thoughts of the heart;" and adds the word "only," as if he would deny that there was a drop of good mixed with it.

Continually . Some expound this particle to mean, from commencing infancy; as if he would say, the depravity of men is very great from the time of their birth. But the more correct interpretation is, that the world had then become so hardened in its wickedness, and was so far from any amendment, or from entertaining any feeling of penitence, that it grew worse and worse as time advanced; and further, that it was not the folly of a few days, but the inveterate depravity which the children, having received, as by hereditary right, transmitted from their parents to their descendants. Nevertheless, though Moses here speaks of the wickedness which at that time prevailed in the world, the general doctrine 270 is properly and consistently hence elicited. Nor do they rashly distort the passage who extend it to the whole human race. So when David says,

'That all have revolted, that they are become unprofitable, that is, none who does good, no not one; their throat is an open sepulcher; there is no fear of God before their eyes,' (Ps. 5:10, Ps. 14:3)

he deplores, truly, the impiety of his own age; yet Paul (Ro 3:12) does not scruple to extend it to all men of every age: and with justice; for it is not a mere complaint concerning a few men, but a description of the human mind when left to itself, destitute of the Spirit of God. It is therefore very proper that the obstinacy of the men, who had greatly abused the goodness of Gods should be condemned in these words; yet, at the same time, the true nature of man, when deprived of the grace of the Spirit, is clearly exhibited.

6. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth The repentance which is here ascribed to God does not properly belong to him, but has reference to our understanding of him. For since we cannot comprehend him as he is, it is necessary that, for our sakes he should, in a certain sense, transform himself. That repentance cannot take place in God, easily appears from this single considerations that nothing happens which is by him unexpected or unforeseen. The same reasoning, and remark, applies to what follows, that God was affected with grief. Certainly God is not sorrowful or sad; but remains forever like himself in his celestial and happy repose: yet, because it could not otherwise be known how great is God's hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the Spirit accommodates himself to our capacity. Wherefore, there is no need for us to involve ourselves in thorny and difficult questions, when it is obvious to what end these words of repentance and grief are applied; namely, to teach us, that from the time when man was so greatly corrupted, God would not reckon him among his creatures; as if he would say, 'This is not my workmanship; this is not that man who was formed in my image, and whom I had adorned with such excellent gifts: I do not deign now to acknowledge this degenerate and defiled creature as mine.' Similar to this is what he says, in the second place, concerning grief; that God was so offended by the atrocious wickedness of men, as if they had wounded his heart with mortal grief: There is here, therefore, an unexpressed antithesis between that upright nature which had been created by God, and that corruption which sprung from sin. Meanwhile, unless we wish to provoke God, and to put him to grief, let us learn to abhor and to flee from sin. Moreover, this paternal goodness and tenderness ought, in no slight degree, to subdue in us the love of sin; since God, in order more effectually to pierce our hearts, clothes himself with our affections. This figure, which represents God as transferring to himself what is peculiar to human nature, is called **■νθρωποπ■θεια**

7. And the Lord said , I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth , both man and beast , etc . He again introduces God as deliberating, in order that we may the better know that the world was not destroyed without mature counsel on the part of God. For the Spirit of the Lord designed that we should be diligently admonished on this point, in order that he might cut off occasion for those impious complaints, into which we should be otherwise too ready to break forth. The word said here means decreed ; because God utters no voice, without having inwardly determined what he would do. Besides,

he had no need of new counsel, according to the manner of men, as if he were forming a judgment concerning something recently discovered. But all this is said in consideration of our infirmity; that we may cleverly think of the deluge, but it shall immediately occur to us that the vengeance of God was just. Moreover, God, not content with the punishment of man, proceeds even to beasts, and cattle, and fowls and every kind of living creatures. In which he seems to exceed the bounds of moderation: for although the impiety of men is hateful to him, yet to what purpose is it to be angry with unoffending animals? But it is not wonderful that those animals, which were created for man's sake, and lived for his use, should participate in his ruin: neither asses, nor oxen, nor any other animals, had done evil; yet being in subjection to man when he fell, they were drawn with him into the same destruction. The earth was like a wealthy house, well supplied with every kind of provision in abundance and variety. Now, since man has defiled the earth itself with his crimes, and has vilely corrupted all the riches with which it was replenished, the Lord also designed that the monument of his punishment should there be placed: just as if a judge, about to punish a most wicked and nefarious criminal, should, for the sake of greater infamy, command his house to be razed to the foundation. And this all tends to inspire us with a dread of sin; for we may easily infer how great is its atrocity, when the punishment of it is extended even to the brute creation.

8. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. This is a Hebrew phrase, which signifies that God was propitious to him, and favored him. For so the Hebrews are accustomed to speak: -- 'If I have found grace in thy sight,' instead of, 'If I am acceptable to thee,' or, 'If thou wilt grant me thy benevolence or favor.' Which phrase requires to be noticed, because certain unlearned men infer with futile subtlety, that if men find grace in God's sight, it is because they seek it by their own industry and merits. I acknowledge, indeed, that here Noah is declared to have been acceptable to God, because, by living uprightly and homily, he kept himself pure from the common pollutions of the world; whence, however, did he attain this integrity, but from the preventing grace of God? The commencement, therefore, of this favor was gratuitous mercy. Afterwards, the Lord, having once embraced him, retained him under his own hand, lest he should perish with the rest of the world.

9. These are the generations of Noah . The Hebrew word **דור** (toledoth) properly means generation. It has, however, sometimes a more extended sense, and applies to the whole history of life; this indeed seems to be its meaning in the present place. 271 For when Moses had stated that one man was found whom God, -- when he had determined to destroy the whole world, -- would yet preserve, he briefly describes what kind of person he was. And, in the first place, asserts, that he was just and upright among the men of his age: for here is a different Hebrew noun, **דור** (dor ,) which signifies an age, or the time of a life. 272 The word **טמם** (tamim) which the ancient interpreter is accustomed to translate perfect , 273 is of the same force as upright or sincere ; and is opposed to what is deceitful, pretended, and vain. And Moses does not rashly connect these two things together; for the world, being always influenced by external splendor, estimates justice, not by the affection of the heart, but by bare works. If, however, we desire to be approved by God, and accounted righteous before him, we must not only regulate our hands, and eyes, and feet, in obedience to his Law; but integrity of heart is above all things required, and holds the chief place in the true definition of righteousness. Let us, however, know that they are called just and upright, not who are in every respect perfect, and in whom there is no defect; but who cultivate righteousness purely, and from their heart. Because we are assured that God does not act towards his own people with the rigour of justice, as requiring of them a life according to the perfect rule of the Law; for, if only no hypocrisy reigns within them, but the pure love of rectitude flourishes, and fills their hearts, he pronounces them, according to his clemency, to be righteous.

The clause, "in his generations," is emphatical. For he has already often said, and will soon repeat it, that nothing was more corrupt than that age. Therefore, it was a remarkable instance of constancy, that Noah being surrounded on every side with the filth of iniquity, should hence have contracted no contagion. We know how great is the force of custom, so that nothing is more difficult than to live homily among the wicked, and to avoid being led away by their evil examples. Scarcely is there one in a hundred who has not in his mouth that diabolical proverb, 'We must howl when we are among the wolves;' and the greater part, -- framing a rule for themselves from the common practice, -- judge everything to be lawful which is generally received. As, however, the singular virtue of Noah is here commended; so let us remember that we are instructed what we ought to do, though the whole world were rushing to its own destruction. If, at the present time, the morals of men are so vitiated, and the whole mode of life so confused, that probity has become most rare; still more vile and dreadful was the confusion in the time of Noah, when he had not even one associate in the worship of God, and in the pursuit of holiness. If he could bear up against the corruptions of the whole world, and against such constant and vehement assaults of iniquity; no excuse is left for us, unless, with equal fortitude of mind, we prosecute a right course through innumerable obstacles of vice. It is not improbable that Moses uses the word generations in the plural number, the more fully to declare what a strenuous and invincible combatant Noah was, who, through so many ages, had remained unaltered. Besides, the manner of cultivating righteousness, which he had adopted is explained in the context; namely that he had "walked with God," which excellency he had also commended in the holy father Enoch, in the preceding chapter, where we have stated what the expression means. When the corruption of morals was so great in the earth, if Noah had had respect to man, he would have been cast into a profound labyrinth. He sees, therefore, this to be his only remedy; namely, to disregard men, that he may fix all his thoughts on God, and make Him the sole Arbiter of his life. Whence it appears, how foolishly the Papists clamor that we ought to follow the fathers; when the Spirit expressly recalls us from the imitation of men, except so far as they lead us to God. Moses again mentions his three sons, for the purpose of showing that, in the greatest sorrow by which he was almost consumed, he was yet able to have offspring, in order that God might have a small remnant of seed for himself.

11. The earth also was corrupt before God . In the former clause of this verse Moses describes that impious contempt of God, which had left no longer any religion in the world; but the light of equity being extinct, all men had plunged into sin. In the second clause he declares, that the love of oppression, that frauds, injuries, rapines, and all kinds of injustice, prevailed. And these are the fruits of impiety, that men, when they have revolted from God, -- forgetful of mutual equity among themselves, -- are carried forward to insane ferocity, to rapines, and to oppressions of all sorts. God again declares that he had seen this; in order that he may commend his longsuffering to us. The earth is here put for its inhabitants; and the explanation immediately follows, 'that all flesh had corrupted its way.' Yet the word flesh is not here understood as before, in a bad sense; but is meant for men , without any mark of censure: as in other places of Scripture,

'All flesh shall see the glory of the Lord,' (Isa 40:5.)

'Let all flesh be silent before the Lord,' (Zec 2:13.)

13. And God said unto Noah . Here Moses begins to relate how Noah would be preserved. And first, he says, that the counsel of God respecting the destruction of the world was revealed to him. Secondly, that the command to build the ark was given. Thirdly, that safety was promised him, if, in obedience to God, he would take refuge in the ark. These chief points are to be distinctly noted; even as the Apostle, when he proclaims the faith of Noah, joins fear and obedience with confidence, (Heb 11:7.)

And it is certain that Noah was admonished of the dreadful vengeance which was approaching; not only in order that he might be confirmed in his holy purpose, but that, being constrained by fear, he might the more ardently seek for the favor offered to him. We know that the impunity of the wicked is sometimes the occasion of alluring even the good to sin: the denunciation, therefore, of future punishment ought to be effectual in restraining the mind of a holy man; lest, by gradual declension, he should at length relax to the same lasciviousness.

Yet God had special reference to the other point; namely, that by keeping continually in view the terrible destruction of the world, Noah might be more and more excited to fear and solicitude. For it was necessary, that in utter despair of help from any other quarter, he should seek his safety, by faith, in the ark. For so long as life was promised to him on earth, never would he have been so intent as he ought, in the building of the ark; but, being alarmed by the judgment of God, he earnestly embraces the promise of life given unto him.

He no longer relies upon the natural causes or means of life; but rests exclusively on the covenant of God, by which he was to be miraculously preserved. No labor is now troublesome or difficult to him; nor is he broken down by long fatigue. For the spur of God's anger pierces him too sharply to allow him to sleep in carnal delights, or to faint under temptations, or to be delayed in his course by vain hope: he rather stirs himself up, both to flee from sin, and to seek a remedy.

And the Apostle teaches, that it was not the least part of his faith, that through the fear of those things which were not seen he prepared an ark. When faith is treated of simply, mercy and the gratuitous promise come into the account; but when we wish to express all its parts, and to canvass its entire force and nature, it is necessary that fear also should be joined with it. And, truly no one will ever seriously resort to the mercy of God, but he who, having been touched with the threatening of God, shall dread that judgment of eternal death which they denounce, shall abhor himself on account of his own sins, shall not carelessly indulge his vices, nor slumber in his pollution; but shall anxiously sigh for the remedy of his evils.

This was, truly, a peculiar privilege of grace, that God warned Noah of the future deluge. Indeed, he frequently commands his threatening to be proposed to the elect, and reprobate, in common; that by inviting both to repentance, he may humble the former, and render the latter inexcusable. But while the greater part of mankind, with deaf ears, reject whatever is spoken, he especially turns his discourse to his own people, who are still curable, that by the fear of his judgment he may train them to piety.

The condition of the wicked might at that time seem desirable, in comparison with the anxiety of holy Noah. They were securely flattering themselves in their own delights; for we know what Christ declares concerning the luxury of that period, (Lu 17:26.) Meanwhile, the holy man, as if the world were every moment going to ruin, groaned anxiously and sorrowfully. But if we consider the end; God granted an inestimable benefit to his servant, in denouncing to him a danger, of which he must beware.

The earth is filled with violence through them . 274 God intimates that men were to be taken away, in order that the earth, which had been polluted by the presence of beings so wicked, might be purified. Moreover, in speaking only of the iniquity and violence, of the frauds and rapines, of which they were guilty towards each other; he does it, not as if he were intending to remit his own claims upon them, but because this was a more gross and palpable demonstration of their wickedness.

14. Make thee an ark of gopher wood . Here follows the command to build the ark, in which God wonderfully proved the faith and obedience of his servant. Concerning its structure, there is no reason why we should anxiously inquire, except so far as our own edification is concerned. First, the Jews are not agreed among themselves respecting the kind of wood of which it was made. Some explain the word gopher to be the cedar; others, the fir-tree; others, the pine. They differ also respecting the stories; because many think that the sink was in the fourth place, which might receive the refuse and other impurities.

Others make five chambers in a triple floor, of which they assign the highest to the birds. There are those who suppose that it was only three stories in height; but that these were separated by intermediate divisions. Besides, they do not agree about the window: to some it appears that there was not one window only, but many. Some say they were open to receive air; but others contend that they were only made for the sake of light, and therefore were covered over with crystal, and lined with pitch.

To me it seems more probable, that there was only one, not cut out for the sake of giving light; but to remain shut, unless occasion required it to be opened, as we shall see afterwards. Further, that there was a triple story, and rooms separated in a manner to us unknown. The question respecting its magnitude is more difficult. For, formerly, certain profane men ridiculed Moses, as having imagined that so vast a multitude of animals was shut up in so small a space; a third part of which would scarcely contain four elephants.

Origin solves this question, by saying that a geometrical cubit was referred to by Moses, which is six times greater than the common one; to whose opinion Augustine assents in his fifteenth book on the 'City of God,' and his first book of 'Questions on Genesis.' I grant what they allege, that Moses, who had been educated in all the science of the Egyptians, was not ignorant of geometry; but since we know that Moses everywhere spoke in a homely style, to suit the capacity of the people, and that he purposely abstained from acute disputations, which might savor of the schools and of deeper learning; I can by no means persuade myself, that, in this place, contrary to his ordinary method, he employed geometrical subtlety.

Certainly, in the first chapter, he did not treat scientifically of the stars, as a philosopher would do; but he called them, in a popular manner, according to their appearance to the uneducated, rather than according to truth, "two great lights." Thus we may everywhere perceive that he designates things, of every kind by their accustomed names. But what was then the measure of the cubit I know not; it is, however, enough for me, that God (whom, without controversy, I acknowledge to be the chief builder of the ark) well knew what things the place which he described to his servant was capable of holding.

If you exclude the extraordinary power of God from this history, you declare that mere fables are related. But, by us, who confess that the remains of the world were preserved by an incredible miracle, it ought not to be regarded as an absurdity, that many wonderful things are here related, in order that hence the secret and incomprehensible power of God, which far surpasses all our senses, may be the more clearly exhibited. Porphyry or some other caviller, 275 may object, that this is fabulous, because the reason of it does not appear; or because it is unusual; or because it is repugnant to the common order of nature.

But I make the rejoinder; that this entire narration of Moses, unless it were replete with miracles would be colds and trifling, and ridiculous. He, however, who will reflect aright upon the profound abyss of Divine omnipotence in this history, will rather sink in reverential awe, than indulge in profane mockery. I purposely pass over the allegorical application which Augustine makes of the figure of the ark to the body of Christ,

both in his fifteenth book of 'The City of God,' and his twelfth book against Faustus; because I find there scarcely anything solid.

Origin still more boldly sports with allegories: but there is nothing more profitable, than to adhere strictly to the natural treatment of things. That the ark was an image of the Church is certain, from the testimony of Peter, (1Pe 3:21;) but to accommodate its several parts to the Church, is by no means suitable, as I shall again show, in its proper place.

18. But with thee will I establish my covenant . Since the construction of the ark was very difficult, and innumerable obstacles might perpetually arise to break off the work when begun, God confirms his servant by a super added promise. Thus was Noah encouraged to obey God; seeing that he relied on the Divine promise, and was confident that his labor would not be in vain. For then do we freely embrace the commands of God, when a promise is attached to them, which teaches us that we shall not spend our strength for nought. Whence it appears how foolishly the Papists are deceived, who triflingly argue, that men are led away by the doctrine of faith from the desire of doing well. For what will be the degree of our alacrity in well-doing, unless faith enlighten us? Let us therefore know, that the promises of God alone, are they which quicken us, and inspire each of our members with vigor to yield obedience to God: but that without these promises, we not only lie torpid in indolence, but are almost lifeless, so that neither hands nor feet can do their duty. And hence, as often as we become languid, or more remiss than we ought to be, in good works, let the promises of God recur to us, to correct our tardiness. For thus, according to the testimony of Paul, (Col 1:5,) love flourishes in the saints, on account of the hope laid up for them in heaven. It is especially necessary that the faithful should be confirmed by the word of God, lest they faint in the midst of their course; to the end that they may certainly be assured that they are not beating the air, as they say; but that, acquiescing in the promise given them, and being sure of success, they follow God who calls them. This connection, then, is to be borne in mind, that when God was instructing his servant Moses what he would have him do, he declares, for the purpose of retaining him in obedience to himself, that he requires nothing of him in vain. Now, the sum of this covenant of which Moses speaks was, that Noah should be safe, although the whole world should perish in the deluge. For there is an understood antithesis, that the whole world being rejected, the Lord would establish a peculiar covenant with Noah alone. Wherefore, it was the duty of Noah to oppose this promise of God, like a wall of iron, against all the terrors of death; just as if it were the purpose of God, by this sole word, to discriminate between life and death. But the covenant with him is confirmed, with this condition annexed, that his family shall be preserved for his sake; and also the brute animals, for the replenishing of the new world; concerning which I shall say more in the ninth chapter. Ge 9:1

19. And of every living thing of all flesh . "All flesh" is the name he gives to animals of whatsoever kind they may be. He says they went in two and two; not that a single pair of each kind was received into the ark, (for we shall soon see that there were three pairs of the clean kinds, and one animal over, which Noah afterwards offered in sacrifice;) but whereas here mention is made only of offspring, he does not expressly state the number, but simply couples males with females, that Noah might hence perceive how the world was to be replenished.

22. Thus did Noah . In a few words, but with great sublimity, Moses here commends the faith of Noah. The unskilful wonder that the apostle (Heb 11:7) makes him "heir of the righteousness which is by faith." As if, truly, all the virtues, and whatsoever else was worthy of praise in this holy man, had not sprung from this fountain. For we ought to consider the assaults of temptation to which his breast was continually exposed. First, the prodigious size of the ark might have overwhelmed all his senses, so as to prevent him from

raising a finger to begin the work.

Let the reader reflect on the multitude of trees to be felled, on the great labor of conveying them, and the difficulty of joining them together. The matter was also long deferred; for the holy man was required to be engaged more than a hundred years in most troublesome labor. Nor can we suppose him to have been so stupid, as not to reflect upon obstacles of this kind. Besides, it was scarcely to be hoped, that the men of his age would patiently bear with him, for promising himself an exclusive deliverance, attended with ignominy to themselves.

Their unnatural ferocity has been before mentioned; there can therefore be no doubt that they would daily provoke modest and simpleminded men, even without cause. But here was a plausible occasion for insult; since Noah, by felling trees on all sides, was making the earth bare, and defrauding them of various advantages. It is a common proverb, that perverse and contentious men will dispute about an ass's shadow. What, then, might Noah think, would those fierce Cyclops do for the shadow of so many trees; who, being practiced in every kind of violence, would seize with eagerness on all sides an occasion of exercising cruelty?

But this was what chiefly tended to inflame their rage, that he, by building an asylum for himself, virtually doomed them all to destruction. Certainly, unless they had been restrained by the mighty hand of God, they would have stoned the holy man a hundred times; still it is probable, that their vehemence was not so far repressed, as to prevent them from frequently assailing him with scoffs and derision, from heaping upon him many reproaches, and pursuing him with grievous threats.

I even think, that they did not restrain their hands from disturbing his work. Therefore, although he may have addressed himself with alacrity to the work committed to him; yet his constancy might have failed more than a thousand times, in so many years, unless it had been firmly rooted. Moreover, as the work itself appeared impracticable, it may be further asked, Whence were provisions for the year to be obtained? Whence food for so many animals? He is commanded to lay up what will suffice for food during ten months for his whole family for cattle, and wild beasts, and even for birds.

Truly, it seems absurd, that after he has been disengaged from agriculture, in order to build the ark, he should be commanded to collect a two-years' store of provision; but much more trouble attended the providing of food for animals. He might therefore have suspected that God was mocking him. His last work was to gather animals of all kinds together. As if, indeed, he had all the beasts of the forest at his command, or was able to tame them; so that, in his keeping, wolves might dwell with lambs, tigers with hares, lions with oxen -- as sheep in his fold.

But the most grievous temptation of all was, that he was commanded to descend, as into the grave, for the sake of preserving his life, and voluntarily to deprive himself of air and vital spirit; for the smell of dung alone pent up, as it was, in a closely filled place, might, at the expiration of three days, have stifled all the living creatures in the ark. Let us reflect on these conflicts of the holy man -- so severe, and multiplied and long-continued -- in order that we may know how heroic was his courage, in prosecuting, to the utmost, what God had commanded him to do.

Moses, indeed, says in a single word that he did it; but we must consider how far beyond all human power was the doing of it: and that it would have been better to die a hundred deaths, than to undertake a work so labourious, unless he had looked to something higher than the present life. A remarkable example, therefore, of obedience is here described to us; because, Noah, committing himself entirely to God,

rendered Him due honor. We know, in this corruption of our nature, how ready men are to seek subterfuges, and how ingenious in inventing pretexts for disobedience to God.

Wherefore, let us also learn to break through every kind of impediment, and not to give place to evil thoughts, which oppose themselves to the word of God, and with which Satan attempts to entangle our minds, that they may not obey the command of God. For God especially demands this honor to be given to himself, that we should suffer him to judge for us. And this is the true proof of faith, that we, being content with one of his commands, gird ourselves to the work, so that we do not swerve in our course, whatever obstacle Satan may place in our way, but are borne on the wings of faith above the world.

Moses also shows, that Noah obeyed God, not in one particular only, but in all. Which is diligently to be observed; because hence, chiefly, arises dreadful confusion in our life, that we are not able, unreservedly to submit ourselves to God; but when we have discharged some part of our duty, we often blend our own feelings with his word. But the obedience of Noah is celebrated on this, account, that it was entire, not partial; so that he omitted none of those things which God had commanded.

Footnotes

259

"Est autem res sanctorum conjugium quam ut oculis ferri homines debeant ad voluptatem coitus."

260

"■■■■ Vagina, in qua gladius est reconditus. Per metaphorum corpus, cui anima, tanquam gladius vaginae, inest." "A scabbard in which the sword is concealed. Metaphorically, the body in which the soul is, as a sword in its scabbard." -- Schindler . -- Ed

261

"Acsi Gallice quis diceret, c'est trop plaider," as if any one should say in French, "This is to plead too much."

262

"Non permanebit." -- Vulgate . "Ο■ μ■ καταμε■νη τ■ πνε■υμ■ μου." -- Sept . See on the word ■■■■, Poole's Synopsis in loco, and Professor Lee's Lexicon.

263

The whole of this passage might have been more clearly expressed. At the close of chapter 5, it is said, "Noah was five hundred years old: and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japeth." In the verse on which Calvin here comments, it is stated, that man's days on earth "shall be one hundred and twenty years"; but in Ge 7:11, we are told, that the deluge came "in the six hundredth year of Noah's life." This would pare down the one hundred and twenty years to one hundred; and therefore Calvin asks, "Where are the remaining twenty to be found?" To answer this question, he shows that there was something indefinite in the statement of Noah's age in the first of these passages, and Moses does not say that the flood began precisely in that year. He therefore concludes that, according to a common mode of speaking among the Hebrews, he was in the fifth century of his life; and therefore he would infer, that Noah was about four hundred and eighty years of age at the time referred to: if one hundred and twenty years be added, it will

make him six hundred years old at the time of his entering the ark. -- Ed.

264

"Quia excidissent a communi statura;" a misprint, undoubtedly, for excedissent. -- Ed.

265

"Vatablus in Poli Synopsi." -- Ed.

266

"Gigantes autem erant super terram in diebus illis. Postquam enim ingressi sunt," etc. There were giants on the earth in those days. For after the sons of God, etc. -- Vulgate . The words which the Vulgate translates, 'for after,' -- plainly accounting for the birth of the giants from the intercourse alluded to in the next clause, -- are translated in the Septuagint, κα■ μετ ■κε■νο, "and after this;" which favors the interpretation of Calvin, with which also the English version corresponds. -- Ed

267

"Ipsi potentes a saeculo." 'They were mighty men from the age'; or, from the old time. -- Ed.

268

Vide Schindler's Lexicon, sub voce ■■■■

269

Per ■νθρωποπ■θειαν

270

That is, the "general doctrine" of man's total and universal depravity. -- Ed.

271

See Dathe, in loco.

272

Though it also means generation. -- See Gesenius, Schindler, etc, sub voce ■■■■

273

"Noe vir justus atque perfectus ferit." -- Vulgate . -- "■■■■■" refers chiefly to moral integrity, irreproachable, innocent, honest." -- Gesenius

274

"Repleta est terra iniquitae a facie eorum."

275

"Hoc Porphyrius, vel quispiam alius canis, fabulosum esse obganniet." Throughout the above passage, Calvin takes for granted, that there was a miracle, when a close examination would have convinced him that there was none. It has only required the use of a little arithmetic, and common sense, to prove that the ark was more than sufficient to contain all the creatures which Noah was commanded to bring into it, as well as provision for the whole time of their residence in it. -- See Wells' Geography of the Old Test., chap. 11. -- Ed.

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