

Genesis 9:1-29

by John Calvin

John Calvin's sermon on Genesis 9:1-29 explores God's covenant with Noah, emphasizing the sanctity of life and the restoration of humanity's dominion over creation after the flood.

Scripture: Genesis 9:1-27

Topics: "Covenant Theology", "Sanctity Of Life"

Description

John Calvin preaches about the blessings and responsibilities bestowed upon Noah and his sons by God after the great flood. God commands them to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth, establishing a covenant with them and all living creatures. The prohibition against eating flesh with its life (blood) is given to respect the sanctity of life. The severe consequences of shedding man's blood are highlighted, emphasizing the value of human life created in the image of God. Noah's prophecy regarding the future conditions of his sons symbolizes the unity and diversity among nations, with a promise of restoration and reconciliation through God's grace.

Transcript

1. And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.

1. Et benedixit Deus Noah, et filiis ejus: et dixit ad eos, Crescite, et multiplicamini, et replete terram.

2. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.

2. Et timor vester et pavor vester erit super omnem bestiam terrae, et super omne volatile coeli, cum omnibus quae gradiuntur in terra, et omnibus piscibus maris: quia manui vestrae tradita sunt.

3. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.

3. Omne reptile quod vivit, vobis erit ad vescendum: sicut virentem herbam dedi vobis omnia.

4. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

4. Veruntamen carnem cum anima ejus, sanguine ejus, non comedetis.

5. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.

5. Et profecto sanguinem vestrum, qui vobis est in animas, requiram: de manu omnis bestiae requiram illum, et de manu hominis, et de manu viri fratris ejus requiram animam hominis.

6. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

6. Qui effuderit sanguinem hominis in homine, sanguis ejus effundetur: quia ad imaginem Dei fecit hominem.

7. And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein.

7. Et vos crescite, et multiplicamini, et generate in terra, et multiplicemini in ea.

8. And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying,

8. Et dixit Deus ad Noah, et ad filios ejus qui cum eo erant, dicendo,

9. And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you;

9. Et ego, ecce ego statuo pactum meum vobiscum, et cum semine vestro post vos.

10. And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth.

10. Et cum omni anima vivente quae est vobiscum, tam cum volatili quam cum animali, et omni bestia terrae vobiscum, ab omnibus quae egressa sunt ex arca: cum omni, inquam, bestia terrae.

11. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

11. Et statuam pactum meum vobiscum, et non excidetur omnis caro ultra ab aquis diluvii, et non erit ultra diluvium, ut disperdat terram.

12. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

12. Et dixit Deus, Hoc est signum foederis quod ego do inter me et vos, et omnem animam viventem quae est vobiscum in generationes saeculi:

13. I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

13. Arcum meum ponam in nube, et erit in signum foederis inter me et terram.

14. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud:

14. Et erit, quum obnubilavero nubem super terram, tunc apparebit arcus in nube.

15. And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

15. Et recordabor foederis mei quod est inter me et vos, et omnem animam viventem cum omni carne: et non erit ultra aqua ad diluvium, ut disperdat omnem carnem.

16. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

16. Et erit arcus in nube, et videbo illum, ut recorder pacti perpetui inter Deum et omnem animam viventem cum omni carne quae est super terram.

17. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.

17. Et dixit Deus ad Noah, Hoc est signum foederis quod statui inter me et omnem carnem quae est super terram.

18. And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan.

18. Erant autem filii Noah qui egressi sunt de arca, Sem, Cham, et Jepheth: et Cham est pater Chenaan.

19. These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread.

19. Tres isti, filii Noah: et ab istis dispersa est universa terra.

20. And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard:

20. Coepit vero Noah colere terram, et plantavit vineam.

21. And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.

21. Et bibit de vino et inebriatus est, et discooperuit se in medio tabernaculi sui.

22. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.

22. Et vidit Cham pater Chenaan turpitudinem patris sui, et nuntiavit duobus fratribus suis in platea.

23. And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.

23. Et tulerunt Sem et Jepheth vestimentum, et posuerunt super humerum ambo ipse: et euntes retrorsum, operuerunt turpitudinem patris sui: et facies eorum erant retrorsum, et turpitudinem patris sui non viderunt.

24. And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.

24. Expergefactus autem Noah a vino suo, cognovit quod fecerat sibi filius suus minor.

25. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

25. Et dixit, Maledictus Chenaan, servus servorum erit fratribus suis.

26. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

26. Et dixit, Benedictus Jehova Deus Sem, et sit Chanaan servus eis.

27. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

27. Dilatet Deus Jepheth, et habitet in tabernaculis Sem: et sit Chanaan servus eis.

28. And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years.

28. Et vixit Noah post diluvium trecentos annos et quinquaginta annos.

29. And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years: and he died.

29. Fuerunt autem omnes dies Noah nongenti anni et quinquaginta: et mortuus est.

1. And God blessed Noah . We hence infer with what great fear Noah had been dejected, because God, so often and at such length, proceeds to encourage him. For when Moses here says, that God blessed Noah and his sons, he does not simply mean that the favor of fruitfulness was restored to them; but that, at the same time, the design of God concerning the new restitution of the world was revealed unto them. For to the blessing itself is added the voice of God by which he addresses them. We know that brute animals produce offspring in no other way than by the blessing of God; but Moses here commemorates a privilege which belongs only to men. Therefore, lest those four men and their wives, seized with trepidation, should doubt for what purpose they had been delivered, the Lord prescribes to them their future condition of life: namely, that they shall raise up mankind from death to life. Thus he not only renews the world by the same word by which he before created it; but he directs his word to men, in order that they may recover the lawful use of marriage, may know that the care of producing offspring is pleasing to Himself, and may have confidence that a progeny shall spring from them which shall diffuse itself through all regions of the earth, so as to render it again inhabited; although it had been laid waste and made a desert. Yet he did not permit promiscuous intercourse, but sanctioned anew that law of marriage which he had before ordained. And although the blessing of God is, in some way, extended to illicit connections, so that offspring is thence produced, yet this is an impure fruitfulness; that which is lawful flows only from the expressly declared benediction of God.

2. And the fear of you . This also has chiefly respect to the restoration of the world, in order that the sovereignty over the rest of animals might remain with men. And although after the fall of man, the beasts were endued with new ferocity, yet some remains of that dominion over them, which God had conferred on him in the beginning, were still left. He now also promises that the same dominion shall continue. We see indeed that wild beasts rush violently upon men, and rend and tear many of them in pieces; and if God did not wonderfully restrain their fierceness, the human race would be utterly destroyed. Therefore, what we have said respecting the inclemency of the air, and the irregularity of the seasons, is also here applicable. Savage beasts indeed prevail and rage against men in various ways, and no wonder; for since we perversely exalt ourselves against God, why should not the beasts rise up against us? Nevertheless, the providence of God is a secret bridle to restrain their violence. For, whence does it arise that serpents spare us, unless because he represses their virulence? Whence is it that tigers, elephants, lions, bears, wolves, and other wild beasts without number, do not rend, tear, and devour everything human, except that they are withheld by this subjection, as by a barrier? Therefore, it ought to be referred to the special protection and guardianship of God, that we remain in safety. For, were it otherwise, what could we

expect; since they seem as if born for our destruction, and burn with the furious desire to injure us? Moreover, the bridle with which the Lord restrains the cruelty of wild beasts, to prevent them falling upon men, is a certain fear and dread which God has implanted in them, to the end that they might reverence the presence of men. Daniel especially declares this respecting kings; namely, that they are possessed of dominion, because the Lord has put the fear and the dread of them both on men and beasts. But as the first use of fear is to defend the society of mankind; so, according to the measure in which God has given to men a general authority over the beasts, there exists in the greatest and the least of men, I know not what hidden mark, which does not suffer the cruelty of wild beasts, by its violence to prevail. Another advantage, however and one more widely extended, is here noted; namely, that men may render animals subservient to their own convenience, and may apply them to various uses, according to their wishes and their necessities. Therefore, the fact that oxen become accustomed to bear the yoke; that the wildness of horses is so subdued as to cause them to carry a rider; that they receive the pack-saddle to bear burdens; that cows give milk, and suffer themselves to be milked; that sheep are mute under the hand of the shearer; all these facts are the result of this dominion, which, although greatly diminished, is nevertheless not entirely abolished.

3. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you . The Lord proceeds further, and grants animals for food to men, that they may eat their flesh. And because Moses now first relates that this right was given to men, nearly all commentators infer, that it was not lawful for man to eat flesh before the deluge, but that the natural fruits of the earth were his only food. But the argument is not sufficiently firm. For I hold to this principle; that God here does not bestow on men more than he had previously given, but only restores what had been taken away, that they might again enter on the possession of those good things from which they had been excluded. For since they had before offered sacrifices to God, and were also permitted to kill wild beasts, from the hides and skins of which, they might make for themselves garments and tents, I do not see what obligation should prevent them from the eating of flesh. But since it is of little consequence what opinion is held, I affirm nothing on the subject. 286 This ought justly to be deemed by us of greater importance, that to eat the flesh of animals is granted to us by the kindness of God; that we do not seize upon what our appetite desires, as robbers do, nor yet tyrannically shed the innocent blood of cattle; but that we only take what is offered to us by the hand of the Lord. We have heard what Paul says, that we are at liberty to eat what we please, only we do it with the assurance of conscience, but that he who imagines anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean, (Ro 14:14.) And whence has this happened to man, that he should eat whatever food he pleased before God, with a tranquil mind, and not with unbridled license, except from his knowing, that it has been divinely delivered into his hand by the right of donation? Wherefore, (the same Paul being witness,) the word of God sanctifies the creatures, that we may purely and lawfully feed on them, (1Ti 4:5.) Let the adage be utterly rejected which says, 'that no one can feed and refresh his body with a morsel of bread, without, at the same time, defiling his soul.' Therefore it is not to be doubted, that the Lord designed to confirm our faith, when he expressly declares by Moses, that he gave to man the free use of flesh, so that we might not eat it with a doubtful and trembling conscience. At the same time, however, he invites us to thanksgiving. On this account also, Paul adds "prayer" to the "word," in defining the method of sanctification in the passage recently cited.

And now we must firmly retain the liberty given us by the Lord, which he designed to be recorded as on public tables. For, by this word, he addresses all the posterity of Noah, and renders this gift common to all ages. And why is this done, but that the faithful may boldly assert their right to that which, they know, has proceeded from God as its Author? For it is an insupportable tyranny, when God, the Creator of all things, has laid open to us the earth and the air, in order that we may thence take food as from his storehouse, for

these to be shut up from us by mortal man, who is not able to create even a snail or a fly. I do not speak of external prohibition; 287 but I assert, that atrocious injury is done to God, when we give such license to men as to allow them to pronounce that unlawful which God designs to be lawful, and to bind consciences which the word of God sets free, with their fictitious laws. The fact that God prohibited his ancient people from the use of unclean animals, seeing that exception was but temporary, is here passed over by Moses.

4. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof Some thus explain this passages 'Ye may not eat a member cut off from a living animal,' which is too trifling. However, since there is no copulative conjunction between the two words, blood and life, I do not doubt that Moses, speaking of the life, added the word blood exegetically, 288 as if he would say, that flesh is in some sense devoured with its life, when it is eaten imbued with its own blood. Wherefore, the life and the blood are not put for different things, but for the same; not because blood is in itself the life, but inasmuch as the vital spirits chiefly reside in the blood, it is, as far as our feeling is concerned, a token which represents life. And this is expressly declared, in order that men may have the greater horror of eating blood For if it be a savage and barbarous thing to devour lives, or to swallow down living flesh, men betray their brutality by eating blood. Moreover, the tendency of this prohibition is by no means obscure, namely, that God intends to accustom men to gentleness, by abstinence from the blood of animals; but, if they should become unrestrained, and daring in eating wild animals they would at length not be sparing of even human blood. Yet we must remember, that this restriction was part of the old law. 289 Wherefore, what Tertullian relates, that in his time it was unlawful among Christians to taste the blood of cattle, savours of superstition. For the apostles, in commanding the Gentiles to observe this rite, for a short time, did not intend to inject a scruple into their consciences, but only to prevent the liberty which was otherwise sacred, from proving an occasion of offense to the ignorant and the weak.

5. And surely your blood of your lives will I require. In these words the Lord more explicitly declares that he does not forbid the use of blood out of regard to animals themselves, but because he accounts the life of men precious: and because the sole end of his law is, to promote the exercise of common humanity between them. I therefore think that Jerome, in rendering the particle **■** (ach,) for, has done better than they who read it as an adversative disjunctive; 'otherwise your blood will I require;' yet literally it may best be thus translated, 'And truly your blood.' 290 The whole context is (in my opinion) to be thus read, 'And truly your blood, which is in your lives, or which is as your lives, that is which vivifies and quickens you, as it respects your body, will I require: from the hand of all animals will I require it; from the hand of man, from the hand, I say, of man, his brother, will I require the life of man.' The distinction by which the Jews constitute four kinds of homicide is frivolous; for I have explained the simple and genuine sense, namely, that God so highly estimates our life, that he will not suffer murder to go unavenged. And he inculcates this in so many words, in order that he may render the cruelty of those the more detestable, who lay violent hands upon their neighbors. And it is no common proof of God's love towards us, that he undertakes the defense of our lives, and declares that he will be the avenger of our death. In saying that he will exact punishment from animals for the violated life of men, he gives us this as an example. For if, on behalf of man, he is angry with brute creatures who are hurried by a blind impulse to feed upon him; what, do we suppose, will become of the man who, unjustly, cruelly, and contrary to the sense of nature, falls upon his brother?

6. Whoso sheddeth man's blood 291 The clause in man which is here added, has the force of amplification. Some expound it, 'Before witnesses.' Others refer it to what follows, namely, 'that by man his blood should be shed.' 292 But all these interpretations are forced. What I have said must be

remembered, that this language rather expresses the atrociousness of the crime; because whosoever kills a man, draws down upon himself the blood and life of his brother. On the whole, they are deceived (in my judgment) who think that a political law, for the punishment of homicides, is here simply intended. Truly I do not deny that the punishment which the laws ordain, and which the judges execute, are founded on this divine sentence; but I say the words are more comprehensive. It is written,

'Men of blood shall not live out half their days,'

(Ps 55:23.)

And we see some die in highways, some in stews, and many in wars. Therefore, however magistrates may connive at the crime, God sends executioners from other quarters, who shall render unto sanguinary men their reward. God so threatens and denounces vengeance against the murderer, that he even arms the magistrate with the sword for the avenging of slaughter, in order that the blood of men may not be shed with impunity.

For in the image of God made he man . For the greater confirmation of the above doctrines God declares, that he is not thus solicitous respecting human life rashly, and for no purpose. Men are indeed unworthy of God's care, if respect be had only to themselves. but since they bear the image of God engraven on them, He deems himself violated in their person. Thus, although they have nothing of their own by which they obtain the favor of God, he looks upon his own gifts in them, and is thereby excited to love and to care for them. This doctrine, however is to be carefully observed that no one can be injurious to his brother without wounding God himself. Were this doctrine deeply fixed in our minds, we should be much more reluctant than we are to inflict injuries. Should any one object, that this divine image has been obliterated, the solution is easy; first, there yet exists some remnant of it, so that man is possessed of no small dignity; and, secondly, the Celestial Creator himself, however corrupted man may be, still keeps in view the end of his original creation; and according to his example, we ought to consider for what end he created men, and what excellence he has bestowed upon them above the rest of living beings.

7. And you , be ye fruitful and multiply . He again turns his discourse to Noah and his sons, exhorting them to the propagation of offspring: as if he would say, 'You see that I am intent upon cherishing and preserving mankind, do you therefore also attend to it.' At the same time, in commending to them the preservation of seed, he deters them from murder, and from unjust acts of violence. Yet his chief end was that to which I have before alluded, that he might encourage their dejected minds. For in these words is contained not a bare precept, but also a promise.

8. And God spake unto Noah . That the memory of the deluge might not inspire them with new terrors, as often as the sky were covered with clouds, lest the earth should again be drowned; this source of anxiety is taken away. And certainly, if we consider the great propensity of the human mind to distrust, we shall not deem this testimony to have been unnecessary even for Noah. He was indeed endued with a rare and incomparable faith, even to a miracle; but no strength of constancy could be so great, that this most sad and terrible vengeance of God should not shake it. Therefore, whenever any great and continued shower shall seem to threaten the earth with a deluge, this barrier, on which the holy man may rely, is interposed. Now although his sons would need this confirmation more than he, yet the Lord speaks especially on his account. And the clause which follows, 'and to his sons who were with him,' is to be referred to this point. For how is it, that God, making his covenant with the sons of Noah, commands them to hope for the best? Truly, because they are joined with their father, who is, as it were, the stipulator of the covenant, so as to

be associated with him, in a subordinate place 293 . Moreover, there is no doubt that it was the design of God to provide for all his posterity. It was not therefore a private covenant confirmed with one family only, but one which is common to all people, and which shall flourish in all ages to the end of the world. And truly, since at the present time, impiety overflows not less than in the age of Noah, it is especially necessary that the waters should be restrained by this word of God, as by a thousand bolts and bars lest they should break forth to destroy us. Wherefore, relying on this promise, let us look forward to the last day, in which the consuming fire shall purify heaven and earth.

10. And with every living creature . Although the favor which the Lord promises extends also to animals, yet it is not in vain that he addresses himself only to men, who, by the sense of faith, are able to perceive this benefit. We enjoy the heaven and the air in common with the beasts, and draw the same vital breath; but it is no common privilege, that God directs his word to us; whence we may learn with what paternal love he pursues us. And here three distinct steps are to be traced. First, God, as in a matter of present concern, makes a covenant with Noah and his family, lest they should be afraid of a deluge for themselves. Secondly, he transmits his covenant to posterity, not only that, as by continual succession, the effect may reach to other ages; but that they who should afterwards be born might also apprehend this testimony by faith, and might conclude that the same thing which had been promised to the sons of Noah, was promised unto them. Thirdly, he declares that he will be propitious also to brute animals, so that the effect of the covenant towards them, might be the preservation of their lives only, without imparting to them sense and intelligence. Hence the ignorance of the Anabaptists may be refuted, who deny that the covenant of God is common to infants, because they are destitute of present faith. As if, truly, when God promises salvation to a thousand generations, the fathers were not intermediate parties between God and their children, whose office it is to deliver to their children (so to speak) from hand to hand the promise received from God. But as many as withdraw their life from this protection of God (since the greater part of men either despise or ridicule this divine covenant) deserve, by this single act of ingratitude, to be immersed in eternal fire. For although this be an earthly promise, yet God designs the faith of his people to be exercised, in order that they may be assured that a certain abode will, by his special goodness, be provided for them on earth, until they shall be gathered together in heaven.

12. This is the token of the covenant . A sign is added to the promise, in which is exhibited the wonderful kindness of God; who, for the purpose of confirming our faith in his word, does not disdain to use such helps. And although we have more fully discussed the use of signs in Ge 2:1, yet we must briefly maintain, from these words of Moses, that it is wrong to sever signs from the word. By the word, I mean not that of which Papists boast; whereby they enchant bread, wine, water, and oil, with their magical whisperings; but that which may strengthen faith: according no the Lord here plainly addresses holy Noah and his sons; he then annexes a seal, for the sake of assurance. Wherefore, if the sacrament be wrested from the word, it ceases to be what it is called. It must, I say, be a vocal sign, in order that it may retain its force, and not degenerate from its nature. And not only is that administration of sacraments in which the word of God is silent, vain and ludicrous; but it draws with it pure satanic delusions. Hence we also infer, that from the beginning, it was the peculiar property of sacraments, to avail for the confirmation of faith. For certainly, in the covenant that promise is included to which faith ought to respond. It appears to some absurd, that faith should be sustained by such helps. But they who speak thus do not, in the first place, reflect on the great ignorance and imbecility of our minds; nor do they, secondly, ascribe to the working of the secret power of the Spirit that praise which is due. It is the work of God alone to begin and to perfect faith; but he does it by such instruments as he sees good; the free choice of which is in his own power.

13. I do set my bow in the cloud . From these words certain eminent theologians have been induced to deny, that there was any rainbow before the deluge: which is frivolous. For the words of Moses do not signify, that a bow was then formed which did not previously exist; but that a mark was engraven upon it, which should give a sign of the divine favor towards men. That this may the more evidently appear, it will be well to recall to memory what we have elsewhere said, that some signs are natural, and some preternatural. And although there are many examples of this second class of signs in the Scriptures; yet they are peculiar, and do not belong to the common and perpetual use of the Church. For, as it pleases the Lord to employ earthly elements, as vehicles for raising the minds of men on high, so I think the celestial arch which had before existed naturally, is here consecrated into a sign and pledge; and thus a new office is assigned to it; whereas, from the nature of the thing itself, it might rather be a sign of the contrary; for it threatens continued rain. Let this therefore be the meaning, of the words, 'As often as the rain shall alarm you, look upon the bow. For although it may seem to cause the rain to overflow the earth, it shall nevertheless be to you a pledge of returning dryness, and thus it will then become you to stand with greater confidence, than under a clear and serene sky.' Hence it is not for us to contend with philosophers respecting the rainbow; for although its colors are the effect of natural causes, yet they act profanely who attempt to deprive God of the right and authority which he has over his creatures.

15. And I will remember my covenant . Moses, by introducing God so often as the speaker, teaches us that the word holds the chief place, and that signs are to be estimated by it. 294 God, however, speaks after the manner of men, when he says, that at the sight of the rainbow he will remember his covenant. But this mode of speaking has reference to the faith of men, in order that they may reflect, that God, whenever he stretches out his arch over the clouds, is not unmindful of his covenant.

18. The sons of Noah . Moss enumerates the sons of Noah, not only because he is about to pass on to the following history, but for the purpose of more fully illustrating the force of the promise, "Replenish the earth." For we may hence better conceive how efficacious the blessing of God has been, because an immense multitude of men proceeded in a short time from so small a number; and because one family, and that a little one, grew into so many, and such numerous nations.

20. And Noah began to be an husbandman . I do not so explain. the words, as if he then, for the first time, began to give his attention to the cultivation of the fields; but, (in my opinion,) Moses rather intimates, that Noah, with a collected mind, though now an old man, returned to the culture of the fields, and to his former labors. It is, however, uncertain whether he had been a vine-dresser or not. It is commonly believed that wine was not in use before that time. And this opinion has been the more willingly received, as affording an honorable pretext for the excuse of Noah's sin. But it does not appear to me probable that the fruit of the vine, which excels all others, should have remained neglected and unprofitable. Also, Moses does not say that Noah was drunken on the first day on which he tasted it. Therefore, leaving this question undetermined, I rather suppose, that we are to learn from the drunkenness of Noah, what a filthy and detestable crime drunkenness is. The holy patriarch, though he had hitherto been a rare example of frugality and temperance, losing all self-possession, did, in a base and shameful manner, prostrate himself naked on the ground, so as to become a laughingstock to all. Therefore, with what care ought we to cultivate sobriety, lest anything like this, or even worse, should happen to us? Formerly, the heathen philosopher said, that 'wine is the blood of the earth; and, therefore, when men intemperately pour it down their throats, they are justly punished by their mother. Let us, however, rather remember, that when men, by shameful abuse, profane this noble and most precious gift of God, He himself becomes the Avenger. And let us know, that Noah, by the judgement of Gods has been set forth as a spectacle to be a warning to

others, that they should not become intoxicated by excessive drinking. Some excuse might certainly be made for the holy man; who, having completed his labor, and being exhilarated with wine, imagines that he is but taking his just reward. But God brands him with an eternal mark of disgrace. What then, do we suppose, will happen to those idle-bellies and insatiable gluttons whose sole object of contention is who shall consume the greatest quantity of wine? And although this kind of correction was severe, yet it was profitable to the servant of God; since he was recalled to sobriety, lest by proceeding in the indulgence of a vice to which he had once yielded, he should ruin himself; just as we see drunkards become at length brutalized by continued intemperance.

22. And Ham , the father of Canaan . This circumstance is added to augment the sorrow of Noah, that he is mocked by his own son. For we must ever keep in memory, that this punishment was divinely inflicted upon him; partly, because his fault was not a light one; partly that God in his person might present a lesson of temperance to all ages. Drunkenness in itself deserves as its reward, that they who deface the image of their heavenly Father in themselves, should become a laughingstock to their own children.

For certainly, as far as possible, drunkards subvert their own understanding, and so far deprive themselves of reason as to degenerate into beasts. And let us remember, that if the Lord so grievously avenged the single transgression of the holy man, he will prove an avenger no less severe against those who are daily intoxicated; and of this we have examples sufficiently numerous before our eyes. In the meanwhile, Ham, by reproachfully laughing at his feather, betrays his own depraved and malignant disposition.

We know that parents, next to God, are most deeply to be revered; and if there were neither books nor sermons, nature itself constantly inculcates this lesson upon us. It is received by common consent, that piety towards parents is the mother of all virtues. This Ham, therefore, must have been of a wicked, perverse, and crooked disposition; since he not only took pleasure in his father's shame, but wished to expose him to his brethren. And this is no slight occasion of offense; first, that Noah, the minister of salvation to men, and the chief restorer of the world, should in extreme old age, lie intoxicated in his house; and then, that the ungodly and wicked Ham should have proceeded from the sanctuary of God. 295 God had selected eight souls as a sacred seed, thoroughly purged from all corruption, for the renovation of the Church: but the son of Noah shows, how necessary it is for men to be held as with the bridle of God, however they may be exalted by privilege.

The impiety of Ham proves to us how deep is the root of wickedness in men; and that it continually puts forth its shoots, except where the power of the Spirit prevails over it. But if, in the hallowed sanctuary of God, among so small a number, one fiend was preserved; let us not wonder if, at this day, in the Church, containing a much greater multitude of men, the wicked are mingled with the good. Nor is there any doubt that the minds of Shem and Japheth were grievously wounded, when they perceived in their own brother such a prodigy of scorn; and, on the other hand, their father shamefully lying prostrate on the ground.

Such a debasing alienation of mind in the prince of the new world, and the holy patriarch of the Church, could not less astonish them, than if they had seen the ark itself broken, dashed in pieces, cleft asunder, and destroyed. Yet this cause of offense they alike overcome by their magnanimity, and conceal by their modesty. Ham alone eagerly seizes the occasion of ridiculing and inveighing against his father; just as perverse men are wont to catch at occasions of offense in others, which may serve as a pretext for indulgence in sin.

And his age renders him the less excusable; for he was not a lascivious youth, who, by his thoughtless laughter, betrayed his own folly, seeing that he was already more than one hundred years old. Therefore, it is probable, that he thus perversely insulted his father, for the purpose of acquiring for himself the license of sinning with impunity. We see many such at this day, who most studiously pry into the faults of holy and pious men, in order that without shame they may precipitate themselves into all iniquity; they even make the faults of other men an occasion of hardening themselves into a contempt for God.

23. And Shem and Japheth took a garment . Here the piety, as well as the modesty, of the two brothers is commended; who, in order that the dignity of their father might not be lowered in their esteem, but that they might always cherish and keep entire the reverence which they owed him, turned away their eyes from the sight of his disgrace. And thus they gave proof of the regard they paid to their father's honor, in supposing that their own eyes would be polluted, if they voluntarily looked upon the nakedness by which he was disgraced. At the same time they also consulted their own modesty. For (as it was said in Ge 3:1) there is something so unaccountably shameful in the nakedness of man, that scarcely any one dares to look upon himself, even when no witness is present. They also censure the impious rashness of their brother, who had not spared his father. Hence, then, we may learn how acceptable to God is that piety, of which the example here recorded receives a signal encomium of the Spirit. But if piety towards an earthly father was a virtue so excellent, and so worthy of praise; with how much greater devotedness of piety ought the sacred majesty of God to be worshipped? The Papists make themselves ridiculous by desiring to cover the filthiness of their idol, yea, the abominations of their whole impure clergy, with the cloak of Shem and Japheth. I omit to state how great is the difference between the disgrace of Noah and the execrable vileness of so many crimes which contaminate heaven and earth. But it is necessary that Antichrist and his horned bishops, with all that rabble, should prove themselves to be fathers, 296 if they with that any honor should be paid them.

24. And Noah awoke . It might seem to some that Noah, although he had just cause of anger, still conducted himself with too little modesty and gravity; and that he ought, at least, silently to have mourned over his sin before God; and also, with shame, to have given proof of his repentance to men: but that now as if he had committed no offense, he fulminates with excessive severity against his son. 297 Moses, however, does not here relate reproaches uttered by Noah, under the excitement of rage and anger, but rather introduces him speaking in the spirit of prophecy. Wherefore we ought not to doubt, that the holy man was truly humbled (as he ought to be) under a sense of his fault, and honestly reflected on his own deserts; but now, having received the grant of pardon, and his condemnation being removed, he proceeds as the herald of Divine judgment. It is not indeed to be doubted that the holy man, endued with a disposition otherwise gentle, and being one of the best of parents, would pronounce this sentence upon his son with the most bitter grief of mind. For he saw him miraculously preserved amongst a few and having a place among the very flower of the human race. Now, therefore, when, with his own mouth, he is compelled to separate him from the Church of God, he doubtless would grievously bewail the malediction of his son. But by this example, God would admonish us that the constancy of our faith must be retained, if at any time we see those fail who are most closely united to us, and that our spirits ought not to be broken; nay, that we must so exercise the severity which God enjoins, as not to spare even our own bowels. And whereas, Noah does not pronounce a sentence so harsh, except by Divine inspiration, it behoves us to infer from the severity of the punishment how abominable in the sight of God is the impious contempt of parents, since it perverts the sacred order of nature, and violates the majesty and authority of God, in the person of those whom he has commanded to preside in his place.

25. Cursed be Canaan 298 It is asked in the first place, why Noah instead of pronouncing the curse upon his son, inflicts the severity of punishment, which that son had deserved, upon his innocent grandson; since it seems not consistent with the justice of God, to visit the crimes of parents upon their children? But the answer is well known; namely that God, although he pursues his course of judgments upon the sons and the grandchildren of the ungodly, yet in being angry with them, is not angry with the innocent, because even they themselves are found in fault. Wherefore there is no absurdity in the act of avenging the sins of the fathers upon their reprobate children; since, of necessity, all those whom God has deprived of his Spirit are subject to his wrath. But it is surprising that Noah should curse his grandson; and should pass his son Ham, the author of the crime, over in silence. The Jews imagine that the reason of this was to be traced to the special favor of God; and that since the Lord had bestowed on Ham so great an honor, 299 the curse was transferred from him to his son. But the conjecture is futile. Certainly, to my mind, there is no doubt that the punishment was carried forward even to his posterity in order that the severity of it might be the more apparent; as if the Lord had openly proclaimed that the punishment of one man would not satisfy him but that he would attach the curse also to the posterity of the offender, so that it should extend through successive ages. In the meantime, Ham himself is so far from being exempt, that God, by involving his son with him, aggravates his own condemnation.

Another question is also proposed; namely, why among the many sons of Ham, God chooses one to be smitten? But let not our curiosity here indulge itself too freely; let us remember that the judgments of God are, not in vain, called "a great deep," and that it would be a degrading thing for God, before whose tribunal we all must one day stand, to be subjected to our judgments, or rather to our foolish temerity. He chooses whom he sees good, that he may show forth in them an example of his grace and kindness; others he appoints to a different end, that they may be proofs of his anger and severity. Here, although the minds of men are blinded, let every one of us, conscious of his own infirmity, learn rather to ascribe praise to God's justice, than plunge, with insane audacity, into the profound abyss. While God held the whole seed of Ham as obnoxious to the curse, he mentions the Canaanites by name, as those whom he would curse above all others. And hence we infer that this judgment proceeded from God, because it was proved by the event itself. What would certainly be the condition of the Canaanites, Noah could not know by human means. Wherefore in things obscure and hidden, the Spirit directed his tongue.

Another difficulty still remains: for since the Scripture teaches that God avenges the sins of men on the third and fourth generation, it seems to assign this limit to the wrath of God; but the vengeance of which mention is now made extends itself to the tenth generation. I answer, that these words of Scripture are not intended to prescribe a law to God, which he may not so far set aside, as to be at liberty to punish sins beyond four generations. The thing to be here observed is, the comparison instituted between punishment and grace; by which we are taught, that God, while he is a just avenger of crimes, is still more inclined to mercy. In the meantime, let his liberty remain unquestioned, to extend his vengeance as far as he pleases.

A servant of servants shall he be . This Hebraism signifies that Canaan shall be the last, even among servants: as if it had been said, 'Not only shall his condition be servile, but worse than that of common servitude.' 300 Yet the thunder of this severe and dreadful prophecy seems weak and illusory, since the Canaanites excelled in strength and in riches, and were possessed of extensive dominion. Where then is this servitude? In the first place, I answer, that though God, in threatening men, does not immediately execute what he denounces, yet his threats are never weak and ineffectual. Secondly, that the judgments of God are not always exhibited before our eyes, nor apprehended by our carnal reason. The Canaanites, having shaken off the yoke of servitude, which was divinely imposed upon them, even proceeded to grasp

at empire for themselves. But although they triumph for a time, yet in the sight of God their condition is not deemed free. Just as when the faithful are iniquitously oppressed, and tyrannically harassed by the wicked, their spiritual liberty is still not extinct in the sight of God. It behoves us then to be content with this proof of the divine judgment, that God promised the dominion of the land of Canaan to his servant Abraham, and at length devoted the Canaanites to destruction. But because the Pope so earnestly maintains that he sometimes utters prophecies, -- as did even Caiaphas, (Joh 11:51,) -- lest we should seem to refuse him everything, I do not deny that the title with which he adorns himself was dictated by the Spirit of God, 'Let him be a servant of servants,' in the same sense that Canaan was.

26. Blessed be the Lord God of Shem . Noah blesses his other children, but in a different manner. For he places Shem in the highest post of honor. And this is the reason why Noah, in blessing him, breaks forth in the praise of God, without adhering to the person of man. For the Hebrews, when they are speaking of any rare and transcendent excellence, raise their thoughts to God. Therefore the holy man, when he perceived that the most abundant grace of God was destined for his son Shem, rises to thanksgiving. Whence we infer, that he spoke, not from carnal reason, but rather treated of the secret favors of God, the result of which was to be deferred to a remote period. Finally, by these words it is declared, that the benediction of Shem would be divine or heavenly.

27. God shall enlarge Japheth . In the Hebrew words יַפְתֵּהּ (japhthe) and יַפְתֵּחַ (japheth ,) there is an elegant allusion. For the root of the word is יַפְּחַ (pathah ,) which, among the Hebrews, signifies to entice with smooth words, or to allure in one direction or another. Here, however, nearly all commentators take it as signifying to enlarge. 301 If this exposition be received, the meaning will be, that the posterity of Japheth, which for a time would be scattered, and removed far from the tents of Shem, would at length be increased, so that it should more nearly approach them, and should dwell together with them, as in a common home. But I rather approve the other version, 'God shall gently bring back, or incline Japheth.' 302 Moreover, whichever interpretation we follow, Noah predicts that there will be a temporary dissension between Shem and Japheth, although he retains both in his family and calls both his lawful heirs; and that afterwards the time will come, in which they shall again coalesce in one body, and have a common home. It is, however, most absolutely certain, that a prophecy is here put forth concerning things unknown to man, of which, as the event, at length, shows God alone was the Author. Two thousand years and some centuries more, elapsed before the Gentiles and the Jews were gathered together in one faith. Then the sons of Shem, of whom the greater part had revolted and cut themselves off from the holy family of God, were collected together, and dwelt under one tabernacle. 303 Also the Gentiles, the progeny of Japheth, who had long been wanderers and fugitives were received into the same tabernacle. For God, by a new adoption, has formed a people out of those who were separated, and has confirmed a fraternal union between alienated parties. This is done by the sweet and gentle voice of God, which he has uttered in the gospel; and this prophecy is still daily receiving its fulfillment, since God invites the scattered sheep to join his flock, and collects, on every side, those who shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. It is truly no common support of our faith, that the calling of the Gentiles is not only decreed in the eternal counsel of God, but is openly declared by the mouth of the Patriarch; lest we should think it to have happened suddenly or by chance, that the inheritance of eternal life was offered generally to all. But the form of the expression, 'Japheth shall dwell in the tabernacles of Shem,' 304 commends to us that mutual society which ought to exist, and to be cherished among the faithful. For whereas God had chosen to himself a Church from the progeny of Shem, he afterwards chose the Gentiles together with them, on this condition, that they should join themselves to that people, who were in possession of the covenant of life.

28. And Noah lived . Although Moses briefly states the age of the holy man, and does not record his annals and the memorable events of his life, yet those things which are certain, and which Scripture elsewhere commemorates, ought to recur to our minds. Within one hundred and fifty years, the offspring of his three sons became so numerous, that he had sufficient and even abundant proof of the efficacy of the Divine benediction Increase and multiply. He sees, not one city only, filled with his grandchildren, nor his seed expanded barely to three hundred families; but many nations springing from one of his sons who should inhabit extensive regions. This astonishing increase, since it was a visible representation of the divine favor towards him, would doubtless fill him with unbounded joy. For Abraham was nearly fifty years old when his ancestor Noah died. 305 In the meantime, he was compelled to behold many things, which would afflict his holy breast with incredible grief. To omit other things; he saw in the family of Shem, the sanctuary of God, -- into which the sons of Japheth were to be received, -- destroyed, or, at least, dilapidated and rent. For whereas the father of Abraham himself, having deserted his proper station, had erected for himself a profane tabernacle; a very small portion indeed remained of those who worshipped God in the harmonious consent of a pure faith. With what tormenting pains this terrible confusion affected him cannot be sufficiently expressed in words. Hence we may know, that his eyes of faith must have been exceedingly penetrating, which did not fail to behold afar off, the grace of God, in preserving the Church, at that time overwhelmed by the wickedness of men.

Footnotes

286

The question which Calvin here dismisses as one of little importance has, in modern controversy, assumed a very different position; and most commentators have come to a decision, the reverse of that to which he inclines. His arguments appears chargeable with the want of firmness, which he imputes to others. The inference that the flesh of sacrifices was eaten, since otherwise it must have been wasted, is of no force, if we suppose the first sacrifices to have been all holocausts, or whole burnt offering unto the Lord. The garments or tents referred to as made from the skins of animals were, in all probability, those of the very animals which were thus sacrificed; so that there is no reason hence to conclude, that flesh was eaten before the deluge. But let the reader refer to Magee on the Atonement, Dissertation, No.li2 -- Ed.

287

By external prohibition, is probably meant such as might be enjoined by the magistrate during a time of scarcity, or for any purely civil purpose. -- Ed.

288

This is apparent in the English version, where the words, "which is," are added in *Italics*, showing that in the judgment of the translators, the word following was explanatory of that which preceded. -- Ed.

289

"Partem fuisse veteris paedagogiae."

290

Thus agreeing with the English version.

291

"Qui effuderit sanguinem hominis in homine." He who shall have shed the blood of man in man.

292

This is the interpretation of the English version.

293

"Ut secundo loco in societatem accedant."

294

"Precipuas esse verbi partes, et inde aestimanda signa." -- "Queleprincipal gist en la parole, et que d'icelle il faut estimer les sacramens." That the principal force is in the word, and that from it we must estimate the sacraments. -- French Tr.

295

Reference is here made to the ark, as the type of the Church. -- Ed.

296

That is, legitimate fathers.

297

This is an objection, to which the answer immediately follows.

298

It has been remarked by Bishop Lowth, that nearly all the indications of future events in the Holy Scriptures are announced in verse and in numbers. -- Prael. 2 We have here a remarkable instance of this peculiarity. The following is a translation of Bishop Lowth's version of Noah's prediction: --

Cursed be Canaan!

A servant of servants he shall be to his brethren.

Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Shem!

And let Canaan be their servant.

May God enlarge Japheth,

And may he dwell in the tents of Shem;

And let Canaan be their servant. -- Prael. 4

The adoption of some differences of reading has been suggested by later critics. It has been especially observed, that the first hemistich is a broken or short line, and does not correspond with the next in length or rhyme. And on the authority of the Arabic version, (see Walton's Polyglott,) many learned men would

thus fill up the line --

"Cursed be Ham, the father of Canaan."

They would also, on the same authority, alter the fourth and sixth lines, by inserting the word "father," thus --

"And let the father of Canaan be their servant."

Yet such alterations are not lightly to be made in the sacred text; and it seems highly probable, that the addition in the Arabic version was intended for nothing more originally than a paraphrase to explain the translator's view of the passage. The reader is referred to Caunter on the Poetry of the Pentateuch, for further information respecting the poetical character of these verses; and to Bishop Newton's Dissertations, No. I., for its prophetic application. Some excellent remarks, of a practical kind, will be found in Bishop Hall's contemplations. -- Ed.

299

Namely, that of having preserved him in the ark. -- Ed.

300

Vide Ainsworth in loco, Bishop Newton's Dissertation i.

301

"Dilatet Deus Japheth." -- Vulg . "πλατ■ναι ■ Θε■ς" -- Sept

302

See marginal reading of English version, "God will persuade Japheth." -- See also Schindler's Lexicon, sub voce ■■■, and Ainsworth in loco. It is however objected, and not without reason, that the word here rendered persuade is rarely, if ever, used in a good sense, that it generally means to entice, or allure to evil; and, therefore, the most judicious critics seem rather inclined to fall back upon the version given in the text of our translation, than to accept the marginal reading, with which Calvin agrees. See Professor Bush's note on this place. Dathe gives the preference to the Arabic version, which signifies that God will prosper Japheth; but for this there is no sufficient authority. -- Ed

303

Allusion here seems to be made to the words quoted by James from the prophecy of Amos: "I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof and I will set it up." -- Ac 15:16. -- Ed.

304

It is not clear whether the original really means that "Japheth," or that "God," "shall dwell in the tents of Shem." If the former, then this is a plain prediction of events which have been in a remarkable manner fulfilled, by the conversion of the Gentiles, and by the diffusion of a vast European population over those regions which were originally occupied by the descendants of Shem. If the original really means the latter, then it has been fulfilled by the manifestation of God's glory among the Israelites, first through the

Shechinah which appeared in the tabernacle and temple, and then more especially through the advent of the Messiah, of whom St. John says, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," (Joh 1:14.) -- Ed.

305

Lightfoot places the death of Noah two years before the birth of Abraham; Dr. A. Clarke two years after it. These chronological differences, however, do not materially affect the general conclusions drawn by Calvin. -- Ed.

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