

***“So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand” (Genesis 9:1-2).***

By using the word "blessed" in this passage, the Scriptures tell us that God showed favor toward Noah. (1) Since the Flood marked a new beginning for the world, God blessed Noah in a manner reminiscent of the blessing He bestowed upon Adam earlier in Genesis chapter one: ***“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:28).***

God’s command to ***“be fruitful”*** also expressed His intent to see Noah’s family bear children and replenish the Earth’s population. But the Scriptures discuss this concept of “fruitfulness” in a different manner as well.

You see, the Biblical concept of fruitfulness often serves to illustrate a cause-and-effect relationship. That effect can vary depending on the underlying cause, and may be beneficial or detrimental. Just as we can identify a tree by the fruit it produces, we can often gauge the character of various individuals by observing the “fruit” that grows from their choices and decisions.

A God-honoring person is someone who generally exhibits God-honoring characteristics. Even though he or she is an imperfect human being, a Godly person will bear fruit that is consistent with his or her profession of faith in Christ. Jesus addressed this subject in the following excerpt from the Gospel of Matthew...

***“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:16-20).***

We can help ensure our lives produce the right kind of fruit if we prayerfully seek to follow Jesus' message from the Gospel of John...

***“...No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing...***

***If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:4-5, 7-8 NIV).***

(1) “barak” OT:1288 *Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*

This concept of “fruitfulness” is also true in an opposite sense as well. For instance, there are negative consequences that are sure to follow those who engage in illegal, immoral, or unethical activities. The same is true of those who abuse alcohol, pharmaceuticals, illicit drugs, or get involved in an inappropriate physical relationship, to name a few examples. The “fruit” of those choices and their consequences will surely affect others in a negative manner.

The point is that our lives will produce fruit that will affect ourselves and others for better or worse. With this in mind, it’s important to remember that everyone teaches others through the example of their lives. Some teach others what to do, while some teach others what *not* to do. The question is, what lessons are others learning from us? While it may be instructive to learn from a poor example, it is undoubtedly better to learn from a positive role model.

We can help ensure our lives produce the right kind of fruit when we seek God's empowerment to act on the following counsel from 1 Timothy 4:12: ***“...Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity” (NLT).***

***“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man.***

***From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. 'Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man. And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth And multiply in it'” (Genesis 9:3-7).***

These verses discuss the role of capital punishment in human society. Capital punishment (also known as the “death penalty”) refers to *“punishment by death, as ordered by a legal system.”* <sup>(1)</sup> Genesis 9:6 classifies murder as a crime that warrants capital punishment, for it tells us, ***“Whoever takes a man's life, by man will his life be taken; because God made man in his image” (BBE).***

This directive may be difficult to explain, for this portion of Scripture seemingly conflicts with the sixth commandment given to us in Exodus 20:13: ***“Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13 KJV).*** So if Genesis 9:6 tells us, ***“If anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands” (NLT),*** but Exodus 20:13 says, ***“You shall not kill” (RSV),*** then what should make of those apparent conflicts?

We can unravel this mystery with a closer look at the word “kill” from Exodus 20:13. This word is more accurately translated “murder,” and several contemporary Biblical translations render it in that manner. <sup>(1)</sup> This means the sixth commandment is best understood as, ***“Thou shall not murder,”*** or, ***“Do not terminate someone's life without just cause.”***

Old Testament authorities did not classify judicial executions as murder, just as is true with certain crimes in many jurisdictions today. On the other hand, murder is defined as *“the unlawful killing of one human being by another with malice aforethought.”* <sup>(2)</sup> That is the violation under discussion in our text from Genesis 9:6.

The Biblical Scriptures thus distinguish between killing and murder. “Killing” does not always constitute murder, for there may be reasonable grounds that justify the act of taking another person's life. Those grounds might include an act of self-defense, or a circumstance where a soldier engages in lethal force against an enemy in the midst of an armed conflict.

With these things in mind, we can say murder is a crime that shows a callous disregard for human life. Furthermore, murder demonstrates contempt for God, for human beings are created in His image. As a result, God mandates a death penalty for those who engage in an act of murder. When potential murderers lack respect for God and fellow human beings who are made in His image, perhaps the value of their own lives may serve as an effective deterrent.

(1) The *New King James (NKJV)*, *New Living Translation (NLT)*, *New International Version (NIV)*, and *Contemporary English Version (CEV)* offer a few examples

(2) See *Legal Defense of Homicide (From Human Side of Homicide, P 251-261, 1982, Bruce L Danto et al, eds. - See NCJ-93170)*. U.S. Department Of Justice, Official Justice Programs. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/legal-defense-homicide-human-side-homicide-p-251-261-1982-bruce-l> Accessed 06, April 2024

***“Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: 'And as for Me, behold, I establish My***

***covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Genesis 9:8-11).***

Contemporary audiences may be unfamiliar with the type of covenantal agreement mentioned in these verses. However, a covenant is much like a modern-day contract in several ways.

For instance, a covenant specified the duties and obligations of the parties involved, just like a modern-day contract. And just like other types of contractual agreements, a covenant often imposed penalties upon those who did not fulfill their responsibilities.

In a similar manner, God’s covenant with Noah represented a legal and official promise to do what He said. Nevertheless, these Biblical covenants differed from other types of agreements in several important respects. First, God initiated the terms of each covenant, just as we see here with Noah.

Next, this passage illustrates another important aspect of a Biblical covenant: the terms of a covenant were non-negotiable. In other words, the language of a covenant could not be modified to suit the preferences of one party. Instead, a Biblical covenant was accepted or rejected in its entirety, without alteration.

We can find a good example of these features in chapters [twenty-eight to thirty of Old Testament book of Deuteronomy](#). Those chapters specified the blessings God would bring to His people if they fulfilled the terms of His covenant with them. However, that passage also included an extensive list of disciplinary measures that God would impose upon the people of Israel if they chose to disobey His statutes.

Thus, God summarized His desire for humanity regarding these promises.....

***“I call on heaven and earth as witnesses today that I have offered you life or death, blessings or curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants will live” (Deuteronomy 30:19 GW).***

There is another aspect to God's promise to Noah in Genesis 9:11 that is more important than it may appear. Without God's promise to refrain from destroying the world in that manner again, every new rainfall might unleash the possibility of another catastrophic flood. However, God’s pledge in Genesis 9:11 eliminates the need for any such concern.

God then provided Noah with a visible and identifiable sign to confirm His promise...

***“And God said: 'This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.***

***It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.'***

***And God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth'” (Genesis 9:12-17).***

So much like a signature on a contract, a rainbow serves as a visual reminder of God’s covenant with Noah. It represents a validation and affirmation of His commitment to never destroy the world with a flood again.

***“Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated. And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent” (Genesis 9:18-21).***

The continuous flow of this Biblical narrative makes it easy to overlook the passage of time that occurred between Genesis 9:1 and the verses quoted above. For example, it takes a significant amount of time to plant a vineyard, bring it to maturity, harvest the grapes, process them, ferment the resulting grape juice, and bottle it for storage. Because of this, it's likely that a minimum of three to five years elapsed between the events that opened this chapter and the events of Genesis 9:18-21.

In seeking to understand this difficult passage, we can start by acknowledging that Noah is recognized as a great man of God. For instance, Noah is featured within the Biblical “Hall Of Fame” given to us in [Hebrews chapter eleven](#). The New Testament epistle of 1 Peter also identifies him as a preacher of righteousness in [1 Peter 3:20](#). In addition, we shouldn't overlook the fact that Noah was the person who essentially saved humanity from the destruction of the Great Flood from a human perspective.

So how did someone of that spiritual caliber allow himself to become so intoxicated that he lost consciousness? Well, Noah's experience tells us that God-honoring men and women can still commit serious mistakes. For instance, the Biblical Scriptures repeatedly emphasize the negative consequences associated with alcohol abuse. Ephesians 5:18 offers one such example.....

***“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (NIV).***

"Debauchery" (meaning “to corrupt morally”<sup>(1)</sup>) is a word that has largely fallen out of use today. This word was once used to identify unmarried couples who embraced a sexually active lifestyle. Today, we might use a word like "promiscuous" to describe such behavior.

Modern health care professionals now acknowledge alcohol's function as a depressant. Alcohol abuse thus serves to depress our capacity for self-control, sound judgment, and wise decision-making. In light of this, Noah's experience in Genesis chapter nine validates the Biblical counsel given to us in Ephesians 5:18: ***“And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled by the Spirit” (HCSB).***

Unfortunately, Noah's decision led to some decidedly negative consequences.

(1) “Debauch” *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition Copyright © 1992 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

***“And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside” (Genesis 9:22).***

So Noah's son Ham happened upon Noah's condition and reported it to his brothers Shem and Japheth. While it may seem as if there is nothing extraordinary about this, a closer look at the original language of this passage implies something else.

For instance, the context of this verse implies that Noah's son didn't simply notice his condition. Instead, this passage implies that Ham gazed upon his father for a time as he lay in his drunken stupor; evidentially with satisfaction, as one source puts it. <sup>(1)</sup>

Another issue involves Ham's decision to discuss what he saw with his brothers. One commentator reports that the original text of this verse suggests that Ham reported this news with a sense of delight. <sup>(2)</sup> So it appears that Noah's son derived a sense of pleasure or satisfaction from observing his father in

such a condition. At the very least, Ham did nothing to protect his father's dignity or self-respect.

Therefore, it seems that Ham took advantage of this situation and sought to use it as an opportunity to tarnish his father's reputation. It then appears that he approached his brothers with an invitation to do the same. However, Noah's other sons were more honorable, and they elected to handle the situation in a more appropriate manner...

***“But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness” (Genesis 9:23).***

So instead of following Ham's example, Shem and Japheth demonstrated love, honor, and respect for their father. They didn't ignore the situation, deny it, or act as if nothing was wrong. Instead, they acknowledged Noah's uncharacteristic behavior and assisted him in recovering with dignity.

In doing so, Shem and Japheth became living examples of what it meant to help a God-honoring person recover from a momentary lapse in judgment. As the Apostle Peter would later go on to say...

***“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).***

(1) Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* copyright 1976, by Henry M. Morris, Baker Book House and Master Books, [pg. 235]

(2) David Guzik, *Genesis 9 – God's Covenant With Noah And Creation* <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-9/>

This incident with Noah offers something else to consider as we interact with friends, acquaintances, family members, and those within our church community. Each of those individuals are similarly imperfect human beings who make mistakes, just like Noah- and there will be times when they commit judgmental errors as well.

There is no shortage of those who are eager to raise an accusation of hypocrisy when fallible human beings who profess faith in Christ are caught in a moment of weakness. However, a “hypocrite” is not someone who makes a judgmental error or struggles to live a sincere, God-honoring life. Instead, a hypocrite is someone who is knowingly and intentionally different from what he or she claims to be.

Thus, we must live with fallible human beings who must repent and ask forgiveness when they err, just as they must live with us. When we encounter those situations, we face a choice: *“Will I follow Ham's example or will I follow Shem and Japheth's example? Will I share those errors with others in an indiscriminate fashion, or will I help that person maintain a sense of dignity and respect?”*

This does not obligate us to remain silent in the face of activities that are illegal, immoral, blatantly unethical, or potentially life-threatening. However, the New Testament letter of Galatians provides us with a general guideline that can help us respond appropriately to indiscretions that fall beyond those parameters...

***“...if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path, remembering that next time it might be one of you who is in the wrong” (Galatians 6:1 TLB).***

These passages should prompt us to think carefully before we publicize the faults, idiosyncrasies, and shortcomings of others, especially those within the family of God. This does not mean that we must deny the truth about others; however, genuine love accepts them in Christ and refrains from exposing their flaws and imperfections in a way that damages their reputation. As we're told in the Old

Testament book of Proverbs, *"Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins" (Proverbs 10:12).*

*"So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. Then he said: 'Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brethren.' And he said: 'Blessed be the Lord, The God of Shem, And may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, And may he dwell in the tents of Shem; And may Canaan be his servant.'*

*And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died" (Genesis 9:24-28).*

As we close our look at this chapter, we should note that this incident with Noah led to an unforeseen consequence. That consequence involved a curse on Ham's son, Canaan. Perhaps Canaan was involved in this situation in a way that is unknown to us. Either way, Ham's son was destined to bring dishonor to him, just as he sought to dishonor his father, Noah.