

Your Reputation Precedes You
Genesis 6:1–10

You've probably heard the old saying, "*Your reputation precedes you.*" It means that people have learned or heard things about you before they meet you.

Hopefully good things, although that's not always the case.

But it is a fact of life, and it is the nature of the world we live in, that we make a reputation for ourselves. This truth is reflected in the OT book of Proverbs, chapter 20, which says, "*Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright.*"

We develop a reputation with people based on things we say and do. And I would propose that, in a similar way, we develop a reputation with God. However, God observes not only our deeds and words, but our thoughts and desires as well.

Hebrews 4 reminds us that nothing is hidden from His sight. God sees the whole person: every action, every word, every intention, every thought. And the Scriptures tell us that sin has affected every part of a person.

Earlier we proclaimed what we believe about sin. We understand that mankind was radically or completely corrupted at the Fall, in every faculty and facet of our humanity. This is often referred to as "total depravity." It does not mean (as late Bible scholar R.C. Sproul stated) that we are as bad as we could be, but that there is no part of us that sin did not touch, no part over which the sinful nature does not exert influence. The sinful nature of Adam was imputed or passed down to all mankind.

Therefore sin has contaminated the whole person thoroughly and entirely. This is why the whole person of Jesus Christ was necessary for our redemption.

Jesus was fully human, with words, actions, thoughts and desires of His own. But also, He was fully God, and therefore absolutely holy, sinless, in every human capacity. His natural reputation before God the Father is that of a beloved Son. Our natural reputation is that we are sinners, God's enemies. Sin defines mankind.

We need Jesus Christ to redefine us, to transform our reputation with God.

If you've ever tried to change your reputation for the better, you know how difficult that can be. So how can our reputation with God be changed?

These verses of Genesis 6 help us understand. You can find an outline on page 6 in the WG. How can you experience reputation transformation with God? Admit the name you have made for yourself in and through sin, and then receive the name God has made for you in and through Christ. We left off in Genesis 5 with the mention of Noah as one who would bring rest from the

effects of sin in the world. But before giving details about Noah's life, Moses backs up to describe the world at that time.

After Adam's fall into sin in Genesis 3, God declared that there would be these two seeds or offspring, one of the serpent and one of the woman: two sons, both from Eve, but different. There would be hostility between the two lines. We see this immediately begin to play out when Adam and Eve's son Cain kills his brother Abel. Genesis 4 goes on to describe the increasingly wicked descendants of Cain.

They made a wicked name for themselves.

But at the end of ch. 4, we learn that Adam and Eve had a son to replace Abel, named Seth. And Seth's line began to be called by the name of Yahweh, by God's name. Genesis 5 then goes on to list those in the line of Seth. They honored God.

But that began to fall apart as well. Genesis 6, verse 2 tells us that as people multiplied, "*the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose.*" There has been much speculation about what this means. But in light of the context and the events and language leading up to this verse, the most reasonable explanation is that the descendants of Seth (the sons of God) began to intermarry with the descendants of Cain (the daughters of man).

Some have suggested that this describes angels coming down to marry women, but Jesus states in Mark 12 that angels don't marry and there's no indication that angels have the ability to reproduce, especially with humans.

Rather, what this describes is those who worshiped the one true God marrying those who did not, and the results were very bad. This intermarriage caused humans to trend not toward God, but away from Him. Notice God's response in verse 3: "*Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years."*"

This does not mean that people would no longer live but 120 years; in fact, after the flood, Noah lived much longer than that. What it seems to say is there would be 120 years before His judgment in the form of the flood.

Now, this next verse has produced some speculation also. Verse 4, "*The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them.*" "Nephilim" is used later in the OT, in Numbers 13, when some Israelites are sent to spy on the Caanites who inhabited the Promised Land.

Some have proposed that the Nephilim were perhaps the superhuman offspring of bad angels and human females, but a plain reading of Scripture leads us to see them simply as notorious men. These were individuals of especially bad reputation. They had a bad name, so bad in fact that they had a title. Notice again, Moses writes, "*The Nephilim were on the earth in those days,*

and also afterward." The Israelites were familiar with these people. There were still men going by this title in the present day.

And the Hebrew words here are very important. Notice the end of verse 4 again, "*These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown.*" This literally says they were "warriors, men of the name." But everything leading up to this verse indicates that their name or their reputation was evil, and their presence so many years later in the godless land of Canaan confirms that. The next time this phrase is used is to describe a descendant of Noah's son Ham, whose family was cursed by God.

Many scholars believe that the name Nephilim meant "fallen ones." It seems that the Nephilim were a large part of why Moses says in verse 11, "*the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence.*"

Now, Numbers 13 says that the "Nephilim" were large in physical stature. The Israelite spies described them as giants. So how physically large were they? We can't say for certain. People lived longer at that time, as we saw last week, and perhaps some people grew especially large. But even today, that is the case.

Last weekend, my family and I went to Columbia for a college basketball game, and the opposing team had a player who was 7 feet tall! You could tell he was huge when he was under the basket, but when he came to the huddle, he towered over his teammates, which included young men who were well over 6'6"! It was astonishing to see this young man's height.

Now imagine if you saw a person that big who was also exceptionally violent with no fear of God. A man like that would strike fear into the hearts of people. It appears that as the intermarriage between Seth and Cain's descendants took place, one result was these terrible wicked and intimidating men. But, notice verse 5, "*The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*"

Why is this important? Well, when I was studying this and thinking about the Nephilim, I thought about some of the various groups throughout history who have been known for being particularly evil. We see evil nations in the Scriptures, and there are evil nations in the world today. I thought of the organized crime groups that have existed throughout history, in every age. These intimidating, larger than life figures often have nicknames as a group.

But notice that verse 5 does not say that the LORD saw wickedness only in the Nephilim. The point Moses is making is that God saw great wickedness in everyone. You might read about evil individuals in history or see them in the world today and think, "*The wrath of God is aimed straight at them for their wickedness.*" Which is true, but the Scriptures teach us that God's wrath is aimed at all wickedness; not just toward the most heinous of deeds, but toward every sinful thought and desire.

You see, God's wrath against sin is aimed at your sin as well. With the flood, God was not wiping out only the Nephilim; His judgment was broad sweeping.

Now notice verse [6] *"And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart."* God does not change His mind as humans do, but He does respond to the actions of humans. What Moses describes here is not regret as if a mistake was made by God, but rather, grief over what He observed, sorrow over what mankind had become. This word is translated in the next verse as "sorry."

This is another example in Scripture of God being described in human terms. Elsewhere we read about God's mighty hand or His arm or His face, but God is a spirit and He does not have a body as we do. But this description helps us understand. God was not pleased with mankind's wickedness, nor was He indifferent to it.

And so, verse 7, *"So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."* This sounds like there will be no more humans. That's it. Over. And God would be entirely just to end mankind. The same was true in Genesis 3.

You must understand that with God, the punishment always fits the crime. That should tell you all you need to know about how bad things were before the flood. The Nephilim had made a name for themselves, they were "men of a name," but in reality, all mankind had done so.

All mankind had a sinful reputation before God.

For our reputation with God to change, we must first accept our natural reputation before Him. Admit the name you have made for yourself in and through sin. Do you take this attitude toward God: it is a privilege to come into His holy presence? It is an honor for God's grace to be extended to sinners. There should be no being puffed-up. The name we naturally make for ourselves is one of man-centeredness, sinful in every part. That is us without God's intervention, without His grace. And we see grace in these next verses.

If we go back to the end of Genesis 4, to the birth of Seth, what made Seth different? He had the same mother as Cain. He had the same father. What made him different was God's grace. God set him and his descendants apart. God bestowed His own name upon them.

But they too were sinners and they commenced to make their own name.

Making a name or reputation comes up again in Genesis 11, at the tower of Babel. They said, *"Let us make a name for ourselves."* Noah had a name, or a reputation, before God. He was a sinner; he was human.

But notice verse 8 again, *"Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD."* In other words, Noah found grace with Yahweh. John Currid points out here that the Hebrew wording actually

indicates an ongoing state of grace; not that Noah did something that merited God's favor, but that God had acted long before to place Noah in this state.

God was not done with humanity in Genesis 3. God had a plan to work through the line of Seth. And God is done with humanity in Genesis 6.

Notice verse 9 and 10, *"These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God."* This recalls Noah's ancestor Enoch. Again, Noah was not sinless, but he was exceptional. He had integrity in an age of wickedness.

In 1 Cor. 15, the apostle Paul says, *"By the grace of God I am what I am."* He even says that He worked hard to preach Christ, *"though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."* Noah's character amidst all the evil was ultimately the grace of God toward Him and mankind. Later in Genesis we see Noah sin. His righteousness, and His reputation, was a credit to God.

Now look finally at verse [10] *And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.* For now, I want to point out that it would be through Shem that the line of Seth would continue. Abraham would come from the line of Seth, then Isaac and Jacob, who would be called Israel. The Israelites descended from Shem.

Try to follow me here: the Hebrew word for "name" or "reputation" is practically identical to the name "Shem." The meaning of Shem's name is not entirely certain, but it possibly meant "reputation." It would not be a coincidence that God would give Noah a "Shem," and then from that "Shem" would eventually come Jesus Christ, and that through Jesus, God's people *"shall be called by a new name,"* as the prophet Isaiah wrote.

For our reputation with God, our name before God, to be changed, we must admit the name we have made for ourselves in and through sin, but then we must receive the name God has made for us in and through Christ.

We must receive the new name God gives us by His grace.

How do we receive this name? By turning from sin and trusting in Jesus Christ. We receive the name of Jesus through repentance and faith.

Through Jesus, God changes your name.

I don't want to get ahead of myself, but in Genesis 17 God changes Abram's name to Abraham and in Genesis 32, God changes Jacob's name to Israel. The sinful reputation of these ancient men preceded them, just as our reputation precedes us. But by His grace, God bestowed on them a new reputation, a new name.

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul states, *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."* Grace comes, and a new name comes, through Jesus.

Jesus was treated like a man of bad reputation so we could have a good reputation with God. Through Jesus, the old reputation with God goes away. If you are in Christ, God accepts and loves you based on Jesus' sinless record. Sin and death was imputed to us through Adam; the free gift of righteousness is imputed through Jesus Christ.

Do you stand before God on your own reputation, or are you in Christ, so that you are known by His reputation, by His name before God?

Does your reputation precede you with God, or does the reputation of Jesus precede you?

After this life is done and on the Last Day, for those who are in Christ, the name of Jesus will precede them into the presence of the God Almighty. That is cause for great relief, great peace and hope, and great joy! It comes through knowing Christ. This is why, in Philippians 3, Paul told the churches, *"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."*

Let's bow in prayer.