

Are We That Bad?: Genesis 6:1-8

Main Idea: God's judgment is just and His grace is necessary.

Genesis 6 opens with humanity multiplying across the earth. On the surface, this sounds like Genesis 1:28 is being fulfilled. People are filling the earth and families are growing. The problem is that growth is not the same thing as being faithful. Scripture does not measure success by what we are capable of building or accomplishing. **The deeper issue is whether or not people are using the life God has given them under His authority.**

Christians have disagreed for centuries about the identity of the “sons of God” and the Nephilim, and we should be careful not to speak with more certainty than the text gives us. There is a main point to this passage that can get overlooked by overspeculation. Verse 2 sounds familiar: they “saw” what was desirable and “took” what they wanted. Genesis has already given us that pattern in the fall, when Eve “saw that the tree was good for food” and “took of its fruit” (Gen. 3:6). The problem seen here goes attraction or marriage. **Fallen human beings repeatedly look at what appears good to us and claim the authority to decide for ourselves whether we should have it.** James describes the process that occurs inside a person when he says that each person is tempted “when he is lured and enticed by his own desire,” and that desire eventually “gives birth to sin” (James 1:14-15). Desires are not a trustworthy moral compass. Our culture often treats a deeply felt desire as self-validating. If something feels necessary for happiness, questioning it appears judgemental. **Sin often looks reasonable from the perspective of our own desires.** Scripture repeatedly forces us to ask ourselves not, “Do I want this?” but, “Has God given this to me?” Proverbs 14:12 warns that “there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”

For believers, discipleship must go beyond warning one another against obviously sinful acts. **We must submit our desires, ambitions, relationships, and definitions of happiness to God.** Sometimes obedience means receiving a gift with thanksgiving, but sometimes it means rejecting something we want because God has said it is not good. Christian freedom is not the freedom to go after whatever our heart desires. It is freedom from slavery to sin so that we can increasingly delight in what God defines as good. The Christian life does not teach us to stop having desires... It teaches us that even our desires need to be transformed. If the “sons of God” are understood as coming from the line of Seth, there is something else to learn from this passage. The people characterized by calling upon the name of the Lord become increasingly indistinguishable from the surrounding world. Romans 12:2 warns, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Holiness does not mean withdrawing from the world or treating non-believers as beneath us. **It means belonging to God so completely that the world around us does not define what we love, pursue, and celebrate.**

Verse 3 adds another key takeaway. God declares that humanity will not continue indefinitely in rebellion. Judgment is coming, but it does not come immediately. Scripture later describes the days of Noah as a period in which “God’s patience waited” (1 Pet. 3:20). **This means divine patience should never be confused with divine approval.** One of the mistakes fallen people make is assuming that because God has not acted against our sin, He must not be concerned about it. The Bible presents God’s patience very differently. Romans 2:4 says that God’s kindness is meant to lead us to repentance. Every day in which judgment has not come is mercy. **God’s patience is not permission to become content in rebellion; it is an opportunity to turn from it.** That should change the way we think about delayed consequences in our own lives, but it should also shape our evangelism. Peter says that the Lord is patient, “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Christians should see the present age as a season in which God is still calling sinners to repentance, not as a frustrating time of increasing wickedness.

To Ponder:

1. Why is it dangerous to only ask, “Is this sinful?” instead of, “Is this good and pleasing to God?” How do those two questions lead us to different conclusions?
2. How should the patience of God shape the way Christians approach evangelism? How can we speak with both urgency about repentance and compassion toward the people we are trying to reach?

Verse 5 takes us beyond human behavior and shows us God's assessment of the human heart: "every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." **The Bible does not teach that every person is always committing the worst possible sin. It does teach that sin has affected the whole person.** Our thoughts, motives, reasoning, relationships, and wills are all corrupted by the fall. This explains why human beings can do nice things and still remain separated from God. We can love our families, help our neighbors, pursue justice, but still need reconciliation with God who made us. This is important because the doctrine of total depravity can easily be misunderstood. Those outside of Christ are still capable of acting generously and contributing to the good of society. God continues to give good gifts and restrain wickedness. What total depravity tells us is that none of those things is able to cleanse us of our rebellion against God or produce the righteousness necessary to reconcile us to Him. **The issue is not that fallen people are incapable of doing anything beneficial. The issue is that nothing within fallen humanity can cure our separation from God.** The biblical view therefore differs from explanations that isolate the human problem only outside us. Our environment matters and experiences shape us, but Jesus says, "out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45), and Jeremiah says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick" (Jer. 17:9). **The core of our sin problem is that humans need a new heart.**

This has enormous implications for Christian ministry and personal growth. Churches can settle for behavior management and teach people how to look respectable, use Christian vocabulary, and attend regularly while never dealing with the heart. Parents can make the same mistake with children. We should teach obedience and establish wise boundaries, but the goal is not to produce children who only behave when adults are watching. We want them to know that they need grace, repentance, faith, and ultimately a new heart that only God can give. God promises in Ezekiel 36:26, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you." **Christianity is not fundamentally self-improvement. It is rescue and transformation.** This should also shape our evangelism. Christians should care about truth, poverty, injustice, and suffering, because our neighbors are image-bearers of God. But Genesis 6 reminds us that none of these things really deals with humanity's sin problem. **The gospel therefore cannot become one ministry among many within the church. Everything else we do must ultimately serve our calling to make Christ known.** Verses 6-7 show us why judgment is not an overreaction on God's part. Human wickedness grieves God who made humanity in His image. We can't compare ourselves horizontally and conclude that we aren't that bad because someone else is worse. Scripture forces us to compare ourselves with the holiness of God. **When we minimize sin, God's judgment begins to look excessive.**

Then verse 8 gives us the turn: "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD." Favor is grace. The next verse describes Noah as one who walked with God, but grace is the foundation of that life. **The answer to a corrupt heart is not confidence in ourselves. It is the mercy of God in Christ, who forgives sinners and changes the people He saves.** This should produce humility and hope. Christians cannot look at a sinful world as though grace found us because we were better. Paul asks, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7). At the same time, no one is beyond the kind of grace that must rescue all of us. Understanding human depravity should not make the church eager to condemn. It should make us realistic about sin, grateful for mercy, patient with struggling believers, and confident that the gospel addresses a problem no human can. **The Christian response to a wicked world is neither surprise nor superiority. It is faithfulness, evangelism, repentance, and gratitude that God still gives grace to sinners.**

To Ponder:

3. How can the church call people to obedience without giving the impression that Christianity is only about being well-behaved? What should we teach others about sin, grace, and repentance?
4. When you think about your own sin, are you more likely to focus on what you have done or on what your actions reveal about your heart? What might you be avoiding by staying at the level of behavior?