

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 7/16/2000 Brad Brandt

Genesis 9:18-29 "A Blemish on a Godly Life"*

Proposition: Genesis 9:18-29 is a wake up call for those who think, "It won't happen to me!" Two scenes in the account illustrate the blemish on the otherwise godly life of Noah.

I. Scene #1: We see a family's failure (18-23).

A. Noah blew it (20-21).

1. He exhibited drunkenness.
2. He exhibited immodesty.

B. Ham blew it (22).

1. He dishonored his father.
2. He slandered his father.

C. Shem and Japheth did right (23).

1. They exhibited honor.
2. Rather than ignore, they took steps to restore.

II. Scene #2: We see the fall-out (24-29).

A. Noah pronounced a curse (24-25).

1. Ham sinned.
2. Apparently, Canaan was just like him.

B. Noah pronounced a blessing (26-27).

1. Shem would enjoy the Lord's favor (26).
2. By association, so would Japheth (27).

Application: We can learn some valuable lessons...

1. There is no such thing as a problem-free family.
2. Yesterday's obedience does not guarantee today's.
3. The choices I make will affect those around me.

You have to admire Noah. What a man of faith! What a man of God! When God told Noah the Flood was coming, he believed God. When God told him to build an ark, he built it. When God told him to take along a remnant of animals, he obeyed. And finally, when God told Noah to get on the ark, he got on it just like God said.

Noah was a man who wasn't afraid to go against the grain of society. He alone shone as a light in a dark world. In Noah's day the earth was corrupt and full of violence (6:11), but Noah walked with God, as Genesis 6:9 records. He was a righteous man and blameless among the people of his time.

Can you imagine the ridicule Noah endured year after year while building the ark? "What'ya doing over there, Noah, building a boat in the middle of dry ground? You say it's going to rain, huh? Ha! You're a fool, Noah! You're a religious nut!"

And so Noah took the abuse for years. But he didn't just take it. Noah didn't become passive, nor did he develop a "Poor me" mentality. In fact, 2 Peter 2:5 says Noah was a "preacher of righteousness." In the midst of the mocking, Noah preached and warned his contemporaries, "You need to get right with God before it's too late."

Yes, Noah was a remarkable man. Genesis 6:8 records that "Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD." Hebrews 11:7 elaborates, "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith."

The pages of Scripture bear witness to the fact that Noah was quite a man. But...he was still a man.

Do you remember Vinko Bogatej? He was a ski-jumper from Yugoslavia who, while competing in the 1970 World Ski-Flying Championship in Obertsdorf, West Germany, fell off the takeoff ramp and landed on his head. Ever since, the accident has been used to highlight "the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat" on ABC's "Wide World of Sports."

Bogatej was hospitalized after the spill, but he recovered and later worked in a foundry in Yugoslavia. Doug Wilson, a producer for ABC, interviewed him several years later for a special anniversary edition of the show. "When we told him he's been on the program ever since 1970," says Wilson, "he couldn't believe it. He appears on television 130 times a year."

Vinko Bogatej didn't intend on falling that day in 1970, but he did. For all the world to see--and see again and again and again.

But Vinko's not the only person who's ever fallen in life, is he? Do godly men ever struggle? Do they ever fall? Do Christians ever have trouble on the home front? Indeed, they do. Even the greatest of God's people, when it's all said and done, are in and of themselves weak and frail.

Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love--as the hymnwriter put it.

God's Word testifies that Noah was a righteous man, very true. But the Scriptures don't hide the fact that Noah had a blemish on his resume. Yes, Noah made it through the *big* challenge--he built the ark. But later, he got tripped up over something that seemed so innocent.

Years later Peter, a godly man who himself had a blemish on his record, offered this counsel, "Be sober! Be vigilant! Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

Perhaps the five most dangerous words that could ever come from the lips of a Christian are these, "It won't happen to me!" Beloved, even a giant can fall. There is no such thing as "arriving" in the Christian life. Jesus didn't come to save the righteous, but sinners. And the moment we forget that we are sinners--praise God justified sinners, but sinners none-the-less--at that moment we are in great danger.

Genesis 9:18-29 is a wake up call for those who've been walking with God for awhile. After we receive Christ as our Savior and Lord, we know we are weak and He is strong. But as time passes we tend to forget our frailty, and may start coasting. When that happens, look out! Genesis 9 is for those of us who think, "It won't happen to me!"

We're going to see two scenes this morning that portray a blemish on the otherwise godly life of Noah. God's Word does not hide the warts of God's people. In black and white it shows us Abraham's lie, Jacob's deceitfulness, David's adultery, Peter's denial, and John Mark's running.

Why are these accounts in the Bible? For several reasons perhaps, but certainly this one. *To warn us*, to

challenge us to wake up. So let's take inventory by looking at Noah.

I. Scene #1: We see a family's failure (18-23).

First, the backdrop of the story. Genesis is a book of beginnings. We see the creation of the first world (chapter one), the first man and woman (chapter two), and the first temptation and sin (chapter 3). We see God's first promise of a coming Deliverer in Genesis 3:15. We see the first children as well as the first murder (chapter four). So Genesis is a book of *firsts*.

It's also a *foundational* book. In fact, the rest of the Bible assumes we know Genesis. In the first chapters of Genesis we learn why we work, why we marry, why divorce is wrong, why God gives children, why we wear clothes, why we die, and why blood sacrifice is necessary to be right with God.

Genesis is actually part of a bigger story, the story of redemption. Genesis is actually the prologue to the Torah, the Law that God gave to Israel as recorded in Exodus through Deuteronomy. Where did Israel come from? Genesis tells us. The story goes back to Abraham. Where did Abraham come from? We must go back further, to a man named Noah who had three sons.

Let's read the immediate setting in Genesis 9:18-19, "The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth."

All people on the planet can trace their ancestry to Adam, that's true. We've come from Adam. But we've also come from Noah. There was a time when God judged the world, and the sole inhabitants of the world were Noah, his wife, their three sons, and their sons' wives.

Our story takes place in that post-Flood world. Noah and his family got off the ark and when they did, it was a new beginning. Time passed. How much time we're not told. But then one day it happened...

A. Noah blew it (20-21). Without making judgment the biblical author, Moses, simply lets the actions speak for themselves in verses 20-21. Here's what happened, "Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard (20)."

Why he planted the vineyard, we're not told. Vineyards are mentioned throughout the Bible. Naboth had one that King Ahab coveted (1 Kgs 21). Isaiah illustrated God's relationship with Israel by telling a story about a vineyard (Isaiah 5). Jesus told a parable about a vineyard (Matt 21).

Apparently Noah, like his father Lamech, engaged in farming (5:21). And here he planted a vineyard. Then what happened?

Verse 21, "When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent." The brevity of the text raises some difficult-to-answer questions, one of which is, did Noah know what he was doing? Some suggest that Noah didn't know that fermented grape juice could cause drunkenness. But the text doesn't seem to present Noah as a helpless victim. Rather, in verse 21 Noah displayed two sinful actions.

1. *He exhibited drunkenness.* He became *drunk*. In the Bible drunkenness is a sin. Noah wasn't drinking grape juice that day. I don't know what the alcoholic content of his beverage was, but it was enough to get smashed. And then in his state of drunkenness he displayed a second, sinful action...

2. *He exhibited immodesty.* He became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. Alcohol removes inhibitions and causes people to do what they *never do* when sober. Sing, yell, fight, drive recklessly. Expose themselves.

It's noteworthy that this is the first mention of wine in the Bible. Furthermore, it's significant that the first mention of alcohol points out its potentially devastating effects. And what was true *then* is certainly true *now*.

Noah's family wasn't the last to feel the destructive power of the bottle, was it? That being the case I feel compelled to take some time right now to address this question: *What does the Bible teach about drinking alcohol?*

First of all, the Bible is clear that drunkenness is forbidden. Proverbs 20:1 states, "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise."

Someone will say, "But they drank wine in Bible times, didn't they? Jesus turned water into wine, didn't He?" Yes, but there are other factors to consider. The biblical characters lived in a world where good drinking water was not always easy to locate. And in a world where they were no drug stores, the medicinal value of wine was understood, as Paul recognized in his comments to Timothy (1 Tim 5:23).

It's true. The Bible doesn't prohibit drinking *per se*, but drunkenness. But we don't live in the biblical world, do we? We live in a society where alcohol is one of the chief contributors to domestic violence, child abuse, and the breakdown of the family. The statistics don't lie. In our country, alcohol is involved in fifteen thousand homicides and suicides annually, twenty thousand accidental deaths, plus one-half of all auto accidents and the additional twenty-five thousand deaths they cause. Even 40 percent of the pedestrians who are killed have been drinking.

Even the pagan world today recognizes the dangers of alcohol. Alcohol has the power to ruin marriages, dissolve friendships, and destroy health. Yet all the while many church goers are seeking to justify its use.

To put it bluntly, is it a *sin* to drink? Biblically speaking, no. But is it *wise* to drink? Again the answer is no, not in my opinion. Why not? The story we're studying is a vivid demonstration of why not.

But there's a more fundamental reason. If we belong to Christ, we are not our own (1 Cor 6:19). We have *no rights*, so there goes the argument, "I've got a right to drink if I want to." No, we exist to please the One who saved us.

The fact is, there are things I *could* do that I *shouldn't* do. Isn't that Paul's point in his discussion of "rights" in 1 Corinthians 9? If I am a Christian, *everything* I do must be tested by the question, will it enhance or hinder the reputation of Christ my Master?"

You say, "Does the Bible have anything else to say about the subject of drinking?" Plenty. Ephesians 5:18 offers this exhortation to believers, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

The prophet Isaiah pronounced these woes in Isaiah 5, "Woe to those who rise early in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine (11)." "Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks (22)."

And no passage from God's Word is more expressive on the subject than Proverbs 23:29-35, "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. 'They hit me,' you will say, 'but I'm not hurt! They beat me, but I don't feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?'"

Beloved, don't be deceived by alcohol. Choose today to honor Christ in this and every area of your life. Don't be controlled by spirits, but by The Spirit. Learn from Noah. I'm confident Noah didn't *intend* to sin and dishonor God that day. He just got caught off guard. That's how temptation works.

Henry Morris offers this perspective, "Noah, having stood strong against the attacks of evil men for hundreds of years, remaining steadfast in the face of such opposition and discouragement as few men have ever faced, now let down his guard, as it were, when it seemed that all would be peace and victory from now on. After everything he had been through, what harm could there be in a little relaxation and a little provision for the comforts of the flesh?"

As far as we know this was Noah's only moral lapse in a life full of faithful obedience. But it's there. He blew it. Then what happened?

B. Ham blew it (22). "Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside." How did Ham blow it? By committing two sins.

1. *He dishonored his father.* Ham violated the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother (Ex 20:12)." The verb "saw" in this context seems to connote "gazed at." Some have suggested lust was involved, but I don't think so. Since Ham got on the ark to escape the corruption and destruction of the world, it seems plausible that he was a believer. I don't see immorality here so much as insubordination.

Henry Morris elaborates, "Ham's actions here...expressed a long-hidden resentment of his father's authority and moral rectitude. There was apparently a carnal and rebellious bent to Ham's nature, thus far restrained by the spiritual strength and patriarchal authority of his father."

Did Ham really harbor some resentment towards his father? I don't know. The details are sketchy, so our conclusions must be tentative concerning Ham's motivation. But concerning his actions we know this. First, Ham dishonored his father--he "saw."

2. *He slandered his father.* He "told" his brothers. And where were they? The text says they were "outside." That word seems to indicate that Ham didn't just "happen" to walk in on his father and catch an innocent glimpse of him. He went in and saw his father's nakedness. And then he went back outside and informed his brothers of what he found.

Gordon Wenham comments on Ham's actions, "With total lack of discretion he publicized it to his brothers." We don't know what he said to his brothers, but we get the impression that some sort of mocking was involved.

Was Noah responsible for actions? Yes. But was Ham responsible for his actions? Yes, both men were. Both blew it. What about the other two brothers?

C. Shem and Japheth did right (23). "But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness."

Did you notice that the term "nakedness" is mentioned three times in these two verses? It's not the first time we've seen the term in Genesis. In Genesis 2:25 Adam and Eve were "naked" and unashamed. Then after sin entered the world in Genesis 3, they were "naked" and ashamed (3:7). So what did God do? He clothed them (3:21).

Answer this. Why do we wear clothes today? Why should we be concerned about modesty? The answer is what God did right here in Genesis. God put clothes on His image-bearers. To take care of their shame He covered them. His actions become the basis for ours. The problem is, sinners are prone to take off what God put on! We take off what God put on and call it entertainment. We could learn a lot from the actions of Ham's brothers right here. What did they do?

1. *They exhibited honor.* How so? They refused to look upon their father's nakedness. Were they being old-fashioned and prudish? Hardly! It was a brand new world!

I'm impressed by the respect and honor these young men had for their father. Even when his actions didn't warrant it, they respected his position.

Can't you just see the brothers backing into the tent until Noah's toes are seen in front of the cloak, which they gently lowered over him? That's honor. But they did something else...

2. *Rather than ignore, they took steps to restore.* Why did Shem and Japheth cover their father? Why didn't they just let him sleep it off? They could have just walked away and said, "It's none of our business. He made his bed. Let him sleep in it."

But no. They loved their dad and didn't want him to remain in sin's disgrace. Why? Because rather than ignore, love always seeks to restore.

"He who covers over an offense promotes love (Prov 17:9)." "Love covers over all wrongs (Prov 10:12)." "Love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8)." "Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins (James 5:20)."

When you see a brother in sin, how do you respond? A lot of people say, "It's none of my business. I don't want to get involved." Some people follow Ham's example and gloat. I want to challenge you to do what Shem and Japheth did--take loving steps to restore your brother.

Do you know of anyone right now that's in sin's grip? Don't ignore them. Ask God to use you to restore them for His honor.

So there's scene #1. In verses 18-23 we see a family's failure. Now scene #2...

II. Scene #2: We see the fall-out (24-29).

The fall-out came in the form of two pronouncements by Noah.

A. Noah pronounced a curse (24-25). "When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, 'Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.'"

To be honest it's difficult to discern Noah's response here. He speaks as a prophet of God pronouncing both a curse and a blessing. First he acknowledges that...

1. *Ham sinned.* Verse 24 states he found out what his "youngest son" had done to him. Ham was the guilty party.

But who did Noah indict? He cursed Canaan, Ham's son.

Wait a minute. Is Noah merely speaking as a man whose thinking is blurred by a hang-over head-ache, or is he aware of what he's doing here? Instead of saying, "I was wrong for my actions," why does he seem to take out his anger on his grandson?

First of all, it's an argument from silence to assert that Noah didn't take responsibility for his actions. He may well have, and being a man of God, we can assume and hope he did.

But the million dollar question remains. If Ham committed the sin, why did Noah curse Canaan? The answer is that...

2. *Apparently, Canaan was just like him.* Like father, like son. According to Genesis 10:6 Ham had four sons, and Canaan was his youngest. It's possible that Canaan had character faults similar to his dad, and knowing this, Noah pronounced the curse on Canaan. "Canaan will be the lowest of slaves to his brothers," Noah said.

It's a sad chapter in the history of the church that some used this text to justify the enslavement of blacks by whites. But who did Noah curse? The descendants of Canaan. Who were they? The *Canaanites*. The Canaanites were Caucasian. The Canaanites settled in Canaan. And ultimately the Canaanites were the wicked people that the Israelites subdued under Joshua when they conquered the Promised Land. In my estimation, that's the main intent of Noah's prophecy.

After the curse...

B. Noah pronounced a blessing (26-27). "He also said, 'Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave.'"

The blessing was twofold.

1. *Shem would enjoy the Lord's favor (26).* History verifies that Shem became the father of the Semites who settled in the Middle East. The Hebrews were descendants of Shem, and likewise, the Messiah came from his line. According to Noah's blessing, Shem would enjoy the Lord's favor.

2. *By association, so would Japheth (27).* Noah said that Japheth would "live in the tents of Shem," indicating blessing by association. And so it happened.

Gordon Talbot says this about Japheth. "He became the father of the Gentile nations which settled Europe and a large part of Asia. In accordance with Noah's prophecy his descendants were scattered far and wide and became both powerful and prosperous."

The story concludes in verses 28-29, "After the flood Noah lived 350 years. Altogether, Noah lived 950 years, and then he died."

Do you know what strikes me? In Genesis there were two men who were said to have "walked with God." Enoch and Noah. Enoch walked with God and God took him straight to heaven (5:24). Noah walked with God, but in the end he died. Who knows? If Noah had not fallen into sin after the Flood, perhaps God would have taken him away, too. We'll never know for sure this side of heaven.

What we do know is that Noah, Noah's family, and Noah's descendants lived with the fall-out of that day for a long, long time.

Are there any lessons here for us? I believe there are...

Application: We can learn some valuable lessons... Here are three...

1. *There is no such thing as a problem-free family.* Are you facing problems in your home? You're in good company.

Never forget this. A Christian home is not a problem-free home. Rather, it's a home where the problems are faced and solved God's way. And what's our most basic problem?

Contrary to the opinions of some, it's not the environment around us. Noah lived in a renewed world. The corruption he had faced in the first part of his life was washed away by the Flood. The corrupt culture was

gone. After he got off the ark, he walked into a new world, but he faced the same fundamental problem we face.

It's sin, isn't it? The Flood cleaned up the world, but it couldn't change the human heart. Only Jesus can do that.

That's the point of this story. We need a Savior. We've been looking at the best family on the planet, the only family God saw fit to spare from the judgment of the Deluge. But they too were sinners in need of a Deliverer.

Are you overwhelmed with the problems of life? Look to Jesus. God sent His Son into this world to rescue sinners. He died on the Cross to pay the penalty for our sin. He rose again and offers new life to all who will call upon Him. Call on Him today.

2. Yesterday's obedience does not guarantee today's. Just because Noah obeyed God a thousand times before did not guarantee he would on this day. We can't live on yesterday's grace.

The Greeks had a race in their Olympic games that was unique. The winner was not the runner who finished first. It was the runner who finished with his torch still lit. I want to run all the way with the flame of my torch still lit for Him. Don't you?

Are you obeying Christ today? I'm not asking about what you did for Him ten years ago, or last year, or even last week. Are you serving Him today? Is He real in your life today? Or are you coasting? Beware.

We cannot afford to be passive. We are in a battle! No one ever "arrives." No one. Yesterday's obedience does not guarantee today's.

3. The choices I make will affect those around me. Sin has consequences. For yourself, and for those closest to you. May God help us to learn from Noah today.