

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver St.
Flagstaff, AZ 86001
www.fcfonline.org

SIN'S FULL COURSE

Genesis 6:1-8

By

Steven J. Cole

March 3, 1996

Copyright, 1996

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from
The New American Standard Bible,
Copyright, The Lockman Foundation

March 3, 1996
Genesis Lesson 14

Sin's Full Course
Genesis 6:1-8

A pastor friend and I used to eat lunch together once a month. After lunch we'd often continue our conversation as we took a walk. On one occasion he seemed fatigued and out of breath by an easy stroll, even though he was no older than I. He told me that he was fighting the flu. But several weeks later, when the symptoms did not subside, doctors discovered a massive lump in his chest. He had lymphoma, a form of cancer. They discovered it too late. After several rounds of chemotherapy, my friend died. To fight cancer, early detection and aggressive treatment are essential.

Sin is like cancer of the human soul. It often starts unnoticed, perhaps with a small compromise. There may be a few bothersome symptoms, but we dismiss them or excuse them as due to some other problem. But the cancer is there and growing, working corruption in the individual and also tainting his relationships. If unchecked, it will contaminate an entire society. The final result is God's judgment. But, thankfully, throughout the process prior to God's judgment, His grace gives us repeated offers to repent and be restored. This process is pictured in Genesis 6:1-8, which describes the world just prior to God's judgment in the flood. It shows us that ...

Sin begins with compromise, goes on to corruption, and ends in condemnation, unless we respond to God's grace.

We would do well to pay attention to these verses, since Jesus likened the days just prior to His return to the days just prior to the flood. He said, "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:37-39). Jesus is saying that the people of Noah's day ignored God's warnings. They went

about the normal things of life, oblivious to the repeated warnings of judgment, until it was too late. The same thing will happen to many in the days just prior to Christ's return. So the message to us is, "Make sure you listen to God's warning about your sin. If you ignore the symptoms, it may be too late!" Our text reveals sin's full course:

1. Sin begins with compromise.

We read that as the population grew, "the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose" (6:1-2). The first interpretive problem (of several) is, *Who are the sons of God and the daughters of men?*

It's easy to lose the application of this text in the debate over the right interpretation. The debate is centuries old, with godly men holding differing views. But whichever view is right, the application is the same--that the human race before the flood was corrupted by sin, and that corruption began with compromise.

Three main views have been proposed. The first view is that the sons of God were powerful rulers, probably controlled or indwelt by demons, striving for fame and fertility. In some Ancient Near Eastern cultures, kings were called the sons of one of the gods, and even in the Bible, the Hebrew word "Elohim" is used for men in positions of authority (Exod. 21:6 [NASB margin]; Ps. 82:1, 6). The daughters of men refers to all women. The sin of these rulers was their lust for power and women; they were trying to achieve immortality through immorality. (Allen P. Ross, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* [Victor Books] 1:36, defends this view.) The weaknesses of this view are that it seems forced on the text, it stretches the biblical terms, and it would not have occurred to Moses's audience in reading the context of Genesis.

A second, more widely held, view is that the sons of God refers to fallen angels (demons) who came to earth in human bodies and cohabited with women, resulting in a superhuman race called the Nephilim (6:4). Many respected modern Bible scholars hold this view (A. W. Pink, Donald Barnhouse, Ray Stedman, James Boice, Charles Ryrie [*Study Bible*]). It goes back as early as the Septuagint in 200 B.C. Justin Martyr and Tertullian held this view in

the early Church, but it was opposed vigorously by Augustine and Chrysostom and later by the Reformers. But there are some strong arguments in its favor or so many respected men would not hold it.

The strongest argument for it is that every other time the term "sons of God," is used in the Bible, it refers to angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Dan. 3:25; Pss. 29:1; 89:6). Also, several New Testament passages referring to the flood mention demons who disobeyed by abandoning their proper abode, thus incurring God's judgment (1 Pet. 3:19, 20; 2 Pet. 2:4, 5; Jude 6). It is argued that these demons left their proper abode of the spirit world and cohabited with women. But, how could angels do this? In Genesis 19, the angels visiting Lot in Sodom were desired by the men of that evil city for homosexual relations. If you object that Jesus said that angels cannot marry, it is answered that Jesus said that *in heaven* the angels do not marry (Matt. 22:30). But neither will men and women marry in heaven. Thus, there is no inherent problem with angels cohabiting with earthly women.

Proponents also argue that in the context of Genesis, Satan wanted to thwart God's promise to bring a deliverer by the seed of the woman by corrupting the human race with this superhuman race of giants. It was his insidious plan to bring immortality to the human race illicitly, bypassing God's curse of death.

In spite of these arguments, I reject this view. I think it creates mind-boggling theological problems which have no biblical warrant. We do not need such a far-fetched view to explain the text adequately in its context. So why adopt it? First, there is the theological problem of how angelic beings can have sex with women. It is one thing to say that demons indwell human men who marry human women. But it is incredible and makes the Bible sound like Greek mythology to say that demons take on bodies and produce offspring with human women!

What were the offspring--half-angel, half-men? There is no such category in the Bible. Do they have some sort of angel-human souls? While the term "sons of God" refers to angels in other Old Testament uses, it refers to righteous angels, not to demons. (In Job 1:6 and 2:1, Satan is distinguished from the sons of God, as if he were not part of their number. In the other references [Job 38:7; Dan. 3:25; Pss. 29:1; 89:7], righteous angels clearly are

meant.) "Sons of God" seems like a strange term for fallen angels. And while the exact term is not used of men, God's people are called His sons in the Old Testament (Deut. 32:5; Ps. 73:15; Hos. 1:10 [in the Hebrew text, "children" = "sons"]). With regard to the New Testament references (1 Pet. 3:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:4-5; Jude 6), there are other adequate interpretations. So why introduce a mythological sounding concept full of incredible theological problems which has no other scriptural warrant when we don't need to?

The third view, and most normal in light of the context, is that the sons of God refers to the godly descendants of Seth, who called on the Lord (4:26 & 5:1-32); the daughters of men refers to ungodly women, mostly from the line of Cain, who rejected God (4:16-24). The problem described here, which led to the corruption of the human race and the judgment of the flood, was the intermarriage of the godly line of Seth with godless women. Undoubtedly Satan was involved behind the scenes, as he always is when a generation turns away from the Lord (Balaam, Numbers 25). To say that Satan was involved in seducing men from a godly heritage to marry ungodly women is not fantastic; to say that fallen angels actually married human women is.

The biggest problem with this view is why Moses uses this term. It is an unusual designation. If it were not, everybody would agree on the interpretation! The best answer is that Moses used the term to underscore the high standards which the Sethites should have observed (H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* [Baker], p. 252; also, see Calvin). As "sons of God," they should have known better than to marry godless women. But instead, they married on the basis of sexual attraction only, not on the basis of godly character. They "saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose" (6:2). The result was the compromise of godly standards which led to the corruption and judgment of the human race. Luke 3:38 seems to support this view. Luke traces the line of Christ back through Seth to Adam, but doesn't stop there; he calls Adam "the son of God." Thus Adam's descendants through Seth are the sons of God who became corrupted through wrongful marriage alliances.

As I said earlier, it's easy to lose the application in the process of working through the interpretation. But let's not do that. No

matter what interpretation you take, the *application* is the same: *Sin begins with compromise*. Satan often uses wrongful marriages as the area of compromise to seduce God's people. It is an effective tool, since the sex drive and the emotions of romantic love are so powerful. I have seen many young people neutralized in their Christian lives by marrying "nice" unbelievers or worldly-minded professing Christians.

It is proper to be physically attracted to the person you marry. But to marry primarily because of physical attraction is a serious mistake. The typical short-lived Hollywood marriage ought to tell us that. But Satan uses this weapon over and over. A couple is physically attracted to each other, they get physically involved, they get married on that basis, and later there is often infidelity and divorce. Their testimony for Christ is polluted.

While the area of wrongful marriage alliances was where the line of Seth compromised, and is a major area where we can compromise, it is not the full extent of the application. When these men from the line of Seth, called "sons of God," married these ungodly women on the basis of sexual attraction, they compromised their integrity. They had a name to live up to: "sons of God." But their lives didn't match their title. So they had to put up a front, to try to maintain the image of sons of God, while living on a natural, sensual plane. It is a short step from there to total spiritual corruption.

Guard your spiritual integrity! Integrity does not mean perfection, but it does mean walking in reality with God, and dealing biblically with your sin. Satan wants to undermine your integrity. He wants you to compromise your testimony on the job, and instead of confessing your sin, to cover it up or deny it. He wants you, as perhaps a church leader, to yell at your kids and verbally abuse them at home, but not to confess your sin and ask their forgiveness. Then you come to church and pretend to be spiritual. You've just compromised your integrity. Sin begins with compromise.

2. Sin goes on to corruption.

I will come back to verse 3; but note that in verse 4, Moses mentions the Nephilim. This is another major interpretive problem. *Who were the Nephilim?* Those who hold to the angel view say

that they were a race of giants who resulted from the union of the angels with the daughters of men. But the text doesn't say that they are the product of that union, but only that they were on the earth at that time and also afterward.

The word occurs only one other time, in Numbers 13:33. There the spies who return to the Israelite camp report that they had seen the Nephilim, and that they felt like grasshoppers in comparison to them. The word comes from a root word meaning "to fall upon," and thus apparently points to men of violence, who had a reputation of falling upon their enemies. They may or may not all have been giants physically. But the point is, they were vicious men who would just as soon kill you as look at you. Moses' point is that the generation prior to the flood was notorious for its violence (see 6:13). Their unchecked sin had grown into the worst sort of corruption. They had let themselves go in hardened, open rebellion against God.

This is further affirmed by God's evaluation of that generation: "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (6:5). God looked beyond the actual deeds of wickedness and saw the hearts. What He saw was total corruption. Alfred Edersheim says of verse 5: "This means more than the total corruption of our nature, as we should now describe it, and refers to the universal prevalence of open, daring sin, and rebellion against God, brought about when the separation between the Sethites and the Cainites ceased" (*Old Testament Bible History* [Eerdmans], 1:39). Verse 5 is God's description of the extreme corruption of that generation.

But it is also a description of the corruption of every human heart. Sin begins in the heart, or thoughts (Mark 7:20-23). It does not always reach the outward manifestation of Noah's day (although our society is at least as far gone), but the heart of every person is the same as what God saw when He looked on that generation. After the flood, when the righteous Noah offered a sacrifice, God said, "... the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). This is God's revelation of His view of what goes on inside every person, even those, like Noah, whom He has redeemed.

If you want to verify God's viewpoint, look at the world around you--the violence, greed, sexual immorality, and self-centeredness. But you don't need to look out there. Look at your own heart. Even though outwardly you may be reasonably respectable, is there anyone who would want their innermost thoughts to be broadcast? Though I have been a Christian for years and experience consistent victory over sin, I often have to fight against degraded, corrupt thoughts! I agree with Martin Luther who wrote, "Without the Holy Spirit and without grace man can do nothing but sin and so goes on endlessly from sin to sin" (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 2, p. 40, cited in James Boice, *Genesis* [Zondervan], 1:250). Sin's course begins with compromise; it goes on to corruption.

3. Sin ends in condemnation.

God determined to bring judgment on the whole world because of man's corruption (6:6-7). When the Bible says that God "repented" (KJV), it does not mean that He changed His eternal plan. God is unchangeable in His person, perfections, and purposes. Nothing thwarts the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). But from our perspective, sometimes it seems that God has changed His plan. To put it in terms which we can understand, and to reveal God's heart response to human sin, the Bible says that God repents, or feels sorrow (1 Sam. 15:11, 29).

The point is, God doesn't get a sadistic kick out of judgment. It grieves Him to see our rebellion and sin, and He only brings judgment after He has repeatedly warned and appealed to us to turn from our sin. When He does judge, His judgments are always just. He has a right to judge man, because He created him (6:7). But, even then, as He said to Ezekiel, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11).

Thus sin begins with compromise; goes on to corruption; and ends in condemnation. But the section ends on a brighter note. The cycle can be broken!

4. We can respond to God's grace.

"But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (6:8). The word favor means acceptance or grace. When used of God's favor

toward man it means His undeserved favor. Noah did not earn favor with God, he found it. He was just as much a sinner as his contemporaries (9:21). The difference was, Noah was willing to accept God's view of his own sin and to turn from that sin to God, seeking His grace. The result was a righteous life.

This is the first time the word grace appears in the Bible. It is not the first time grace appears, since God's grace is seen in His treatment of Adam and Eve in clothing them with animal skins rather than judging them for their sin. It is seen in His repeated dealings with Cain. It is seen in the long life of Methuselah, whose name means, "when he is dead, it [that is, judgment] will come." His long life was a testimony to God's gracious appeal over almost 1,000 years to this godless world to repent.

God's grace is seen in 6:3, when the Lord says that His Spirit will not strive with men forever. The word "strive" means to judge, in the sense of striving to restrain men from their evil ways. God is saying that the human race had cast off any desire to live in the realm of the spirit, and was living as mere flesh, as totally given over to sin. He was warning that He would not continue to strive to check man's unbridled sinfulness indefinitely. But, God adds, "his days shall be 120 years." Some understand this to mean that his lifespan would now be 120 years. But I think God means that there will be another 120 years before the judgment of the flood for man to repent. That's grace! If they had repented, I believe that God would have relented on His judgment, even as He did with sinful Ninevah in the days of Jonah.

But, when sin was at its peak, we read that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. That's a great encouragement. It means that in spite of the corruption, the horrible violence, immorality and degradation around us, God's grace for the individual still shines through. Where sin abounds, grace superabounds (Rom. 5:20). No matter how terrible your sin, you can find grace if you will turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus did not come to save the righteous, but to call sinners to repentance. If you will agree with God's view of your heart (6:5), and cry out to Him, "Be merciful to me, the sinner," He will pour out His grace and salvation on you.

Conclusion

But God's grace does have a limit. In Noah's day, it was 120 years. The flood came and everyone was lost except Noah and his family. In our day, we do not know when time will run out. We do know that our day, like Noah's, is a time of unparalleled corruption, with people going on about life without regard for God. And we do know that God "has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). We're all infected with the cancer of sin. Only God can cure it. He is ready and willing, if you will respond to His gracious offer. The only other option is to let sin run its full course, resulting in corruption and final condemnation. God calls out to you, "Now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

Discussion Questions

1. What are some ways we are tempted to compromise with sin in our society?
2. What would you say to someone who argued that all people aren't as bad as verse 5 indicates?
3. Where is the balance between sharing God's judgment and His love when we witness?
4. Why is intermarriage with unbelievers such a serious sin?

Copyright 1996, Steven J. Cole, All Rights Reserved.