

# Genesis 9.18-29 / FBC / 10.11.20

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## Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** When I was at college, I walked into a room where about a dozen people were all naked and intertwined together. This was called an ecstasy party. All these people had ingested the hallucinogenic drug, Ecstasy [or MDMA], which left them feeling very loving. So they all lay together, enjoying their day. They did invite me to stay, but I politely declined.
- Ecstasy was popular on our campus, and everyone said it was harmless, that you should not believe all the “government propaganda” about the drug having dangerous side effects. You know, dangerous effects other than leading you into an orgy with eleven other unprotected people in the age of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.
  - I did some research back then and more recently on how Ecstasy works and what the long-term effects are. Primarily it affects the flow of Serotonin between neurons in the brain, though it also affects Dopamine levels. The drug is habitative, in that you strongly desire the effect again when the high wears off, and that can lead to physical addiction.
  - Long-term, repeated, use leads to an actual reduction in serotonin levels, because serotonin neuron terminals are destroyed in the brain. Thus chronic users suffer changes in mood, aggression, sleep patterns, and pain sensitivity. Many also suffer memory impairment and changes in personality.
  - I think of one young lady I used to know. She was a bright student, with a nice personality, a good sense of humor, and pretty looks. She started hanging out with the Ecstasy crowd. I watched her deteriorate. She became less joyful, less interested in academics, less athletic, less healthy. Three years after I met her, she was arrested for prostitution.
  - If I could influence young people in one way other than to have faith in Christ, it would be that they would never get drunk or high, would never make themselves vulnerable to that evil. Even if you are not addicted, drugs change your personality, perceptions, way of thinking, emotions, even between highs. Use of drugs and getting drunk on alcohol is inviting evil, inviting even demonic influence, into not just your life, but into your mind! I pray all of you will find true paths to joy as you walk with God. Let’s all pray...

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**[2: 9.18-19]** Genesis 9.18-19 NET: The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Now Ham was the father of Canaan.) These were the sons of Noah, and from them the whole earth was populated.

- † We finished last week with God confirming his covenant with Noah and his family to be God’s image bearers. Do you remember the four purposes for image bearers, the four “R”s? People were to reflect God’s character, represent God on Earth, rule as God’s stewards over the rest of creation, and reproduce the image of God throughout the earth.
- God promised to empower them as his image bearers, and to someday bring a seed of the woman who would defeat evil, and in the meantime to not destroy the Earth again as he had in the flood. The sign for this last promise was the rainbow.

- Now the author begins a new scene by showing us the principle characters of the scene, Noah and his three sons. Some time must have passed, because we learn that by this time Ham has a son of his own, named Canaan.

**[3: 9.20-21] Genesis 9.20-21 NET: Noah, a man of the soil, began to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of the wine, he got drunk and uncovered [literally in Hebrew “exposed”] himself inside his tent.**

† Let’s talk first about Noah planting a vineyard. The Bible never says consuming alcohol *without* getting drunk is a sin. In fact, the overwhelming evidence is that wine is a blessing from God.

- **[4: Deuteronomy]** Moses told the people of Israel in **Deuteronomy 7.13 NASB: He [God] will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock, in the land which He swore to your forefathers to give you.**
- Through Moses, God instructed Israel to use wine in their drink offerings [Exodus 29.40; Leviticus 23.13; Numbers 15.5-10; 28.14] and in their tithes [Deuteronomy 12.17; 14.23; 18.4].
- Melchizedek served wine to Abram [Genesis 14.18]. Paul prescribed wine to help Timothy’s stomach [1 Timothy 5.23].
- **[5: Matthew]** Jesus created wine in his first recorded miracle [John 2.3-11]. And Jesus used wine to represent his sacred blood when talking about inaugurating the New Covenant and the ordinance of the Lord’s Table. **Matthew 26.27-29 NIV: Then he [Jesus] took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”**
- Perhaps many of you were taught that the Bible really speaks of unfermented juice, not wine. Many conservative churches have taught that over the years, but it is not so. We really are talking about wine, not grape juice. We know that from word usage in both Hebrew and Greek, biblical descriptions, external historical documentation, and archaeological evidence of the use of wine in this culture.

† To be sure, wine was not for everyone. God prohibited wine for the priests who were going into God’s presence [Leviticus 10.9] and for those taking the Nazarite vow [Numbers 6.2-4]. If you struggle with alcoholism or addiction, you also should abstain from drinking.

- Alcoholism is identified in scripture as a potential problem. In Israel, if you were a rebellious son, given to disobedience, gluttony, and drunkenness, your parents could have you stoned to death [Deuteronomy 21.20-21].
- Talking about pastor/elders, Paul twice taught they must not be given to drinking too much wine [1 Timothy 3.3; Titus 1.7].
- **[6: 1 Corinthians]** Paul also advised the Corinthians not to associate with people who claimed to be Christian but were drunkards [1 Corinthians 5.11] and said such addiction was characteristic of being spiritually lost [1 Corinthians 6.10]. **1 Corinthians 5.11 NET: But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who calls himself a Christian who is sexually immoral, or greedy, or an idolater, or verbally abusive, or a drunkard, or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person.**

- Should we hire a pastor who sleeps around? Do we want a worship leader who worships idols? Would you respect a teacher or small group leader who swindled you? Nor should we expect we can go around representing Christ or the church when we are yielding to addictions.
  - I believe all addiction is sinful, whether or not it involves other emotional, mental, or physical aspects. Many of the scripture passages which speak of drunkenness suggest a sinful ongoing problem.
  - My point here is that even though wine was seen as a blessing, it was similar to how we see drinking coffee: it was not right for everyone, and it was never right to let it control you.
- † **[7: Ephesians]** Let's talk about that control next. Noah did not sin by planting a vineyard, nor by making wine, nor by drinking some of the wine. But Noah did sin by becoming drunk.
- Any instance of drunkenness or drug high is a sin. **Ephesians 5.18 NET: And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery** [excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures], **but** [rather] **be filled by the [Holy] Spirit...** Do you see the contrast? Don't be controlled by alcohol, be controlled by the Holy Spirit.
  - In Galatians 5.21, drunkenness is one of the deeds of the flesh, in contrast to the nature of those who are being led by the Holy Spirit. So again, don't be walking by the flesh, controlled by alcohol, instead walk by the Spirit, controlled by the Spirit.
  - **[8: Romans] Romans 13.13 NLT: Because we belong to the day** [light of Christ], **we must live decent lives for all to see. Don't participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy.**
- † **[9: circles]** The reason getting drunk or high, and falling into addiction, are sins is that it is wrong for any element of creation to have control over those made in God's image.
- People were made in God's image [Genesis 1.26-29], and in part that meant people were to rule creation in God's name, they were to be God's stewards. We represented this with the three circle diagram: God is over the human family, with man [Noah in this case] at the head, and the human family is supposed to reflect God's character and represent God, as they rule in God's name, as God's stewards, over creation.
  - Noah allowed alcohol, something created, to control him, just as Adam and Eve allowed the snake control in the garden of Eden [Genesis 3.1-7]. This subverts God's created order, in which only God is to be over those made in his image, only God is to control people.
  - We saw on the ark that the three circles were in operation, with Noah and his family obeying God and serving as God's stewards over the created animals. But now, Noah allowed a created thing, rather than the creator, to control him.
  - Without Satan working through the serpent, I wonder whether Adam and Eve would have ever sinned, it might not have occurred to them. But by this time people had deteriorated through corruption in their inherited nature: this time the instigator seems to be Noah's own weak flesh.
  - So Noah was disobedient and he failed. Noah had the opportunity of a new creation [6:17-22], but he was tainted with the inherited nature of sin, and so he failed to represent God in this situation. He fell, just as did Adam.

- As Francisco wrote, “With the opportunity to start an ideal society, Noah was found drunk in his tent” [“The Curse on Canaan,” *Christianity Today*, 04.24.64, 648]. And as always in the bible, this sin will have repercussions, as we’ll see.
- † **[10: Proverbs]** Today we are far more at risk for both drunkenness and addiction than the people in ancient Israel or in Jesus’ day. The custom back then was to mix wine with water, diluting it to somewhere between a third and a tenth of the strength of the wine and other drinks we have today, so people in Bible times were far less likely to risk drunkenness by consuming a glass or two.
- Even in that day, listen to this from **Proverbs 23.29-35 NIV: 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 will 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?”** Now that is poetic representation!
  - With stronger drinks today, if you do consume any alcohol, you must be extremely moderate about it, careful not to even approach drunkenness, and careful not to consume it on a regular basis so as to preclude any aspects of dependency.
  - And, because we love our brothers and sisters who struggle with addiction, we must be careful not to unwittingly influence those who do have dependency issues into further consumption.
- † Before we go on with Noah, allow me to share a few related thoughts. In Colorado, one of the first states to legalize recreational use of marijuana in 2012, within three years many children and teenagers were using it daily. Underage usage in Colorado was 58% higher than the national average, and usage by college students was 54% higher. According to an article in *The Washington Post*, visits per year to children’s hospital facilities for paranoia, psychosis, and other acute cannabis-related symptoms increased 382%.
- The drug is much more addictive than it used to be, because it is much stronger than it used to be, with THC levels 300% higher than a decade ago, 400% higher than in the 1980s. Yet it is now legal to sell for recreational use in ten states and DC, and there are over 300 retail outlets in Denver alone, where they sell not just pot cigarettes but edible candies and baked goods, which are attractive to the young and in which the THC levels can be even higher. Four more states are considering legalization this autumn; I think it is a mistake.
- † One of the greatest crises in our society today is the prevalent use of prescription narcotic pain medication. These medications are as addictive as crack cocaine and more widely used. We have to be aware of their dangers, even when initially used legitimately.
- † In most churches and seminaries today, the big problem is caffeine addiction. The negative health effects of heavy caffeine use are well documented and more severe than most people realize.
- More to the point, dependence on caffeine is a sin by the criteria laid out in this sermon. As with wine, the occasional glass of iced tea or bowl of chocolate custard will not hurt you, and might even help you if you do not have any eating disorders, but overindulgence and dependency are sins and health risks.

- Those who struggle with any addiction need to get help to be free of drugs and to find purpose and fulfillment through Christ. Rather than using drugs or other worldly methods to pursue comfort and happiness, or to escape from discomfort and unhappiness, we need to find our solutions in Christ.

† **[11: 9.20-21]** There is more to Noah's sin, because Noah, once drunk, exposed himself. A secondary problem with drunkenness or being high is that it often leads you to further sin. In this case, indecent exposure.

- Obviously it is fine to be naked before your spouse, but otherwise nakedness in the Old Testament usually is shameful. Adam and Eve felt shame about being naked before God once they had fallen into sin.
- God told the Israelites he did not want to see their nakedness exposed at his alters [Exodus 20.26], nor in their camps [Deuteronomy 23.12-14]. The prophets often used nakedness as a metaphor for shame [Isaiah 47.3; Lamentations 1.8, e.g.].
- Noah was in his own tent, but this tent must have been somewhat public, for apparently he left himself vulnerable to being seen, which would lead to further sin issues, as we shall see.

**[12: 9.22-23] Genesis 9.22-23 NET: Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers who were outside. Shem and Japheth took the garment and placed it on their shoulders. Then they walked in backwards and covered up their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so they did not see their father's nakedness.**

† To see someone other than your spouse naked was to bring dishonor and exploitation. Ham looked at his father naked, shaming his father, violating a personal boundary, depriving his father of dignity and privacy, violating his rights. This is always true if you look at someone's nakedness with pornography or peeping.

- For Ham, there might also have been homosexual and incestual aspects.
- Either way, Ham then left his father naked, instead of fixing the problem.
- Then Ham went and talked to his brothers about it, shaming his father further.
- And it gets even worse. Most translations say Shem and Japheth took a garment to cover their father's nakedness, but as scholar Alan Ross notes, the Hebrew actually says they brought "the garment," most likely suggesting that Ham had brought his father's garment outside with him, thus completing his exposure.

† At the least, Ham did not honor his father, which was important enough that God made it one of the Ten Commandments that were the foundational principles for Israel's law [Exodus 20.12].

- Shem and Japheth show the seriousness of Ham's sins. They took *extreme* care to cover their father without looking at his nakedness.

**[13: 9.24-25] Genesis 9.24-25 NET: When Noah awoke from his drunken stupor he learned what his youngest son had done to him. So he said, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves he will be to his brothers."**

† These are the first words of Noah recorded in scripture! Not very delightful. They raise questions.

- † First, what does it mean that Noah made a curse? I think we can rule out some sort of superstitious magic incantation. But was this a prayer request or a prophecy from God? To insult Noah, the head of the family that was to represent God, was to insult God, as we see later with Abraham and David, so was this God prophesying a curse on the family of Ham?
  - The Hebrew verb forms suggest Noah spoke a prayer or request: Noah was saying, “May God curse Canaan!” This might be an expression of faith in God’s judgment or a request for justice.
- † But why did Noah curse Canaan instead of Ham? Genesis 10 shows us Canaan was not even the first born son of Ham. I cannot offer a definitive answer.
  - Was Canaan somehow involved? Did Noah anticipate in Canaan the evil traits of his father? The text twice has pointed out that Ham was the father of Canaan, perhaps suggesting not just parental lineage, but also that Canaan was the image of his father in character.
- † Was Noah leveling the curse just on Ham’s son, or on Canaan’s family line? As history would show, the Canaanites would exhibit the same dishonor and lewdness as Ham and worse. They were a people known for moral abandonment. Was Noah holding to the principle of corporate solidarity, that people reproduce their own kind?
  - When this was written, the people of Israel were about to enter the promised land, to oust the Canaanites, whom God had said were wicked. In Noah’s day, God removed the wicked from the Earth to provide a blessed fresh start to his people in Noah’s family; in Israel’s day, God’s plan was to remove the wicked from the promised land, to provide a blessed fresh start to his people in Abraham’s family, which was a subset of Noah’s family. Did Noah accurately predict this or did God bring this about as a result of Noah’s request? Nobody knows for sure.

**[14: 9.26-29] Genesis 9.26-29 NET: He also said, “Worthy of praise is the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem! May God enlarge Japheth's territory and numbers! May he live in the tents of Shem and may Canaan be his slave!” After the flood Noah lived 350 years. The entire lifetime of Noah was 950 years, and then he died.**

- † Here the English better reflects the Hebrew verb types, by starting each sentence with “may.” Noah praises God and asks that Canaan would be the slave of Shem and Japheth, and that Japheth would prosper and live in the tents of Shem.
  - There is no good explanation for all this either. But it is interesting how God played it out. God would be the God of Shem, from whom would come Abraham and the people of Israel.
  - We know the Canaanites turned out to be enslaved by sin and defeated in the promised land.
  - While Israel was battling the Canaanites, waves of sea peoples began to sweep into the land and the lands of the Hittites to the north and Egyptians to the southwest. These were descendants of Japheth. We will discuss all this further in Genesis 10.
- † Scholar Bruce Waltke reminds us that today Christ has eliminated these distinctions for the most part: “Apart from the preservation of an elect remnant within ethnic Israel, these ethnic divisions no longer exist in God’s administration. Today his church includes the Ethiopian eunuch (Ham), Peter and Paul (Shem), and Cornelius (Japheth). God is no respecter of a person’s ethnic origin but only of his or her spiritual condition.”

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## Conclusion

- † **[15: title]** Noah was righteous, blameless, a man who walked with God. And God had given him a fresh start, on a renewed Earth, with all the wicked people removed. But Noah had the inherited corruption in his human nature, which we all have, handed down from Adam and Eve.
  - Noah sinned by getting drunk, and this led to further sin in exposing his nakedness to his family. That in turn was a factor in Ham's multiple sins, bringing tragic results for these individuals, the family, and the future of their descendants on Earth.
  - Keep in mind, however, that God knew Noah would screw up when God chose to deliver Noah through the flood. God gave Noah grace, grace in the form of deliverance from the judgment of his day and grace in the form of forgiveness and a relationship with God himself.
- † We can take a few truths from this part of the story.
  - First, drunkenness, public nakedness, voyeurism, dishonoring your parents, and moral abandonment are all bad ideas. In contrast, sobriety, modesty, sexual purity, honoring your parents, and seeking to reflect God's character are all good.
  - Second, anyone who abandons God's morality is enslaved by their lusts and doomed for some form of destruction. God's people will be characterized by piety and restraint.
  - Third, even though we try hard and generally succeed in walking with God, we will all fail, no one is perfect, except Jesus, so look only to him or to God the Father of whom he is the image. It is not right to base your life or religion on anyone else, not even Calvin, Luther, Wesley... Harry Morgan, or Will Groben. You can emulate those who are emulating Jesus, but look only to Jesus as the example of righteousness and source of salvation.
  - Fourth, since we do all fail, we have to depend on God's offer of grace through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's true for salvation and just as true for ongoing transformation and freedom. If you want to know more about that offer and how it can bless you day to day, please come talk to me!
  - Let's pray...