

A BELIEVER'S FALL

Genesis 9:18-29

The events recorded in the preceding verses of this chapter might well suggest that henceforth everything would be well with Noah and his sons. A new start had been made amid great hopes, with perfect provision and a divine assurance. Yet, here comes the record of failure. As we read it, our hearts are full of disappointment.

I. Noah's Sons. Genesis 9:18-19.

The names of Noah's sons have been given before. They are given again here because the narrative concerns them especially. Their names were Shem, Ham and Japheth.

II. Noah's Sins. Genesis 9:20-21.

The occasion of the sins of Noah was his daily occupation. They were committed in the course of his ordinary work. It was perfectly legitimate for a tiller of the soil to plant a vineyard, and no blame is attached to him in this respect. It is a point worthy of careful notice that legitimate occupations may easily become the occasions of wrong doing. Opportunities for sinful and vicious behaviour lurk in our everyday occupations.

No man, however exalted in character or position, is absolutely safe from a fall into sin. There is no man among the children of God whose nature is not corrupt and into whose life sin does not intrude. In I Kings 8:46 we read "There is no man that sinneth not." The most exalted Christian must exercise watchfulness and prudence or he will bring reproach upon the name of Christ. This incident also teaches us that one sinful act may have incalculable consequences and may affect the lives of many in addition to the sinner.

Noah's first sin was that of drunkenness. Regardless of what views people may hold as to the lawfulness or wisdom of moderate drinking, there is no question about the fact and heinousness of the sin of drunkenness as revealed in the Word of God. Warnings and denunciations abound in the Old Testament. In the New Testament drunkenness is included in Paul's catalog of the works of the flesh with all of the most sinful of evils. The story of Noah is the first recorded instance of a sin that has since become prevalent throughout the world. Whether Noah's sin of drunkenness was committed in ignorance, or thoughtlessly, or deliberately, we notice that the consequences were the same.

Associated with drunkenness was the sin of immodesty. The Hebrew word, which is here translated "uncovered," clearly indicates a deliberate act and not a mere unconscious effect of drunkenness. The two sins of intemperance and impurity are twin sisters. Their association has become proverbial.

Noah passed through thrilling experiences both of mercy and of judgment; he was an heir of the righteousness which is by faith; he was an honored servant of God; and he stood firm as a rock in testimony for God during times of adversity; yet, when times of prosperity came, he tampered with the wine-cup and brought a stain upon his otherwise blameless name. The lesson for us is expressed in the words of Paul, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Corinthians 10:12).

III. Noah's Shame. Genesis 9:22.

To think that the man who had passed through the thrilling and unique experiences of the flood and the associated events should have been guilty of such conduct was a fact full of unspeakable shame. The corruption of the best is always the worst thing possible.

From this narrative of Noah's fall we discover a striking proof of the inspiration of the Scriptures. In the Bible human nature is painted in its true colors. The characters of its heroes are faithfully depicted, and the sins of its most prominent personages are frankly recorded. Had some human admirer chronicled the history of Noah, his awful fall would have been omitted. The fact that it is recorded and that no effort is made to excuse his sin is evidence that the characters of the Bible are painted in the colors of truth and nature, that such characters were not sketched by human pens and that Moses and the other historians must have written by Divine inspiration.

From Noah's fall we learn the fact of the utter and total depravity of human nature. Moreover, we learn the danger of using wine and the awful evils that attend intemperance. It is surely significant, as well as designed as a solemn warning, that the first time wine is referred to in the Scriptures it is found associated with drunkenness, shame and a curse. Solemn are the denunciations of the Word of God upon drunkenness, a sin which is still on the increase. Drunkenness is a sin against God, for it is an abuse of His mercies. It is a sin against one's neighbors, for it sets before them a bad example. It is a sin against one's family, for it deprives them of happiness and frequently numerous necessities. It is a sin against one's self, for it robs of self-control, decency and usefulness. Drunkenness usually leads to other evils, as it did in the case of Noah.

Another lesson which we learn from this incident is the necessity of watchfulness and prayer. A believer is never immune to falling into sin. The evil nature is still within, and nothing but constant dependence upon God can enable us to withstand the solicitations of the world, the flesh and the devil. Neither age nor character is any security in the hour of testing. Noah was a man who had withstood the temptations of an evil world for centuries, and, yet, he succumbed to the lusts of the flesh.

Instead of sitting in judgment upon Noah with pharisaical complacency, let us consider ourselves lest we also be tempted. No experience of God's mercies in the past can deliver us from exposure to new temptations in the future.

Even more shameful than the conduct of Noah was that of his son Ham. Ham had no sense of filial love or even of common decency. In him we see depravity of no ordinary degree. Not only was Ham guilty of the sin of omission in failing to hide his father's shame, but he was guilty also of a sin of commission in calling attention to the existing circumstances and in endeavoring to get his brothers to share in his sin. Ham's mockery was all the more sinful in that the one whom he ridiculed was his own father to whom he should have shown filial reverence.

Doubtless Noah's sin must have been a single act, for Ham would not have made fun of his father if the circumstances had been familiar. He jeered at his father and took a personal pleasure in seeing him in that condition. He went and published the shameful news to others. Evidently he thought his brothers would be glad to hear what he knew about their father. We sometimes find children who have not been reared properly who go away from home and tell the troubles that occur in the family. People in general never have much respect for a news-gatherer and tale-bearer. They may listen to what one says and may make use of it, but they will not respect him or her for it. Love is not disposed to point out the sins of others and talk about them.

IV. Noah's Sorrow. Genesis 9:23-24.

Shem and Japheth refused to join Ham in his sin. With filial love, true purity, profound embarrassment and deep regret, they took immediate steps to cover their father's body.

After all, he was their father, and they owed everything to him. They took a garment, laid it upon their shoulders, walked backward to their father and covered him with it, thus treating him with respect even though he had not maintained self-respect.

Noah's sorrow must have been great when he awoke from his drunken stupor and realized what he had done and learned what Ham had done to him. It would be difficult for us to imagine the sense of shame and the sorrow for sin that filled Noah's heart. He who had "found grace in the eyes of the Lord," about whom God had testified that he was the upright one in that age, who had been the honored instrument of declaring and doing God's will in circumstances such as would never occur again, he it is who had awakened to a consciousness of terrible sin in his own life and in that of his son.

V. Noah's Prophecy. Genesis 9:25-27.

This utterance consisted of two parts--a malediction and a benediction. Fearful had been the fall of Noah, and terrible was the sin of Ham, who on discovering the sad condition of his father went out and reported his sin with malignant pleasure to his brothers. Ham sinned as a son and was punished in his son. The punishment meted out to Ham was that his son should be brought into subjection to others and his descendants be compelled to serve as slaves. The curse came into fruition in his son.

Shem's blessing consisted in being the carrier of the name of Jehovah, in being the master of Canaan and in giving shelter and blessing to Japheth. In other words, Shem's reward was in the sphere of religious privileges. God was going to enter into covenant relationship with Shem's descendants.

Noah's prophecy about Japheth indicates great prosperity and the multiplication of descendants. Not only have his children been enlarged as to the territory that God allotted to them, but also as leaders in intellectual development and inventions and in the government of the world.

VI. Noah's Death. Genesis 9:28-29.

We may assume that Noah lived a long time after this disgraceful incident and that he never repeated his terrible sin. His drunkenness is never mentioned elsewhere in the Word of God. I do not have any doubt about his complete forgiveness, restoration of fellowship with God and victory over any future temptation to use alcoholic beverages. There is not a single intimation that Noah was ever intoxicated again. However, the memory of that most embarrassing experience of his lifetime must have remained with him and clouded the glory of his former and better days. At the ripe age of 950 years Noah died.