

The Covenant Renewed

Genesis 9:1-4

When Noah walked off that ark, he entered a whole new world. You have to understand that to understand chapter 9. Everything was different. The land was barren, desolate. The lands that once had teemed with animals and people and lush vegetation had been replaced by a desolate wilderness. The air which formerly was warm and gentle now moved in stiff and sometimes violent winds, and there was a chill on the mountain slope where the Ark rested.

There were only two of every kind of animal alive, and only 8 human beings alive. There were more oceans, higher mountains, and less land. There was rain, to say nothing of ice and snow. The geology of the earth's crust and outer atmosphere were irrevocably altered. For Noah, it would have been as if he was brought to a different planet. There would have been no doubt in his mind that without God's help, he nor the human race would survive.

So, in that new world existence after the flood, God very appropriately renews his covenant with man, the covenant of grace which he established after Adam and Eve had fallen into sin. With Noah, this covenant of grace is enlarged and further developed, and we'll see that some things stay the same and some things change.

First, God renews the responsibilities given to man at creation. God had given man these instructions at creation,

Gen. 1:26 "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

What we find in chapter 9 is that,

I. AFTER THE FLOOD, GOD RENEWS THE BASIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANKIND.

v.1

Those must have been very encouraging words to Noah, for he, no doubt, was questioning his own survival! He must have been wondering how he could keep himself alive. But God says, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." In a real sense, of course, Noah and his sons were starting over. Adam and Eve had begun the process, and for over 1600 years, they had been faithfully reproducing and filling the earth. The only trouble was, they were filling the earth with fallen sinners.

But after the flood, that command is repeated, continued. Noah was blessed, and when man is blessed by God, it does not mean merely that God wishes him well, but that he actually imparts good to him. In this case, the good imparted is the promise of descendants.

A. With no changes, God blesses man with the ability and duty to reproduce abundantly.

Notice that the form of this is a command, as well as a promise. They were commanded to have children. With that command, or duty, comes the ability. They were blessed with the ability to have children. Never should we forget the nature of that

blessing, nor think that having children depends upon our will or our decision as human beings. Too many young people enter marriage thinking that way, that they themselves can determine and control the number of their children, missing the bigger and much more important point, that God blesses his people with the ability to reproduce.

At creation, God blessed man with the ability to reproduce fruitfully. After the flood, with Noah facing the very threat of his own survival, God renews that blessing. But what about the rest of what Adam was promised at creation, the so-called cultural mandate, which we find in,

Gen. 1:26 “Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Now, after the flood, what do we read about man’s ability and duty to rule over the rest of God’s creation? Well, here we see an important difference.

v.2

The difference is fear and dread. Genesis 1 mentions nothing of fear and dread. In those circumstances, before the fall, everything was very good, therefore there was no trouble, no conflict, no fear and no dread. Everyone got along fine. There was no death, not even among the animals. And that includes the relationship between mankind and all the animals. After the flood,

this blessing of dominion would continue, but with changes. Man was now to exercise his rule in a fallen world, a world full of conflict. So in verse 2 we see significant changes, due to the change of circumstances.

B. With significant changes, God blesses man with the ability and duty to govern all his creatures.

The responsibility continues, but now, instead of willing obedience and submission by the created animals, there would be the unpredictability and potential violence of fear and dread. Conflict abounds, and man is forced to rule in the context of holding terror over the creatures.

The beautiful harmony of the original creation is gone. Still, the responsibility remains, and so now we must work diligently to be faithful stewards over all God’s creation, realizing this blessing that, in a fallen world, the animals really are terrified of us. Few wild animals will actually be aggressive toward man, few will attack man unprovoked. And that is a blessing, for many of the wild animals are far superior to us in their strength and fighting ability.

Again, Genesis 9 is essentially a covenant renewal ceremony, and in that renewed covenant, the basic responsibilities of mankind remain the same. But next comes something drastically different, the result, no doubt, of the cataclysmic destruction brought about by the flood.

II. AFTER THE FLOOD, GOD GIVES MAN THE RIGHT TO EAT THE MEAT OF ANIMALS.

This is new.

v.3

Remember God’s original dietary instructions to mankind, Gen. 1:29 “And God said, “See, I have given you every herb

that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. 30 Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food”; and it was so.”

At creation, man was a vegetarian. He ate the plants and fruits of the trees. So did all the animals! Again, before the fall, there was no death, for death came through sin, and sin came through Adam! Paul states that quite plainly,

Rom. 5:12 “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

Actually, the first animal death recorded was at the Lord’s hands, for the coverings he gave Adam and Eve to cover their now shameful nakedness was the skin of animals!

Gen.3:21 “Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.”

We also know that Abel had killed an animal for a sacrifice offering to God, no doubt a regular practice established right from the start. And of course, we studied last week, there is Noah’s sacrifice of all the clean animals.

So, since the fall, there had been killing of animals. No doubt, the animals that were subjected to the frustration of living in a fallen world also demonstrated that fallenness in their behavior. In other words, after the fall, the animals were no doubt killing each other as they do today. There would be vicious and destructive animals, as there clearly are today. And we can presume, since the heart of man was described as so completely and thoroughly sinful, we can presume that men were killing animals to eat before the flood, even though they were prohibited

from doing so. But now, that prohibition is removed. Man can eat the meat of animals.

To make a simple application to today, anyone is free to chose not to eat meat today. Anyone, in his own conscience, is free to decide to remain vegetarian for any number of reasons, not the least of which is health concerns. But no one has the right to bind someone else’s conscience to do the same. No one has the right to say to someone else, “you are forbidden from eating meat.” For we cannot forbid what God allows!

In any number of circumstances, that is a common pitfall. Yet man continually falls into that trap! And Paul addressed that error rather forcefully,

Col. 2:20 “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations— 21 “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” 22 which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”

So we ought always to be on guard, lest we go beyond the requirements of Scripture and forbid what God has allowed. Yet in the context of our study of Genesis 9 today, we can legitimately ask, why does he now allow it? If it was good for man, at creation, to be a vegetarian, wouldn’t it be good for him to remain a vegetarian? Why the change?

I can’t give an infallible nor comprehensive answer, but I can bring out something clearly implied in,

v.3

The implication is that,

A. God is graciously providing for the needs of mankind.

“Just as I gave you the green plants,” God says, “I now give you everything.”

Man needed to eat. Man needed food. And God provided that food in abundance, from creation. “I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.” After the flood, man still needed food, but now that food was much harder to obtain. So God graciously provides for his needs.

This must have been a huge adjustment for Noah, not only physically, where his whole digestive system would now have to get used to animal meat, but personally. I don’t want to say these animals were his friends, and start implying all sorts of things that aren’t in the text, but Noah must have had some sense of care and protectiveness over the animals. There would have been some sort of personal relationship. He had cared for them for over one year on the ark. And as a righteous man, we can assume that he had never killed an animal, except for sacrifice. He was not a frustrated hunter finally given the freedom to act out all his impulses. Killing animals would have been foreign to his whole nature to say nothing of his practice.

But now, after the flood, in the desolation of the new world, he is given that right. In part as an example of how God graciously provides for all his needs. I think something else is at least implied as to why God gave man the right to eat meat, and that relates again to,

v.2

Because of sin, the whole world order is altered, for the worse. There is now competition, and there is now killing, death.

Because of the flood, the whole environment of the earth and sky is changed, creating havoc upon all the creatures. So it stands to reason that there was increased frustration among the animals, increased violence and killing. And increased tension among all creation. There certainly was tension between man and the animals. “The fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth.” So, with the permission granted to eat animal meat,

B. God is regulating the altered relationship between man and animals.

It is a relationship now marred by sin. It is now a relationship of frustration, enmity, and competition. And that frustration which the animals experience is a consequence of our sin. That is, the animals are not being punished for their own sin, for they are not created in the image of God with the ability to sin or not to sin. But man is. And his sin brought about the frustration of this changed relationship. It is described in,

Rom. 8:19 "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”

Therefore, the relationship between man and animals is now a relationship characterized by killing. Animals would be fierce, and man might often have to kill them in self-defense. So when could a man kill an animal? And if an animal is killed, and not burned as a sacrifice to God, can the meat be eaten? If not, what should you do with the meat? Do you allow other animals to eat the meat, even though, at creation, they too, were forbidden from eating meat? Those are all legitimate questions.

God answers those questions, regulating a situation that was brought about by the sin of mankind. With the presence of death and killing, with violence and fear dominating their relationship, man is given the right and the freedom to eat the meat of animals. It is a right never taken away in Scripture, and therefore, it is not more spiritual or more obedient to eat only fruits, grains and vegetables. We see one further restriction.

v.4

This is the first of what we can appropriately call “ceremonial regulations.”

III. AFTER THE FLOOD, GOD ESTABLISHES CEREMONIAL REGULATIONS.

The appropriate question is still, “Why?” Why the prohibition against blood. A second very appropriate question might be, “Are we still obligated to observe that restriction?”

That is a very practical question for me, because I still like my steaks medium to medium rare. I know that government safety regulations won’t let a restaurant serve a hamburger with any bit of red remaining, but when it comes to a good steak, I still like it pink. So am I violating the commands of Scripture? I’ll answer that question in just a moment, but first, the question “why?” What, exactly, is God doing, and what is his purpose for this regulation?

Why was there such a specific prohibition against eating meat with blood still in it? Let me give a simple answer, and then try to explain it in an understandable way. The simple answer is this,

A. The blood of animals is reserved for ceremonial sacrifices and may not be eaten.

v. 4. “You shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.”

Some translations combine those two ideas into one word, which is a correct idea, the idea of lifeblood. But to separate them adds even more emphasis. The life IS the blood. The life of the animal is the blood. That is not difficult to prove.

Lev. 17:10 “And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. 11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.’ 12 Therefore I said to the children of Israel, ‘No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.’ 13 “Whatever man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who hunts and catches any animal or bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust; 14 for it is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life. Therefore I said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.”

In these later regulations for sacrificial worship, the blood of a sacrifice which was to be eaten had to be poured out first! Over and over again is that regulation given. The life of the animal, which in Hebrew is the same word for soul, the life of the animal, or the soul, is that which is offered to God. The ceremonial sacrifices were not merely outward things. They were sacrifices of life, the loss of life, which was the covenant penalty for sin.

A sacrifice had to be a sacrifice of life. And so the life of an animal, whose blood was spilled on a sacrificial altar, was accepted by God in substitutionary death for the life of a guilty sinner, who deserved to die but who was permitted to live because of the sacrifice, whose blood “covered” his sins.

Now, we know from the NT that the blood of animals could only figuratively cover sins. The reality to which all the blood of those animals pointed was Jesus Christ. And so we read in,

Hebr. 9:9 “It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. 11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Therefore, the prohibition against eating blood is inseparably connected with the OT sacrificial system, which, as I just read, is “symbolic for the present time.” And they are “concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.” Until the new order. And the new order is when Christ came.

So are we today under this prohibition against eating blood? No, for Christ has already come. The new order has already come. Those ceremonial regulations prefiguring Christ are no longer in effect, for if they were, they would deny the unique, once-for-all nature of what Christ actually accomplished upon the cross. The temple no longer stands, and the entrance into the Holy of Holies of God’s presence no longer depends upon external washings. And so we read with great encouragement,

Hebr. 10:10 “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.”

The passage continues,

Hebr. 10:19 “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Don’t miss this. The blood of the animals represents the life of the animals. And the sacrifice which God required from his people was the sacrifice of life. That sacrifice can correctly be called “the blood of the covenant.” The blood of the animals is reserved for ceremonial sacrifices and may not be eaten. But now the blood of Christ has actually accomplished what those OT sacrifices of blood could only symbolize--the forgiveness of sin.

One final note about the ceremonial regulations which God established after the flood, one actually not mentioned here in Genesis 9, but which was made explicit later. And I want to add it on to our study of Genesis 9 today because it is very much related to the prohibition against eating blood. It is the prohibition against eating unclean animals. We find it specifically stated in the whole chapter of Leviticus 11, summarized in,

Lev. 11:46 ‘This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, 47 to distinguish between the

unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.”

The chapter describes in detail which animals are clean, and may be eaten, and which animals are unclean, and may not be eaten. Those regulations make sense from what we’ve already read about Noah, for God had already begun that distinction, having told Noah to take 7 of all the clean animals onto the ark. It was from all of those clean animals that Noah was to offer sacrifices. So the further regulations of Leviticus are based upon that first distinction between clean and unclean given to Noah.

But why the distinction? And again, “Are we still obligated to observe those distinctions?” The answers to both those questions are joined together. Ultimately, the answer is this:

B. The distinction between clean and unclean animals is established to define the holiness of God’s people.

Look again at Leviticus 11.

Lev. 11:44 “For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. 45 For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

That’s why the distinction between clean and unclean animals is established. That’s why some animals could be eaten and others could not be eaten. Because that distinction among the animals represents the distinction and separation of God’s people as holy, separated out from the rest of the world. And we, as God’s people, are to be holy because the God who redeemed us is holy.

Therefore, the whole purpose for all these distinctions between clean and unclean animals is to make a distinction between the people of Israel and those from all the other nations. The people of Israel were God’s people, they were set apart, they were declared to be holy. Therefore, they were commanded through the dietary laws to demonstrate their holiness and separation from the other nations by separating between clean and unclean animals.

The dietary laws were put in force to demonstrate the distinction between God’s people Israel and the heathen nations. Everything the people of Israel were commanded by God to do would reinforce that distinction. And so we read further in,

Lev. 20:25 “You shall therefore distinguish between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. 26 And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.”

Now, do those dietary regulations between clean and unclean animals still continue today, now that Jesus has come in the flesh? The answer is NO. God himself said so. Look at,

Acts 10:11 “[He] saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” 14 But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” 15 And a voice spoke to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.”

Peter understood that that meant. The point is that all the

nations are clean! God's elect people are to be found in all the nations, not just in Israel. And Peter so clearly understood that.

Acts 10:34 "Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him."

So, after the flood, God establishes ceremonial regulations, all of which point to Jesus Christ. The Covenant was renewed. And that renewed covenant further prepares the way for Jesus to come. And when Jesus came, the obvious point of the gospel was that God's people would be found in every nation, in every place, until the end of the age.

And God's people are now no longer set apart by the blood sacrifices of animals as they were in the days of Noah, repeated year after year.

Heb. 9:11 "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."

I proclaim to you that work of redemption, that work of salvation, so that by believing in him, in Jesus, you might have life, the forgiveness of sins. And as we proclaim that gospel to the world in which we live, it is also the hope upon which our worship of God is founded, for,

Col. 1:13 "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."