Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

As we read a moment ago, the world of Noah’s day was a world of widespread and continual wickedness. And the response of the Lord to this situation is described as regret, being grieved in His heart that He had ever made man, and being sorry. And we come across similar language in relation to God several times in the Old Testament. So, our question today is: How are we to understand this language? Is the Lord’s regret the same as ours, or is it different? Did He not know that this would happen? Is He, perhaps, not in total control of what happens down here? And I want to assure you that this is not just some nerdy theological study. This has to do with who God is, His attitude towards sin especially, and the person and work of Christ. And if we do our work well, we will have more reasons to praise God for His glory and goodness!

We don’t have three cute and alliterated points today. We will simply start by looking at this and other passages that speak about the Lord’s regret, and one passage in particular. And because of what we see in that passage, we will then move on to that must important principle of Bible interpretation, which is: Let the plain interpret the less plain. And we will do that by looking at the passages of the Bible that speak most plainly about the character of God. And then we will finish with what all this reveals about God and sin and Christ.

1. So, let’s take a look at **this and other passages of the Bible that speak about the Lord’s regret**.
   1. I expect that every single one of us has at least once expressed the sentiment that we wish we had never done or begun something. We had good intentions, we thought it would be easy, or we had no clue what would happen down the road, but for whatever reason something has blown up in our face and turned into an absolute nightmare, and we wish we had never started it. Do you know what I am talking about? So, we have regrets, we are grieved in our heart, we are sorry for what we did. And at first glance, verse 6 seems to suggest a similar scenario with God – that the situation described in verse 5 took Him by surprise; that He never saw this ubiquitous wickedness coming, and He now regretted and grieved and was sorry that He had ever created mankind. So, on plain reading, it sounds like God is just like us.
   2. And as I said earlier, there are several other passages where we find the same language in relation to God. And we will come to the one that is most similar, and which most helps us understand what *is* being said here and what *is* not being said here, in a moment.
      1. But the next one along in the Bible is in Exodus 32. It is **the golden calf episode**. And the Lord was very angry about what the people had done and decided to kill them all off and start over with Moses. But Moses pleaded with God and interceded on behalf of the people. And we are told that “*the Lord relented* (and it is the same Hebrew word translated as ‘regret’ in our passage) *from the disaster that He had spoken of bringing on His people*,” and He did not destroy them. So, again, it sounds like the Lord did not know that the golden calf episode would happen, and when it did, He decided to do one thing, but Moses talked him out of it, and He changed his mind and did not do it.
      2. We find a similar example in **the book of Jonah**. God told Jonah to preach to the people of Nineveh that in 40 days the city was going to be destroyed. But the people repented. And we are told that “*When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it*.”
      3. And the other passages in the Old Testament, of which there are around ten, are all warnings to people to repent of their sins, in the hope that God would relent and not punish them as He had warned He would do.
      4. So, a surface reading seems to suggest that God does not know everything that will happen and that He can have regrets and change His mind about what He will or will not do.
   3. But this is where **1 Samuel 15** is most helpful. Let’s turn there together (p. 237). And as you turn there, have you noticed what *the* thing is in all the passages that we have spoken about thus far that leads to the Lord’s regret? It is human sin. Every time, the regret or sorrow or grief of the Lord is **in response to sin**. And that is very important to note. And it is the same here in 1 Samuel 15. Saul is Israel’s king. And he was told by the prophet Samuel to completely destroy the Amalekites, including all their livestock. But do you boys and girls remember what happened? Saul spared the Amalekite king and the best of the animals.
      1. So, look at **verse 11**: the Lord said to Samuel, “*I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments*.”
      2. And Saul’s pathetic excuse was that the people made him do it, and that the animals were for a sacrifice. And right at the end of the chapter, in **verse 35**, we read: “*And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel*.” And again, it’s the same word as in Genesis 6. And again, it sounds like the Lord did not know that Saul would behave like this, and He wished He had never made Saul king.
      3. But now look at **verse 29**. And this is the really important verse. For there Samuel rebuked Saul for his disobedience and told him that he would lose the kingdom to David. And look what Samuel said, “*And also the Glory of Israel* (meaning God) *will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret*.” Let me read that again. So, in a passage where we read about the Lord regretting that He made Saul king, we are told, very plainly, that the Lord does not have regrets like men do.
2. And we will come back to what this means and how it helps us with our Genesis 6 passage in our last point, but let’s switch focus for a moment and look at **the passages of the Bible that speak most plainly about the character of God**.
   1. And we begin with two passages that very plainly declare the **sovereignty** or **omnipotence** – all-powerful-ness of God. They are:
      1. Psalm 115:3: “*Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases*.”
      2. And Isaiah 46:8-10: “*Remember… [that] I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purpose*.'”
   2. And next here are some passages that speak about God’s **omniscience**. And God’s omniscience means God’s all-knowing-ness – that He knows everything.
      1. Psalm 139:4 says, “*Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether*.” And later in that same Psalm, the Psalmist says of God, “*Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them*.”
      2. Psalm 147:5 says, “*Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; His understanding is beyond measure*.”
      3. Ezekiel 11:5 says, “*Say, Thus says the LORD: So you think, O house of Israel. For I know the things that come into your mind*”.
      4. In John 21:17, Jesus asked Peter if He loved Him, and Peter replied, “*Lord, you know everything*.”
   3. And to these we can add passages about His **immutability** – His unchangeableness.
      1. In Malachi 3:6, God says, “*For I the LORD do not change*.”
      2. James 1:17 says, “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change*.”
      3. And then there are those most beautiful words in Hebrews 13:8: “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*.”
   4. So, the Scriptures are plain: God is sovereign, in complete control of all things, and He knows everything, before it happens, and it happens always according to His ultimate, good purposes, including sin and evil, and He does not change. And from this we can infer the characteristic of God that the Westminster Confession of Faith calls His **impassibility** – His being without passions – His not having passive properties. Let me explain. You and me are passionate creatures, meaning that we are influenced by our passions. When something bad happens, we react with dread or anxiety or upset or regret. And when something good happens, we react with joy and happiness and excitement. And these passionate feelings can then influence our decisions and behaviours.
      1. And if you want to see what I am talking about, just come along and watch one of our indoor soccer games on Tuesday evening; a goal or a victory means smiles and happiness and celebration, but a goal conceded or a poor referee decision means grumpiness and disagreement and a whole lot of huffing and puffing. That is how it is with us as passible creatures.
      2. But that is not how it is with God. As R.C. Sproul puts it: “The impassibility of God means that unlike you and me, who passionately react to our circumstances, God does not, because nothing surprises Him … Without ... passions means that He does not experience mood swings or become depressed.”
      3. Now, let me quickly add here that this is not to suggest that God is without emotions. And we will say more about this in our last point in a moment. But God is in sovereign control of all things, He knows all things, and He does not change, in that what He does is not influenced by His passionate reaction to circumstances :-) :-( :-< as it is with us.
3. So, with all that in view, we can return to our text to better understand what we are being told here, and what this reveals about God and sin and Christ.
   1. And we can begin with **a few questions** in light of what we learned in our previous section: Did God know that man would become utterly wicked in Noah’s day? Yes, He did. Did what happened in Noah’s day happen according to God’s ultimate and good purpose? Yes, it did. Are we being told here that if God could do it all over, He would not have created the world? No. So, Genesis 6:6-7 is not about God being surprised and shocked and disappointed by what happened and reacting, passionately, with regret and grief and sorrow, as we do to things that surprise and shock and disappoint us.
   2. So, what ***does*** this language mean? How are we to understand the regret and grief and sorrow of God?
      1. Well, the first thing to note is that because God is the Creator and we are creatures, He must accommodate or stoop down or express Himself or describe Himself in a way that we can understand. And many Bible teachers have used the analogy of **baby-talk**.
         1. When an adult explains something to a very young child, he or she will use really simple words or facial expressions or hand-gestures or even just sounds, to try and communicate what is meant. And it can be really funny to watch adults do this with children. But we all get it and we all do it!
         2. And this is a helpful way of thinking about how God describes Himself in the Bible. Whether it is Him looking down upon the earth or carrying us in His hand or flaring His nostrils in anger (because God does not have a body!) or this language of regret and being sorry He made us, God is describing Himself in a way that we can relate to.
         3. So, first off, this is God stooping down to our level, so that we can understand Him and relate to Him.
      2. But that is not all that this is. For if God had no regret or grief at all, then He would open to the charge of lying or misrepresenting Himself. But **this is a true regret and grief and sorrow**. For although God is not led by His passions, as we are, He does have emotions, as we noted before. He is a personal being. We must never think of God as cold and unemotional and distant.
         1. Pastor John Piper put it like this: God’s regret is not analogous in every way to our regret, but it is regret. God’s heart is capable of complex combinations of emotions infinitely more remarkable than ours. He can lament or regret something He chose to bring about. And He can look back on the very act of bringing something about and lament that act in one regard, while affirming it as best in another regard.
         2. And Pastor John uses this helpful illustration from human life:

*If I spank my son for blatant disobedience and he runs away from home because I spanked him, I may feel some remorse over the spanking — not in the sense that I disapprove of what I did, but in the sense that I feel some sorrow that the spanking was necessary and part of a wise way of dealing with my son in this situation, and great sorrow that he ran away. If I had to do it over again, I would still spank him. It was the right thing to do, even knowing that one consequence would be alienation for a season. I approve the spanking from one angle, and at the same time I regret the spanking from another angle. If such a combination of emotions is possible for me in my finite decisions, it is not hard for me to imagine that God’s infinite mind — the infinite complexity of God’s emotional life — would be capable of something similar or even more complex.*

Can you follow that? It’s helpful, isn’t it. So, in terms of our text, God

approved His creation and regretted it. For He is the sovereign and

personal God of the Bible.

* 1. And this brings us to our conclusion. For what was it that led to God’s regret here in Genesis 6? **Man’s wickedness**. And we said earlier that all the passages that speak about God’s regret are in relation to man’s sin. And we can add to them **Isaiah 43:24** where God says to Israel, “*But you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities*.” And in **Ezekiel 6:9** He says, “*How I have been broken over their … eyes that go whoring after their idols*.” And in **Psalm 95:10** He says, “*For forty years I loathed that [unbelieving and idolatrous] generation."”* You see, brothers and sisters, prior to creation, there was no sin. So, there was no reason for God’s regret. But for God to accomplish His saving purpose for His elect ones, there was a need for sin to exist. And so, even though He permits sin for His saving purposes, it produces within Him regret, grief, sorrow, loathing, and a being burdened, wearied, and broken. And even though it is not the same as our regret and being burdened, etc, it is absolutely real. And it is why we read, in **Ephesians 4:30**, “*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*.” And instead, as Christians, we are called in **Colossians 3** to “*walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him*.” And you better believe that your sin *really* does grieve the Lord and your efforts to obey Him *really* do please Him.
  2. But beyond that, where should the Lord’s regret over wickedness direct our thoughts?
     1. Firstly, to **Judgment Day and hell**. For unlike as it is for us humans, who typically have to settle for regret, the Lord does not; He will judge every wicked deed committed by those who refuse to repent and believe, and condemn them to everlasting torment in the fires of hell.
     2. But what about you and me, as believers? What about our sin, which we now know leads the Lord to regret and grief being burdened and wearied? Well, it should lead us to **the cross of Jesus Christ**. For that is where we see the regret and grief and sorrow and being burdened and wearied and broken of God in all its horrible agony. For it was all poured out on the Lord Jesus as He hung there and endured the punishment for our sins. It is no wonder that Jesus cried out, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” For having only ever enjoyed perfect joy and sweet fellowship with the Father before creation, now, to accomplish our salvation, He had to endure the Father’s wrath and regret and grief and loathing at each and every sin. It is the most profound mystery ever! But it is how Jesus accomplished your salvation.

But He did this only for those who have received Him and believed in His name. Is this you? I pray that it is. For no one comes to the Father except through Jesus! I said at the beginning of the sermon that if we do our work well, we will have more reasons to praise God for His glory and goodness! And I trust that we have done our work well, and that your response is: Hallelujah! What a Saviour! Amen? Amen!