

Homiletics Analysis: Genesis 6

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Genesis 6 opens the flood narrative by exposing the depth of human corruption and the collapse of the pre-flood world. The chapter begins with the enigmatic account of the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men” (vv. 1–4), a passage dense with interpretive complexity, before pivoting to God’s diagnostic assessment of humanity: every intention of the thoughts of the human heart is *only evil continually* (v. 5). This verdict drives the narrative. God grieves (v. 6), determines to blot out all He has made (v. 7), and then pivots to Noah — who found grace in the eyes of the LORD (v. 8). The second half of the chapter (vv. 9–22) introduces Noah more formally, reiterates the scope of corruption (“all flesh had corrupted their way,” v. 12), announces God’s decision to bring a flood to destroy the earth, establishes the covenant framework with Noah, and delivers specific ark-building instructions. The chapter ends with Noah’s complete obedience: “Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him” (v. 22).

The chapter moves in two paired arcs: (1) human corruption → divine grief and judgment; (2) divine grace toward Noah → covenant and commanded response. These two arcs are not in tension — they are the chapter’s argument. The depth of judgment illuminates the magnitude of grace; the specificity of the covenant commands frames the nature of faithful response.

This Text — Intent

God is seeking to accomplish two things simultaneously through this chapter. First, He is confronting the reader with the full severity of human corruption — not as a historical curiosity but as a theological diagnosis of the human condition apart from grace. The phrase “only evil continually” is not hyperbole; it is a divine verdict that applies to fallen humanity in every generation. Second, God is establishing that grace is entirely His initiative: Noah did not earn favor — he *found* grace (v. 8). The covenant and the ark follow from grace, not toward it. God intends the reader to feel both the weight of judgment and the surprising mercy of election, and to respond — as Noah did — with complete, detailed, faithful obedience to the commands of the covenant God.

Subject Sentence: God judges a world consumed by evil and saves one man by grace alone.

Primary Claim: The total corruption of humanity deserves total judgment — yet God, entirely on His own initiative, extends grace to Noah and calls him to complete covenant obedience. This passage confronts us with the seriousness of sin, the sovereignty of grace, and the shape of faithful response.

Interpretive Evaluation

The “Sons of God” in Verses 1–4

This passage generates the most significant interpretive divergence in the chapter. Three primary readings exist across the history of interpretation:

The angelic/divine-being view holds that “sons of God” (בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, *bene ha’elohim*) refers to angelic beings or fallen divine beings who cohabited with human women, producing the Nephilim. This reading is ancient (found in 1 Enoch, the Septuagint trajectory, and referenced in Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4) and is defended by many conservative scholars (Wenham, Walton). The parallel usage of *bene ha’elohim* in Job 1:6 and 38:7 strongly supports a supernatural referent. On this reading, vv. 1–4 describe a cosmic transgression of created boundaries — a blurring of heaven and earth analogous to the transgression in Eden.

The Sethite view holds that “sons of God” refers to the godly line of Seth (traced in Genesis 5) intermarrying with the ungodly line of Cain, producing spiritual apostasy through compromise. Calvin and many Reformation-era interpreters preferred this reading as more theologically coherent with the New Testament’s silence on angelic sexuality (cf. Matthew 22:30). On this reading, the passage describes the collapse of the last remaining godly lineage into general corruption — completing the downward spiral of Genesis 3–5.

The royal/dynastic view, advanced by some scholars, reads “sons of God” as royal figures or rulers who accumulated harems through power, producing warrior-dynasties (the Nephilim). This has less exegetical traction but anchors the text more firmly in Ancient Near Eastern royal ideology.

Evaluation: The angelic reading best accounts for the specific terminology (*bene ha’elohim*), the ancient Jewish interpretive consensus, and the canonical echoes in Jude and 2 Peter. The Sethite reading imports a genealogical distinction (godly Sethites vs. ungodly Cainites) that the text does not itself supply — Genesis 5 nowhere describes Noah’s ancestors as spiritually distinct, only as long-lived. However, the Sethite reading rightly insists that the *theological point* of vv. 1–4 is not demonology but the escalation of corruption and the perversion of God’s design. Whatever the precise identity of the “sons of God,” the function of vv. 1–4 within the chapter is clear: to depict a world where boundaries God established at creation are being transgressed at every level, setting up the divine verdict of v. 5.

The Reformed exposition does not need to resolve the angelic/Sethite debate in order to preach the text faithfully, but should acknowledge the complexity honestly rather than pretending the text is plain where it is not. What is plain — and what drives the chapter — is the divine assessment of v. 5, not the precise identity of the beings in vv. 1–4.

“Noah Found Grace” — Grace as Divine Initiative

Some Arminian and semi-Pelagian readings of v. 8 interpret Noah’s favor with God as a response to his righteousness described in v. 9 (“blameless in his generation”). On this reading, Noah earned or merited the grace extended to him by being a righteous man. The narrative sequence appears to support this: v. 9’s description of Noah follows v. 8’s statement of favor.

Evaluation: This reading inverts the logical and theological structure of the passage. Verse 8 states that Noah *found* (מָצָא, *matsa*) grace — the language of unexpected discovery, not of earning. The Hebrew word for grace here (חֵן, *chen*) consistently denotes unmerited favor in the Old Testament. Furthermore, the description of Noah’s righteousness in v. 9 does not precede the grace — it follows it, functioning as a description of Noah’s Spirit-enabled character, not as the basis for God’s election of him. Reformed theology reads this correctly: election precedes and produces the righteousness it is sometimes confused with. Noah’s blamelessness is the fruit of grace, not its cause. This is the reading that accounts for the whole canon’s testimony on divine election (Deuteronomy 7:6–8; Romans 9:11–16; Ephesians 1:4–5).

The Covenant in Verse 18

Verse 18 contains the first occurrence of the word “covenant” (בְּרִית, *berit*) in Scripture: “I will establish my covenant with you.” Some dispensational readings distinguish sharply between this Noahic covenant and later covenants, treating each as a distinct administrative arrangement with its own unique terms and applicability. Reformed covenant theology reads the Noahic covenant as part of one unfolding covenant of grace, with this moment serving as an early formal expression of God’s covenant commitment to His creation and to the seed He is preserving.

Evaluation: The text itself does not define the full scope of the covenant in chapter 6 — that definition comes in chapter 9. What chapter 6 establishes is the *structure* of covenant: God speaks; God initiates; God instructs; God calls to obedience. Noah responds with total compliance. This pattern is foundational to every subsequent covenant in Scripture. The Reformed reading rightly sees this as the covenant of grace in early expression, not a separate administrative dispensation. The command to enter the ark (v. 18) is a covenant command — it is the specific shape obedience takes in response to the gracious word of God.

Key Canonical Support

- **Genesis 3:14–19** — The curse following the fall establishes the trajectory of corruption that Genesis 6 depicts reaching its apex. The flood is not an interruption of history but its logical consequence; Genesis 6 shows what Genesis 3 set in motion.
- **Romans 3:10–18** — Paul’s catena of Old Testament indictments culminates in the same verdict as Genesis 6:5: “None is righteous, no, not one... no one does good.” Genesis 6 is the earliest comprehensive divine assessment of universal human depravity, anticipating Paul’s doctrinal statement.
- **Ephesians 1:4–6** — “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world... to the praise of his glorious grace.” Noah finding grace in the eyes of the LORD (v. 8) is the narrative prototype of the electing grace Paul describes theologically — grace that precedes, enables, and shapes the righteousness of its recipients.
- **Hebrews 11:7** — “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” The canonical interpretation of Noah’s ark-building frames it explicitly as a faith-response to the word of God — not as moral achievement but as covenant obedience. This is the New Testament key to reading vv. 13–22.
- **1 Peter 3:20–21** — Peter connects the ark and the flood to baptism, establishing the flood narrative within the broader redemptive-historical pattern of judgment and salvation. The ark is not merely a historical vessel but a type of Christ — the only structure within which creatures are saved from the judgment their sin deserves.

Aim: To expose the depth of human corruption and the sovereignty of divine grace, so that readers abandon self-confidence, embrace the grace of God in Christ as their only hope, and respond to God’s covenant commands with the total obedience Noah modeled.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1–2	Population growth; “sons of God” take “daughters of men” as wives	First occurrence of <i>bene ha’elohim</i> in Genesis; boundary transgression
3	God limits human lifespan to 120 years	Divine restraint in response to transgression; interpretation disputed (120

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
		years until flood, or lifespan limit)
4	The Nephilim; “mighty men of old, men of renown”	Ancient warrior/giant tradition; appears pre- and post-flood (cf. Numbers 13:33)
5	The LORD sees human wickedness; every intention of every thought is “only evil continually”	The chapter’s theological pivot — divine diagnostic verdict on humanity
6	The LORD is grieved (נָחַם, <i>nacham</i>) and His heart is pained	Divine pathos; anthropopathic language expressing genuine relational grief, not regret of error
7	God announces intention to blot out humanity, animals, birds	Scope of judgment matches scope of corruption; creation partially unmade
8	“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD”	Pivotal contrast; first use of חֵן (<i>chen</i> , grace) in Scripture; entirely God’s initiative
9	Noah described: righteous, blameless in his generation, walked with God	Threefold characterization; fruit of grace, not basis for it
10	Noah’s three sons named: Shem, Ham, Japheth	Genealogical grounding; these three repopulate the earth (Genesis 10)
11–12	Earth is corrupt and filled with violence; all flesh has corrupted its way	God’s assessment confirmed; repetition of “corrupt” (שָׁחַת, <i>shachat</i>) intensifies the verdict
13	God announces to Noah His decision to end all flesh	Noah is brought into the divine council; covenant partner in what follows
14–16	Detailed ark specifications: gopher wood, rooms, pitch, dimensions, roof, door	Specificity underscores the seriousness of God’s word and the concreteness of obedience required
17	God states He will bring the flood to destroy all flesh	Divine first-person announcement; “I myself”

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	under heaven	— emphatic
18	“I will establish my covenant with you” — Noah, sons, wife, sons’ wives to enter ark	First covenant (<i>berit</i>) in Scripture; grace precedes command; family included in covenant
19–21	Instructions for animals and food	God’s care extends to creation; Noah functions as a new Adam preserving created kinds
22	“Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him”	Complete obedience; faith expressed as action; echoes later Exodus obedience language

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–4	The World in Transgression: Boundaries Broken
2	5–7	The Divine Verdict: Total Corruption, Total Grief, Total Judgment
3	8–10	The Exception of Grace: Noah Found Favor
4	11–13	The Confirmation: Corruption Pervasive, Judgment Certain
5	14–21	The Covenant Command: Grace Expressed in Specific Instruction
6	22	The Response of Faith: Noah Did All That God Commanded

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: God judges a world consumed by evil and saves one man by grace alone.

Primary Claim: The total corruption of humanity deserves total judgment — yet God, entirely on His own initiative, extends grace to Noah and calls him to complete covenant obedience. This passage confronts us with the seriousness of sin, the sovereignty of grace, and the shape of faithful response.

Applications (Five)

1. Receive the divine verdict on human nature without softening it. (*Mind/Belief*)

Genesis 6:5 does not say that human beings are mostly bad, or bad in certain areas, or capable of both good and evil. It says that every intention of the thoughts of the heart is *only evil continually*. This is not pessimism — it is the Creator’s own diagnostic read on the creature He made and knows completely. Modern therapy culture, educational philosophy, and secular optimism all operate on the assumption that human beings are fundamentally good and in need of information, environment, or encouragement. Genesis 6 contradicts this at the root. The reader who takes this verse seriously will stop being surprised by the depth of sin they see in the world, in their neighbors, and in themselves — and will stop building their anthropology on the assumption that the human heart is a reliable guide.

2. Let the grief of God over sin produce grief over sin in you. (*Affections/Worship*)

Verse 6 says the LORD was grieved to His heart. This is not a divine malfunction — it is the portrait of a God who is genuinely invested in what He has made and genuinely wounded by what they have done with it. The God of Genesis 6 is not a detached judge processing violations; He is a relational God who created for relationship and who grieves when creation destroys itself. The appropriate affective response to this portrait is not theological note-taking but sorrow — sorrow over sin that matches, however dimly, God’s own grief. Preaching that produces only cognitive clarity about the doctrine of sin without producing grief has not yet reached the heart Genesis 6 is addressing.

3. Abandon every version of the belief that you earned God’s favor. (*Mind/Belief*)

Noah found grace — he did not build grace, earn grace, or deserve grace. The verb *found* (אָפֶּטֶק) is the language of unexpected discovery. The order of the text is irreversible: grace in v. 8, righteousness in v. 9. God’s election of Noah preceded and produced the character for which Noah is sometimes credited as the *reason* for his election. Every reader who thinks their moral effort, church attendance, spiritual discipline, or general goodness gives them standing before God has inverted the order of Genesis 6. You are not saved because you are righteous; you are made righteous because you are saved. This is not a New Testament innovation — it is Genesis.

4. Take seriously the concrete specificity of God’s covenant commands. (*Will/Behavior*)

God did not tell Noah generally to “trust Him” or “remain faithful.” God gave Noah gopher wood, cubit measurements, rooms, pitch, a door, a window, a timeline, and a passenger

manifest. Covenant obedience has always been specific. The reader who is content with vague spiritual sincerity — who would rather feel generally faithful than specifically obedient — is not reading Genesis 6 straight. Ask where in your life God’s word has given you specific, concrete instruction that you are currently softening into general principle to avoid the cost of actual obedience.

5. Respond to God’s saving word with the totality Noah modeled. (*Will/Behavior*)

Verse 22 is one of the great summary statements in the Old Testament: “Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.” Not most of it. Not the parts that made sense to him. Not after negotiating the terms. All of it. The ark was a preposterous construction project from a human perspective — years of visible, public obedience to an announcement that probably made Noah an object of ridicule in his community. Hebrews 11:7 calls this faith. The question Genesis 6 presses on every reader is not “do you believe in God?” but “what specifically is God calling you to obey, and are you doing all of it?”

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Genesis 6 contains Scripture’s earliest and most comprehensive divine diagnosis of human depravity. The verdict of v. 5 — “every intention of the thoughts of the heart is only evil continually” — establishes what Reformed theology will later call *total depravity* not as a Pauline or Augustinian innovation but as God’s own assessment of fallen humanity given early in the biblical record. The chapter also establishes the absolute priority of grace: before there is any covenant, any command, any ark, or any obedience, there is grace — Noah *found* it, unmerited and unexpected. The character of God displayed here is complex and profound: He is a righteous Judge who cannot tolerate the pervasive destruction of His creation, a grieving Father wounded by what His creatures have done, and a sovereign Initiator who reaches into a condemned world to call out one man by grace. The covenant established in v. 18 introduces into the canon the formal structure of God’s relationship with humanity — a structure that will develop through Abraham, Sinai, David, and finally Christ, but whose bones are visible here: God speaks, God promises, God commands, God includes.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Genesis 6 is foundational to the Reformed understanding of *sola gratia* — grace alone. The sequence of grace (v. 8) preceding righteousness (v. 9) is not an accident of narrative arrangement but a theological declaration: God’s favor is not drawn to the righteous; God’s favor *produces* the righteous. This is the same structure Paul argues in Romans 9 and Ephesians 1 — election is not based on foreseen faith or merit but on the sovereign freedom of God. The Reformed doctrine of total depravity finds its earliest biblical grounding here: not that every person is

as bad as they could possibly be, but that there is no part of the human being — including the mind and its intentions — that is unaffected by sin and capable of initiating return to God. The ark functions typologically within the Reformed hermeneutic as a figure of Christ: the only structure within which creatures escape the judgment their corruption deserves. Salvation is not self-constructed; it is entered through a door God designed and God opened. Noah's total obedience (v. 22) does not earn the covenant — it inhabits it, and in doing so models the covenant obedience that grace has always been calling forth.

Main Takeaway

The world of Genesis 6 is not ancient history — it is a mirror. God's verdict on the human heart ("only evil continually") is not a description of pre-flood people; it is a description of people. You are not the exception. But neither was Noah beyond reach. The same God who grieved over a world in ruins crossed that ruin to extend grace to one man — not because of what that man was, but because of what God is. That grace found Noah. It finds you in Christ. And it calls you to the same response: not partial, negotiated, selective compliance — but all of it, all that God has commanded.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Spending the sermon on the "sons of God" debate and losing the chapter.** The identity of the beings in vv. 1–4 is genuinely interesting and should not be pretended away — but it is not the chapter's claim. The chapter's claim pivots on v. 5 and v. 8. A sermon that spends forty percent of its time resolving the angelic/Sethite question has subordinated the plain thing to the interesting thing. Treat the interpretive question honestly and briefly, then move to where the text is carrying its weight.
- **Preaching Noah's righteousness as the reason for his salvation.** The most natural misreading of this chapter is to treat Noah's character (v. 9) as the cause of God's favor (v. 8) rather than its fruit. This produces a moralistic sermon: be like Noah, be righteous, walk with God, and God will bless you. This is the precise inversion of the text's order and the precise opposite of the text's claim. The exposition must establish clearly that grace precedes righteousness in Genesis 6, not the reverse.
- **Domesticating the divine grief of verse 6.** It is tempting to explain away the anthropopathic language of v. 6 ("the LORD regretted... and it grieved Him to His heart") with a quick disclaimer about divine impassibility before moving on. This handles a genuine theological tension but at the cost of the text's emotional force. God's grief is real and is meant to be felt by the reader. Handle the theological complexity briefly and honestly, but do not let it evacuate the passage of its affective power.

- **Treating the ark-building instructions (vv. 14–21) as mere background material.** Preachers often rush past the specificity of the ark dimensions to get to the “theological” content. But the specificity *is* theological content — it establishes that covenant obedience is concrete, detailed, and costly. The cubit measurements are not filler; they are the shape obedience takes. Skipping them reinforces the false impression that faith is general spiritual sincerity rather than specific response to specific commands.
- **Losing the flood as judgment in order to make the ark warm and accessible.** The ark is a structure for escaping judgment — not a family adventure or a nature preserve. The comfort of the covenant (v. 18) must not be preached without the terror of v. 17. Grace that is not set against the background of deserved judgment is not grace — it is therapeutic niceness. The flood is real, the judgment is total, and the ark is the only way through. Strip the judgment and you strip the grace of its weight.
- **Failing to connect Noah’s obedience to Christ.** Verse 22 is a powerful conclusion, but it must not be preached as a bare moral example — “be like Noah, do all that God commands.” Hebrews 11:7 frames Noah’s obedience as faith. The ark is a type of Christ. The preacher who concludes with “go and obey completely” without grounding that call in the gospel has produced moralism from a grace text. Complete covenant obedience flows from union with the One who fulfilled all righteousness on behalf of His people — we obey from within the covenant, not toward it.