Unit 1, Session 4

Sin and God’s Grace

Summary and Goal
In this session, we will see that what began in Eden with Adam and Eve’s choice not to trust God’s goodness continued on throughout the following generations, growing ever more pervasive. We will see that humankind’s sin did not just impact us; it also grieved God and brought about His rightful judgment. But with that judgment came grace and hope that there was a solution to the curse of sin and death—a solution that would come not from humankind but from God. Finally, we will see that God’s plan for His creation was not thwarted by humanity’s sin. God would continue to call on His people—those who repented of sin and trusted in His grace—to carry out His will by filling the earth and obeying His creation mandate.

Session Outline
1. Sin grieves God and brings His judgment (Gen. 6:5-7).
2. Sin brings judgment, but God provides grace (Gen. 6:8-9,17-22).
3. Sin will not halt God’s creative purpose (Gen. 9:1,12-15).

Session in a Sentence
God is righteous and He will judge sin; however, He is also gracious and has provided a way of salvation.

Christ Connection
Just as God was gracious to Noah and extended salvation to his family, so also God grants salvation by grace to all who come by faith into the family of His righteous Son, Jesus Christ.

Missional Application
Because we are recipients of God’s grace through Jesus, we proclaim the reality of God’s righteousness and grace to others so they may join His family and be saved from the coming judgment.
Group Time

Introduction

**SAY:** Many of us have the same solution for every computer problem we encounter: reboot. And if that doesn't work, we reboot it again. The worst moment in our technological existence comes when we've rebooted four or five times and the problem is still there, because then we know it's going to be a long, painful process on the phone with someone in tech support that might end with us buying a new computer.

**EXPLAIN:** Make the connection between a computer reboot and God's “reboot” of creation with the story of Noah, the ark, and the flood with the following paragraph in the Daily Discipleship Guide (DDG p. 38).

Many of us have the same solution for every computer problem we encounter: reboot. You may not have realized it before, but there's a “reboot” in the Bible. God doesn't call it that, of course, but that's what happened with Noah and the ark. Things in the world had gotten so rotten that God decided to “reboot” creation.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members to share briefly some of their answers to the opening question on page 38 in their DDG.

What are some places in this world you wish could be “rebooted”? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

**SUMMARIZE:** In this session, we will see that what began in Eden with Adam and Eve's choice not to trust God's goodness continued on throughout the following generations, growing ever more pervasive. This grieved God and brought about His rightful judgment. But with that judgment came grace and hope that there was a solution to the curse of sin and death.
**Point 1: Sin grieves God and brings His judgment (Gen. 6:5-7).**

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 6:5-7 (DDG p. 39).

5 When the LORD saw that human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that every inclination of the human mind was nothing but evil all the time, 6 the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and he was deeply grieved. 7 Then the LORD said, “I will wipe mankind, whom I created, off the face of the earth, together with the animals, creatures that crawl, and birds of the sky—for I regret that I made them.”

**SAY:** Modern readers often object to stories of God’s judgment like this one. They read of the violence and destruction that God proclaimed, and whether they can articulate it well or not, they simply know, *This bothers me.* What is striking at the beginning of Noah’s story, though, is that while we are bothered by God’s broad-sweeping judgment, God was bothered so much more by the sin that had spread so deep and wide.

**EXPLAIN:** Show how sin cuts to the heart of God. God uses the language of “regret” and “grief” here to help us try to grasp how seriously God takes the sin of His image bearers against Him.

**Commentary:** The text says that God “was deeply grieved” over humanity’s wickedness. The Hebrew word for “grieved” means “pained” or “hurt.” Related forms of this word were used in Genesis 3:16-17 of the “painful effort” of childbirth for the woman and “painful labor” for the man. God was not merely angry over sin; He was pained by it. Sin, you see, is never primarily about transgressing rules but about betraying a relationship. When we sin, we betray our loving God and hurt His heart. He takes sin personally.

**INSTRUCT:** Ask group members to consider how they typically process the reality and impact of sin against God with the scale in their DDG (p. 39).

How do you typically process the reality and impact of sin against God?

Transgressing God’s Rules  Grieving God’s Heart

**INTERACT:** Communicate that we should not dismiss God’s rules, but we must see sin as a personal attack against our Creator God. Then ask the group the following question.

? How might our attitude toward sin change if we saw it not only as breaking God’s rules but also as “grieving His heart”? (we might be more prone to grieve sin ourselves; we might not be as likely to give in to sin’s enticements; we might be more likely to repent)
**READ:** Use the illustration of sin like the disease of cancer in the following paragraph in the DDG to begin laying the groundwork for understanding God’s decision to use a flood to wipe the world clean.

Sin, like a disease, had consumed all humanity. So God determined to stop the corruption, sending a flood to cleanse the earth. Our instinct is to wonder if God went a bit too far. But consider what you might do if someone you love were being ravaged by cancer. You would take radical measures, like chemotherapy, to cleanse them from the cancer. The cancer of sin grieves God and hurts His image bearers, so God was going to take a drastic step to wipe His creation clean and start over. And He was just to do so.

**EXPLAIN:** God’s use of a worldwide flood to judge humanity can still raise some questions: “Was the situation really that severe? I can accept the idea of divine correction, maybe even judgment, but outright wrath? Why couldn’t God just forgive and let it go?” At the center of questions like these, which often come from a sincere heart, we find three fundamental misconceptions.

- **First is the notion that forgiveness means just letting things go.** But any of us who have forgiven another person of something substantial knows this is not true. If you wreck a friend’s car and she genuinely forgives you for it, the car isn’t magically repaired. There is still a cost to make what is now wrong right again. And that cost has to come from somewhere. Either you pay it or she pays it. The transgression cannot just be “let go.”

- **Second is the belief that God would be better off if He were only a God of love.** Many of us have a lopsided view of God. We want God to be loving and kind, compassionate and concerned with our lives, without any of this ancient “wrath” business. And yes, praise God, He is loving, kind, and near to us. But God is loving and just. If we ignore the unity of who He is and who He has revealed Himself to be, then we create an unhealthy, one-sided, and dangerous caricature of Him. If we only accept the aspects of God we like, we’re blinding ourselves to the beauty and fullness of who God truly is.

- **Third is the idea that a God of vengeance will make us vengeful people.** Violence begets violence, so the thought goes. But God’s vengeance actually does the opposite. We are commanded never to take vengeance into our own hands, for the very reason that God will one day repay all wrongs (Rom. 12:19). This is the irony: If you don’t believe that God exists or that He will one day serve out justice, who bears the burden of ensuring that justice is served? You do. Taking a vengeful God out of the equation actually makes you vengeful, hateful, and fearful. Only when you truly believe that God will restore justice will you let injustice roll off of your shoulders. You should still work for justice, but you won’t bear the burden for it—a weight you could never bear anyway.

**INTERACT:** Ask the group the following question.

- **How can we pursue justice while trusting God with the burden of justice?** (pray for and advocate for justice while relying on government, law enforcement, and courts to do their parts; seek to expose areas in our own lives and churches that reveal injustice; volunteer at ministries and agencies that pursue justice)
**Point 2: Sin brings judgment, but God provides grace (Gen. 6:8-9,17-22).**

**READ** Genesis 6:8-9,17-22 (DDG p. 40).

8 Noah, however, found favor with the LORD.
9 These are the family records of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among his contemporaries; Noah walked with God.

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17 “Understand that I am bringing a flood—floodwaters on the earth to destroy every creature under heaven with the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark with your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives. 19 You are also to bring into the ark two of all the living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. 20 Two of everything—from the birds according to their kinds, from the livestock according to their kinds, and from the animals that crawl on the ground according to their kinds—will come to you so that you can keep them alive. 21 Take with you every kind of food that is eaten; gather it as food for you and for them.” 22 And Noah did this. He did everything that God had commanded him.

**EXPLAIN:** Contrary to a popular opinion, God does not operate differently now in the New Testament era than He did in the Old Testament. Show how Noah’s life demonstrates that salvation has always come only by one path—by God’s grace through faith (refer to the first paragraph in the DDG).

God’s image bearers had become exceedingly wicked, so God planned a flood to wash the world clean of their sin. But God chose to save one man along with his family to preserve His creative work. In this man—Noah—we see an example of God’s grace leading to the righteousness that comes by faith.

**Commentary:** Genesis 6:9 describes Noah as righteous and blameless. Does that mean he was sinless? Hardly. After the flood, he proved himself to be part of the same sinful human race that grieved God’s heart so deeply (cf. Gen. 9:20-23). So if “righteous” doesn’t mean that Noah did all the right things, what does it mean? What made Noah special? The verse before, Genesis 6:8, tells us Noah “found favor” in God’s sight. The word favor here means “grace.” God didn’t save Noah because he was righteous. Noah became righteous because he received God’s gracious offer of salvation. Grace came first. Righteousness followed. That’s why the author of Hebrews, when remembering Noah, said, “By faith Noah … built an ark to deliver his family. By faith he … became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (Heb. 11:7). Only after responding to God in faith was Noah declared “righteous.” That is always the way people become righteous.

**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 40), emphasizing that the grace of God toward sinners has been shown to us most clearly in God the Son—Jesus.
God Is Gracious: God’s nature is to delight in giving unmerited favor to those who are undeserving (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through Christ.

Essential Doctrine “God Is Gracious”: God’s nature is to delight in giving unmerited favor to those who are undeserving (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through Christ. Because of sin, humanity is undeserving of salvation—all of us have turned our backs on God, and as a result, we deserve death (Rom. 6:23). However, instead of leaving people in their sins, God has demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and forgiveness for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).

INTERACT: Ask the group the following question.

Why is it important that we keep grace and righteousness in the correct order? (It preserves the correct order of salvation; it keeps us humble and aware of our need for God and His grace; it combats the common slide toward legalism in many of us)

READ: Ask a volunteer to read the second paragraph in the DDG, which tells of the fulfillment of God’s word and judgment against sinners.

The flood eventually came just as God said it would. Every man, woman, boy, and girl who rejected God perished. Noah was a preacher of righteousness through his faithful obedience for one hundred years (2 Pet. 2:5); this was an opportunity for others to repent. But as people so often do, they mistook God’s patience with His absence (see 2 Pet. 3:3-10). By the time they realized their error, it was too late.

EXPLAIN: Sin brings judgment and wrath, but there is a way out. God offers salvation graciously to all who will receive it—but we have to receive it. The tragedy for so many is they will die and go to hell having missed the countless opportunities to respond to God’s grace through faith in Jesus. God will not override you, but until the day of your death, He will pursue you, trying to wake you up. Don’t confuse what God intends to be time to repent with His absence. Don’t be lulled into complacency. Flee to Christ, because today is the day of salvation. And none of us is guaranteed tomorrow.

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**Point 3: Sin will not halt God’s creative purpose (Gen. 9:1,12-15).**

**READ** Genesis 9:1,12-15 (DDG p. 41).

1 God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

12 And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all future generations: I have placed my bow in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 13 Whenever I form clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all the living creatures: water will never again become a flood to destroy every creature.

**EXPLAIN:** God’s sending a flood to wipe out the overwhelming majority of His creatures may cause us to question the love of God, but it should actually make us question our own perspective on the seriousness of sin. God’s love and grace are clear through what He has made. The fact that He preserved a family to cultivate His creation even when all humanity had rebelled against Him should prompt us likewise to show love and grace to others (refer to this paragraph and the “Voices from the Church” quote in the DDG).

The world is the loving creation of God, preaching to us that He exists and that He is beautiful, powerful, and good. Even in the most dramatic example of judgment in the Old Testament—the flood—we see God reaffirm His plan to bless the earth by filling it with people to cultivate it in worship of Him (Gen. 9:1). Even in one of humanity’s darkest moments, God preserved a remnant because the jewel of His creation has always been people. If God refused to give up on people at their lowest, shouldn’t we show similar compassion for others when we are tempted to give up on them?

**Voices from the Church**

“God wrote, ‘I love you’—he wrote it in the sky, and on the earth, and under the sea. He wrote his message everywhere! Because God created everything in his world to reflect him like a mirror—to show us what he is like, to help us know him, to make our hearts sing.”

—Sally Lloyd-Jones

**SAY:** God will judge sin as He sees fit, but God is, in every possible way, pro-life, and if we know Him, we will be too. We all bear God’s image; we are all precious in His sight. This should be the same posture of every church and every Christian’s heart. For all the individuals in our society who aren’t considered human, who are unloved, neglected, and ignored, whom no one wants—of whatever ethnicity, age, economic status, level of intelligence, or level of development—Lord God, make us a people who says, “We want them. Send them to us.”
INTERACT: Ask groups of 3-4 to share their answers to the following questions. After a couple of moments, allow groups a moment to share some of their responses with the whole group if comfortable to do so.

? Whom has God given you a passion to love as “precious in His sight”? What are some ways you can begin or continue to obey this passion? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

SAY: As dramatic as the flood was, God knew that its cleansing effect was only temporary. God’s assessment of humanity after the flood sounds eerily similar to His assessment before the flood: “The inclination of the human heart is evil from youth onward” (Gen. 8:21). The reboot, so to speak, still had the virus in the system. To fully address the problem of sin, God would pursue a different solution—a better one, a permanent one.

PACK ITEM 4: GOD TAKES THE PUNISHMENT: Use the two images on this poster and the commentary below to show how the rainbow, God’s sign of His covenant promise with Noah and creation never to flood the world again, points to the sacrifice of Jesus as the permanent solution for the problem of sin, inaugurating God’s covenant of forgiveness in the gospel.

Commentary: We associate rainbows with scenes of peace and tranquility, but the word used for “bow” in this passage means a “war bow.” God laid down His war bow in the heavens. In fact, if you look at the direction the bow points, you’ll notice that it points upward, toward heaven, rather than downward, toward the earth. God would not accomplish His ultimate salvation by shooting the arrows of His wrath into men but by absorbing them into Himself. When you see God’s war bow pointed upward, the parallels with Jesus and His sacrifice for sin on the cross begin to come into focus.

PACK ITEM 5: NOAH AND JESUS HANDOUT: Use this handout to explain how Jesus is the better Noah. Then provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 41).

Just as God was gracious to Noah and extended salvation to his family, so also God grants salvation by grace to all who come by faith into the family of His righteous Son, Jesus Christ.
EXPLAIN: Help your group understand how the severity of God’s judgment against sin in the flood should cause us to marvel at the magnitude of God’s grace in Christ—this is the gospel message we need to appreciate for ourselves even as we share it with others.

Commentary: The doctrine of God’s judgment shouldn’t excite any of us. But for many of us, resistance to judgment comes from a heart that doesn’t see ourselves as worthy of hell. The more we are persuaded of our own righteousness, the more God’s justice seems to trouble us.

However, the more we sense the noose of God's judgment rightly around our own necks, the more we are amazed at the greatness of God’s mercy and grace rather than the severity of His justice. Only when we first see ourselves as absolutely worthy of hell are we ready to understand the magnitude of God’s grace in sending Jesus to die on a cross for us.

When we look back on our lives from eternity, what will amaze us is not the severity of God’s judgment but the extravagance of His grace.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 42), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we are recipients of God’s grace through Jesus, we proclaim the reality of God’s righteousness and grace to others so they may join His family and be saved from the coming judgment.

- How might you live differently if you consciously saw everyone as either on his or her way to everlasting joy with God or everlasting sorrow apart from Him?
- What can your group do to love and protect human life?
- How can you tell others about God’s righteousness and grace in balance so they may respond in saving faith?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, You are loving, You are just, and You are good. You are right when you judge sin, and yet, You have chosen to show grace and mercy to those who believe in You and in Your Son—Jesus Christ. We praise You for who You are! Help us to proclaim Your wonderful works and Your salvation to all the world. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 43–45), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 46) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 43-45) help group members get into God’s Word for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 46) helps group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 43-45) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.

- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 2 as a part of point 2 in the session: Noah was not spared because of anything he had done but because of God’s grace alone. As such, Noah’s only proper response to God’s grace was complete surrender.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 4: “Being saved through God’s judgment heightened Noah’s awareness and gratitude for God’s grace. That is why Noah worshiped, and why we do too.”

- Day 5: “When we look upon the rainbow, it should remind us of God’s promise and, more profoundly, His faithfulness to keep His promises.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the DDG (p. 46) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to see this as a time to praise God together for His wonderful grace shown to unworthy sinners.

- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
**Additional Commentary**

**Point 1: Sin grieves God and brings His judgment (Gen. 6:5-7).**

“Humanity was created to obey, worship, and fellowship with God. However, the magnitude of people’s sin had progressively increased from that of eating forbidden fruit (3:6), to murder (4:8), to polygamy and multiple murders (4:23), and finally to worldwide preoccupation with evil (6:6). God’s patience had come to an end, and the curse pronounced against Adam would now be amplified in a single catastrophic act. Since humanity was the capstone of God’s creation, the elimination of people would take away any need for the ecological support system that sustained them; therefore, it was expedient to destroy the animals, creatures that crawl, and birds as well. Even as Adam’s sin had caused him to lose the garden of Eden and Cain’s sin drove him from the soil, the sins of humanity would now cause them to lose the earth.”

“Although ‘regret’ is the customary translation of the Hebrew verb in verse 6, its basic meaning is to ‘be pained.’ This is the sense here, as suggested by the parallel ‘be grieved.’ As it hurts a loving parent to see the disobedience of his children, so it pained God to see how wicked men had become. Human regret arises from one’s inability to foresee or alter the effects of one’s actions. But because of God’s perfect knowledge and unlimited power He is not subject to these human limitations. The correspondence between human emotions and the heart of God provides insight into the mystery of God’s nature. Although the Bible describes God as responding with human emotions, the correspondence is not exact. People often act out of sinful, irrational, or uncontrolled emotion, but God’s emotion is always consistent with His righteous character and eternal purposes (cp. 2 Thess. 2:13). A close reading of the passage shows that God’s disappointment was not with human creation but with human sin. God is not indifferent to sin’s effects, but His grief is not a feeling of helplessness. Coupled with His pained heart is the just recompense of His anger (cp. Ps. 78:40-41; Isa. 63:10).”

**Point 2: Sin brings judgment, but God provides grace (Gen. 6:8-9,17-22).**

“God does not indulge in wanton destruction. He destroyed the earth because it was no longer serving the purpose for which he created it. Humanity and all creation were intended to declare not only God’s ‘eternal power and divine nature’ (Rom. 1:20) but also his holiness (Pss. 19:1; 29:2; Isa. 43:7; 51:7). When human beings frustrate this intention instead of promoting it, the Creator has every moral right, just like inventors in our times, to start all over again. Safety is found in upholding God’s righteousness as Noah did. The Lord makes a covenant with those who do this, while he destroys the rest. Thus when we preach we should never emphasize God’s grace at the expense of his justice. His love and his holiness must be kept in balance, for he maintains both.”
“This is the first occurrence in the Bible of berît, commonly rendered ‘covenant’ or ‘pact.’ Its importance for biblical theology is indicated by our traditional parlance, Old Testament and New Testament, meaning ‘covenant.’ For Genesis it is theologically significant, occurring twenty-seven times, eight of those in the flood narrative and sixteen times in the Abraham narratives, especially pertaining to the rite of circumcision as a sign. This is also true of the flood account, since the majority of its uses appear in conjunction with the rainbow (9:12-17). The etymology and development of the term ‘covenant’ remain uncertain. Although the word may be used of mutual agreement among peers (e.g., 26:28), it often is found in the context of unequal parties where obligations are imposed on both or one. This is true of the international treaties in the second millennium B.C. that have their analogy in the Mosaic covenant, where obligations are undertaken both by God and Israel (e.g., Ex. 20–24).”  

**Point 3:** Sin will not halt God’s creative purpose (Gen. 9:1,12-15).

“God’s covenant with Noah is the climax of the story. Just as he had blessed Adam and Eve, now he blessed Noah and his sons, telling them also to multiply and fill the earth (9:1; see 1:28-30). But the situation had changed since that first divine blessing when nature and humankind lived in harmony. From this time on all creatures would be afraid of human beings. One of the factors contributing to this fear may be God’s giving permission to humans to eat animals as well as plants (9:2-3; see 1:29-30). They no longer need to have a vegetarian diet.”  

Noah is clearly a type of Jesus Christ. Noah is the seed of the woman, a new Adam representing the human race (cf. Rom. 5:14), ‘a righteous man, blameless in his generation…[who] walked with God’ (Gen. 6:9), a person who obeyed God without question (Gen. 6:22; 7:5,9,16; 8:18), a person through whom God made a new start with his world. But Christ is greater than Noah. Through Christ God makes a completely new start with his people: he gives them clean hearts and the hope of a new creation that is ‘free from its bondage to decay’ (Rom. 8:21), ‘new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home’ (2 Pet. 3:13).”

References
7. Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis* (Eerdmans, 2007) [WORDsearch].
A Word from the Editor

Trevin Wax

General Editor—The Gospel Project
Author of multiple books, including
This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in Light of the Gospel

For a story to be great, it must include a great beginning. The story of the Bible, which tells the true story of our world, is no exception.

In the Book of Genesis, we see God the Creator in all His majesty and goodness as He spins the world into motion and lavishes His image bearers with love. We have an “inciting incident” that introduces conflict into this good world, as the first humans raise their fists in defiance toward their loving Father and bring havoc into this peaceful paradise. But even here, we have a promise—God will make things right again. God will cover His people’s sins and crush their adversary. The rest of Genesis shows how even though sin spread throughout the world, God remained faithful to His promise to Eve, His promise to Noah, and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Book of Genesis is a glorious and earthy tale of rebellion and redemption, of sin and salvation, of failings and faith. Here is a book that shows us who we are in our sin and who God is in His grace. May this study lead you to express gratitude for God’s love toward you and then extend His love to everyone who inhabits this world He has promised to restore.