

# MARRING FAMILY LIFE

GENESIS 25:27-28

27 So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents.

28 And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

GENESIS 27:30-35

30 Now it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting.

31 He also had made savory food, and brought it to his father, and said to his father, “Let my father arise and eat of his son’s game, that your soul may bless me.”

32 And his father Isaac said to him, “Who are you?” So he said, “I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.”

33 Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, “Who? Where is the one who hunted game and brought it to me? I ate all of it before you came, and I have blessed him – and indeed he shall be blessed.”

34 When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, “Bless me – me also, O my father!”

35 But he said, “Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing.”

LUKE 12:13-15

13 Then one from the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

14 But He said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?”

15 And He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”

## INTRODUCTION

If it is possible to improve the quality of family life by changing our attitudes and actions, it is also possible to harm the quality of family life by refusing to avoid certain pitfalls. Specifically, families are harmed

when individuals refuse to relinquish selfish behavior. Such behavior manifests itself in a variety of ways. As our lesson texts show, families are harmed when partiality, deceitfulness and dissatisfaction are present. To avoid these errors, and others like them, we must make the protection of our families a priority. When we adhere to the principles of God's Word, selfishness, along with all the actions accompanying it, is cast aside. Unless this occurs, our families are at risk.

## PARTIALITY (GENESIS 25:27-28)

One of the challenges parents and grandparents face is that of being just and fair with each child and grandchild. If families are not careful, it is easy to show partiality and favor one child over the others. Although it is true we develop relationships easier with certain individuals and some are more lovable than others, we must not have favorites among our family members. Doing so results in harm being done to the family in general. Sibling rivalries, which often exist if partiality is present, will only be amplified by such behavior. Resentment and jealousy are spawned by partiality, and feelings of low self-esteem commonly result. Families guilty of partiality inflict harm to those who are mistreated. Even those who benefit from partiality do not escape without injury, for those who have been scorned will likely treat them with contempt (cf. Genesis 37:3-4). Obviously, this is not the kind of environment in which Christians want their families to live.

The story of Jacob and Esau stands as a classic illustration of the problem of partiality in the family. Although they were twins, the brothers were nothing alike. Esau was at home in the outdoors; Jacob was more comfortable "dwelling in tents" (Genesis 25:27). Their differences certainly set them apart from each other. In fact, it seems their differences served to endear each son to a parent – Esau to Isaac and Jacob to Rebekah. Possibly one might see nothing wrong with the preferential position of each son. Yet when we notice the way Jacob and Esau came to treat each other as a result (cf. Genesis vv. 26-34; 27:41), clearly preferential treatment undermined the stability of their family.

The partiality shown by Isaac and Rebekah drove a wedge between them, between Jacob and Esau, and between their descendants. It is no exaggeration to say "the favoritism which is shown by both Rebekah and Isaac to their respective favorites becomes a significant subtheme throughout the rest of Genesis" (Kissling 249). Those who are victims of partiality may seek to win approval by tearing down or belittling others. Or they may seek to get back at those who treated them unjustly. It is possible Esau did this very thing by choosing to marry certain women

(cf. Genesis 26:34-35). Regardless, either approach merely serves to remind the one who has been mistreated of his predicament. Individuals who have been treated unfairly often experience difficulty overcoming such treatment – especially if this treatment derived from a loved one. Partiality can certainly mar family life. Instead of acting in this way, individuals in Christian families should do everything possible to treat one another as they desire to be treated (cf. Matthew 7:12).

### DECEITFULNESS (GENESIS 27:30-35)

Just as families can be harmed by the practice of partiality, so they can suffer greatly because of deceitfulness. When family members are unwilling to deal truthfully with one another, trust can hardly be maintained. Suspicion and doubt will most certainly replace confidence. And when this loss occurs, families lose the glue that binds them together. This is why Scripture stresses the importance of honesty: “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another” (Ephesians 4:25). Deceitfulness is harmful and has no place in the life of a Christian. As Paul’s admonition in Ephesians shows, lying must be stopped because it is self-defeating. If members of a congregation lie to one another, the congregation is harmed; if members of a family lie to one another, the family suffers.

This was certainly true of Isaac and Rebekah’s family. The favoritism shown to each son by these parents led to the development of a rift in the family. The animosity that came to exist between the brothers was furthered when Esau relinquished his birthright for a bowl of stew (cf. Genesis 25:29-34). Even still, Esau’s feelings of hatred were not made known until after Jacob, at the insistence of his mother, deceived Isaac into giving him the blessing intended for Esau (cf. 27:41-42).

After Rebekah overheard Isaac discussing a plan to bestow a blessing upon his older son, Esau, she informed Jacob and encouraged him to deceive his father by pretending to be Esau (Genesis 27:1-10). Jacob feared what might happen if Isaac discovered this deception (vv. 11-12). Nevertheless, his conscience was seemingly eased by Rebekah’s offer to take any blame that might result (v. 13). Thus, Jacob went before Isaac wearing clothes belonging to this brother and goatskins on his hands and neck and carrying a dish of the kind of food Isaac loved to eat (vv. 15-17). Although he could not see, Isaac was suspicious when Jacob arrived. After inquiring about the speed in which he found and prepared the food, feeling of his hands, and asking again about his identity, Isaac ate the food that Jacob brought and offered his blessing upon him (vv. 18-29). All of this occurred just prior to Esau’s arrival.

After Esau came home, Isaac eventually realized he had been tricked. Recognizing this caused him to tremble (Genesis 27:33). Even so, the blessing had been given and was no longer available. “When Isaac found that he had been deceived by Jacob, he certainly would have reversed the blessing if he could; but as it had been conveyed in the sacramental way this was impossible. . . . The father could not reverse it because the grant had already been made and confirmed” (Clarke 171). Esau clearly felt the pain of losing this blessing too, for “he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, ‘Bless me – me also, O my father!’ ” (Genesis 27:34). The effect of deceitfulness, however, could not be erased. Families learn this same fact all too often today.

## DISSATISFACTION (LUKE 12:13-15)

Besides the things already mentioned in this lesson, many other attitudes, actions and pursuits harm families today. One of those is the problem of dissatisfaction. Illustrated by an interaction Jesus had with an individual in Luke 12:13, dissatisfaction can cause one to focus on insignificant things. On that occasion, one of the individuals who heard Jesus demanded: “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me” (v. 13). Rather than involving Himself in this materialistic dispute, Jesus sounded forth a warning: “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (v. 15). Many individuals spend all of their time trying to obtain certain items. Sadly, when those items are obtained, the desire for more rarely ever abates (cf. Proverbs 27:20).

Families emphasizing the things of this world would do well to recognize the world will not last (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). Consequently, we must not fall in love with money or the things money can buy (cf. 1 Timothy 6:6-10). The riches of our world are not as valuable as a single soul (cf. Matthew 16:26). Thus, Christian families should seek to lay up their treasures in heaven rather than on earth (cf. 6:19-20). Those who place an emphasis upon material items do so at their own risk.

## APPLICATIONS

- Those who wish to develop healthy families must seek to treat each family member as an individual made in God’s image (cf. Genesis 1:27). Regardless of a person’s abilities or attainments, he has intrinsic worth and should be treated kindly and respectfully. Partiality should be avoided. Rather than encouraging competitions that exalt one family member over another, families would do well to celebrate the differing yet important abilities possessed by its members.

As it is within a congregation, so it is within a family: Not everyone has the same ability or can do the same job. This does not mean one is less valuable than another. Nor does it mean an individual should be loved less or treated differently than others.

- For a family to function properly, a level of trust must exist among family members. However, if deceitful behavior is present, trust can hardly survive. And if trust is gone, so is the bond that holds families together. Before acting in a deceitful manner, individuals should consider the consequences of their actions. Trust takes a lifetime to establish and a moment to break.

- One of the great challenges faced by families today is that of overcoming the pull of materialism. If materialism is a person's god, it is easy to become dissatisfied. Individuals afflicted with this problem commonly desire the things possessed by others. Often, one's possessions are used to establish self-worth. As Jesus pointed out, however, a person's value is not based on the things he owns. Instead, we are valuable whether we own anything at all. In fact, our value is so great God sent His Son to die for us (John 3:16). Rather than placing an emphasis on things that will not last, let us instead focus upon things that are eternal (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1).

## QUESTIONS

1. In what ways were Jacob and Esau different (Genesis 25:27)?
2. Which parent favored Esau, and which parent favored Jacob (Genesis 25:28)?
3. What did Isaac tell Esau to do so that he might bless him (Genesis 27:1-4)?
4. How was Jacob able to deceive Isaac (Genesis 27:15-17)?
5. How did Esau respond when he realized what Jacob had done (Genesis 27:34)?
6. What did the individual in Luke 12:13 want Jesus to do? How did Jesus respond?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What can families do to overcome the problem of partiality?
2. What does the Bible say about honesty? Why is honesty important to the overall health of a family?
3. What steps can families take to avoid being materialistic?
4. Besides those mentioned in this lesson, what other actions or attitudes must families seek to avoid?