

Genesis 33: Jacob and Esau Reconcile

10-7-18 PM

Genesis 33 records the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau. They had been at odds with each other since Jacob had received the blessing of Isaac in Genesis 27. At that time Esau, feeling that he had been cheated by his brother, had vowed to kill his brother. This is why Jacob had fled to Haran in the north (Gen. 27:42-44).

In Genesis 32 Jacob began preparation to meet his brother. He was returning in part because God had commanded him to do so (Gen. 31:3). He prepared a great series of gifts to be received by his brother. He prayed to God that this meeting might go well. Finally, in chapter 33, Jacob leads his family to meet his brother. The result was a beautiful reconciliation. So pleased was Jacob that he had been received by his brother that he said *"I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably"* (Gen. 33:10).

Why did Jacob make peace in the first place? If we study the events that led to this moment, Jacob really DID NOT owe Esau an apology. Esau had despised his birthright (Gen. 25:34). At that moment, God rejected Esau, and lost the blessing that he later wanted to receive. Jacob did not rob or cheat Esau, the blessing belonged to him. The deception was not against Esau, but his father Isaac. It was to Isaac any apology was owed, and that by Rebekah, not Jacob (Gen. 27:13). Jacob sought reconciliation not because he was at fault, but simply because it was right. He WANTED to live at peace with his brother.

Jacob's reconciliation with Esau is an important lesson on peacemaking for those of the covenant of Christ. In Matthew 5:9 Jesus tells us "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." This is a lesson to us on reconciliation when there is conflict.

Peacemaking is important. First of all, we need to WANT to live in peace with others (Romans 12:18). Along the same lines, it is not just desire, but we need to PURSUE peace with others (Hebrews 12:14). There are four important thoughts we need to consider (and three to reject) in order to be peacemakers.

1. By acknowledging when we are wrong. When we have sinned against another, we need to own that sin. Jesus taught us this in Matthew 18:15-17. When we are charged with sin, we ought to be people who quickly admit wrong (1 John 1:8). Consider Paul's confession in Acts 23:1-5; he quickly owned his sin before unbelievers. We need to have this mind even towards unbelievers

2. By acknowledging when we have hurt someone. Sometimes we hurt others without actually sinning. We say something that hurts someone's feelings, or something we do causes offense. Even if we did not sin, we still have a divine obligation to make an attempt at reconciliation. Consider Matthew 5:23-26; there Jesus says "if your brother has something against you"; He does not mention whether it is sin or not. Jesus makes it clear that if we know another is offended by us, it is more important to reconcile than it is to worship. We CANNOT allow a division to stand.

3. By acting to make amends. Sometimes we need to do something to reconcile with another. Perhaps the offense is petty and meaningless; we still need to do something to make peace. The bible speaks about such overtures of peace in Proverbs 18:16 and 21:14. Such "gifts" may merely be positive attention, kind words, or simple actions that are a message of reconciliation. Too often people make reconciliation conditional on another's behavior. An attitude of "I will if they will" is not enough.

4. By taking the extra step not to offend. Finally, we need to consider how to avoid offending in the first place. It may mean going above and beyond to avoid offense. Jesus set this example in Matthew 17:25-27. Paul tells us he did this to the church, to Jews and to Greeks in 1 Corinthians 10:32-33. We need to work to avoid an unnecessary offense.

Christians need to seek peace. But there are circumstances that peace and reconciliation cannot be. Paul said in Romans 12:18 that we should seek peace *“so far as it depends on you”*. Meaning, sometimes reconciliation is out of our hands. First, we cannot reconcile when we don't know that we have offended. While we should make some effort to understand our impact on others, we cannot know everything. Second, sometimes, despite our efforts, others are unwilling to reconcile. Their sinful attitude thwarts God's desire. If we have made the honest effort, the “ball is in their court”, so to speak. Finally, sometimes there is a division based on the sinful behavior of others. We are NOT PERMITTED to reconcile with those who are in sin (Eph. 5:11, 1 Cor. 5:11, Rom. 16:17, 2 Thes. 3:6, 2 John 13, etc.).