



*When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, “My son.”*

*“Here I am,” he answered.*

*<sup>2</sup> Isaac said, “I am now an old man and don’t know the day of my death. <sup>3</sup> Now then, get your weapons—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me.*

*<sup>4</sup> Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die.”*

*<sup>5</sup> Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, <sup>6</sup> Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, <sup>7</sup> ‘Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the LORD before I die.’ <sup>8</sup> Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: <sup>9</sup> Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. <sup>10</sup> Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies.”*

*<sup>11</sup> Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “But my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I’m a man with smooth skin. <sup>12</sup> What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing.”*

*<sup>13</sup> His mother said to him, “My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say; go and get them for me.”*

*<sup>14</sup> So he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and she prepared some tasty food, just the way his father liked it. <sup>15</sup> Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob. <sup>16</sup> She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. <sup>17</sup> Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made.*

*<sup>18</sup> He went to his father and said, “My father.”*

*“Yes, my son,” he answered. “Who is it?”*

*<sup>19</sup> Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing.”*

*<sup>20</sup> Isaac asked his son, “How did you find it so quickly, my son?”*

*“The LORD your God gave me success,” he replied.*

*<sup>21</sup> Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not.”*

<sup>22</sup> Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” <sup>23</sup> He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he blessed him. <sup>24</sup> “Are you really my son Esau?” he asked.

“I am,” he replied.

<sup>25</sup> Then he said, “My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing.”

Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank. <sup>26</sup> Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come here, my son, and kiss me.”

<sup>27</sup> So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said,

“Ah, the smell of my son  
is like the smell of a field  
that the LORD has blessed.

<sup>28</sup> May God give you of heaven’s dew  
and of earth’s richness—  
an abundance of grain and new wine.

<sup>29</sup> May nations serve you  
and peoples bow down to you.  
Be lord over your brothers,  
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.  
May those who curse you be cursed  
and those who bless you be blessed.”

<sup>30</sup> After Isaac finished blessing him and Jacob had scarcely left his father’s presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting. <sup>31</sup> He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. Then he said to him, “My father, sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”

<sup>32</sup> His father Isaac asked him, “Who are you?”

“I am your son,” he answered, “your firstborn, Esau.”

<sup>33</sup> Isaac trembled violently and said, “Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!”

<sup>34</sup> When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me—me too, my father!”

<sup>35</sup> But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.”

<sup>36</sup> Esau said, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob<sup>a</sup>? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!” Then he asked, “Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?”

<sup>37</sup> Isaac answered Esau, “I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?”

<sup>38</sup> Esau said to his father, “Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!” Then Esau wept aloud.

<sup>39</sup> His father Isaac answered him,  
“Your dwelling will be  
away from the earth’s richness,  
away from the dew of heaven above.

<sup>40</sup> *You will live by the sword  
and you will serve your brother.  
But when you grow restless,  
you will throw his yoke  
from off your neck.”*

*Jacob Flees to Laban*

<sup>41</sup> *Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”*

<sup>42</sup> *When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, “Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you.”<sup>43</sup> Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran.<sup>44</sup> Stay with him for a while until your brother’s fury subsides.<sup>45</sup> When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I’ll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?”*

<sup>46</sup> *Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I’m disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living.”*

Some of you have been raised in loving, Christian homes with a mom and dad and basically happy and healthy upbringing. Some had little or no Christian training. Some were raised in broken homes and still others may have been abused in some way. Many of the families you were raised in could be called dysfunctional. But even if you could win the prize for a dysfunctional family, no one can hold a candle to the dysfunctionality in the lives of the patriarchs. These guys were messed up. By comparison, we all look pretty normal.

In addition to the chapter we just read, let’s review some of their dysfunctionality. First, we turn to Abraham. As we saw way back in chapter twelve, Abraham allowed his wife Sarah to become the wife of Pharaoh. He didn’t learn his lesson and did it again with the Philistine king, Abimelech. Apparently, this was the practice throughout his life for he said to his Sarah, “This is show you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, “he is my brother.” How many times did Abraham do this—just these two times or maybe many, many more? The very fact that he did it at least twice demonstrates that he was not in the least bit repentant over his actions. He continued to treat his wife like a prostitute in order to save his own skin.

Sarah was no saint herself. When she was unable to bear children, she forced her husband to take a concubine named Hagar. After Hagar became pregnant, Sarah abused her so badly that Hagar was forced to flee for her very life. When the Lord and the two angels visited them in Mamre, Sarah snooped around outside the tent and listened in on the conversation. When she heard that she was to bear a son, she laughed at the Lord’s words. After Isaac was born she demanded that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away from them into certain death in the wilderness

Isaac, the son of promise, did not seem to possess much promise. There are two main chapters that describe Isaac’s life and they are not very flattering. In chapter 26 Isaac did like his father and gave away Rebekah as a prostitute to the very same Philistine king! Now here in chapter 27 Isaac looks like a fool. In this chapter the focus tends to fall upon Rebekah and Jacob’s scheming behind the scenes but in the process we tend to miss Isaac’s sinful choices. Isaac was fully aware

of the prophecy about his two sons, that Jacob would rule over the Esau. He certainly knew that Esau had already sold his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. Isaac's blessing should have gone to Jacob. It was the Lord's will and cultural custom dictated it because Jacob now held the full rights as the firstborn son. But Isaac decided to go against God's word and family customs in order to do what he wanted to do. Isaac intended to keep the whole thing a secret. He did not tell his wife. He did not tell Jacob. He didn't plan to tell anyone. The intent was to have a secret ceremony of blessing just between him and Esau.

Why would he have done such a dastardly deed? We are not told other than that we know that Esau has always been his favorite son. Furthermore, Isaac had an appetite for wild game which Esau could readily provide for him. Despite all of the clear indications that he should have given his blessing to Jacob, he said to himself, "I am going to thwart the word of God for the pursuit of my own appetites and to bless my favorite son."

We see a little of Isaac in each of our own lives. Our sinful appetites drive us to do things that we know are wrong. During our mission's service on the reservation, we would pick up kids and take them to the kid's club program. One day I was dropping off a van full of kids. One girl got out of the van and ran to her house. I saw her standing behind the screen door smiling at me holding a package of hand wipes she had just stolen from our van. Little Deborah had an appetite for hand wipes that day and just had to have them. What kind of appetites are driving you right now?

Now it's time to look at Rebekah's scheming ways. The first mistake she made was to listen in on the conversation between Isaac and Esau. Who does that remind you of? Sarah did the same thing when the three men visited their tent and were speaking with Abraham. Rebekah was also fully aware that the blessing should have gone to Jacob. This would have been a fulfillment of the both the Lord's decree and of family custom. But once she became aware of Isaac's secret plan, she set her own secret plan into motion.

I get the suspicious feeling that Rebekah did not make up this plan on the spot. She knew that her husband showed a strong favoritism toward Esau. She probably guessed that he would eventually try something sneaky and underhanded. She may have had this planned for years. She could have gone over all of the small details and refined them until she was completely satisfied with her master plan of deception. She knew that her husband was going blind. She knew that the way to Isaac's heart and mind was through his stomach. She knew his sinful appetites and tendencies and like any good general in the midst of a heated battle, Rebekah planned to hit Isaac at his weakest point.

Was Rebekah obeying the Lord in wanting Jacob to receive the family blessing? In one sense between Isaac and her, she was the more righteous one. She wanted Jacob to have the blessing because the Lord and cultural custom had determined it. But her plan of deception was clouded by two things that are obvious to you and me. First of all, just like Isaac played the favorite with Esau, Jacob was clearly her favorite son. Did she seek to obey the Lord strictly out of obedience to Him or was it because she loved Jacob more? Would she have been able to tell the difference or had she deceived herself to the point that she was unaware of her own heart? If we assume that there was at least some genuine desire to obey the Lord, she fell into the second mistake—

the fatal trap of the ends justifying the means. The end goal was very noble—obey the Lord and make sure the blessing went to Jacob, but the means to the end was a pathway of deception. She must have reasoned that the Lord needed her help to accomplish his purposes.

It is a classic sinful tendency for the ends to justify the means. You and I do it all of the time. For example, we know that the Lord wants us to raise Godly and obedient children. We know that this is a good thing and we might even feel pressure from our church and our friends to produce nice little cookie-cutter Christian kids. The goal is admirable but this can cause us to fall into sinful patterns in the meeting of this goal. If the goal of raising Christian children causes you to sin along the way, then something is amiss. We can fall into patterns of constantly yelling at our kids and strong-arming them into obedience. We can use the powerful tool of shame and blame to get what we want. “You did what? And you call yourself a Christian?!” Or if we are really desperate, we pull out the most effective weapon in the parental arsenal—we compare our kids to one another. “Billy, why can’t you clean your room like Sally does? Just look how neat *her* room is.” “Your brother never got bad grades in school. What’s the matter with you? You must not be trying hard enough.” If our goal is to raise Christian children at all costs, then it will probably come at great cost to your kids. As a parent, you will justify all of your sinful means to the supposed end of producing a Godly child. How effective is this likely to be?

As a parent, your goal should never be to raise Godly children. Let me say that again so you don’t miss it. As a parent, your goal should never be to raise Godly children. Lest you think I have abandoned the faith and gone mad, let me explain what I mean. Your goal is to raise your children in a Godly manner and trust God for the outcome. Do you see the enormous difference between these two goals? If your goal is to raise your children in a Godly manner, then the things that you do on a daily, weekly and monthly basis will be God honoring and likewise good for your children. But if your end goal is to produce Godly children, you are much more likely to justify the means to that end. You will apply pressure and all of the things I already mentioned in order to achieve your goal.

But here is the really frightening thing about the ends justifying the means in our parenting—it might actually work. That is, some kids raised in this kind of overly strict and overbearing environment will conform to your methods. Now obviously some will not. They will express themselves in various levels of rebellion and will reject your attempts to make them conform. In the worst case they might even reject your faith. But other children will conform to your standards and will follow everything you say and do. They will obey you. They will attend church and Bible study. They will grow up, probably get married and raise kids of their own but in what sense have you succeeded? On the outside, most people, including you, might believe that you have achieved great success. Little Billy or Sally seems like a good Christian and a responsible parent. But oftentimes you will produce children who are overly dependent on their parents. They are so emotionally tied to their parents that they cannot leave and cleave to their own spouses and families. They look like a Christian on the outside, but have they really made their parents faith their own? They are probably much more afraid of disappointing mom and dad than they are of disappointing God.

Does this kind of child remind you of anyone in our story? This describes Jacob to a tee. Jacob was a momma’s boy through and through. As we learned in chapter 25, “Jacob was a quiet man,

staying among the tents.” This means that he hung around his mother and probably became dependent upon her approval. How else do you explain the blind following of his mother into massive deception? Clearly he would have also been motivated by selfish ambition. After all, if his mother’s plan succeeded, he would get his father’s blessing and a double portion of the family wealth. He was selfish but he was also pulled along on a leash to do his mother’s bidding.

For Jacob, verse 11 was the turning point in the story. His mother had just laid out her master plan, the one that may have been years in the making. “Your father’s blind and somewhat dumb-witted so let’s make him think that you are Esau.” Now suppose you were Jacob—what would you have done? Hopefully most of us would have said, “Mom, do you hear what you are saying? Just listen to yourself. You’re talking like a crazy woman. Mom, you know I love you, but there is no way I can go along with this insanity.”

This was the point of decision for Jacob. It was the point of no return. His response shows just how selfish he really was. “*But my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I’m a man with smooth skin.*”<sup>12</sup> *What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing.*” In other words, he said, “Mom, that’s a great plan, but what if I get caught?” Do you see, he wasn’t worried about deceiving his father and brother and pulling off the greatest ruse in patriarchal history—he was worried what would happen to him if he got caught. He wasn’t worried about his sin, he was only worried about the consequences of his sin. And the way he said it is so interesting. He said, *I would appear to be tricking him.* What kind of an excuse is that?! I would *appear* to be tricking him? It seems as if he was already so caught up in his mother’s scheming that he could not even admit his guilt. If he went along with the plan, he would not just *appear* to be tricking his father, he *actually* would be tricking his father.

This is another human tactic to rid ourselves of guilt and shame—we subtly alter the significance of the offense. If I appear to be tricking someone it’s not nearly as bad as actual tricking someone, right? Let’s say two of your kids are playing with toys and one suddenly hits the other. If you ask your child why he hit his brother, what is the most common response? “He hit me first!” I know we get tired of listening to this but we need to understand the logic and intelligence of our four year olds. If he hits his brother, he is not really guilty because he was the recipient of the first blow. Your young child in the sandbox or living room floor is simply applying the age old standard of *lex talionis*—an eye for an eye. Even the Bible teaches this. If your neighbor’s bull gored one of your animals, he had to pay it back not with one bull but with four. So in reality, your child who hit his brother was actually restraining himself because according to the Bible, his brother actually deserved four blows in payment for the one he received. Not only was it not wrong that he hit his brother back, but justice demanded that he hit him in order to punish his offense AND to prevent him from doing the same to others. That one blow of retaliation was both punitive and preventative. Your son was not just hitting his brother in anger, he was applying Biblical justice and preventing others from future harm. You never knew how smart your children really are, did you? Even four year olds are incredibly skillful at justifying their sinful behavior.

But instead of taking advantage of his only chance to remove himself from this ill-fated plan, like a little four year old in a sandbox, Jacob justified his mother’s deception and his own

sinfulness and marched full steam ahead. This next scene really needs a Hollywood movie version to do justice to it. Picture the scene. Jacob fetches the goats and brings them to his mother. While the servants are preparing the meal and disguising it to somehow taste like wild game, his mother is attaching the skins of the goats that are cooking onto Jacob's hands and arms. Then Rebekah took one of his smelly garments and proceeded to dress Jacob like a mother pins a diaper on a baby's bottom. Then she drops the food in his hands and sends him on his way.

I wish I could have seen this sight. It must have been extremely comical and very sad at the same time. And what would Jacob have been thinking this whole time? While his mom put the goat skins on his arms, he may have had some silent doubts, "Oh man, this will never work." But once the disguise was complete and he looked himself up and down did he think, "Hey, this might actually work!" This crazy scene would have been about as ridiculous as if I put a top hat on my head and began to quote the Gettysburg address, "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation..." And then everyone in the room points and yells, "Look, it's Abraham Lincoln!"

Listen, we all know that even as adults we are to honor our fathers and mothers. This command does not cease just because you grow up and leave your parent's home. Honor your father and mother, but don't sin in order to do it. This reminds me of a woman from our former church. She had been an active, serving member of this church for twenty years. All of her kids were raised in the church and all of them were baptized in the church and following the Lord. But through all of this, she refused to be baptized out of fear of offending her mother. I don't know if her mother was a die in the wool Lutheran or catholic or what the story was, but it prevented her from taking the step of obedience to be baptized.

Jacob's example also reminds us of how sin always multiplies itself. One lie and one sin will always lead to another. It's often necessary to sin or lie more in order to cover up the original sin, but it's also much easier to sin the second and third time because your conscience is becoming more and more dull with each step you take. Jacob lied repeatedly in this story. Just by allowing himself to be dressed by his mother like a little baby, he was already guilty of deception. But the lies did not stop there. His father asked him, "Who is it?" Jacob replied, "I am Esau, your firstborn." That first lie must have been the most difficult. Isaac asked a second question. "How did you find it so quickly?" You hunters in the church know full well how long it can take to bring down a deer or turkey. Many of you sit in your deer stands and turkey blinds for hours on end and never get a good look at your prize. When Esau hunted for wild game he did not have the luxury of using a rifle that can knock out a buck at 100 yards or blow the head off of a turkey. He didn't even have a high tech Mathews bow from Sparta, Wisconsin. Esau would have been using a handmade bow and arrow for his weapon. It's possible that Isaac did not expect him to return for several days, but instead in a very short time Esau stood before him with cooked game and hot bread in hand.

"How did you find it so quickly?" *"The LORD your God gave me success,"* was his answer. Jacob lied and in the process made the Lord, Yahweh out to be his accomplice. This has to be one of the most dangerous places in which a Christian can find himself: justifying massive sin by baptizing it in spiritual jargon. Three weeks ago while serving at Living Waters, I had the chance

to talk to one of the fellow teachers who used to work in training and development at Moody in Chicago. When you add in the school, the publishing and broadcasting arms of the ministry, it made for a significant number of employees. This man would also handle various disputes and conflicts between employees. He told me something very shocking and disappointing. He said that out of all of his years in the secular workplace on an international level, he had by far the most difficulty handling disputes among Bible believing Christians at Moody. Why was this the case? Because these Christians had the tendency of baptizing their disputes in Christian jargon. They would hide their sin behind pious Bible verses. They were much more likely than pagan employees to blame others and cast judgment upon others. I am not knocking Moody in any way because I imagine every Christian company—and any church—can be like this.

I told this man that I refer to this as taking the “spiritual high ground”. In every battle, the side with the high ground is most likely to win the battle. It is much more difficult to knock an enemy from the top of a hill because they can shoot at will at anyone approaching from the exposed positions below. Sadly, the same is true for Christians who take the spiritual high ground by justifying their sinful behavior in Christian jargon. The problem is not just that they have taken the spiritual high ground, but that they have deceived themselves into thinking they have a right to their position. We know that as believers our highest authority is God and his word and if we can stand upon a Bible verse, even if we are dead wrong, we believe that we are right. We have deceived ourselves but no one can talk any sense into us because we are protected by the shield of Bible verses.

Let’s take a quick look at Esau’s character. Genesis 26:25 tells us that Esau had Canaanite wives and that “they were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.” The twelfth chapter of Hebrews gives us additional information (Heb. 12:15-17).

<sup>15</sup> See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. <sup>16</sup> See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. <sup>17</sup> Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

Even though the writer mentioned Esau in verse sixteen along with sexual immorality, I believe that verse fifteen also applies to him. Following Jacob’s deception, Esau consoled himself with the thought of killing Jacob. Just as the deception was probably planned out, Esau planned the murder of Jacob and it made him feel good to ruminate on the thought of this deed. Wouldn’t you say that premeditated murder is equivalent to letting a bitter root grow up? Even though the story in Genesis may cause us to feel some pity for Esau—watching him cry at the feet of his father and begging for his own blessing—this passage in Hebrews reminds us that Esau was a bad dude. He was godless, sexually immoral and married foreign wives. He had no claim on Isaac’s blessing. He had sold his birthright to his brother. In verse 36 Esau complained, “*Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!*” But this isn’t completely accurate. Jacob and Rebekah were duplicitous, but Esau was wrong to say that Jacob tricked him out of his birthright. He despised his birthright. When he was hungry he had other options available to him but he just gave away his birthright to satisfy his cravings and appetites.



Here we see yet another common tactic in our sinful tendencies—shifting blame. Of course we have seen our fill of it ever since Adam and Eve in the garden, but it never ceases throughout Scripture. Esau blamed Jacob for his loss. Even Isaac placed the blame on Jacob saying, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.” Yes, that part was true, but Isaac is as much of an accomplice as Jacob. He had his doubts all along.

The problem with blame shifting is that the blame-shifter plays the victim card at the same time. We are suckers for the victim card, otherwise known as the sympathy card. If a person is looking for sympathy and if most or all of their problems have been caused by others or forces outside of themselves—in other words, they are victims of endless offenses against them. Even if someone else can recognize the symptoms of a person playing the victim card, it’s nearly impossible to confront them. After all, it seems rather un-Christian to tell someone who is down and out that their problems may be their own fault. That would seem to add insult to injury. But this is precisely what happened with Esau. Of course Jacob took advantage of the situation, but we are told in chapter 25 that Esau despised his birthright. He was lazy and foolish and had brought on much of his own problem.

Have you ever seen such a dysfunctional family? And all of these people are patriarchs and forebears of our faith. Yet despite the massive dysfunction, deception and blame-shifting, the writer of Hebrews has this amazing verse. *By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future* (Heb. 11:20). Abraham earned a total of eleven verses in Hebrews 11 but Isaac only got this one, short verse. And it’s a doosie! Now be honest—if you were going to summarize Isaac’s life, is this the verse you would have written? I certainly would not have chosen the word *faith* to describe Isaac.

Here is how I understand this incredible verse. God will keep his word despite the enormous sin of everyone involved. This is yet another demonstration of God’s amazing grace. As Paul said in Romans 9. *It does not depend on man’s effort or desire but on God’s mercy.* Do not conclude that grace allows you to sin as much as you want. That is a horrible distortion of grace, but you cannot truly understand grace without understanding sin. The patriarchs were sinners of the first rank. Their sin is the dark background which illuminates God’s grace. It reminds us again that there is no sin that is so big that it cannot be reached by God’s amazing grace.

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<sup>a</sup> *Jacob* means *he grasps the heel* (figuratively, *he deceives*).