

PARENTS MAY BE WRONG GENESIS 27

The modern term that would describe the home of Isaac and Rebekah could be dysfunctional. You have the basic ingredients of a traditional family in their household – a father, a mother, and two sons. The way the father and mother related to each other left something to be desired, but the way they related to their children especially left something to be desired. This is true in spite of the fact that this couple made the Hall of Fame for the Saints. Isaac is listed in Hebrews 11 as one of the great examples of faith in the Old Testament. So, it becomes obvious when you look at their lives that even good people may be wrong in their practice of parenting.

Surely we would agree that our faith in God should enrich all the relationships of life. It should make a man a better husband; it should enrich all the relationships of life. It should make a man a better husband and a woman a better wife. It should make adults better parents when God places children into their household. But it is not automatic. The example of this couple in their practice of parenthood makes this rather obvious.

Moses opens the windows into the Jacob household and allows us to watch this family as they related to each other. The scenes he allows us to see took place toward the end of their lives. What we see when Isaac has become an old man is an example of what we would have seen at other stages of their lives. We watch this good man and good woman blundering through their parenting responsibilities and making some tragic errors.

Since some of you are still in the parenting stage of life, and some of you will soon be in the parenting stage of life, let's be warned by watching Isaac and Rebekah as they make some tragic errors. We need to learn from their mistake lest we be guilty of the same errors in judgment.

I. PARENTS MAY PROVIDE A WRONG EXAMPLE.

It is a given that parents do influence their children. Almost all parents attempt to influence their children by what they say. They will be constantly offering little tidbits of instruction and counsel along the way. What they need to realize is that they influence not only by what they say, but also by what they do.

1. Parents are their models for behavior.

What we see Isaac and Rebekah doing is providing a wrong example. They were modeling the very things that they would not want their children to do. They were modeling manipulative and selfish behavior when they would instruct Jacob and Esau to be selfless in their relationships with each other. Isaac forgot that in all likelihood Jacob and Esau would become what they observed him doing.

In the prior chapter these two young men watched their father give in to fear in a moment of crises. Isaac was faced with the threat from the Abimelech and his neighbors. Instead of allowing his faith in God to provide him courage, he worked out a devious scheme to save his own hide. In the process of that devious scheme he exposed the mother of these

boys to great danger. Abimelech mistakenly took her into his home with the intention of making her his wife. Can you imagine the impact that this had on those boys? We need to be aware as parents when we make decisions that our children are watching. They see us as a model. If you respond to crises of life with fear and compromise they will think that this is the appropriate way to respond to the crises of life. If you are unthoughtful and violent toward your marriage mate they will think that is the appropriate way to treat a wife or husband. You can as a parent give to your children a wrong example.

2. Parents influence as much by what they do as by what they say.

This is almost a truism. Everybody acknowledges the power of example. We just need to be mindful of this. In his book entitled, Can Man Live Without God, Ravi Zacharis quotes a popular song by Harry Chapin entitled, "Cats in the Cradle." The words are so probing to those of us who are parents.

They go like this:

My child arrived just the other day;
He came to the world in the usual way,
But there were plans to catch, and bills to pay,
He learned to walk while I was away.
And he was talkin' 'fore I knew it and as he grew,
He'd say, "I'm gonna be like you, Dad.
You know I'm gonna be like you."

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon,
Little Boy Blue and the man in the moon.

"When you comin' home, Dad?"

"I don't know when, but we'll get together then;
You know we'll have a good time then."

My son turned ten just the other day.

He said, "Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on, let's play.

Can you teach me to throw?"

I said, "No, not today,

I got a lot to do."

He said, "That's okay."

And he walked away but his smile never dimmed.

It said, "I'm gonna be like him, yeah,

You know I'm gonna be like him..."

And he came from college just the other day;

So much like a man I just had to say

"Son, I'm proud of you, can you sit for a while?"

He shook his head and he said with a smile,

"What I'd really like, Dad, is to borrow the car keys,

See you later, can I have them please?"

I've long since retired, my son's moved away.
I called him up just the other day.
I said, "I'd like to see you if you don't mind."
He said, "I'd love to, Dad, if I can find the time.
You see, my new job's a hassle, and the kids have the flu,
But it's sure nice talkin' to you, Dad,
It's been nice talkin' to you."

And as I hung up the phone
It occurred to me,
He'd grown up just like me,
My boy was just like me.

And the cat's in the cradle and the silver spoon,
Little Boy Blue and the man in the moon,
"When you comin' home, Son?"
"I don't know when, but we'll get together then, Dad.
We're gonna have a good time then."

The truth we need to learn from Isaac and Rebekah is that a parent can provide a wrong example. A wrong example can have serious consequences in the life of our children.

II. PARENTS MAY PRACTICE A WRONG LOVE

That parents should love their children is not debatable. It is considered unnatural in any culture when there is not love in the heart of parents for their children. Someone said, “Good parents are like turtles-hard on the outside but soft on the inside.” But we learn from Isaac and Rebekah that parental love can be misguided. It may be wrong in its expression.

1. Preferential love is wrong.

This is the first clue that we have that there was something wrong in the parenting practices of Isaac and Rebekah. We learn early on that these two good people began to show preference for one son over another son. We learned that Isaac loved Esau but Rebekah loved Jacob (Gen. 25:28). It is not difficult to understand why these preferences developed. Esau was what Isaac always wanted to be. Isaac tended to be an introvert and a person that stayed fairly close to the tents of Abraham but down deep inside he really wanted to be a macho man. If he had lived in our day, he would have aspired to be the quarterback of the football team, but probably would have been playing in the band. Esau was that macho man. If he had owned a pickup, it would have had a gun rack in the back and some beer cans in the bed. His friends would probably have called him Bubba. In our day he would have been an outstanding athlete. Isaac’s heart got some belated fulfillment from watching the development of Esau as a young man. Rebekah turned toward Jacob for just the opposite reason. Jacob was very comfortable working around the tents and doing the things that went along with the shepherding lifestyle. He was dependable and responsible. Rebekah delighted in this son.

In our text this preference really became open when Isaac set up a plan to bless Esau with the family blessing before he died. But Rebekah sought to thwart what Isaac had designed to do by putting her favorite son, Jacob, in the position to receive the blessing. There is nothing good that can come out of this kind of preferential treatment of the children in your family. This is misguided love.

Now, there is a sense in which it is alright to have a favorite child. One of America's favorite philosophers, Irma Bombeck, wrote about such preferential love on the part of a mother. She wrote:

“My favorite child is the one who messed up the piano recital, misspelled committee in a spelling bee, ran the wrong way with the football, and had his bike stolen because he was careless.”

“My favorite child is the one I punished for lying, grounded for insensitivity to other people's feelings, and found he was a royal pain to the entire family.”

“My favorite child slammed the doors in frustration, cried when she didn't think I saw her, withdrew and said she would not talk to me.”

“My favorite child always needed a haircut,

had hair that wouldn't curl,
had no date for Saturday night,
and a car that cost \$600 to fix.
My favorite child was selfish, immature,
bad tempered, and self centered. He was
vulnerable, lonely, unsure of what he was
doing in this world – and quite wonderful.

All mothers have their favorite child.
It is always the same one: the one who
needs you at the moment, who needs
for you for whatever reason to cling to,
to shout at, to hurt, to hug, to flatter,
to reverse charges to, to unload on – but
mostly just to be there.”

It is alright to have a favorite child under those circumstances but this was not what Isaac did.

2. Conditional love is wrong.

You can read between the lines and see that Isaac and Rebekah gave to their children conditional love. This is really a part of the preferential treatment that they received. One of the things that got Esau into trouble with his mother was the women he married.

He married Hitite women, women that his mother never could accept. Her attitude toward Esau was constantly being affected by the things that he had done. Her love was not unconditional love.

Every child needs the privilege of knowing that there are two people who love him, and that they will love him regardless of what he may do. There is one place to which he can always go home and know that he will be welcomed. The love of parents ought not to be based upon the achievement of the children, the attractiveness, the skills of the children, or even the behavior of the children. At this point we have the opportunity to model to our children the love of our heavenly Father which is always unconditional love.

III. PARENTS MAY SHARE WRONG COUNSEL.

In our text we listen to this mother as she gives to her son wrong counsel. We may be guilty of this ourselves, if we are not careful.

1. Counsel to violate what is right.

When Rebekah heard Isaac giving to Esau his instructions about the meal he wanted and the blessing he would give, she set out to do something that was absolutely wrong. She took her son, Jacob, aside and counseled him in ways to deceive his father. She counseled him to tell his father something that was false – to lie to his father. You remember the story how she took the young goat that Jacob had killed and prepared it just like she knew her husband enjoyed it. You remember that she covered his hands with the skin of the goat so that when Isaac felt of him he would be hairy like his brother, Esau.

You will remember how she told her son how to deceive his father by pretending to be Esau. He did exactly what his mother told him to do. She gave her son wrong counsel.

Would it not have been better for both the mother and the son to put their trust in God? Would it not have been better to wait upon the Lord rather than try to do what only God had the right to do? They could have depended on the Lord to make sure the blessing got to the right son. Instead they tragically deceived this blinded father and sinned against him and against Esau.

2. Counsel to take advantage of others.

The other side of the counsel of Rebekah to her beloved son, Jacob was counseled to take advantage of someone else. She was counseling Jacob to take advantage of his brother Esau. Did she not consider the consequences of such action might be? Did she not consider what she was doing to her son, Esau? Did she not consider its long-term implications for her son Isaac? Evidently not.

We know that the outcome of her counsel and Jacob's action was such a division in the family that they never fully recovered from it. It bred in the heart of Esau a hatred for his brother Jacob, which would have led to murder if it had not been for divine intervention. It's always wrong for a parent to counsel a child to do anything less than the will of God.

Parental example, and parental love, and parental counsel are extremely important in the formation of the character of a child. It is urgent that you provide your children a worthy

example, unconditional love, and wise counsel. If you do, you will contribute to the success of their lives. Let's learn from these notably couple from the Old Testament about how not to do it. Our children will be blessed if we will do this.

A fine Scottish Christian man who was a successful businessman had one son. He was proud of his son for he was for all outward purposes a splendid, well-educated, and respected young man – until one day he was arrested for embellishment. At the trial he was found guilty and all through the trial and even up to rendering of the verdict, the young man appeared unconcerned and proud and nonchalant. Certainly, he was not humbled or broken by the experience thus far.

Then the verdict was brought in. The judge told the young man to stand for the sentence. He stood, still cocky and proud. And he glanced around the courtroom only to notice over at his attorney's table his father, too, was standing. His father had recognized that he was involved in the problem of what his son had become.

He looked and saw his father – who had walked and stood erect with head and shoulders straight, as those of an honest man with a clear conscience. But now, those same shoulders were bowed low with sorrow and shame as he stood to receive, as though it were for himself, his son's sentence from the judge. At the sight of his father bent and humiliated, the son began to weep bitterly and for the first time repented of his crime. We need to recognize that we are making a contribution by our parenting practices to what our children are in the process of becoming. May God help us to do it right!

