

BEING FORGIVEN

Have you ever had someone cheat you or try to cheat you? Has anyone ever thought that you cheated them? What happened to the relationship when the question of being cheated entered the picture? In most cases the relationship goes on the rocks: there is suspicion, at best, and even hatred. The only way that such relationships can be restored is for forgiveness to take place. Even if the guilty party makes restitution, there is still a rift in the relationship until forgiveness enters the picture.

Much has been written about how to improved relationships that are strained. Sometimes there are strained relationships just because of a personality clash or misunderstanding. I have read that one way to improve such relationships is to do some-thing nice for the other person. Sending them a birthday card, buying them a Christmas present, taking them something from your garden are typical things that could be done to remove the strain. That might work and probably does in many cases. Lobbyist use this technique on our Congressmen and salesmen use this technique on purchasing agents. What they are really doing is trying to put themselves in a favorable light so as to be accepted by the other person. In other words, they are working on their image and it has been said that "Image is everything." However, if the strain in a relationship is caused by a disagreement based on **real** differences (rather than perceived differences), then what most of us would like to see is evidence that there has been a **real** change in the person with whom we have the difference. If we could recognize a real change in the person, then forgiveness and restoration of relationships would come easily and naturally.

Speaking of strained relationships, the situation of Jacob and Esau is a classic case. Jacob tricked Esau and Esau felt he had been cheated so much that he had threatened to kill Jacob. You know the story of Jacob leaving the area and going hundreds of miles away to live with his uncle's family. Twenty year had passed and Jacob had become successful. Resentment was starting to build between his uncle's sons and Jacob because of this success. They probably thought that Jacob had cheated them. So God instructed Jacob to return to his homeland and because of the impending meeting with Esau, Jacob had to confront his past behavior and his basic nature.

As Jacob started back, he sent word to Esau that he was coming. He humbly referred to himself as a servant of Esau in the message and also let it known that he had considerable wealth. He was attempting to show humility and to imply to Esau that this wealth might benefit Esau if the relationship between the two could be reconciled. Word came back that Esau was coming to meet him and was bringing 400 men with him. Jacob feared that Esau was coming for revenge. All his scheming, trickery, cheating and whatever had run out. He finally did something that he had not done before and that was to ask God to deliver him from the hand of his brother. He then lined up some gifts to give to Esau to try to appease him. Even though he had asked God for His help, he was still trying to help himself. He was still Jacob, he was still scheming, he was working on his image, nothing had really changed. Jacob was like so many of us who think that to trust God completely would be too risky and reckless.

The crisis time came the night before the meeting with Esau. Jacob was alone and he recognized that the situation was a matter of life and death. You know, when it comes to dealing with God in a complete surrender, it is truly a matter of life and death; although it is not physical life but spiritual life with which we are concerned. We must come to the point of deciding on whether or not we are going to hold on to the Old Nature and then after that decide if we are going to continue to rely on our natural strength. It is a time when we must meet God face to face.

In all his life Jacob had never surrendered. The discipline of the past 20 years had brought him to the place in his life that he was in a struggle with God over who was going to be in charge. God had chosen Jacob and He had started a work in him. God was not going to let Jacob escape His calling on his life. When we do not surrender under the discipline of God, then it may be necessary for God to touch our strength and put it out of commission. Our natural strength may differ from Jacob's but once God has touch our strength it will be like Jacob's thigh that God touched -- it will not be something on which we can rely. We will be as Jacob was in holding on to God. It is ironic that the weaker we are in our own strength, the stronger our hold is on God. After the encounter with God, Jacob was a different person. In fact, he had been given a different name, he was no long Jacob, he was now Israel.

GENESIS 33:1-2 Even though Jacob had encountered God and had experienced his natural strength being broken, he was still attempting to protect himself and his family. It has been suggested that lining up the family the way he did was to put the most expendable (least valued) in front and the

most valued in the rear. The lesson for us would be that even if we have been born again of the Spirit of God, we still tend to rely on what we know that works. We have to learn to trust God as we experience His faithfulness and His power in our lives, then the trust comes naturally.

GENESIS 33:3 Jacob may have lined up his family in order of increasing importance, but he walked on out ahead of them all indicating that if there were trouble he was willing to experience it first. This is an example of the sacrificial love that pleases God since it is the kind of love that He showed to us in dying for our sins.

As Jacob walked to meet Esau, he bowed seven times as an indication that he was seeking Esau's forgiveness. Esau could see that Jacob was different. Such an act of humility to ask for forgiveness was not like the Jacob he knew twenty years ago. Esau could also see that Jacob walked with a limp. Although Esau did not realize the significance of the limp, it was evidence that Jacob had an encounter with God. When people see us, do they see evidence that we have had an encounter with God?

GENESIS 33:4 God had already answered the prayer of Jacob regarding his brother. Esau's anger had subsided and it is likely that he had not missed the birthright and the blessing that he did not have. Esau, glad to see his brother, ran to meet him.

GENESIS 33:5-7 Esau wanted to meet the rest of Jacob's family. As each came up to be introduced, he or she also bowed before Esau. In doing this, they were saying that they respected him. Showing respect for other people is the best possible action to gain acceptance.

GENESIS 33:8-11 When forgiveness takes place and acceptance is granted, then the giving of gifts to put ourselves in a favorable light is no longer necessary. Esau had no need for the present sent by Jacob. However, apparently, Jacob had a need to give the gifts and to see them accepted as evidence of Esau accepting him. It is a strange thing about giving and receiving gifts. If I totally reject you, then I would not receive a gift from you. I believe that this is why many people never receive the gift of salvation from God - they have totally rejected God.

GENESIS 33:12-13 The 400 men that Esau brought with him that Jacob feared at first were available to help him move his family and livestock to his new home. Sometimes this is the way it is when we trust in God: the things that we fear the most are the things that can help us move in the direction of being more and more in the will of God.