

Jacob and Esau: A Picture of Grace

Admittedly, we all struggle with grace. We work to classify it and describe it. We want to define it so we can get it right but also to keep folks from abusing it. I'm not sure that is possible. The fact is Satan will pervert any good thing God has given. But we must still hold a firm grasp on grace or we may fall from it.

Perhaps one of the greatest pictures of misunderstanding how we relate to grace and then seeing the misunderstanding corrected is illustrated by Jacob and Esau in **Genesis 33:8-10**. The passage says:

Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." Jacob said, "No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me" (ESV).

To see the full picture, remember the whole story of Jacob and Esau.

In **Genesis 25:29-34**, Jacob took advantage of his brother's hunger. Yes, I understand Esau shares the blame. He despised his birthright. But, Jacob still took advantage of his brother. Instead of dealing with him in love, sharing with him because he was in need, Jacob used a difficult moment for Esau and swindled him out of his birthright.

Then, in **Genesis 27:1-45**, Jacob deceived Isaac into granting the older son's blessing to him. Esau was legitimately angry. Certainly, he did not have the right to kill Jacob, but I can understand why he wanted to. At his mother's advice, Jacob fled the presence of Esau. He went to his uncle Laban's home in Haran.

While in Haran, Jacob gained two wives, 12 children, many servants, and numerous herds. After 20 years, Jacob left Laban to return to his home with his entire family and fortune. In **Genesis 32:3-6**, Jacob sent messengers to Esau. The messengers reported back that Esau was coming out to meet Jacob with 400 men. That didn't sound like a friendly welcoming committee. It sounded like Esau was coming to attack Jacob. Jacob feared for his life and family, but he pressed on anyway, trusting in the promise of God. He developed a plan. Perhaps he could give Esau a gift and appease him. In **Genesis 32:13-21**, he divided up droves of gifts and sent them ahead of his family with a message.

In **Genesis 33:8-10**, Jacob and Esau finally met again after 20 years. Esau ran to meet Jacob, embraced him, fell on his neck, and kissed him (much like the prodigal's father). Instead of seeking vengeance, he offered grace.

Now we have caught up to our key passage. Esau wanted to know why Jacob sent the gifts. "What is the meaning of this?" he asked. Jacob said, "To find favor in the sight of my lord." The word translated favor in the ESV is the word for grace in the Old Testament. It is used to speak of Noah finding favor or grace in the eyes of the Lord (**Genesis 6:8**). Why had Jacob sent these gifts? To gain grace from Esau whose coming was like that of God to Jacob (**Genesis 33:10**).

But Esau would not accept the gift. He responded saying, "I have enough." In other words, "Jacob, your gift buys nothing from me. Your gift doesn't help me. I have all I need and I don't need anything from you." Esau is essentially saying, "You can't buy my favor. I'm accepting you because I'm offering you grace, and your gifts do not sway me."

Then Jacob shifts. He encourages the gift on Esau, but now his tune has changed. Now, the gifts are no longer offered to somehow purchase the grace. The gifts are offered because Esau, like God, had freely offered his grace and acceptance. "If I have found favor," Jacob said, "accept my present." Jacob gives the gift not to receive grace but as a thankful response for the grace freely given.

Do you see the picture for us now? Many of us approach God as Jacob initially approached Esau. We attend the assemblies, put money in the collection, follow God's pattern, clean up our lives, and obey the Bible. God asks us, "What is the meaning of all this. Our response is, "We are trying to find grace in your sight." God responds, "I don't need all of this. All things are mine, I don't need yours. Your service adds nothing to me. You cannot gain my grace in this way. I

don't need you. You need Me. I'm offering my grace and acceptance to you freely based on my love, not your work" (cf. **Psalm 5:10-12; Acts 17:24-25; Ephesians 2:1-10**).

This overwhelms us. How could God love us so much? When we truly recognize the magnitude of this grace, do we take back our gifts? Do we say, "If this salvation is by grace, then why would I do anything?" Of course not. Instead, we love because He first loved us (**I John 4:19**). Instead of trying to gain favor by God's service, we ask Him to please accept our gift as a thankful response to His grace.

So, the question for us is why are we serving God today? Are we like Jacob as he began with Esau? Are we trying to gain the Lord's favor? Understand this. There is nothing we can do that forces God to grant His favor. Nothing we do is so needed by God that we can receive His favor as in a business transaction. Or are we like Jacob grew to be through this incident with Esau? Are we awed, amazed, and overwhelmed that God has accepted us and offered His grace so we offer Him the gift of our lives as He offered us the gift of His Son?

What a picture of grace. Even Jacob saw that as he claimed this meeting with Esau was as if he were seeing the face of God. When we see the face of God and He asks what we meant by our service and gifts we are sending on before us, what will we say? Will we say, "We were trying to gain your grace"? Or will we say, "Because we found grace in your sight, we offered these gifts"?