



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Genesis 30: 1-43

“Jacob in the Crucible of Divine Discipline”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading for today is the 30th chapter of the Book of Genesis and I would like to read the entire chapter which is a rather lengthy chapter, but one that we want to try to handle in the study this morning. Genesis, chapter 30. Now Jacob, you remember, has been married to Rachel and to Leah and some of his children have now been born; four sons by Leah, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. And now the story continues in the first verse of the 30th chapter.

“Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister and she said to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or else I die.’ Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, ‘Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?’ And she said, ‘Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children.’ That expression to bear on the knees is a figurative expression, that is she would act as her proxy and the children would be Rachel's children, though they were born of Bilhah. ‘So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her, and Bilhah conceived and bore a son. Then Rachel said, ‘God has vindicated me, and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son.’ Therefore she named him Dan.”

If you have a Bible with a marginal note, you will notice that the names given to the children reflect the situation. For example, Dan means judged, and she has just said God has judged me. That is judged in the sense of vindicated. The 7th verse,

“And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. So Rachel said, ‘With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed.’ And she named him Naphtali. When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, ‘How fortunate!’ So she named him Gad. And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, ‘Happy am I! For women will call me happy.’ So she named him Asher. Now in the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, ‘Please give me some of your son's mandrakes.’ But she said to her, ‘Is it a small matter for you to take my husband? And would you take my son's mandrakes also?’ So Rachel said, ‘Therefore he may lie with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes.’ When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, then Leah went out to meet him and said, ‘You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes.’ So he lay with her that night. And God gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Then Leah said, ‘God has given me my wages because I gave my maid to my husband.’ So she named him Issachar. And Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob. Then Leah said, ‘God has endowed me with a good gift. Now my husband will dwell with me because I have borne him six sons.’ So she named him Zebulun. And afterward she bore a daughter and named her Dinah. Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb. So she conceived and bore a son and said, ‘God has taken away my reproach.’ And she named him Joseph, saying, ‘May the Lord give me another son.’ Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph that Jacob said to Laban, ‘Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my own country. ‘Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me depart; for you yourself know my service which I have rendered you.’ But

Laban said to him, ‘If now it pleases you, stay with me; I have divined that the Lord has blessed me on your account.’ And he continued, ‘Name me your wages, and I will give it.’ But he, that is Jacob, said to him, ‘You yourself know how I have served you and how your cattle have fared with me, for you had little before I came and it has increased to a multitude, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I turned. But now, when shall I provide for my own household also?’ So he said, ‘What shall I give you?’ And Jacob said, ‘You shall not give me anything. If you will do this one thing for me, I will again pasture and keep your flock. Let me pass through your entire flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted sheep and every black one among the lambs and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and such shall be my wages. So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come concerning my wages. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, will be considered stolen.’ And Laban said, ‘Good, let it be according to your word.’”

Now you are to understand this, of course, you must understand that the goats were normally black or brown-black, and the sheep were normally white, and so Jacob is speaking about the rarer of the animals. And when he says, "Let me pass through your entire flock today, removing the speckled and spotted sheep and the black from the lambs and the spotted and speckled among the goats," he does not mean I have walked them now, but he means these are to be removed, so that the flock will be purely marked and then from that time on, those that appear marked in this way will be Jacob's, and that's the way Laban understood it as well. And so we read in verse 35;

“So he removed on that day the striped and spotted male goats and all the speckled and spotted female goats, every one with white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the care of his sons, and he put a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.”

So in other words, those that were already of that type were removed, three days' journey, and the flock now is purely marked, and so from now on Jacob is going to ideally wait on those that came with these unusual markings, the rare markings. Now, both of these men are rogues, both Laban and Jacob. Laban is more rogue than Jacob, but Jacob, as far as personal dealings are concerned, is almost a match of Laban. Neither one is trusting the other. So Laban removed those striped and speckled spotted male goats, three days' journey. And now Jacob stoops to some artifices in order to enlarge his flock.

“Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white stripes in them,” (that is, he exposed the bark) “exposing the white, which was in the rods. And he set the rods, which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the gutters, even in the watering troughs, where the flocks came to drink; and they mated when they came to drink. So the flocks mated by the rods, and the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted.”

Of course, this is superstition, but the Bible does not mean for us to understand that this is valid. All it says is that Jacob believed it, and this is what he was doing. In the next chapter it is stated that the blessing in Jacob's flock has really come from the Lord and it was he who gave Jacob those sheep and goats. But this is the way Jacob felt about it. He thought he was carrying out something that would provide some prenatal influences and the result would be a larger number of the speckled and spotted. Verse 40, and he tries another artifice; when he has a few of the lambs and the goats that are speckled and spotted, he uses them instead of the rods.

“Jacob separated the lambs, and made the flocks face toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban; and he put his own herds apart, and did not put them with Laban's flock. Moreover, it came about whenever the stronger of the flock were mating, Jacob would place the rods in the sight of the flock in the gutters, so that they might mate by the rods. (This would be at a

certain time of the year when the sheep mated. They mated twice a year, but one time the result was a stronger brand of sheep and goats. I think it was in the fall. And so at that time of the year he would use his particular method in order to gain prenatal influences so that he would have strong sheep and Laban would have the weak. Smart fellow, so the world would say. Verse 42: But when the flock was feeble, he did not put them in; so the feebler were Laban's and the stronger Jacob's. So the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys.”

Not a very nice picture, but nevertheless it is part of the word of God.

“Jacob in the Crucible of Divine Discipline,” the study this morning. I have a commentary in my library on the book of Genesis written by a well-known Lutheran professor and minister. It is a two-volume work and is of considerable value. This commentary is rather interesting in this sense that at that conclusion of each of the chapters there are homiletical hints that are given by the professor to preachers who might be preaching on certain sections of the Book of Genesis. This is one of the places in the Book of Genesis in which he says this is a chapter that really could hardly be preached upon. It is always very encouraging when you begin to think about a message and have the commentator say you shouldn't preach on this particular chapter.

It's almost as if we are to think that God has let slip something that might prove to be hurtful to the church of Jesus Christ if it is proclaimed, but nevertheless, it is a reflection properly, I guess, of the difficulty that one faces in expounding a text like this in an audience composed of some who are believers and some who are strong believers and have read the Bible for many years, but others who may be visiting and may not have opened the pages of the Bible for a lengthy period of time. Some of the chapters are very difficult. Some of the chapters, I am sure, some people might think border on the pornographic and, as a matter of fact, a later chapter at least is probably is even worse than the one that we are to look at today from that standpoint.

And one, of course, asks the question, why are these chapters in the word of God? Why is it that we have the inner life of Jacob and his wives and the strife, and the troubles and difficulties that they had set forth in a public form such as this? And, of course, most of us after reflecting would surely come to the conviction that the reason for this is that God would like for us to see human nature realistically, and see the human nature of the saints realistically, for we should remember that Jacob, and Abraham, and Isaac were men in whom God had worked and had brought to the knowledge of himself. He is the God who says, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Israel is spoken of very lovingly as the sons of Jacob. That is, they are reflections of the one who was one of the patriarchs in the head of the national entity. So when we think of this chapter, we should think of our own nature.

And if we are Christians of our own nature even after we have come to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are not yet sanctified. The Scriptures do say, there is a sense in which we can be spoken of as sanctified. That is we can be spoken of positionally that way. The apostle wrote to the Corinthian church, which was a church that was flawed by many sins, and yet he said that they had been sanctified. And so there is a sense in which every believer is truly a saint, that is, we have been set apart for a particular purpose by the Lord God. If you have believed in Christ, you are a saint. Not a saint canonized by a particular church of men, but canonized by the Holy Spirit in that he has brought you to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus and attached you to Him so that you belong to Him. Now Jacob is such a saint, but he is a long way from being sanctified.

There are two memorable passages in which the Apostle Paul sets forth in direct form the struggle that still exists in the heart of every believer. In Galatians, chapter 5, he speaks about the flesh lusting against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, and that they are opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. This is a picture of the inner life of a believer. Then in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, in one of the most remarkable passages that Paul ever wrote, one in which he displays an understanding of the inner life of man, such as is not found so far as I know in any other piece of Christian literature, the closest thing to it

may be something like *Augustine's Confessions*, but there he speaks of the fact that though we possess the new nature, even then we are in conflict with the law of sin in our members and furthermore we cannot have victory or success apart from the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. "O, wretched man that I am," the apostle says, "who will set me free from the body of this death?"

What we are seeing in the life of Jacob is the struggle, but we are seeing it in a very concrete situation. Jacob had to learn these very truths that the Apostle Paul speaks about. In fact, his life, if you were to look at it from one standpoint, you would characterize it as one long prolonged struggle under the discipline of God, and a great deal of its outworking was in his own family life. A family life was the fruit of a polygamous relationship. True, it was as a result of the guile of Uncle Laban, but Jacob, even though he had been tricked into marrying Leah did not have to continue that relationship, but nevertheless he did. He continued with Leah and he also added another wife, Rachel, the one whom he loved, and Jacob sowed the bitter seed of polygamy in his life.

This entire story is full of sad and sordid incidents, and we need to remember that as we read it, we are reading something that gives us an insight into the nature of man and also gives us an insight into the long-suffering patience of God that was at work all along in the life of his servant Jacob. The fruits of the misery and the intrigues of these days emerge not so much here as in the later chapters of the book, and even in the history of the 12 tribes which came from Jacob, because all through their history, you can see reminders of their beginnings. This was for instructive purposes. God put his hand upon those sons and saw to it that they in themselves gave us certain lessons that we need.

On the human plane, the relationship between Leah and Rachel and Jacob demonstrates the craving of human beings for love and for recognition, but on the divine plane, it shows the grace of God in operation and isn't it interesting that the grace of God so often chooses very difficult and unpromising material to use the comments of someone who has written on this question?

There is a story about a prison chaplain who noticed one of the prisoners sewing a covering on a bale of overalls. He greeted the man cheerfully one morning by saying, "Good morning, friend;

sewing?" "No sir," said the prisoner, "with a rather grim smile, "reaping." And so Jacob's life and the incidents of it show that the scriptural truth "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap." It is fulfilled in the lives of all; all of us. And remember, it's not what we thought that we sowed; it's not what we wanted to sow; it's not what we hoped to sow, but the Scriptures say "whatsoever a man soweth, that, that shall he reap."

Now Jacob had built a home, but what a home! It was a home in which women who were sisters were vying for his affection; so, that, of course, was fatal to peace. They had been happy, evidently, living as sisters, but when they became wives in the same home, it was a different matter and each had her own difficulty. Poor Leah knew that Jacob never really loved her as she wanted to be loved. She was not the wife of his choice, and while God had compensated her with a family of sons and finally she reached six, still this was not satisfaction and now she had a new form of difficulty because Rachel entered. So, she was desolate in the home and her sons are like so many landmarks in her misery.

But Rachel was equally distraught and miserable. Sure she had Jacob's love, but she wasn't sure of keeping it, and in addition, she was mortified to see the children of Leah growing up and evidently going to be the heirs of her own husband, and so according to Scriptures she fretted, she prayed, and she chafed under the difficulties in which she found herself. And isn't it interesting too that they do pray? It's not that they are all bad or all good. It's that there is a mixture, and a mixture in Jacob, and mixture in Leah, and a mixture of that which is of God and that which is of man in Rachel as well. You can see in the names of the children a reflection of the recognition of the Lord God, but at that same time in the daily life, there is a manifestation of the flesh.

Well, now let's just take a quick look through the chapter and try to hit on the high points of it, and we look first at Rachel and Leah or the fruit of polygamy in the first 13 verses. It is a story of jealousy and the fruit of jealousy and envy. The chapter begins with, "When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or

else I die.’ She became jealous. What a wealth of sadness lies behind them and how often has envy and jealousy troubled families and troubled churches.

One of the most poignant incidents in the life of the Apostle Paul is his imprisonment in Rome and the remarks that he makes in the first chapter of his letter to the Philippians. He speaks about the fact that while he is in prison, some are taking advantage of that. They are preaching Christ out of envy and contention. You know, it's possible to be even zealous for the Lord, but at the same time having mixed with that envy and jealousy of other servants of the Lord. And so the apostle speaks of that and he says that even though they were preaching Christ out of envy and contention, nevertheless he rejoiced in that Christ was being preached. That's the attitude of the person who is wronged, but here is Rachel envious of Leah. "Give me children, or else I die." Jealous, frustrated.

It's possible, it certainly would have seemed likely since she was not a sanctified person that she would have been very proud in the beginning of her marriage to think that Jacob had served seven years for her, and now seven more years have gone by, and it's possible she was insufferable in her pride over the fact that Jacob loved her. She was a beautiful woman, but she had no happiness and she made an unreasonable demand, of course, "Give me children or else I die."

Now, of course, it was not Jacob's fault. As a matter of fact, this was a questioning of the wisdom of God. She had forgotten who gives children. In fact, what she said is positively sinful. In the Scriptures we read in Psalm 127, “Little children are a heritage of the Lord and the fruit of the womb is his reward.” Pride has awakened envy, and jealousy and nagging is the result.

Dr. Barnhouse, who has written a little book of meditations on chapters in the Book of Genesis, comments that when a woman nags her husband, she is out of the will of God, for God is never a nagger. I am sure that many of us who have been husbands would, however, want to say this, that there were times when our wives nagged us when we really ought to have been nagged and when the nagging really did help. But anyway, that is what he said Satan is called, the nagger of the brethren, because he is the one who accuses the brethren.

Now Jacob reminds Rachel of an important spiritual truth. He reminds her of the fact that children are of the Lord. He says, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" In other words, am I the omnipotent God who gives children? And, of course, the answer to that is obvious. I was reading in *Readers' Digest*, not long ago, one of the recent issues on quotable quotes or under the quotable quotes that was the comment, "Even if marriages are made in heaven, man has to be responsible for the maintenance." That's a cute little statement, but it's not true. God is responsible for the children, God is responsible for the marriage, and God is responsible for the maintenance; that is, he stands there to maintain a marriage, and a marriage is not maintained unless the divine help is there. So, Jacob properly replies he is not the omnipotent God.

And so Rachel, not learning from Sarah devises her own stratagem. It's no credit to her because it is purely of the flesh. She says, "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children." And her stratagem worked, but that doesn't mean that it had the divine blessing upon it. And when the second son is born, Naphtali, she proudly says "With mighty wrestlings" or with wrestlings of God literally, "I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed." To use one of our idioms, it's possible that she had hit Leah over the head with the birth of Naphtali. You can see that faith and envy combined in these two. There is the struggle of the flesh and the spirit going on, but strife begets strife and also sin is contagious, and as a result of what has happened, Leah decides, well though she has stopped bearing children, nevertheless, she has a maid too, and so she will follow the lead of Rachel, and that is what happens and she too has additional children, Gad and Asher, and Asher is the eighth of the sons of Jacob. So strife begets strife, and what a condemnation of polygamy is found in this chapter.

Now the next incident is another of the sordid matters of this chapter that has to do with the mandrakes, and again the conflict of the flesh and spirit is obvious. Reuben, at this time, so far as we can tell, was a little toddler of about three or four or five years of age, and so he has wandered out in the time of the wheat harvest which was in May or June in Mesopotamia, and he has seen some mandrakes in the field and he has gathered these flowers for his mother. The mandrake was an herb

of the belladonna family and it had white and reddish blossoms and then the fruit was yellow, similar in size to a small apple. In fact, they were called love apples because people in the ancient Near East thought the mandrakes stimulated sensual desire and aided conception, so they were something like an aphrodisiac in their thought.

Now, of course, this was superstitious, but nevertheless it was believed by them. And so when Reuben came in, Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." And the result is that they work out a bargain whereby Rachel gets the mandrakes and Leah gets Jacob for a night. The outcome is rather ironical because Rachel wanted the children. So she got the mandrakes. Leah wanted Jacob. And so the mandrakes do nothing for Rachel, but Leah gets another son by parting with them.

You wonder about Jacob through all of this; what was his reaction to the four women who were pulling about him so, and then why does not the Bible say a great deal about his own flesh, but perhaps it's so obvious that there is no need to say anything, but you can see again how powerful is the condemnation of polygamy. And also what a signal illustration of retribution we have here, and Jacob's failure to follow the teaching of the word of God. Finally, Rachel does have children, but notice the Scripture attributes it to God. Verse 22, "Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb. So she conceived and bore a son and said, 'God has taken away my reproach,'" and Joseph was born. In the final analysis, you see the trust in the Lord is the important thing.

Now the final chapter of this particular chapter is the story of Jacob and Laban. Jacob's family is almost complete now. He has 11 sons. One last son shall be born later on, but this, Joseph, is the 11th his sons. And now Jacob is thinking about an independent home. He wants his own home, he doesn't want to be staying with Laban, and so he said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my own country. Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me depart; for you know the service that I have rendered you."

Laban said, "Jacob, if you are happy here stay with me. I know the Lord has blessed me because of you. I have divined." You can see from this that Laban is not a true believer. He looks to magic and other things for his guidance. And he went on to say, "Name me your wages, and I will give it." Now Jacob says, "You know how I have served you and how your cattle have fared with me. I came here when you didn't have anything and now look what you have." Well, Laban already knew that. That's why he wanted Jacob to stay. He saw he was a good shepherd.

But he said, "Now when shall I provide for my own household also?" And there is nothing wrong in wanting to provide for one's household. That's very proper and it is very proper for us as men to want to provide for our own household. In our day and time, however, our danger it seems generally is not so much providing as we are very tempted to prosper at the expense of our family; that is at the expense of their spiritual well-being, and I dare say that in the Christian world today, in the evangelical world, the greatest danger is not in not providing, but in making prospering our goal at the expense of the place of the Lord God in our lives. It's well to remember, men and women, that of all the treasures that we hug, and we have so many which we hug in this life, that we can carry no more out of this world than out of that dream that we had last night or the night before. Those things are things that are absolutely confined to this life, this temporary life, this really unreal life. There is a stanza that goes in this strange world of hoarding and growing gray, "All you can hold in your dead cold hand is what you have given away."

Well, Jacob, however, has a natural desire. He wants to provide for his family and so finally Laban, after asking him to name his wages, Jacob says, "I don't want anything from you, don't give me anything. If you just do this one thing, I will pasture and keep your flock." Now that was a fine gesture on Jacob's part because what he was saying is that I will walk in entire dependence on the providence of God in giving me a particular kind of sheep and goat, not the normal; the rare, the speckled, the spotted, and the striped and we will leave it up to the Lord God. Now that was an act of faith, and if he had stayed in that position, we would have to say he was trusting in the Lord God's

providence, and every goat and every sheep that he possessed would have been the result of the Lord's provision.

Now Laban was one of those men who believed that religion had a great value for other people, but not for himself. There are a lot of people like that in the world. There are a lot of them that hang out in churches. They think it is very good for their wife to be religious, but for them, well, that's a different matter, and there are some wives like that too. They think it is fine for their husbands to be spiritual men, but as far as they are concerned, no. Laban did not have any objection to the faith of Jacob or the faith of the members of the family. He just didn't have any for himself. Now he devised a little strategy. He was a little afraid of Jacob. I wonder if it was because he was suspicious of him or just because he was greedy. He did not want Jacob to have even any opportunity to steal from him, so he took all of those speckled and spotted and striped animals out of the flock which was what Jacob had proposed and he took them a three days' journey away, so there would be no possibility of Jacob stealing them.

Now Laban's mistrust, however, kindles mistrust in Jacob, or at least is the occasion for the manifestation of it, and so what we have here are two unprincipled men who are trying to outwit one another. Jacob is a rogue, but Laban is a bigger rogue. One of the commentators has said, “To try to vindicate Jacob, although some try to vindicate him, is like sprinkling rose water on a sewer.” It lowers the standard of morality to attempt to prove that there was not very much harm after all in what Jacob did.

The Bible is beautiful in the fact that it reveals to us exactly the kind of men its heroes are. And Jacob, “Let him be painted in colors borrowed from Rembrandt's brush,” one of the commentators says, “All the more wonder that the grace of God could overcome his duplicity and finally fashion him into the kind of saint that he ultimately becomes; one of the great lovable characters of the Bible in his latter days.”

Now Jacob is a smart man. Laban has Gentiled Jacob out of things that belong to him, but Jacob is going to Jew Laban out of some things as well. So we have one Gentiling the other out of

things and the other Jewing the other. Now, he uses three artifices. The first is the peeled rods in the troughs. He thought that prenatal influence might be given by this and therefore those animals when they saw those rods from which the bark had been peeled and saw the white, then there would be the birth of the speckled and spotted animals.

Incidentally, that has been by some special study shown to be absolutely unscientific. In the placenta and the umbilical cord which constitute the only connection between the mother and the fetus, there are no nerves, so there is no possibility of the working of these prenatal influences in this way, so no mechanism exists by which a mother can mark her offspring in the way that Jacob thought he was accomplishing the marking. The Bible records this not in support of the philosophy of Jacob, but simply to detail what he thought; that's what he thought; that's what others thought. In the next chapter, it will point out that Jacob's increase in flock is due to the power of the Lord God. He had determined to provide for Jacob those animals. Modern genetic studies on dominance and latency have cleared this incident of any scientific significance. So Jacob's success is attributed to selective breeding and particularly to divine intervention.

So the peeled rods were tried first and then when the animals were born, he would turn the animals around and have them look at these speckled and spotted and striped animals. That was the second artifice.

And then finally, he would use this at a particular time of the year, so he would have the strong animals and Laban would have the weak ones. I wonder what Jacob would have said if we had gone up to Jacob after he has seen his flock now begun to grow and he is keeping them over here and Laban's over here and he is having great success, and if you sat down with Jacob and said, "Look Jacob, what motivated you to do this? After all, is there any divine indication that this was the will of God for you?" What do you think he would say? Well, he might say at first, "It's necessary for self protection. My uncle's bent on defrauding me and keeping me down, and if I didn't do this he would succeed in it. I wouldn't have anything. You got to meet a man on his own ground,"

Jacob says, "He's a crook and I have to play the same game. He's a rogue. I have to be a little bit of a rogue too. I can't see the harm of turning his own weapons on himself. It's just being smart."

And there are many Christians who carry on their own life that way. They think that they go to deal with the world and therefore they must use the world's methodology and if the world is roguish, they will be a little roguish too. But what is the biblical principle? We meet fraud by faith. We meet cunning by conscience. We meet violence by divine virtue, the exercise of divine virtue. Just because Goliath wears a great big armor, should David wear it? David put on some armor and took three steps before the armor moved. Finally he threw it off. He said, "There is no reason for me to fight with the kind of armor that Goliath fought with. I'll use what God gave me." That little slingshot, it was that little slingshot, of course, that won the victory for him for our weapons are not carnal weapons. They are not weapons of the flesh. They are weapons of the spirit. They are weapons of dependence on God, and by dependence on God, we can see the remarkable things that the Lord God accomplishes, and he gets the glory and not men.

It always turns me inside when people want to say to preachers and teachers how God has blessed their ministry because they have been eloquent or because they have great knowledge of the word of God and because they are effective in this way or that. That's not the reason why God blesses. He will not give his glory to anybody else. He blesses because it is only through the power of God that anything is accomplished and he blesses because there is an instrument through which his mighty power may be exercised. So I can imagine Jacob saying I got to protect myself.

He had forgotten that Lord said, I will keep you. That was his promise in chapter 28, "I will keep you, wherever you go, I'll keep you. Furthermore, I'll not stop until I've done everything that I've said I would do." Now Paul says that to us. He says being confident of this very thing that he which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. We don't have anything to worry about. He is going to accomplish His work in us, and if we want to strive and scheme and maneuver, we will only make it difficult for ourselves.

He might say business is business. Other shepherds practice it. Laban knows all about it. When you're with the Chaldeans you do as the Chaldeans do. Laban was a Chaldean. But he's got to learn another principle. Let all men break human law; it stands abrogated on the statute book. If no one keeps the law, there is no law, but in the case of the divine laws, it's different. If everybody breaks the divine law, then the punishment still comes. There are many laws on our books that are not carried out. They are worthless because no one follows them. You can break them without any fear of suffering punishment.

They are human laws, but God's laws are not like that. His laws are always applicable, and consequently to say business is business, now that's something else. Or you might say this is the general practice, or it's possible even that Jacob said, "After all, I have to obtain bread. A man's got to live, you know? You've got to take care of your family, haven't you?" That sounds good, doesn't it? Except that a man doesn't have to live. We don't have to live. Who said we have to live? Suppose the martyrs had said we have to live, we wouldn't have their testimony. We wouldn't have the fruit of the martyrs' testimony. Suppose the Lord Jesus Christ had said, "A man's gotta live, you know?" And suppose he had come down from the cross.

The facts are men don't have to live, and principles are more important than our lives. Someone is said to have said to Pompey when he was getting ready to take a trip on the sea, which was rather tempestuous, that he should not go, he ought to live; remember, you ought to live. He said it's necessary for me to go. It's necessary for me to live and duty take precedence over life in situations like that. Well, Jacob unfortunately must suffer the consequences of his chicanery.

Well, our time is up. I want simply to say this that it is clear from this incident that believers are not sanctified persons yet and Jacob is not a sanctified person yet speaking from the practical standpoint. He is the scene of the struggle of the flesh and the spirit. Success comes through the Spirit who works on the principle of grace. Jacob's success, that success that he ultimately has, is attributed by him and by Moses to the Lord God. You see the sad results of marriages not consummated in harmony with the word of God. Much of Jacob's grief from the trials and

tribulations that he experience is traceable to the simple failure to listen to the truth that had been revealed to him. We are slaves, servants who are here to do the will of God. May we remember that we are not our own. We have been bought with a price and therefore we belong to the Lord God and his laws, his principles. His word is our guide in the experiences of life.

If you're here this morning and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then, of course, you're not even sanctified in this positional sense. You're not a saint. To become a saint, one believes in Jesus Christ. It's very simple, recognized from the word of God that you are a sinner that you have sinned against a Holy God, that you have broken His laws, that you are therefore guilty and under condemnation, and that Jesus Christ has offered the sacrifice by which you may have the forgiveness of sins.

Renouncing trust in yourself, in your good works, in your religion and whatever it may be, and fleeing to the cross of Christ and casting yourself upon the blood that was shed brings eternal life, very simple. One simply says, "I thank you Lord that Christ has died for sinners. I'm a sinner. I need salvation. I receive as a free gift, eternal life." May God speak to your heart. If you are here this morning without Christ, may you turn to Him. Having come to Him, you're enrolled in the family of God as one of the saints and then you become subject to the divine discipline, and it's a great thing to have a father who loves us enough to discipline us. No discipline is like the discipline of our Heavenly Father. It's a loving discipline, merciful discipline, but it's a discipline that guarantees that the ultimate end will be likeness to Jesus Christ and in eternity communion with the triune God and other saints. May God bring you to Christ. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We are grateful to Thee Lord for these pictures from the Old Testament, so true to life as it really is. Deliver us from the sin of Jacob in this particular time of his life. Deliver us from the failures that are set forth so plainly in the word of God.

Enable us, Lord, to learn through the word rather than through experience. Help us to remember that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he reap. We cannot escape the judgment of God. Thy hand is upon every aspect of our life. We are never apart from Thee.

“Jacob in the Crucible of Divine Discipline” by S. Lewis Johnson
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O God, work in this congregation. May the work of disciplining continue and may the end result be glory and pleasure in the triune God. If there are some here, Lord, who have never believed in Christ, O Father, we pray that Thy would work in them so that they recognize their need and the sufficiency of the meeting of it in Jesus Chris, blood that was shed. May they flee to him, right now. May grace, mercy and peace go with us as we part.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.