

ESAU—A BIRTHRIGHT DESPISED

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The story of Esau should wake us up, every one, and sober us. He wasn't a bad man; his brother Jacob appears in the Bible to have been more of a crook than he, deceiving his old father, and also deceiving Laban. No such serious crime is recorded of Esau. We don't read of his stealing anything or telling lies. He is the fine biblical example of an upright, decent man who minded his own business and didn't hurt anyone else. But he despised his birthright, sold it, and lost it forever; and all his tears afterwards were for nothing. Paul points to him as a warning to all of us: Look "diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God . . . like Esau" (Heb. 12:15, 16).

What was Esau's problem? The record doesn't indicate gambling, or adultery, or any crime: he didn't appreciate what God had given him in his birthright! He "fell short of the grace of God," that is, his heart wasn't moved by "grace," no contact was made. The "birthright" was the inestimable privilege of being a progenitor of the coming Messiah, the Savior of the world, to get his name listed in Matthew 1 or Luke 3 as shareholders with Christ in saving the world. Through the birthright was to come the blessing of Abraham to whom God promised that "in you shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). That didn't appeal to Esau; he was "profane," not that he necessarily swore curses, but his thinking and feeling were only

worldly, untouched by the “grace of God.” No tears ever came in his eyes; the thought of a cross on which the Prince of glory should die for the world was boring to Esau. He wasn’t a bad man; he just preferred the sports page.

The Bible says something that on the surface sounds awful, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,” God said (Rom. 9:13). That doesn’t mean that God rejected Esau; it means that He appreciated the devotion of Jacob and let Esau go his own way—let him have what he wanted.

Esau illustrates John 3:18, shows us what it means to “not believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” “Not believing” is not doing bad things necessarily; it is cold-heartedness, being “profane” in the sense of not being moved by the grace of God, watching Jesus die on His cross and nonchalantly flipping the channel. It’s what Jesus says permeates the church of Laodicea from top to bottom (Rev. 3:16-18). Ah yes, Christ loves everybody; but He can’t force people to enter His kingdom who would only be bored if they got there. He has too much self-respect.

Does God love Bill Gates, who is worth \$85 billion? Yes, for He “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (Jn. 3:16). Is He speaking to Bill Gates? Yes, for Jn. 1:9 says that Christ is the light that lighteth every man who comes into the world. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ is speaking to Bill Gates, seeking to encourage him to use his vast wealth in a way that will make him happy in the final day when “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that every one may receive . . .

in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power” (Rev. 20:6).

The Book of Hebrews makes clear that Jesus died that death “for every man.” The only possible conclusion is that no one on earth needs to die that second death at last unless he despises and rejects what the Son of God has already done for him.

according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). And God has given him the freedom to choose to respond, for He “hath dealt to every man a measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3). In some way, God is ministering to Bill Gates to appeal to him personally. And of course, He loves all the rich people in the world as well as the poor. The rich man may harden his heart, refuse to recognize that every dollar he has is the gift of the grace of Christ, he may seek only his own “fun” and “crucify to himself afresh the Son of God and put Him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:6), but in deepest love to his soul, Christ will “lighten” each one. He wants to use human agents, His own church on earth; but if the church is not faithful, the Lord will use some other agency. In the final day, each human being on earth will fall on his/her knees and confess that “the Saviour of the world” was indeed his/her Saviour who died his/her second death, who exhausted on his/her behalf “the full penalty of the law,” and thus gave him/her the gift of salvation which was despised and cast away as Esau “despised his birthright possession” (see Heb. 12:16, 17; Gen. 25:33).

Esau illustrates the fate of the lost; the birthright was his; God foreknew what he would do, but in no way did God “program” him to “despise” his birthright. So, every human being has a “birthright” to eternal salvation given him “in Christ.” Jesus taught that those who are lost will be lost not because He did not give them their “birthright” but because they “despised” it (see Jn. 3:17-21). If

somebody out there knows Bill Gates personally, please share this Good News with him.

The strings of a grand piano are always strung tight with tension; they have to be, or there is no music. There is a tension in salvation: on the one hand there are Bible assurances of salvation, and on the other hand there are dire warnings about the tragedy of ultimately being lost. That tragedy would be ultimate; to lose eternal life—it's unimaginable. But Jesus plainly tells us that *many* who have thought they were His followers will say to Him in the final day as they stand before the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11, 12), "Lord! Lord! Haven't we done everything just right, cast out devils in Your name, done many wonderful works," etc. etc. and He will be forced to say to them, sadly, "I never knew you" (Mt. 7:21-23).

One thoughtful writer has said that the *many* will include "the great proportion" of those who now *appear* to be genuine. It's scary. And yet the tension is there: God wants us to stop worrying about our eternal salvation. Jesus says, "Fear not, little flock; for it is the Father's good pleasure to give YOU the kingdom!" (Lk. 12:32). Paul says that He "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3, 4). Why will anyone, then, be lost if it is not His will that they should be? Calvinism says nobody CAN be lost if it is God's will that he/she be saved; but the Bible makes clear that by unbelief man/woman can "frustrate the grace of God."

A good answer to the tension is found in the story of Esau, the elder brother of Jacob. As the elder (if

world to realize how Paul says that Christ GAVE the "free gift" of "much more abounding grace" and "justification" to "all men" (Rom. 5:15-18, 20). His "much more abounding grace" is as unlimited as His atonement! As surely as God gave "the birthright" to Esau, so surely He gave the GIFT of salvation to "all men," in Himself. He gave Himself for the world and to the world. But along with that "gift," He gave the power of choice; and therefore no one will at last be lost who has not chosen to resist, reject, "despise," and has "sold" the precious "birthright" that was GIVEN to him (Gen. 25:33, 34; Heb. 12:16, 17; Rev. 22:17). "Whosoever will may come." Those who "will not" won't want to enter the New Jerusalem.

The Book of Hebrews is the "New Covenant" book that God has given us. It glorifies Jesus as God, equal with the Father (1:3-8), yet as the One who was "made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death" (2:9). He is the only Boy who was born in our 6000+ years who grew up knowing that He must die a "death for every man" (2:9).

What we call "death" the Bible calls a "sleep." But this death that Jesus must "taste for every man" is not that death; Jesus did not merely go to sleep for us for a weekend; and it would not make sense to say that He merely slept "for every man."

The death that Jesus died "for every man" has to be the "second death" that is mentioned in Revelation 2:11 and 20:14. It comes at the end of the 1000 years of Revelation 20, after the second resurrection. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part

God's holy law. He has unfitted himself for heaven. Don't be Esau!

Did Jesus die for everybody? Or only for "the elect," that is, a special group that God has chosen shall be saved? Has He consigned all others to be lost?

One of the celebrated "five points of Calvinism" is called "Limited Atonement," the idea being that Christ offered His blood as an atonement only for a limited group of people--the lucky "elect."

If the idea is true, it leaves me wondering if I am one of the lucky few! And that can trigger all kinds of depression, endless worry. Or if I can be sure that I am one of the lucky few, then it leads toward monstrous arrogance. Why can I assume that the Lord has chosen me to eternal salvation and consigned my neighbor next door to eternal damnation? He may be as good a person as I am!

Careful scholarship brings forth massive evidence now from Calvin's writings that he did NOT believe in "limited atonement." He believed that Christ died for all men. That's Good News indeed.

But the same careful scholarship finds that Calvin believed that only the sacrifice at the cross was for all men, but His intercession at the throne of His Father is "limited" to "the elect." In other words, Calvin believed that all that Christ accomplished at His cross does no one any good unless Christ intercedes for him--and that is what is "limited" only to those special "elect." Salvation is still due to a special, pre-ordained, arbitrary divine "election."

Calvin was a wonderful man and did enormous good. But he lived too early in the history of the

only by a few minutes!) the birthright was his; it could not be taken from him. But stupid-like, he *sold* it in a moment of sensual gratification, and never got it back "though he sought it carefully with tears." (Paul likens his gratification of appetite to committing fornication, and many do willingly *sell* their birthright to heaven for such a momentary thrill; see Heb. 12:15-17). When Esau was hungry he smelled the stew that Jacob was cooking and made the solemn, oath-bound choice to *despise* his birthright for it.

This is illustrated in the experience of Esau; he had the "birthright," it was his by inheritance as the elder son of Jacob. But our Book of Hebrews tells us that "for one morsel of meat [Esau] sold his birthright" (12:16). In modern language, Esau gave up his title to the kingdom of God and eternal life for what we ordinarily call a mere "square meal" of venison, when he was hungry.

To be fair, we must say that the younger twin Jacob took a cruel advantage of his older twin brother Esau when the latter was inordinately hungry; Jacob knew the exact spices to use. But the deed done had eternal consequences. "Afterward, when he [Esau] would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (12:17). He cried tears forever afterwards.

The most expensive "good square meal" the world has ever known about!

And now Esau is the grand prototype of all the lost who will stand before the Great White Throne.

What will hurt them the worst will not be the extent of the Fahrenheit temperature of the *fire* but the painful, burning conviction in every cell of their being that the birthright to eternal life in the kingdom of God was GIVEN to them, they had it, but they threw it away for “the pleasures of sin for a season” (11:25). It’s not God’s arbitrary choice to shut them out; it’s by their own unfitness for Heaven’s companionship.

When the lost at last “perish” in what the Bible calls “the Lake of Fire,” will God still love them? Or will His once-present love have changed to hatred or indifference? This may seem like a silly question; but your answer may well spell the difference for you in your attitude toward God, whether you are happy in His love, or uncertain of it.

There is a profound statement in Revelation that indicates that great sorrow will grip Heaven when the lost perish at last. Introducing the passage about final judgment is this statement: “And when He [the Lamb] had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven . . .” (7:1). We read that “God is love” (*agape*; 1 Jn. 4:8), and that “*agape* never fails” (1 Cor. 13:8). We read that when wicked men crucified the Savior, He prayed, “Father, forgive them.” We read that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ez. 18:32; 33:11). That means He takes severe pain in their death! God’s love is different than ours; it never fails. When at last the wicked realize, like Esau, how they have sold their “birthright” to eternal life, they can find no place of repentance, though they seek it with tears (see Heb. 12:16, 17) because they have burned all

for the Scriptures “testify of Me,” said Jesus (John 5:39).

* One controversy that has stirred good Christian people for 400 years is between Calvinism and Arminianism. The problem is what the Bible means when it says so clearly that “Christ died for the world,” is “the Savior of the world,” “gave Himself a ransom for all men,” “tasted death for every man,” is “the propitiation for the sins of the whole world,” “all are being justified freely by His grace,” “the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life,” etc. Calvinists have always said those texts mean that Christ has accomplished salvation for some people—that is, only those whom God has predestinated to be saved. Arminians say those texts mean that “all men” have a potential for being saved, it’s possible for them to be saved, but it is only IF; Christ didn’t actually accomplish salvation for anyone UNLESS . . . And between these two views a great gulf is fixed.

The story of Esau resolves this controversy of 400 years. It was an accomplished fact that he HAD the “birthright.” It was his by birth, no one could take it from him, not even God, for it was his by the oath of God to the firstborn among Abraham’s descendants.

But Esau “despised” what was HIS and what had been GIVEN him, and then he “sold” it. And “Esau” is the name of every person who will finally be lost. Christ GAVE salvation to him but he wouldn’t have it. He refused to receive the atonement that would have reconciled his alienated heart to God and to

iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6); (g) yes, “we see Jesus . . . that He by the grace of God should taste death [the real thing] for every man” (Heb. 2:9); (h) yes, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . hath made us accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:3-6; a wise writer said that the “us” is the entire human race [“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,’ embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our representative.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 113]). (i) Esau already HAD the birthright—he didn’t have to do a thing to obtain it; he threw away what had already been given him (Gen. 25:21-34; Heb. 12:17, 18).

Could the Good News be better than many Christian people believe it is? Christ DID save the human race; now don’t resist and reject what He has done. Don’t be like Esau and throw away what He has given you.

Dear, sweet, kind Christian people sometimes want to shy away from controversy within the church. But controversy is not always bad. It stirs people up to think and to study and thus to discover very precious truth that God’s people need to appreciate. We are coming close to the second coming of Jesus and the end of the world, and we need truth in order to stand. If you want to run away when controversy arises, let me tell you where is the only place you can go to find none: the cemetery.

* Jesus said, “Take heed, that no one deceive you” (Matt. 24:4). The only way to be sure not to be deceived is to study the word of God for ourselves,

bridges behind themselves and rendered their own souls incapable of repentance.

Their anguish will be indescribable, for at last they will be fully conscious. Most severe will be the pain of those who at one time rejoiced in “the knowledge of the truth” but who like Judas Iscariot betrayed their sacred trusts (see Heb. 10:26-29). But does God love them unto the bitter end? Yes! Will He share their sorrow? Yes. Will the “righteous” inside the New Jerusalem gloat over their anguish? No; there will be “silence in heaven . . .” We can see how God will feel when we look at how He cried about ancient Israel going down to destruction. Hear Him weeping: “How can I give thee up?” (Hos. 11:8).

And we see Jesus (who revealed the Father to us) as He is convulsed with sobbing anguish as He looks on the temple one evening for the last time: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Mt. 23:37). What’s the point? Think seriously about that divine love for you. Beware lest you slip into that position of “ye would not!” Be gathered under those “wings.”

All who believe the Bible recognize that Adam brought “condemnation” upon the entire human race. In fact, the Bible says we are all by nature “in Adam,” at “enmity against God” (1 Cor. 15:22; Rom. 8:7). “Adam:” is our given name. But the question we must ask is this: “Is that condemnation ‘permanent’?” If it is, it’s Very Bad News for the human race.

Can we find some Good News in the Bible about what Adam did for us? Yes, what Adam did for the human race has been reversed by a Man whom the Bible calls “the last Adam,” or the second Adam. The Father sent Him down to this planet with a specific job description: “Save that lost sheep of a world! Earn the title ‘Saviour of the world,’ ‘Saviour of all men!’” Before He died Jesus told Him, “I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do” (see Jn. 17:4; 4:42; 1 Tim. 4:10). All the evil that Adam did for the entire human race Christ reversed.

He did more than make the blessing provisional in the sense that it was a mere offer depending on contingencies: “God so loved the world that He GAVE His only begotten Son,” not merely offered to give Him. To make his point crystal clear, Paul five times in four verses emphasizes that what Christ did for “all men” was GIVE a GIFT (Rom. 5:15-18). Not once does Paul say that it was a mere offer depending on IF . . . When God draws a picture for us it is better than a thousand confusing words of theology.

That picture is Esau, elder son of Isaac. Esau was GIVEN the birthright by virtue of his birth. No law court in earth or heaven could have deprived him of it. Jolly-go-lucky sportsman that he was, his father adored him. He was a good worldly man. But the “condemnation” with tears that he ended up with was entirely his own doing: he “sold his birthright” (Gen. 25:34; Heb. 12:16, 17). He “despised” it. There will not be one person lost in the final lake of fire because of the “condemnation” given him “in Adam.” Christ TOOK that upon Himself, died his

second death. “Every one” who ends up there will get there only because he has “sold” the birthright that Christ gave him “in Himself.”

What did Christ accomplish on His cross? He said He had come to save the world, and He told His Father before He died that He had done it (Jn. 12:48; 17:4).

If what Christ accomplished by His sacrifice was only an offer that is ineffective unless and until we take the first step in believing, then our salvation depends on our own initiative. But Jesus took the initiative; He redeemed the world before we were born. We simply respond to His initiative. Esau is the Bible example of how the plan of salvation works. If the merely “offer” idea is true, then logically Esau did not HAVE the birthright; he would have had to DO something in order to get it.

Surely the Holy Spirit is leading Christian people worldwide to comprehend what happened on the cross. Only when Christ is “lifted up” there, can He “draw all men” to Himself. That truth will be the essence of the final message that will “lighten the earth with glory” (Jn. 12:32; Rev. 18:1-4).

What does the Bible say? (a) Christ reversed the “condemnation” that Adam by his sin brought on the human race; (b) He gave the “gift” of “justification and life for all men” (Rom. 5:18, KJV); (c) He gave the world this “gift by grace” (vss. 15, 16); (d) yes, the same “all” who sinned were “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (3:23, 24); (e) yes, He secured for the human race a “judicial . . . verdict of acquittal” (5:16-18, NEB); (f) yes, “the Lord hath laid on Him the