Genesis 24–25: A DITP Class

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Genesis 24: A Bride for Isaac

I believe that we'll have more time for discussion this morning. This is Genesis 24 and 25, and we take up here the question of Isaac, and especially a bride for him, a bride for Isaac.

Whenever we have the figure of a bride in Scripture, we should piece it together and compare it with other scriptures, and it especially should remind us of what? Yes, the bride of Christ, the bride of Christ. So there's the Christological significance of the bride of Isaac.

You can also see in this the sovereignty of God in working out the bride of Isaac. And we want to think of a personal application, and that personal application might well be in the area of choosing a marriage partner ourselves or, better stated, letting God choose our marriage partner.

And there's certainly a very personal and practical application in that. We see truth as it relates to the providence of God. Does God really provide and lead in the circumstances of life? Is He really able to do that circumstantially? And to what extent are circumstances checked by other aspects of the will of God in interpreting them? And then, of course, in the 25th chapter, the very important truth involving Jacob and Esau.

And Jacob and Esau particularly bring before us the doctrine of divine election. We see that in the book of Romans. "Jacob have I loved, but" what? "Esau have I hated." As it says, before they had been born or had

done any good or evil thing. So there are some very important lessons involved here.

We call attention in your notes to the spiritual order, which is suggestive of a dispensational character. Abraham offers up Isaac. And this is, of course, typical, as we know, of what? The crucifixion. Then Sarah is removed from the scene, which is typical of Israel's removal from the scene of primary dealings with God. And then we see the search begun and the concern for a bride for Isaac. So that's the bringing in of what? [The church.]

I want you to see all these things. You see the immediate historic implications; you begin always with that. Again, you look for the Christological overtones. You look for Jesus Christ, the unifying theme of the Bible. You look for personal applications. And then, of course, you always see the progress of God's dealings, or the dispensations.

We said here that we're not speaking here, in the life of faith, of the call of sinners in the gospel, but we're seeing the calling of the saints to a special relationship with Christ on high. We also see that we have typically an indication that the church is not a continuation of Israel. This is a very important thing in the New Testament. We have the Jew, the Gentile, and the church of God.

One of the most confusing things in the understanding of God's Word is to confuse the church and Israel, or to think of Israel simply as the people of God in the Old Testament and the church as the people of God in the New Testament, and other than that, there's no difference. That's an ultra-simplification which they use.

Very obviously, there is a difference in type, and there is a difference in the express doctrine of the New Testament. Obviously, you wouldn't try to prove this by types, but you illustrate what is directly taught in the New Testament.

Not an unequal yoke

In the first few verses, I think that we can see that Abraham has a concern that his son does not marry a wife of the heathen around them, which under normal circumstances would have been the thing, wouldn't it? They lived among the heathen, and most likely Isaac would have found his wife among the Canaanitish women. And since Abraham was concerned that this not happen, what does this suggest to us? New Testament doctrine. Yes, the unequal yoke. This principle that God is against the unequal yoke is continuously taught, we believe, really from the book of Genesis. We think that it is spiritually set forth in the acts of creation itself. God is always concerned about separating the light from the darkness.

We think of the practical, and we're very conscious of it. You see that when you marry a non-Christian, there are all kinds of things that are opened up. Can you think of any series of things that are opened up in connection with marrying an unsaved person? What are the various things?

Okay, you disobeyed God. You know that He says not to do it, but you do it anyway. So you start out with a disobedience to God, which in itself, if there was nothing else involved in it, puts you on a bad footing. It doesn't make any difference what He says if you disobey Him. What else? You see it even in Abraham's later marriage.

Yes, it breeds strife, because "can two walk together, except they be agreed?" You notice it doesn't say, can two sleep together unless they be agreed. A lot of people sleep together that don't agree, but you can't walk together in the course of life unless you're agreed. And that really has something more to do with it than making a profession. If you want to live for Christ, you have to have a higher qualification for a wife for yourself than that she simply be a Christian. I mean, that won't get it done. If she really doesn't love the Lord and want to be committed to Him, to serve Him at personal sacrifice, you're out of luck, really, because a carnal Christian for a wife is just about as bad — almost as bad, I should say — as an unsaved person, as far as its practical effect.

As far as disobedience to God, you have to be agreed. And the tendency, of course, in order to keep peace in the family when you become married — and I think you realize that it's not only important but it's almost essential that you have some measure of peace in your relationship. You cannot live in a relationship with a woman with tension between you. It's just bad news, right, married men? It's bad news. You've got to get along with that woman, or you just can't go out and fight the battles of the Lord. You can't even go out and fight the battles of the commercial world. You can't fight all day and then fight all night, or have tension between you. You've got to learn to get along. So in order to get peace, if she's not interested in the things of the Lord and you are, what are you going to do? Why, sure, you're going to get along; you're going to compromise. And you have to get down to the common denominator, and the common denominator is not going to be the things of Christ.

Okay, what else? Your children. What's involved there? Yes, there are tremendous problems when you do that. You're trying to raise them in the nurture and the admonition of the Lord, and one person doesn't know the Lord, you see, so they introduce the habits of the unsaved there and the outlook of the unconverted.

Of course, there's another aspect of your children, too. That's right. That's right. As a child of God, each of you, in a sense, has the potential to be the progenitor of a godly seed. In a sense, if you dilute that in any way, if you intermingle it, then you've got tremendous implications in your descendants. As you recall, the Old Testament teaches that you are not to intermingle seed of different grains. Recall, the ox and the ass are not to what? They're not to plow together. Different kinds of material were not to be sewn in the same garment.

And so you understand that there are tremendous implications for all of your descendants. If you do not raise children for God, not only are you going to raise children for hell, but the children that you raise may well be, if we read the book of Genesis right, the greatest enemies of the people of God. Isn't that true? See, you're not only going to raise kids for hell; you're going to raise them to be the enemies of the people of God. That's a pretty solemn thought, isn't it?

Letting God choose

Choosing a life partner. Well, perhaps we should better say, let God choose your partner. Did God choose Rebekah for Isaac? The servant typically is who? The Holy Spirit. So what is Isaac doing all this time? Is he checking out the chicks down in Canaan? Going over to

the nearest village, or going to the weekend dance in the synagogue to look over the dolls?

What is he doing? He's a young fellow, forty years old. What's he doing? What is he waiting on? Waiting on the Lord. How in the world is he going to find a good woman if he doesn't get out and stir himself up and put on his best robe and get out there and move around, check the action?

That's one of the hardest things. People can believe that Jesus can save your soul. But they have no notion at all that Jesus can provide the right partner. I hesitate to think of the hundreds, yea, the thousands of hours that I have spent sitting down and very quietly trying to convince young people, especially girls more than boys, that God can provide a partner for them of His choosing. I don't care if she's sitting out in the Sahara Desert. I'm going to tell you, they don't believe it. They really don't believe it.

They can believe that God can save their soul. They certainly don't believe that God can provide a partner unless they get in there and help the Lord out a little bit. And that's exactly what you don't have here. You see, the worst thing that can happen to you when you take things into your own hand is that God will let you live with the consequences of it. I've found that in so many things. If you want to take things into your own hand, the Lord will let you do it. And then you live with the consequences.

Of course, they don't like that. This raises the question — in the ancient world, and as a matter of fact right up to fairly recent times, and perhaps in our culture — the families have always had a great deal to say about whom

people married in the family, right? I mean, in a great part of the world, that's still true. We think the American dating pattern, "choose your own poison," is the only way, which has to do with the arrogance of the modern mind: our culture is the only way. But in the history of mankind, it's safe to say that 97% of the history of mankind is against us. The family has always had a significant role in the selection of a partner for their children.

And this raises an interesting question, having been exposed to Bill Gothard on the chain of command. If you believe that the authority of God can well be exercised or mediated through the authority of your family, you've got to believe that, in spite of all you think, there's some residual of wisdom there, and that the parents might well be listened to. Whereas the practice in our country is to totally ignore them. We feel there's nobody better able to choose a life partner for me than me. And my observation is that there's nobody that's a poorer judge of the right partner for you or me than you or me.

In counseling, I've had the sad difficulty of telling people, sometimes when I've seen them make the same mistake over, "If you had fifteen other husbands or wives to choose, so far as I can tell, you'd make the same mistake every time." And we see that tragically. As someone has said, the most important thing that we learn about history is that men learn nothing from history. They really don't. They go right back into the same bear trap. They're sure they won't, but they absolutely do. They seem to fly together with the wrong people like iron filings to a magnet. They seem to have no sense at all about whom they take up with.

It almost seems as if, when a man makes up his mind about getting married, he's going to get married no matter who walks into the room. He gets that notion, and the first girl that comes along and gets him in the gun sights, in the crosshairs — he's gone. Now, he may have the conceit to think that he chooses the woman, but that's only a conceit. I will assure you that the woman sights in on you. That's a male conceit, that you choose her. The fact of the matter is, in most instances, she chooses you. The best person to choose a bride for you is the Lord.

Is there a specific woman for you? Or, if you were women, I would say, is there a specific man for you? What do you think the Scripture teaches? Any one of a thousand women okay for you? What do you think, Fred? How many agree with Fred? Hands down. How many of you don't agree? Don't agree, okay. What's that? How many of you don't know? You're agnostic, huh?

Well, let me raise the question. Was there only one woman for Isaac? There was, wasn't there? Only one woman for Jesus: the bride of Christ. You see, if you let God pick your partner, He will get the person that most complements you. Sometimes — I don't know — I think that you can make a case for "opposites attract." That's certainly true chemically, isn't it? When opposites come together, there's a complementing of each other.

We make a great deal about similarity of interest. I think spiritual values have to be together. They have to be together in the spiritual area. But there is a sense in which a man and a woman should complement each other. I don't mean say nice things about each other; I mean "complement" is to supply what the other lacks.

We may need a woman to sandpaper our rough edges, and to oppose us in our conceit and male vanity, or to supply the tenderness where we have roughness, or to supply something of an intellectual character if we're a little slow in the upper story, or to have any number of other qualities and sensibilities that we need and don't have. And by the same token, we also can supply to them what they need.

I don't know whether we've ever thought of our marriage as a ministry to one another, but in a sense I think that we can argue that there's a real ministry of a man and a woman to each other. If the two shall be one flesh, and if God Himself said it is not good for man to live alone, it follows that there is something that a woman and a man can bring to each other that complements each other, and without which, somehow or another, they're not entirely complete — except for those individuals of whom Paul tells us, that are set apart by God and enabled to live a life of celibacy. There are such people, and God does call them to that. Brother MacDonald feels that way about it in his own life and ministry. Certainly Paul did, and I'm sure there have been many others. But it is clear from Scripture that that is the exception rather than the rule. Nevertheless, it is an important exception, and every one of us should consider whether God's decision for us is that we are better to remain unmarried, because there are some that can do that. And, of course, it's an advantage in the service of God, if you can, to some extent.

The servant's prayer

The sovereignty of God had only one woman for Isaac. And it's interesting in this question of direction. We find

this in verses 10 to 14. He had a very clear idea about what he wanted. He wanted someone of the family. He wanted to keep in mind the idea of the seed. He did not want to intermingle their seed with the seed of the Canaanitish people. And so the servant has sworn to go forth.

It's very interesting that, as he goes seeking the woman, what does he begin by doing? He prays. He prays about it. And do you think this servant was sincere about wanting to know the will of God? I really do. I think a lot of people pray and they're not sincere at all. I think they just pray and say, "Lord, I want You to show me the woman. Now, I really have in mind Debbie. Now, if You don't want me to marry Debbie — and she's awful cute — well, You just strike me dead with lightning, and then I'll know You don't want me to marry Debbie. Stop me cold right in the parking lot. Cause me to fall over my own feet when I go up the stairs. Nail up the door so I can't go in when I try to enter. You stop me, Lord." I don't know why they don't stack it the other way around, because the servant really did stack the deck against getting any woman, didn't he? In what way is that true? How did he stack the deck against an easy solution? First of all — yes.

Do you have any idea how much water it would take to water a camel? Those things can go seven days without water. Do you have any idea how much water she'd have to draw to water one camel, drawing it out of that well — and ten of them? She was a husky one. Do you have any idea what the odds were that some girl would come along there and say, "How would you like a drink?" And you say, "Gee, that'd be wonderful." She draws it up and gives you a drink. And she says to you, "Let me water

those ten camels for you." Do you have any idea what the odds would be against that? What would they be, Fred? About the same odds. Sure. Fantastic. He really stacked the deck against it. You know why? Because he really wanted the will of God. He wanted the will of God.

But you know, when that woman did that — gee, I'd have rushed out there, kissed her on both cheeks, and said, "You're the one." But he didn't do that. What did he do? What did he say? He said, "Well, I'm not sure. I'm not sure." It says, verse 21, "And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not." He really wasn't quite sure.

I like the story of the man who was so conservative. He was riding along the road, and his friend says, "Look at those sheep up there. They've just been sheared." And he said, "Well, on one side anyway." He wasn't jumping to conclusions. "Well, I wonder if this is the woman the Lord has made." Okay. And he said, "Now, tell me about your parents. Whose daughter are you?" What did he care who her parents were?

Sure, that's right, because she's got to be of Abraham's family; she's got to be related. That's one of the conditions. In other words, he doesn't interpret circumstances — which is the incident of the camels — apart from the will of God; in this case the will of Abraham was, to the servant, the will of God. See?

And people are running around, you know, and they're getting ready to do something, and any little thing happens — a circumstance — and, man, it must be the will of God, you know. A circumstance popped up there. The door just flew wide open, and, my friend, it must be God's will. It might be the devil's will. Do you think the

devil ever makes it easy, circumstantially, for you to do the wrong thing? Why, sure. But it tells us in the Scripture that circumstances must always be compared with the will of God. I don't care what the circumstances are to make it easy. You shouldn't do it if it's contrary to the will of God.

Some people are really praying to God about whether they should, for example, marry an unsaved man or something like that. They're wasting their time, and no amount of circumstances would be sufficient to indicate that, because it's contrary to the will of God. Circumstances can never be judged apart from the will of God.

How is this illustration of the servant, in regard to prayer, applied correctly? For a partner? Well, I think our prayer should be, "Lord, if You want me to have a wife" — and I say that because you're all fellows here; the same thing goes for the gals, and they have a much more difficult problem, because they reason within themselves that there are more Christian girls around than there are fellows, and that they can't be as aggressive, they say, as the fellows, although that's disappearing these days — "but, Lord, I'm open to the idea that You may not want me to marry, and I want to keep that in front of me. But if You want me to marry, I pray that You'll make it absolutely clear, so that I cannot doubt that that's what You want and that this certain girl is the one. And I want You to show it to me, in Your own way, in a way that I cannot possibly doubt."

Mr. MacDonald has an interesting way. He tells the Lord sometimes, "Well, Lord, You know how dull I am, and I don't get things straight." And he really asks not only for

the specific individual things, but for other things to confirm those things. He has, more or less, not only indications but also confirming indications to reinforce the indications. In fact, in giving up my position to do this, I asked the Lord for three different things, all of which were quite unlikely at the time that I asked them, and yet God in a very gracious way gave all those three things to me.

However, it's interesting that he did not dictate to God. Do you understand that? He said so and so and so, verses 10 through 14. And then he said, "Let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher," she shall say, and so on. Let it be that way. That's the important thing: that we don't dictate to God. I don't want to be in the position ever of presuming to tell God what to do, or how to do it. I would ask Him if He would graciously indicate it to me.

And the things that I asked of God, in my instance, of course, had to do with very practical things that I felt were important to my being here. And they weren't just arbitrary. It wasn't a case of putting out the fleece and asking for something, in that sense, supernatural. I mean, I didn't ask God to drop a golden Cadillac on my lawn or anything like that. I asked for those things that had a practical importance to the ministry. My whole attitude was, "I'm open, and I just want You to make it clear." And He very graciously did that. Now, He didn't have to do that, but He was gracious enough to do that. So I think we should avoid at all costs dictating to God how He chooses to communicate with us. But we can certainly ask, and it does say, "Ask, and it shall be given you," okay?

"I being in the way, the LORD led me"

Any other questions in this entire sequence here, before we go on to Jacob and Esau? There are a lot of things that I put here in your notes, and I just don't want to review them here. Any questions that you have in this area?

There's a lot of rehearsing of the circumstances in the passage — how they go to the house of her family. And as a matter of fact, a very important expression in verse 27 should be really underlined in all your Bibles. It's a classic. It says that Abraham's servant thanks God, and then he says, in the last part of verse 27, "I being in the way, the LORD led me." It's one of the great classics on divine leading. "I being in the way, the LORD led me."

The servant had a mission. He wasn't just sitting at home lying on his cot. He was in motion for God, but open to the leading of God. And it was as he was in the way, seeking the guidance of God, that there he experienced the guidance of God. And I think that's very suggestive in matters of divine guidance.

Remember, as you minister or counsel, the most important single subject that you will ever run into with people is the continuous subject of "How can I know the will of God?" The whole theme of our summer program was the will of God. And when we got through, we hadn't even scratched the surface. People were still asking questions: "How can I know the will of God for my life?" I don't think that you will encounter any other question from people, in dealing with them, as much as that single question. You really ought to give a lot of thought to it. How can I know the will of God? Anything

that you can read, scripturally or otherwise, you should think about the will of God.

Yes, Pete?

Well, I think, first of all, that we must understand that there is an importance to it in the mind of God. Just like we said, the very amount of space devoted to it indicates that it is important in the sight of God. Now, the tabernacle is a good illustration, because He went over it carefully with them, because it was the picture of the true tabernacle in heaven. As we get into the tabernacle, we'll understand that every detail of the tabernacle was extremely important in the sight of God, and He wanted to get it straight. And so we have to believe that the reviewing of these circumstances is important, as far as God has indicated, for our understanding.

I think that you can take the time — and we haven't done that this morning. Of course, I don't want you to think that we're exhausting everything in Genesis by the little time that we've spent in it here. But notice his courtesy to the family, and the family's receptivity to the leading of God. They showed that they were in contact with God themselves by their whole attitude. You know, a stranger comes along and wants to marry your daughter, see? Well, your initial reaction is, "Get lost. Who are you?" But they were open to the leading of God. And this girl's going to go off to marry a perfect stranger, and she's open to the leading of God. And I'm sure she was a very attractive woman.

Marriage is permanent

This matter of the dowry, for example, is important because it was a confirmation of the permanence of the

relationship. You see, one of the things that we see today, as has been pointed out, is that people decide to get married and they have no notion whatever that it is necessarily going to be permanent. Their whole concept is, "We'll get married, and if it doesn't work out, well, we'll just separate and find somebody else." That's the contemporary attitude toward marriage. You see, our whole attitude toward marriage has to be based upon this: when we make that selection, or God makes that selection for us, as far as God is concerned, it is His intention that that's it. You're going to spend the rest of your life with that single woman. And if you have gone astray, there's nothing worse than spending the rest of your life with the wrong woman — wrong for you. That's a nightmare. And if you don't believe that, you just wait until you get into marriage counseling. You listen to the sad, sad story, to the misery, to the unhappiness, and to the tears.

The other day Jack didn't have the "Do not disturb" sign on the door, and unfortunately I opened the door, and there was a married woman here in the congregation, weeping at his desk, and he was praying with her about a very sad circumstance in her marriage. And it really is sad. And it's so sad in many instances that you're tempted to do what you as a Christian should not do. And that is — I don't think that any Christian counselor should counsel divorce.

I don't counsel people to get divorced. I don't counsel people to leave other people. I'm not in the position of condemning them under certain circumstances when they decide to do so, especially when they're being physically mistreated or the children are abused. But I don't do that. Although, as a man, and as a human being,

I've been sorely tempted to do that in many instances. It's a great temptation. And you just say to yourself, you know, isn't it too bad they got married? There are some people that seem to me so utterly unsuited to each other.

I remember a man told me one time he just couldn't stand his wife anymore. And in a way, I kind of understood it, you know. She was a trial. And I said, "Well, now listen, brother, didn't you know she was this kind of woman when you married her?" And he said, "Well, yeah, in a way — not really." I said, "Well, what is it you can't stand?"

"Well," he said, "among other things, she's so slow. She's so slow. She can hardly move off the dime." That's true. And I said, "Now, didn't you know that she was slow when you married her?" And he said, "Well, I knew it, but I didn't know it was that bad." That's something you'll hear over and over and over: "I knew it, but I did not know it was that bad." And I said, "Dear brother, if you didn't know that woman was the slowest woman God ever created, you were the only person that didn't know it."

It was obvious. I married them, and it was obvious to me. Because when people come to you to get married, they're not coming to you to tell them they shouldn't get married. They're coming to you to formalize it. The chances that you're going to stop an intended marriage when they ask you to marry them are about the chances that you're going to get struck by lightning. Occasionally you can stave it off, and something happens. I've done that. You've got to be very careful about that.

But you just say, well, this marriage sure wasn't made in heaven. What we have to counsel there is the grace of God. The God of recovery, you see, can overrule, and He can sweeten that relationship and work in that relationship to make it acceptable in some way by His grace, in spite of the fact that they've made a mistake, I think. And that should be the line of our counseling. We should trust God for that, not say, "Well, I'd like to start all over and do it again."

And this whole matter indicates that this whole idea was one of permanence. A lot of these details — a lot of this is a rehearsal of oriental custom; you know, that's how it's done, the exchange of gifts and all that kind of stuff. These are orientalisms, indicating the customs of the day. But basically, you know, this is going to be a permanent relationship.

I think that sometimes you could say, "Well, Lord, You could have shortened that up a little bit there, you know." But who am I to say what God should have shortened up? I mean, I would have liked to have Him give me more details on creation, see? But He didn't think that was important for me to know. If He had thought so, He would have said so. He's more interested in the people than anything else. We can say that God Himself is really people-oriented.

Genesis 25: Jacob and Esau

Okay, let's go into chapter 25, then, and this is tremendously important. Jacob and Esau are the key of the story.

It talks about Abraham and Keturah. Interesting thing: this old man, after being dead as far as procreation is concerned — then he has Isaac, and all of a sudden he marries all these other women, and she starts having children like crazy, isn't it? A new lease on life, didn't he?

It's been suggested that, dispensationally, these might well be the millennial nations or something like that. But there is an indication, as you have in your notes, that all these children were not exactly an unmixed blessing. And that is indicated in what? What has shown that? How has it shown that they weren't exactly a big blessing? Names? Names again, yes. How would you like to have kids named like this? Snare. Strife. Contention. "I want you to meet my kids: Snare, Strife, and Contention." Those kids will love that. Yes, yes. How about Depression? "Here's old Depression over there." I'm sure he was depressed when he was around, though.

Barrenness, and delay that is not denial

Okay. And in verse 19 and following we have, of course, a very interesting thing that occurs throughout Scripture, and that is the woman that's barren. We have to understand that barrenness in the Scriptures, especially in the Old Testament, was considered a judgment of God. We don't think that today, you know. Is it Ehrlich over here at Stanford, the big population man,

who says the mother of the year has been sterilized and has two adopted children? You know, it's just so anti-procreation today. In that day, children were exactly what the Scripture says they were. They were the heritage of the Lord. And a woman that couldn't have children considered that she was under the judgment of God. We have all this gynecological information today, you know, and yet we fail to see the divine factor in it.

Children are a heritage of the Lord, and happy is the man that has his quiver full of them. I think we have to make a distinction, though, between countries that do not know Christ and the children of Christians. We must remember that we bring forth the godly seed. What is happening today is that the Christians are ceasing to have the godly seed, and we're letting the unregenerate and the ungodly have children by the hundreds of millions. The solution is not, we're told, that they should stop or reduce their output of children in those lands due to starvation. The solution, we're told, is for the Christians in this country to stop having children and adopt the children of those people. You want to stop and think whether that's the will of God or not, in the light of what you know.

Yes, that's a spiritual thing, you see. But in terms of natural creation, you see, if there are going to be godly children in this world, if they're of a godly line, one would understand that they must come, by and large, in some way from the godly seed. Yes, it is a spiritual thing, but I think that you will find, the more you get into it — and I had a very interesting experience of this in my own life, that God showed it to me — I don't believe any of you don't have believers in your forebears, whether you know it or not. I'm certain of that. I think all of us have

somewhere in our familial line believers, and somewhere somebody's been praying for us. I heard a man say he'd never known anybody to be converted except somebody was praying for them.

Now, I'm not trying to lay this on you, telling you all to have six kids because that's the will of God. I'm just saying very simply that we want to think of it before we start jumping on the world's bandwagon, see? Just think things through. We're easily taken up with contemporary ideas, see, and it's a very "in" thing now: you don't have kids, you have adoptions. Just think that through before you're stampeded to jump on the bandwagon. Did you get this idea from God or His Word, or did you get it from the world?

I had hoped that I wouldn't get into that. I think that's a matter of Christian liberty. I really do. I don't think it's legislated. The sin of Onan was not birth control. The sin of Onan was that he spilled it on the ground in the sense that he refused to obey God. He was to raise up seed to his brother. The Roman Catholic Church uses that as a scriptural argument against birth control. It's a misapplication of Scripture. He was to raise up seed to his brother, and he refused the commandment of God. So in that sense, the sin of Onan was not that he spilled it on the ground and refused to have children as a method of contraception, but rather that he refused to obey God. I don't think they have a scriptural argument against it.

I think that you need to consider your motivation. Some people do not have children because they're selfish. They don't want to be bothered with it. They don't want to be tied down by it. They don't want the responsibility.

They don't want to interfere with their pleasures. They don't want to have to spend any money on it. They don't want any of that. It's absolutely, purely, and totally selfish. It has no other motivation. If that's your motive, I think it's bad news. Now, if you have six kids, and your wife had all of them by Caesarean, you know, and you're trying to serve the Lord and all that sort of thing, and you don't have a lot of money, I really think you ought to pray about it, you know, instead of heaping more children on your suffering wife and on the congregation. I mean, you may want to practice — as hard and as difficult as the thought seems — a little continence, you know, a little self-discipline. You know, that's a very unacceptable idea to a man, but I think it's completely scriptural. I think you ought to consider those things. I think motivation and circumstances enter into each person's decision, and I think it's a matter of Christian liberty, not a question of law — to make you happy, Sam.

Okay. The story of Jacob and Esau. Incidentally, she was barren, but we can see here that the delay in her conception was not denial. That's an important thing in answered prayer: delay is not denial. As someone has said, there are three answers to prayer. What are they? Yes, no, and wait. We forget the third. People are very confidently saying, "God didn't answer my prayer." And I'm not so sure He didn't. Okay?

Of course, barrenness also has another spiritual meaning in Scripture. What is barrenness? What's the spiritual significance of barrenness in the Bible? Unfruitfulness. Are there many barren Christians? Absolutely. Think of that.

Why people are like they are

Now, here are two men that have the same heredity and the same environment. You want to know why? I think it's the most fascinating subject in the world. We can go on and talk about it until the Lord Jesus comes. Read all you want to about it, in Scripture or outside of Scripture. You'll never get to the bottom of it, and you'll never come to a definitive conclusion. Why are people like they are?

The prevailing idea today, of course, is determinism, which is a secular philosophy, usually expressed in environmentalism. You are taught in schools and universities, you are taught in the media, you're taught by the culture, you're taught in the literature today, that virtually everything about you is environmentally determined — as high as 99%.

This is an interesting swing of the pendulum. Sixty years ago, people were just as convinced, absolutely convinced, that the most important thing was what? [Heredity.] And if you had challenged that concept, you would have been thought to be a scientific idiot. Dr. Alvarez of the Mayo Clinic, professor emeritus, frequently writes on this subject. And that's all we got in the schoolbooks — about the Jukes family and all the people that wound up in criminal institutions, mental sanitariums and everything else, and on the other side, all the people of a different family that were college professors and geniuses and so forth. But there's just no question that heredity is an important thing. And I think the Bible underscores that.

And I don't doubt that environment has a value. If I didn't care about environment, I wouldn't care how I

raised my kids. Certainly we care about environment. But we've gone too far when we say, and particularly as Christians, that everything we are is environmentally conditioned. We want to beware of falling into the trap of secular thinking, which says that we can say why every one of you is like you are, or that you went astray because of something your parents did or didn't do. And I don't think you should buy that. In the first place, even if it were true — even if it were absolutely true that Mrs. Jones' two kids went astray because she did bad things as a mother — I could never prove it, could I?

Never. At best, it will always remain a speculation. But Christians feel absolutely free to speculate at will. We just think we know why people are like they are. And we don't know any such thing, really. We've got a lot of gall to say we know why somebody is like he is, and to enter into the prognostication about why they're like they are. We don't know.

I don't think it's right to go around placing the blame on all the parents because their kids went astray, or on the church or assembly, no matter what they were, because somebody got away from the Lord, or somebody mistreated them, or they were stumbled by somebody. I don't think that we should swallow that, and I don't think in counseling we should let people get away with that. In fact, I think it's a totally ineffective way of counseling. When you get into counseling and we begin to think about this, you're going to begin to see that the most effective counseling today is basically to help people to get away from their past and to get away from finding scapegoats, to facing up to the situation as it is today, and saying, "I don't care what's in your past. What are you going to do about it now?"

You and I make decisions, and the Bible indicates that we're responsible for our decisions. And I don't think any of you believes that we're going to get to the judgment seat, either of Christ or the great white throne, and we're going to tell God, "I am here because other people failed." You're not going to get by with that. If you're not going to get by with that up there, we shouldn't let people get by with it down here. That's a lot of noise. We make the decisions. I don't care if my parents were failures, drunks, perverts, or whatever they are. It doesn't excuse me for choosing wrong. I don't care if I came into the church and every time I came in they spit in my face and kicked me out. There's no reason for turning against Jesus.

We've got to help people get off of that stick, you know. I make the decisions, and I am responsible as a human being to God. I don't care what other people do. And there are innumerable illustrations where, with the worst of parents and the most difficult of treatment in the church, people have gone on to live for God. It basically is a great cop-out for people, and we shouldn't let them get by with it.

Four factors

Verse 22. We certainly are not totally a product of our environment. I think there are four factors in why people are like they are. I think heredity is a factor, and I think the Bible says so. I think environment is a factor, because we're concerned about example, and we see that with Jacob and his children. I think the sovereignty of God, as we're going to see in Jacob and Esau, is a tremendous factor. Interpreted by Romans 9, it is a much overlooked factor. But finally, fourth, human

choice. I think those are the four factors, and in a mysterious way those factors come together; they determine what people are and how they wind up: heredity, environment, the sovereignty of God — which has to do with election, or God doing what He pleases — and human choice. In that order? No, not in that order; there's no significance to the order. I think that the most significant thing is divine sovereignty. It certainly was with Jacob and Esau. That's number one: the will of God. All things proceed from the will of God.

The fourfold prophecy

The woman came into trouble. Verse 22: "And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD." And the Lord said unto her — He gave her a fourfold prophecy.

First, He said there would be two nations, two totally different nations, although these were twin children. Now, that was extremely unlikely, that a woman would have twins and they'd be the fathers of two entirely different nations, wasn't it? That's exactly what happened. One became the father of the Jewish people. One became the father of the Edomites. Two nations.

Number two, He says, two manner of people. They not only were nationally different, but they were totally different kinds of people. The one people were the followers of God, men of the Spirit. The other people were men of the flesh. Two entirely different people.

You can see in all of this the overtones of the struggle in every Christian of what? Two natures. You're going to get into eternal security, and you're going to find that

there are people that deny there's any such thing as two natures in the Christian. "No such thing." But I think it's clearly taught in the New Testament, and I think we have a foreshadowing of it here. You had the struggling of these two within this woman, didn't you? Frank has written that down in his composition very well. Two natures, two different people, the old man and the new, struggling within a person. There's a strife here. These are two different kinds of people.

The third part is that one should be greater or stronger than the other. And that was true. The Edomites were an inferior people and were basically the slaves or the inferiors of the Jews. The exceptions were individuals, of whom, of course, the most notable were the descendants of Herod. The Herodians were Edomites, and they ruled the Jews. This is a strange thing. It's a picture of the representatives of the flesh ruling the people of the spirit, and you know the spiritual effect of the rule of the Herods on the Israelites.

Finally He said, and quite miraculously, "the elder shall serve the younger." Now, that was never true — never true that the elder should serve the younger. The younger was always subordinate to the elder in their economy.

Jacob and Esau

The first one is called Jacob, and his name means literally "heel catcher," and he got that name because as he came out of the womb he grasped on to the heel of his brother. It's an interesting thing that the gynecologists tell us that there is a very strong grasping instinct in newborn infants, and they will quite definitely grab hold of something. But in the case of twins, usually

in the birth of twins, they are separated by approximately an hour. This was an unusual birth of twins, in that they came together, and the brother caught hold of the heel of the other. One emerged first and then went back in, you see. He was the heel catcher. It's sometimes rendered "supplanter," S-U-P-P-L-A-N-T-E-R, and he took the place of the other, so to speak. In a sense, he set forth something of the example of the people that were his descendants. They are the heel catchers. They are the supplanters, you see.

And it tells us, of course, that he was a plain man — and you can read that a pious man, or a moral or a spiritual man, if you please — and he dwelt in tents. The other guy, Esau — Esau means rough or shaggy; you can say hairy. He was a hairy man. Hair is an emanation of the flesh. Esau, typically, is the man of the flesh.

He was called Edom, meaning red, and he got that from that red stuff that he bought. And it says that he was a hunter, and he liked it outside, and the indication is that he was a wild rover, and that he was bound only by his own will. He was a man of the field, it says, but you can also put in there that he was a man of the world. Esau was a man of the world. Esau was the kind of man that this world would appreciate. He was outdoorsy. He was worldly. He was bluff. He was hardy. He was generous. He's what you might call devil-may-care. He's the kind of man the world would admire. They probably would have thought Jacob was a creep, you know. But God looked at them in a totally different way. See, He saw that there was something uniquely different and better.

How about Jacob? What about him did He see? What was he? Yes, he was a man of faith. He valued divine

things. And the other man didn't. That makes all the difference. So people will tell you that there are non-Christians that live better than Christians. Well, it shouldn't be so. And generally, I'm persuaded that it isn't so. But even if it were so, it wouldn't prove anything. Because the thing that sets apart the child of God is that he's a man of faith and that he values divine things. Even if he doesn't always act in the right way, that's what really counts.

Election, character and choice

It's said that there are three factors of difference here. And these three factors also count for the difference in your life direction.

The first is election. Election. And in this respect, Romans 9 is decisive. In fact, Romans 9 is the most important passage in the Bible on the subject of divine election, and it specifically singles out this incident as an illustration of divine election. All right, verse 11: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." God made up His mind about these two boys before they were born. Election.

Now, number two: we begin to see that things happen which confirm the election of God, and that is the character of the two men. From the earliest part of their life, in their character, they began to show that they were two different kinds of men. Their character is different. One is the fleshly or worldly man, and the other is the man of faith, and that is seen in their life.

And the third thing is their human choice. Their choice confirmed it. They made the choice. After all, who made Esau sell his birthright to his brother? That's exactly right. He made the choice. God didn't force Esau to sell his birthright. The important thing about this is that divine election does not set aside human responsibility. Man is responsible, and by his choices man confirms the foreknowledge of God and the election of God.

You see, the whole doctrine of election, which seems so unfair, springs from a concept that's just simply not acceptable to people today, and that is that God has a perfect right to do anything He wants to with you or me, whether we agree with it or not, or whether we think it's fair or not. Why? Because He's God. Because He's the potter and we're the clay. And He has a perfect right to throw you and me in the garbage can if He wants to. And men don't like that at all. Don't like that at all. But, I mean, that's a fact. And we just need to bow and worship that God, in His sovereignty, has seen fit to choose us for glory.

However, in life it will be seen that our character will confirm that, and our human choice will confirm it. We'll fall in along with the election of God, and we'll make those choices, and God won't make the choices for us. We'll make them, and we'll be responsible for those choices. We will not be able to say to God, "Now, I couldn't do anything else, you know, because that's the way You made it." We're not going to be able to say that. We made an absolutely free choice of our own volition, but what we did do was confirm the electing grace of God. There's a lot more going to be said about election in the future, but this might be an introduction to it.

The birthright

Esau is called in Hebrews chapter 12 a profane man — a profane man, a worldly man. He didn't value the things of God. He sold his birthright. The birthright involved three things.

First of all, supremacy over your brethren. The man who was the firstborn had the birthright. He had supremacy over his brothers.

The second thing is that he got a double share of the inheritance. When everything was split up, the firstborn got two shares. And that's still done in some states today in this country.

And number three, and the most important thing of all: when he sold his birthright, he also sold his right to bring forth the seed of Messiah. Think of that. Of his seed there could have been, by the birthright, the seed of Messiah. God bypassed the firstborn in the seed of the Messiah on numerous occasions. For instance, David was not the firstborn. Solomon was not the firstborn. Jacob was not the firstborn. And many others bypassed the firstborn.

Someone has said that this meal was the most expensive meal that was ever eaten, with the possible exception of the one in the Garden of Eden. We talk about inflation — this was a high-priced meal. Yes, for the wrong thing. Okay?

What was the second point on the result? Supremacy, and the double portion of the inheritance. Yes. If you had five kids, you divided it into six parts, and the one that had the birthright got two shares. That's still done in some wills and in the laws of some states. Okay?

Brother Bill, do you want to commit us to the Lord and ask Him to bless our understanding of these things?