

People sometimes think of Christian morality as “a **straitjacket**” (as if God gave us random commands that we must keep... in order to prove our devotion to him.) ... C.S. Lewis addressed this misconception in a letter he wrote on September 12, 1933... to his good friend Arthur Greeves. ... Lewis was no stranger to lust and sexual temptation... and neither was Greeves... who experienced same-sex attraction. ... Lewis gave the following illustration:

Supposing you are taking a dog on a lead through a turnstile or past a post. You know what happens (apart from his usual ceremonies in passing a post!). He tries to go to the wrong side and gets his head looped round the post. You see that he can't do it, and therefore pull him back. You pull him back because you want to enable him to go forward. He wants exactly the same thing—namely to go forward: for that very reason he resists your pull back, or, if he is an obedient dog, yields to it reluctantly as a matter of duty which seems to him to be quite in opposition to his own will: though in fact it is only by yielding to you that he will ever succeed in getting where he wants.

The dog believes the lie that the only way forward, the only way to get what it wants, is to push ahead. Lewis, the dog-owner, affirms the longing of the dog to go forward, but he must pull the dog back in order for it to actually make any progress.

So what should you do when you fall into sin? Ask for forgiveness and redirection. Lewis continued:

"You may go the wrong way again, and again [God] may forgive you: as the dog's master may extricate the dog after he has tied the whole lead round the lamp-post. But there is no hope in the end of getting where you want to go except by going God's way."

We have not advanced very far in our spiritual lives... if we do not understand the basic paradox of freedom. ... (LISTEN!) Here is freedom's paradox: “We are the most free - when we are bound.” ... The one who

would like to be an athlete... but who is unwilling to discipline his body by regular exercise and by abstinence... is not free to excel with any sport.

I love to watch football... and I'm probably like many of you... we enjoy seeing the rewards of disciplined lives... (both physical and mental)... that compete on the football field. ... When I watch a game on TV... the receivers who catch the ball and hold on to it while taking a vicious hit... completely amaze me. (You know)... the excellent receivers... most often are not the strongest and most athletic people on the field. Receivers like Steve Largent and Fred Blitnikoff... were not that impressive physically... But their discipline was very remarkable. They were perhaps the most meticulous and regimented players on the team... and that is how they always seemed to find ways to make unbelievable snatches out of the air. They made it look so easy. They had such freedom in getting to where they told their quarterback they would be... and exactly when they would be there.

True spiritual freedom relies on the same principle regarding discipline. "We are the most free - when we are bound." Our whole life... must reflect the belief: Discipline is the price of freedom.

But unfortunately... I think that what Elisabeth Elliot says is true:

"Freedom and discipline have come to be regarded as mutually exclusive... when in fact freedom is not at all the opposite... but the final reward... of discipline. It is to be bought with a high price, not merely claimed..."

(However let's face it)... Just knowing these truths is not enough. ... You might have the strongest agreement with the realities that... "We are the most free - when we are bound" ... and ... "Discipline is the price of

freedom”... but you will never apply discipline to your life... unless you are CONVINCED that you absolutely need it. Discipline will be absent... unless you honestly face the truth about the dark and wicked society we live in. (That it is a world of hideous immorality... and you can be - so easily - swept away by it.) ... But we so happily live among it... ignoring the danger that we are actually in... thinking things are not really so bad. *“If things really get bad... then I’ll get serious and add discipline. But right now... things are OK... and I’m alright.”*

This is why our passage today is so helpful. It is all about painting a picture of this worldly... wicked society. ... It faces the truth of the wickedness that is in the heart of man. ... It is a picture of shameful behavior... a picture that yells at us... like a good football coach who is motivating his players to apply all the rigors of discipline to their lives... or face horrible consequences of awful shame. Genesis 34 is designed to motivate us to keep our head in the game... (which is really... so much MORE than a game)... and to experience true freedom.

As we prepare for our study of it... lets remind ourselves about the noticeable lack of discipline that we previously saw in Jacob... which will come to a head... in Genesis 34. It is a sordid narrative... that leaves us gasping for air... as one unspeakable act after another is presented.

Jacob has finally returned to the Promised Land. But as I mentioned the last time... God's command was that Jacob return to **Bethel**. (We saw this in Genesis 31:13) ... Then he was to go to his home where Isaac still lived... which was Hebron. (When we get to Genesis 35:27... we will see that THIS was what God’s plan had been for Jacob.). ... But instead...

Jacob remained (first) at Succoth (which was on the opposite side of the Jordan River from the Promised Land)... but when... he eventually crossed over... he only partially obeyed God, as he settled near Shechem.

Now let me refer to Hebrews chapter 11... to understand something else about Jacob's partial obedience. According to Hebrews 11:9-16... Abraham... Isaac... and Jacob... were supposed to live in the Promised Land - **as pilgrims** (in other words... not as permanent residents... but in temporary dwelling places - living in tents.) ... But at Succoth... Joseph built a house for himself and sheds for his flocks and herds. ... Then... when he moved near Shechem... Jacob purchased a piece of property and became a "resident alien" in the land. ... Obviously... he was trying to settle down in the land.

So it is rather apparent that Jacob wasn't disciplined with his obedience... and he certainly was in no hurry to return to **Bethel**. ... As we continue into Genesis 34... the name of the Lord isn't mentioned once in this chapter... and the wisdom of the Lord is surely absent as well.

When we disobey (or *partially* obey) the Lord... we put ourselves and our loved ones in danger. ... Consider what happened to Abraham in Egypt (saying that Sarai was his sister) and then again in Gerar... Consider how Lot put himself and his loved ones in great danger by moving to Sodom... and how Isaac did it to his family in Gerar.

The horrible story of Genesis 34 must be understood in the context of Jacob's delay in returning to Bethel. ... There is a very telling statement in our previous chapter... (where we left off... before the Christmas break.) ...

Speaking of Jacob's move to Shechem... Genesis 33:18 used the phrase: '*...and pitched his tent before the city.*' ...This is the same phrase that we saw with regard to Lot (back in Genesis 13:12) '*..and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.* ... Isn't that interesting? Our author wants us to notice a similarity.

Jacob's family is clearly in danger of the same kind of compromise with the people of the land... that had afflicted Lot and his family. ...This tragedy could have been averted... if Jacob had been at Bethel... instead of dwelling with his tent pitched toward Shechem. ... In the previous chapter... Jacob had claimed that he was loyal to God... by building an altar (33:20). But what a sham! It is always a sham. ... Loyalty to God means one hundred percent obedience. ... Trying to have God in your life without obedience to God... will always create situations that bring you heartache. ... And being loyal to God means not pitching our tent toward Sodom. (LISTEN!) We pitch out tents toward Sodom... whenever we put ourselves and our families... where we know temptation will be strong.

You might think that you are being loyal to God because you have excellent church attendance... you know more about the Bible than most people... and you give sacrificially to missions. But if you are pitching your tent toward Sodom – with things you look at on the internet... and on television... or by spending a lot of time with ungodly people and ungodly influences... You are quite a bit like the Jacob of Genesis 34. (And let me say it again: This is an ugly narrative.)

Here is a maxim for us to keep in mind as we study this chapter of Genesis: "*When you lie down with dogs – you will rise up with fleas.*"

Genesis 34:1

If we were to re-write this narrative as a modern-day story... a close parallel would be for us to depict Dina as a child of the backwoods... who was brought to face the bright lights of the big city. The nomadic life in which she had been raised... did nothing to equip her for the temptations of the exciting city nearby. ... Such moral training (as she might have received)... did not arm her against the flatteries of an striking young man... who wanted to take advantage of her.)

The world can also look very attractive and alluring to children brought up in the shelter of a Christian home. Often those brought up in godless homes know by bitter experience what a shallow... shameful place the world is. ... Those brought up in a separated environment... often find the world fascinating... that is... if they have not been taught to fear it.

Was Dinah just curious about how the young women of the world dressed, acted, and lived? ... Was Dinah rebelling against her parents? ... Against their trying to select who she could (and could not) have as friends? ... Was Dinah naïve or ignorant about the ways of the world? ... Was Dinah seeking the companionship of the worldly young ladies of the land?

Dina might have been the only daughter of Jacob... but Jacob had so many servants and ranch hands... and they would have kids. Certainly there must have been MANY other girls (right there) in their camp... from which she could find female companionship.

The Bible does not say why she wandered out; it is silent. ... But one thing is known: Dinah knew better than to be out in the countryside and city all alone. ... Notice the phrase (in verse 1) *young women of the land*. It means the young women of the world... women who were not believers... who were not followers of God and His promises. ... It was unsafe to walk alone in that day. ... It was understood that she was fair game for men to flirt with and seduce.

Whatever was Jacob up to... we wonder. How could he allow his daughter such freedom in such a place? ... Well... perhaps he just had no idea who Dinah's companions were... but if so... that is even more telling about Jacob's lack of spiritual discipline. ... A young person's peers very quickly become the most important opinion-makers in their life... and peer pressure... once established... is very strong. ... So... off Dinah went to visit her unsaved friends and... of course... she was spotted by the very heart-throb of every girl in the city. ... Shechem saw her... and made it a point to get to know her better.

Genesis 34:2

What now happened was tragic. The young Hivite prince of the area seduced and raped her. ... Dinah had probably gone to a friend's house or to the place where the young men and women of that city gathered to socialize. ... When the young prince saw her... he was attracted and began to pay attention to her. ... Did she play him along... enticing him? ... Again... Scripture does not say... but Dinah had exposed herself. ... She had sought the companionship of the worldly and immoral of this earth...

and the worldly and immoral are always open to the lusts of the flesh and subject to give in to sexual pleasure.

Notice that the prince was named Shechem (after the city of Shechem.) He probably had all the young women he could have desired. ... The very fact that he would pay attention to Dinah... most likely thrilled and excited her. ... It certainly would have most young ladies from the backwoods... who are experiencing the big city.

Genesis 34:3-4

He spoke kindly to Dinah but did not treat her kindly. Whether it is a guy or a girl... beware of the sweet-talking of sin.

Proverbs 5:3-4 (ESV)

³ For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, ⁴ but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.

Shechem's words may have expressed natural emotion or even lustful passion. He wants to possess what he had wrongfully taken. However... there is no hint of remorse for doing something wrong... or any evidence of repentance. ... He charges his father with the command... '*Get me this girl for my wife.*' ... Shechem displays the true character of a Canaanite. ... He takes what he wants... and shows no remorse for the effect his actions have on others.

Genesis 34:5-7

Shocking as Dinah's seduction was... we are equally shocked by Jacob's non-response. ... When he heard that Dinah had been defiled... he said

nothing about it until his sons came home. ... Why was he so passive? Perhaps he was too shaken by the whole thing to act... or maybe it was because this was Leah's daughter? (Remember how Jacob had put the wives and children that he cared the least about at the front of the line... when Esau came to meet them. Those would be the ones who would die first.)

The reaction of Dinah's real brothers was very different... and far more appropriate — they were absolutely ***incensed*** that such a disgraceful thing had been done against Israel. ... Such a sexual crime was an outrage... incriminating a whole community. ... While Jacob was silent... the sons were filled with fury and grief. ... When the head of the household (Jacob) did nothing... the young and immature members took matters into their own hands.

Genesis 34:8

Hamor and Prince Shechem addressed Jacob and his sons without apology. This was a little matter for which they believed that they had a reasonable and generous solution that Jacob's family would like. But notice that they were careful not to mention two things: ***first***, what Shechem had done to Dinah; and ***second***, that they still had Dinah in Shechem's house. (We will see this later on...in verse 26.) They had the upper hand... nevertheless... Hamor and his son were willing to make it "right"... as they knew "right" to be.

Genesis 34:9-12

The story unfolds in four tragic steps. It begins with *the desperate craving that caused the problem*. ... At the bottom of everything... was Shechem's passion for the girl he had shamed. ... No price would be too great for him to pay... to obtain the girl to be his lawful... wedded wife. Thus marriage negotiations were begun. ... Old Hamor, with a strong streak of the fox in him... approached Jacob and his sons to see what arrangements could be made to smooth troubled waters.

His offer was an out-and-out worldly one. ... He offered them worldly *society*. "*Make your marriages with us*," he said. ... This offer must have had a rather strong appeal. ... Jacob's sons were of marriage age... and he must have given serious thought to the problem of where to find them wives. ... But he was a patriarch... and marriage out of the will of God was not to be considered.

Then Hamor offered worldly *security*. "*Dwell with us*," he said. ... That, too... must have been a temptation. ... Jacob lived in a hostile... pagan world. ... An alliance with a powerful clan... must have been bait hard to resist.

Finally... Hamor offered worldly *success*. "*The land shall be before you*," he said... "*dwell in it and trade in it*." ... Twenty years before Jacob would have jumped at the offer.... It was a generous enough proposition from a worldly point of view. ... But that was the whole point. It was a worldly offer.

Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it". "No hard feelings. Let's all get married and be one big happy family"—a thing that Israel could never do.

Hamor's offer pulsed with economic appeal—property in Canaan, grazing rights, the freedom to travel and dwell anywhere. In sum, Hamor promised what God had promised Israel. Very enticing. A shortcut to the promised land! ... Satan sure was behind this appeal... just as he is in all of our temptations. “*God is holding out on you. There are joys that you can have right now. You don’t have to wait!...*” But if Jacob had accepted the offer... it would have wiped out the patriarchal line (God’s plan for world redemption through the Jewish Nation)... in a single generation.

Before Jacob could speak... young Shechem broke in. His father had spoken with the voice of persuasion. Shechem spoke with the voice of passion. ... He would do anything... (anything!)... to obtain his heart's desire. ... “*Ask me for a HUGE dowry,*” he urged, “*and I will give it.*” ... But it was that desperate craving that caused the problem. ... Shechem wanted Dinah... no matter what the cost.

But once again... Notice that there was... no apology... no confession of wrongdoing... no sympathy... no suggestion that Shechem would be disciplined... Hamor was totally insensitive to the wrong that had been done. He just accepted the seduction as a routine happening. There was no sense whatsoever of sin... shame... guilt... regret... sorrow... wrongdoing... or judgment to come. And why should there be...? Immoral behavior—sex and sexual pleasure—outside of marriage was accepted as normal behavior. It was not condemned.

How like society today. Sex and sexual pleasure outside of marriage are considered to be acceptable behavior. ... People have become insensitive to it being wrong and immoral. ... In fact... many (even those who profess

to be Christians) have and lost all conscience... (all sense and feeling of sin and wrongdoing.) ... They have become insensitive to such a degree that they call what is wrong "right"... and what is right "wrong."

Father and son expected immediate acceptance. But, of course, Hamor and Shechem did not understand with whom they were dealing—and especially their God-given religious scruples.

Genesis 34:13-17

"You are offering the wrong kind of currency," they said. "We won't do business that way. We are evaluating the wrong done to us not in terms of riches but in terms of religion. You have done far more than defile our sister; you have dishonored and violated our religious convictions. We have no intention of marrying our sister to a pagan, no matter who he is. Before we can even consider a marital alliance with you people you must accept our basic religious premise. You and all your clan must be circumcised. Apart from that there can be no further discussion. However, if you will accept our terms we will accept yours."

That was the subtle dishonesty of Simeon and Levi. They had not the slightest intention of allowing Shechem to marry Dinah. What they really wanted would become only too plain before long.

(LISTEN!)... All dishonesty is wrong... but dishonesty wrapped up in matters that are holy and sacred... is the very worst kind. Circumcision was a sacred matter... that they treated so lightly.

Genesis 34:18-24

Hamor was a rascal... but he almost seems like a saint when compared to the sons of Jacob. ... Back to the city Hamor went with his son... to call the clan into council. ... To get the whole city to submit to the painful rite of circumcision... was going to take some convincing! ... Hamor took the line that once the marriage contract was signed... the Shechemites could proceed at leisure... to totally assimilate the Israelites... and could then enrich themselves with the vast liquid assets that Jacob so obviously possessed. ... "*Shall not their cattle and their substance be ours?*" he urged. "*All we need to do is go along with this religious scruple of theirs, then we can swamp them!*" ... The greed of the city fathers was aroused and Hamor's arguments prevailed.

Genesis 34:25-29

Here now is bold biblical realism. The Bible does not spare its readers the awful truth. These two were cold and calculating.... Simeon and Levi had acted worse than Assyrian shock-troops would act when Israel was taken into captivity by them. Moses (who authored Genesis)... tells the story in all its naked horror... as though he still feels the outrage and the shame of the deed - even after the passing of over four hundred years. ... Years later... as Jacob was on his deathbed... he remembered this vicious act. As he was blessing his sons... Jacob would pause and pronounce an anti-blessing on Simeon and Levi:

Genesis 49:5-7 (ESV)

⁵ "*Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords.* ⁶ *Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness they hamstrung oxen.*

⁷ *Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.*

The outworking of the brother's plot was tragic and **unnecessary**. Simeon and Levi... and no doubt their households with all their servants... went and slaughtered all the males in the town... while they were incapacitated and in pain from the circumcision. ... And then Simeon and Levi rescued Dinah. ... The rest of the brothers came and plundered the city and the fields for the Shechemites' property, livestock, wealth, women, and children.

This was not justice. ... It was brutal and excessive **revenge**. ... Ironically... the defilement of **one** woman (Dinah)... led to the painful capture of **many** women and children. ... From that point forward... their presence among the Israelites... would be a perpetual reminder of the cruelty of that day.

One of the most important lessons of this gruesome scene... is to learn how a "values system" wrongly applied can be destructive. ... We all need to have values. The sons of Jacob began with their values - in the right place. ... They saw the compromise of their father with his passivity. ... But their own compromise... led them into a greater folly.

Sometimes... a righteous indignation turns into an **unholy** anger. ... We can wrongfully assume the role of **avenger**... when it is not our place to do so. ... Has your "righteous anger" ever morphed into revenge...? ... If we are honest... we have to admit that sometimes it does. But the Bible clearly teaches '...Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord' (Romans 12:19). ... The very minute we attempt to take revenge or get

vengeance, it means that we are no longer walking by faith. We are saying that we cannot trust God to work it out.

Jacob (by virtue of his own previous actions)... already understood the trouble one creates by jumping ahead of God. He tried to obtain his promised blessings by tricking his father... and was sent into a 20 year exile as the result.) ... It is a pity that he could not have taught that lesson to his sons.

It is important that evil be punished... but it must be within the parameters of God's methodology. All too often humans want to rush ahead of God. Punishment in this manner is never fair and equitable.

Genesis 34:30-31

Jacob stood and stared in horror at the vast amount of spoil that Levi and Simeon had hauled into his camp. ... He stopped his ears at the pitiful cries of the newly-made widows... and the orphaned children of Shechem. ... He looked with dismay at his sons.

Jacob voiced two major concerns. The concerns in Jacob's complaint were not noble but revealed poor character. **First**, the concern about honor. He was concerned about the loss of honor—he would "*stink*." ... People will complain quicker about a loss of **honor** than about the loss of **holiness**. **Second**, the concern about harm. ... Jacob also feared that the Canaanites would harm him. ... He was more concerned about physical harm than moral harm.

Jacob was pathetic—for what he did *not* say. He did not condemn the massacre. Neither did he condemn his sons for breaking the law of *lex talionis* (*just an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth*). He did not mention that they violated his contract with Shechem. Jacob said nothing about their desecration of Israel's most precious symbol of faith (Circumcision.) ... And... of course... there was still not a word of concern about his just-raped daughter Dinah. Jacob's only concern was survival—to save his own skin and... by association... that of his family.

So there the patriarch stood... face-to-face with his bloody... glistening sons. - **And they were not buying it.** ... They fiercely shouted back... "*Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?*" (v. 31). ... Despite the immorality of the genocide that they had just committed... they had assumed the moral high ground. ... And sadly... Jacob was silenced. ... They had rebuked Jacob for being more concerned about his honor and harm... than Dinah's holiness. ... But it does not justify their bloody massacre. ... Simeon and Levi had serious character problems, too.

What a mess! And the whole thing was Jacob's fault. ... Instead of traveling straight to Bethel (as God had called him to do)... he first sojourned in Succoth (outside the promised land.) ... Then when he did enter the land... he did not settle in Bethel... but rather twenty miles away in prosperous Shechem. ... It was *almost* obedience... which is simply disobedience. If Jacob had gone to Bethel in full obedience, none of this would have happened.

But even more... the murderous deceit by his sons was rooted in *Jacob's* own deceitful ways. ... Why should they be concerned about deceiving the

Shechemites... when Jacob had deceived on so many occasions — the most recent being his deception of Esau when he broke his promise to visit Esau in Seir? ... What was wrong with their backing out of a commitment... if it was okay for their father to do so? ... On top of this... Jacob had provoked his sons' revenge by his apathy about their sister Dinah.

Jacob and his family certainly were not experiencing much freedom... were they? What an illustration we have just seen of “We are the most free - when we are bound.”

Are there some resolutions you should make (and with God’s help you will keep)? ... Have you been the proper leader in your home... showing the greatest concern for holiness... instead of what others might think of you...? Do you need to be in God’s Word everyday... this coming new year...? Do you need more consistent prayer with Him... maybe to set up a war room somewhere in your house where you can go and fight battles through prayer...?

“Discipline is the price of freedom” and we need discipline right now... because Sodom lies before us. ... Some may need to realize that you have pitched your tent before Sodom... and you need to make changes to what you are filling your mind with. ... Make those changes now. Because Jacob’s story is so common. Do it... before his horrible outcome... becomes yours... as well.