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Pause Ponder Profit

Esau A Profane Person

by L. A. Stauffer

“Esau, son of Isaac and brother of Jacob, according to the writer of Hebrews, was a ‘profane person . . . who for one mess of meat sold his own birthright’ (Heb 12:16). The word profane generally describes the desecration of that which is holy or sacred. This was one of the accusations made against Paul by the Jews when, as they said, ‘he brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath defiled this holy place’ (Acts 21:28; see Acts 24:5).

A profane person would, therefore, be one who fails to consecrate himself to God and God’s purposes for man. Every Christian, for example, is to be a priest who offers himself and his life unto God. To fail to do that is — profane or unholy. Esau was a “profane person” because he took lightly his role as the oldest son and sold the birthright that granted him both the privileges and the responsibilities of that role. The NIV in its translation of Hebrew 12:16 calls Esau a “godless” man. But what were the qualities of this man that made him profane or godless?

Focus On The Flesh

Esau, like all profane persons, focused his mind on the flesh. When he came in that day from hunting he could think of nothing else but his hunger. He smelled the red stew that Jacob had cooked up and could not get his mind off its smell, his anticipation of its taste, and the satisfaction it offered his empty stomach. His spirit, his relationship and responsibility to the family as the eldest son, and what is right, were forgotten in the weakness of the moment (see Gen 25:27-34).

Man so easily ignores his spirit, sets his affections on the flesh, and violates his sacred duties to God. This, as with Esau, makes him a profane person.

Exaggeration

Esau also exaggerated his situation. “Behold,” he said, “I am about to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?” (Gen 25:32). Man, of course, can go several days without food. Jesus, we remember, fasted for 40 days. Men in our own time have done the same. Esau, clearly, was not about to die. He was so totally wrought up by his fleshly desire and its demands that he was unable to calmly analyze the alternative.

Men today experience this whether they are trying to diet, overcome an addictive habit, or avoid the practice of sin. They think they are going to die if they don’t have a piece of chocolate pie, a cigarette, or another man’s wife. Many are arguing these days that they are born homosexuals or alcoholics and that they simply must fulfill these desires. Exaggerating problems or temptations, as Esau did, makes profane persons — even today.

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Ignoring Avenues Of Escape

Esau, finally, was a profane person because he failed to see any avenues of escape. We know, for example, that Esau himself was a good cook. His father loved the meat he brought from the field and the savory meals he prepared (see Gen 27:3-4). Yes, he was tired and hungry when he came in from the field, but there nonetheless was another avenue open. If his brother was too selfish to give him some stew, he could have boiled up some pottage of his own. He did not have to sell his birthright for a bowl of soup.

The New Testament reminds men today when they are tempted to sin that there are ways of escape that God provides. Paul appealed to the Old Testament examples of sin to warn God's people not to sin. And in so doing he reminds them: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor 10:13).

Man today looks at Esau and wonders how anyone could be so foolish and profane that he would sell the family blessings and position for a bowl of red stew. He then goes his merry way indulging the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life in exchange for his own soul (see Matt 16:26; 1 John 2:15-17). When the flesh interferes with man's sacred duties to God and his rights to heaven, he is as "profane" and "godless" as Esau — and will pay a greater price (see Heb 10:27-31; 2 Thess 1:7-9).



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