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FATAL ATTRACTION

Genesis 34:1-31

by

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Genesis Lesson 61

FATAL ATTRACTION
Genesis 34:1-31

A few years ago, there was a popular movie called "Fatal Attraction." I did not see it (because it was R-rated), but it was about a man whose involvement with a prostitute almost got him murdered. Genesis 34 is the original version of "Fatal Attraction." A young man's lust for a teenage girl results not only in his murder, but also in the murder of his father and all the men in his town. The script has lust, rape, anger, deception, greed, murder, and family conflict. Who needs the movies or TV--it's all right here in the Bible!

You may wonder, "Why is a sordid chapter like this in the Bible?" If a Jewish writer, like Moses, had wanted to make the nation's founding fathers look good, either he would have left this story out or doctored it up, because it isn't a pretty picture. While Shechem's date rape of Dinah was wrong, it was nothing compared to the treachery and brutality of Jacob's sons, who even used their religion to trick these friendly men. After slaughtering them, they looted their goods and took their wives and children as slaves. God's chosen people weren't exactly being a channel for His blessing to the nations!

Since "all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16), this text has lessons for us. I think Moses included this chapter in all its repulsiveness to warn God's people of the danger of becoming assimilated with the world. The nation Israel was about to go into the land of Canaan. The greatest danger facing them was not fighting the giants in the land. It was the danger of being seduced into blending in with the Canaanites. The same is true for us today:

Assimilation with the world is the greatest danger facing God's people.

If Satan can get God's people to act as bad or worse than those who do not know Christ, the world shrugs off the gospel. It's even more tragic when Christians use the faith to take advantage of others, as Jacob's sons did here. When believers are fatally attracted to the world, it is fatal for the world, which misses the gospel. Our text reveals three aspects about this fatal danger:

1. Assimilation with the world is a great danger because it is a subtle danger.

The greatest dangers in life are always subtle, not frontal. With a frontal danger, you're on guard; you're not as vulnerable. But with a subtle danger, like the proverbial frog in the kettle, you're not aware of it until it's too late. When Jacob returned to Canaan, Satan didn't use an army or a band of robbers to try to get him. Instead, he used Jacob's fear of Esau to get him to settle in the north, near Shechem. It was inside the borders of Canaan, so Jacob could rationalize that he had obeyed God by returning to the land. But it wasn't Bethel, where Jacob needed to fulfill his vow to the Lord. It wasn't Hebron, where his father Isaac was still living. Jacob's settling on the outskirts of Shechem reminds us of Lot pitching his tent near Sodom. Although Jacob built an altar there, he wasn't where God wanted him to be.

The Shechemites were friendly toward Jacob. Although the young man for whom the town was named violated Jacob's daughter, he wanted to make things right. He said he loved her and wanted to marry her. He was willing to pay a handsome dowry. He and his father offered to form a friendly alliance, intermarrying with Jacob's people and letting them trade and own property (34:9-10). The appeal was for Jacob to "become one people" with them (34:16, 22). It sounded attractive.

Jacob thought he was in great danger in facing Esau; actually, he was quite safe then, surrounded by a regiment of angels. Here, Jacob thought he was quite safe with these friendly people, but he was in great danger. If he had accepted the Shechemites' offer, God's people would have been absorbed into the Canaanite culture and would have ceased to exist. We pray for the church in countries where there is persecution, and rightly so. But the greatest danger to God's people is not persecution; it's assimilation. Persecution has a way of weeding out the lukewarm. We who are prone to blend in with our hedonistic culture are in greater spiritual danger than those who are persecuted.

I am convinced that the primary way Satan has seduced American Christians is through television. We average over three hours of TV per day per person. That's almost one full day in seven spent watching the tube! American teenagers view about 14,000 sexual references a year on television. Weekend daytime programs for children portray an average of 25 acts of violence per hour. A decade ago, *Newsweek* (11/24/86, p. 76) reported, "Many social scientists think that television's portrayal of family life may be the single most influential factor in how we conduct it." They cited a study by the National Institute of Mental Health that "a majority of adults and children use TV to learn how to handle their own domestic roles."

Back when "Ozzie and Harriet," "Leave it to Beaver," and "Father Knows Best" were the prime-time hits, the negative influence may have been negligible. Those days are long gone! This month TV breaks new ground by having the star of "Ellen" come out with the fact that she is a lesbian. Previous episodes have featured her and others on the show having promiscuous sex. The American Family Association's *Journal* gives a brief synopsis of some of each week's programs. I was going to read a few of these to you, but they are so gross I decided I should not. But popular programs such as "Seinfeld," "Friends," "ER," "NYPD Blue," "Living Single,"

"Burke's Law," "Frasier," and many more, are pure raunch.

Studies have shown that those who identify themselves as evangelical Christians watch the same amount and the same programs as the society at large! I'm going to make a statement that may make you angry, but I will defend it: *If you as a professing Christian watch that kind of programming on a regular basis, you are not a godly person and you will not raise godly children!* You are being assimilated into our godless culture, whether you realize it or not. To watch such fare is to disobey Ephesians 5:3, 4: "But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks."

So we've got to be on guard, because Satan is a subtle foe. He doesn't usually saunter up and say, "Would you like to ruin your life and the lives of your family? Follow me." He's subtle, seducing us when we think there is no danger.

2. Assimilation with the world is a great danger because it happens in the course of everyday family life.

Shechem may have been good for Jacob's finances, but it was disaster for his family. His seed of disobedience in not going all the way to Bethel resulted in this harvest of shameful events in Shechem. And it all came about in the course of everyday family living. Dinah, Jacob's daughter by Leah, was about 14 or 15. Like any teenage girl, she wanted some girl friends, so she started wandering over to Shechem. As she hung out there, she scored big--the prince, for whom the town was named, fell for her.

What 14 or 15 year-old girl wouldn't be thrilled by that? It would be like a freshman girl being asked to the homecoming dance by the captain of the football team. Dinah was probably a bit naive, so she allowed herself to get into a situation with Shechem where the two of them were alone. His passion got

the best of him, and he raped her.

When word of what happened got back to Jacob, he didn't know quite what to do. But his sons got mad, and then they got more than even! When Shechem and his father came seeking Dinah's hand in marriage, Jacob's sons told them deceitfully that if they and all the men in their town would be circumcised, Shechem could take Dinah in marriage. Shechem, who was highly respected, persuaded his townsmen to comply by convincing them that it would be financially profitable. When all the men of Shechem were at the height of their pain from the operation, Simeon and Levi took their swords, came upon the city unawares, and killed every male. Then Jacob's sons looted the town and took all the women and children as slaves.

It was terrible revenge. Even though God would later command Israel to wipe out the Canaanites, He had not done that here. There is no way of justifying what they did. The whole incident was like an avalanche which begins with a little stone and ends up burying a whole town. It never would have happened if Dinah had not visited there, which would not have happened if Jacob had not settled there. And it all came about in the course of everyday family life. Perhaps as Dinah went out the door she called, "I'll be back later; I'm going over to my friend's house." Little did anyone suspect the events which would transpire.

As God's people, we're locked into a life and death struggle with our enemy, the devil. When you think about spiritual warfare, you may conjure up images of missionaries confronting witch doctors or of evil governments persecuting Christians. But do you think of everyday family life? You should! The family is under attack from the enemy, and the battlefield is made up of everyday events like a teenager going over to a friend's house.

My question is, why did Jacob and Leah let a girl of Dinah's

age go alone to a pagan city to be with pagan friends? Why no word of warning? And then, after the disaster of her being raped, it seems that Jacob was going to let her be married to Shechem. (He didn't know of his sons' evil plan.) Jacob's father had warned him sternly not to take a bride for himself from among the Canaanites (28:1), but he doesn't seem concerned that Dinah is going to be married to this Canaanite man!

Parents are responsible before God for where their kids go, what they do, and who they spend time with. Wrong friendships can lead Christian kids into terrible situations where they lack the wisdom or willpower to resist evil. Shechem was a pagan young man with no moral scruples living in a town that was just the same. What do you expect when you let your 14 year-old daughter visit such a place alone? I think one reason Jacob wasn't as angry about this incident as his sons were is that he knew it was as much his fault as anybody else's.

I also suspect that Jacob didn't have enough of a relationship with Dinah to have warned and corrected her anyway. She was Leah's daughter, and Jacob wasn't overly fond of Leah. In that culture, daughters weren't as highly valued as sons. My guess is that Jacob hadn't spent much time with Dinah. So when she wanted to go visit the girls in Shechem, either he didn't know about it until after the fact or he didn't say anything. His passivity was a major factor in his daughter getting raped.

All of us are influenced by our relationships. It's normal and proper for teenagers to develop friendships with others their own age. But if they get in with the wrong crowd, it can have devastating results. That's why it's so important for parents to maintain a close relationship with their kids during their teen years. They need the influence of godly parents, and that influence is imparted through a close relationship.

“Impossible!” you say. A lot of parents expect their teenagers to rebel and they assume that they have to give up friendship with their kids during the teen years. I’m sorry, but I don’t buy that common notion. It’s not inevitable that teenagers rebel against their parents. I didn’t--I never felt a need to. If parents treat their teenagers with respect and love, there doesn’t have to be a rupture in relationship. The teen years are a critical time when kids desperately need the wisdom and counsel of their parents, to keep them from making some very damaging mistakes. Your parental counsel will be heard to the degree that your love is felt.

Thus, assimilation with the world is a great danger because it’s subtle and it happens in the course of normal family life.

3. Assimilation with the world is a great danger because it is an aggressive danger.

It’s subtle, but it’s not passive. If you’re passive against an aggressive foe, you’ll lose. We’re engaged in warfare, and you don’t win wars by being passive. Dwight Eisenhower once said, “War is a terrible thing. But if you’re going to get into it, you’ve got to get into it all the way.” One writer put it, “Casual Christians will become Christian casualties.” (John Blattner, *Pastoral Renewal* [11/87], p. 15.)

Throughout this chapter, Jacob is passive. He never warns or stops Dinah before it’s too late. When he hears of her defilement, he is silent. He doesn’t give any direction to his sons as to how they should deal with things. He’s passive in dealing with Hamor and Shechem, letting his sons do all the talking. It seems he would have let Dinah marry Shechem after he was circumcised, even though he still would have been as pagan as before. Although he rebukes his sons, it’s based more on his own fear of retaliation than on moral principle (note the emphasis on “me” and “I” in verse 30). If he was grieved over Dinah’s defilement or his sons’ godless revenge, it’s not recorded. At least his sons grieved over what

happened to their sister (34:7).

One of Satan's most aggressive schemes for wiping out God's people has been intermarriage with unbelievers. Let me state it plainly: It is sin for a Christian to marry a non-Christian. I've had girls tell me, "But I've prayed about it; I have a peace about it." But you don't need to pray about whether you should marry a non-Christian any more than you need to pray about whether you should commit adultery. I've seen Christian girls neutralized by marrying nice non-Christian guys. Often they get involved sexually, just as Dinah did. True, she was raped; but why was she alone with a guy like Shechem in the first place?

Whenever a Christian girl goes out with a non-Christian guy, she is on the defense; he is on the offense, trying to see how far he can get sexually. Any football fan knows, you don't win if you are always on the defense. It's only a matter of time until the guy will wear down her resistance and she will lose her purity. (This applies just as much to Christian guys as to girls.) So don't even date a non-Christian! And choose friends of the same sex who want to follow Christ. Nobody plans the kind of disaster we have in Genesis 34. It began when Dinah went out to visit her worldly girlfriends.

CONCLUSION

How do you fight the subtle, yet aggressive danger of assimilation with the world, especially as it seeks to undermine your family life? Here are three commitments that will help:

First, commit yourself to *proper separation*. As God's people, we are not to live in monasteries. But there is a place for proper separation from evil people, evil activities, and evil environments. Paul warned, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (1 Cor. 15:33). If you want to be godly, don't choose ungodly people as your best friends. If you think you'll influence them and not vice versa, then you're deceived and you're disregard-

ing the apostle's warning.

Paul also wrote, "I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil" (Rom. 16:19). Not many of us could claim to be innocent in what is evil! I've heard Christian parents say, "My kids are going to find out about the world sooner or later, so I'm not going to shelter them." That's tragic! I can hear Jacob and Leah saying the same thing as Dinah trotted off to Shechem. Read the Bible to your kids and they'll find out all they need to know about sexual immorality, lust, greed, and every other sin. But they'll learn about it in a context where the results of sin are clearly spelled out.

I'll shoot straight: Some of you watch TV shows and videos which neither you nor your kids should watch. Some of you have magazines in your home which belong in the trash. In the context of mental lust, Jesus said, "If your eye offends you, pluck it out and throw it away If your right hand offends you, cut it off and throw it away ..." (Matt. 5:29-30). He used those radical images to make the point that we dare not dally with sin. God wants us to be holy in our thought life. And that means that we've got to separate ourselves from the things which defile us and hinder our fellowship with our holy God.

Second, commit yourself to *proper insulation*. By this I mean that we need to wrap our minds with the Word of God so that our thinking and attitudes are shaped by God, not by this evil world. Unless our minds are steeped in the Word, we're going to be swayed by the world. If you read your Bible 15 minutes a day, and watch TV for 3 hours, guess which will influence you the most!

Take, for example, the worldly view of sin. You can see it here with Shechem and his father. Neither one admits that Shechem's rape of Dinah was wrong. He's just a red-blooded young man! Boys will be boys! That's a worldly view of sin: "Teenagers will be teenagers! Every generation has to sow some wild oats!"

Or take Jacob's sons' actions. It was right to be angry about the sin, but they were angry for the wrong reason: They were not

concerned about God's glory. Their family pride was offended: "Should he treat our sister as a harlot?" While they were bothered by Shechem's sin against Dinah, they were oblivious to their own sins of deception, vengeance, murder, and theft. In their deception, they are truly Jacob's sons (34:13). Years before, Jacob should have been dealing with his own and his sons' sins.

My point is, if we pick up our values and how we relate to others from the world, especially from TV, we will justify sins like pride, envy, anger, deception, and sexual immorality, because the world shrugs off all those sins. Our kids will learn to be defiant to authority, because TV portrays parents as a bit slow, at best. We will learn to relate to others by selfishness and put-downs, because that's how they do it on TV. It is only when we turn to the Bible that we learn how to please God in our thought life, our words, our actions, and our relationships.

If you're a father, I urge you to read the Bible to your family on a regular basis. Every Christian needs to memorize verses that tell us how to think, how to speak, and how to relate to one another. Properly insulated with godly thoughts and attitudes, we can be in the world without being of the world.

Third, commit yourself to *proper intention*, or purpose. Jacob's sons had the wrong purpose: They were out to teach the Shechemites, "Don't mess with us!" Things would have been different if they had been focused on God's purpose--to be a channel of His blessing to all people! This situation should have been an opportunity for witness on behalf of their covenant-keeping God. Instead, they used God's covenant sign (circumcision) as the means of deceiving these lost men and sending them to a godless eternity!

When we go out into the world, we've got to keep our purpose uppermost in our minds. We're not there to judge the world. We're not there to cavort with the world in its sin. We're there to represent our Savior, who came to seek and to save those who are lost. Go into the world with the proper *separation* from evil, the proper *insulation* of biblical thinking, and the proper *intention* of

witness for Christ, and you won't be assimilated into it. The world won't be a fatal attraction for you, or you for it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How much should Christians separate themselves and their kids from the world? Where do we draw the lines?
2. Agree/disagree: Teenagers need not rebel?
3. How should Christians respond to a crime against a family member such as rape? Is it wrong to seek justice? Vengeance?
4. Why do Christians who seek not to be worldly often seem weird?

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