



By God's grace, we are empowered to grow in *grace-ness* (graciousness) toward others—even those with whom we may disagree or those who may have hurt us. Anyone can theoretically wax eloquent and preach a great sermon or write an inspiring article about the values of love, peacemaking, inclusivity and reconciliation. But when there is an emotional, psychological or relational price to be paid to realize these virtues, many go AWOL.

RECONCILIATION'S PRICE

It seems we understand a little about loving the Lord. Loving our offending brother, less. Loving each other in a cruciform way (loving each other as Christ loves us)—well, very few have a graduation certificate from that program.

The familiar story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 32-33 has some lessons for us regarding the

cruciform cost of being peacemaking ministers of reconciliation.

Jacob conspired with his mother to cheat Esau out of his birthright and blessing. *"Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see..."* (Genesis 2:11). In the story, Isaac gave Jacob at least three distinct opportunities to honestly identify himself—he didn't. This was not a one-off moment of weakness. This was lying with malice and intent—good reason for an offense.

Speaking as a patriarch, Isaac prophetically blesses Jacob in disguise as Esau. He tells Jacob some things that we must catch: God said, speaking through Isaac: *"Many nations will serve you and peoples will bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers..."* (Genesis 25:29).

Years of sin pass and Jacob has a divine encounter with the messengers of God at the

beginning of Chapter 32. If we had been Jacob, we would have written a book about our encounters with angels and might have booked a bus and rented a tent to launch our revival ministry.

When angelic messengers told Jacob that Esau was coming to meet him, he was justifiably



afraid that Esau might kill him. So Jacob gives his servants a very specific message to convey. In it, Jacob *identifies Esau as lord and Jacob as his servant!* (Genesis 32:18).

RECONCILIATION: YIELDING THE RIGHT TO BE RIGHT

In a sense, he offers to Esau that which God had given to him, which was rightly Esau's to begin with! Jacob did not demand Esau agree with him over the issue that brought the division. *He yielded his right to be right.*

Restoring a broken relationship has to be more important to us than winning a doctrinal argument. It does not mean that what we may believe is neither true nor important. I do not think that Jacob had any doubt of the reality of what was his, even though he got it through deceit. But *emotionally and interpersonally—he let it go—he let it go so deeply that he was willing for a role reversal to take place, just so he could be restored to his offended brother.*

The story unfolds as Jacob puts together gifts for Esau. *The gifts cost Jacob something.* They represented two things: the fruit of his life's energy and work and the genuineness of his repentance.

CHEAP REPENTANCE

God does not need us to “make good” to him in order to forgive us. However, other humans may need us to do so.

Cheap repentance—“I said I am sorry, so you have to forgive me”—is no repentance at all. The

cycle of repentance (confession, repentance, and restoration) is not complete until, if within my power to do so, I restore—make whole—those whom I have hurt. Their restoration has to be more important to me than my right to be right.

The story in Genesis 32 continues when Jacob has another divine encounter—wrestling with God at Peniel—and there he has a name change. This kind of reconciliation is humanly impossible. It is no small coincidence that it is *after* Jacob has an awareness of his relational alienation, and *after* he has given up his right to be right, and *after* he has accepted the cost of reconciliation that he has a name change. The personal transformation we may desire is inextricably linked to our relationships with others. Being a follower of Jesus is not a personal piety society. It is about having right relationships with God *and* humanity.

In Genesis 33, as the gift caravan approaches Esau, everyone bows before Esau multiple times. Esau in turn greets Jacob with a kiss. There is a cultural nugget we must see here. For Middle Eastern people, a kiss was the way you greeted a social equal. Bowing, prostrating oneself, was the way an inferior acknowledged a social superior.

Jacob let Esau have the “upper hand.” He did not berate him with the blessing he received from Isaac about being lord and his brothers serving him! Jacob let Esau have the honor that God had promised to himself. Jacob was okay with it. He didn't react.

GOD'S PRESENCE IN RECONCILIATION



We will never know the depths of God's love in relational reconciliation if we are unwilling to let go of who is the “rightest” about the Bible. Even the one who may indeed be right must be willing to seem to lose the point. This is Calvary-style love on planet earth.

Finally, and most profound to me, Jacob says to Esau: “*When I saw you, it is as if I had seen the face of God*” (Genesis 33:10). Jacob had metaphorically “seen” or touched the essence of God. The fruit of Jacob's spiritual experiences was *seeing that in the offended other, God is present.*

Sometimes when other parties are involved, reconciliation will not be possible. I get it. However, we can deal with our own hearts and come to grips with this Genesis version of Saul of Tarsus' Acts 9 encounter on the road to Damascus. Jesus did not confront Saul about being “born

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“Deconstruction” –defined–

by Sean Davidson—excerpted from
Brad Jersak’s *A More Christlike Way*

One thing “deconstruction” does not mean is a cynical, angry interlude on the way to militant progressivism.

At least it wouldn’t have meant that for *Jacques Derrida*, the French philosopher who coined the term. Deconstruction, for Derrida, isn’t about manning the barricades. It’s about learning to slow down, to attend closely to the way we use language. It is to be mindful about how we discuss and practice truth and meaning.

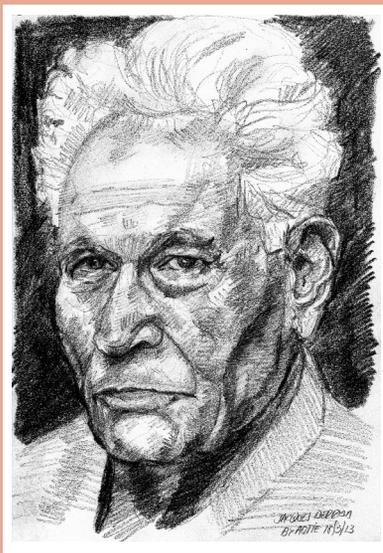
This has important implications for theology. If you pay close attention to Derrida, he doesn’t try to disprove truth claims—nor does he try to prove them. He remains open to truth and meaning.

The point of deconstruction is to unmask claims to truth that pretend to stand on their own, independent of conditions and contexts.

The pop version of “deconstruction” fails to appreciate these dynamics in its own discourse. For many post-Evangelicals, deconstruction tends to be practiced as an intermediary stage of doubt and cynicism in the service of militant progressivism. That form of deconstruction is a construction that Derrida himself would have deconstructed.

I know there have been very real abuses in the church. I’ve lived through enough of them to have my own struggles and misgivings. What troubles me is the strident reactionary and rationalistic spirit as recourse. I can understand that to an extent, given the experience of spiritual abuse. But not as a concerted strategy for moving forward in faith, hope and love. There’s too much about this spirit that seems fueled by the very thing it’s supposing to resist.

Derrida’s original practice provides a much-needed corrective—it not only helps to critique institutionalized problems, but also reactionary solutions. It forces us to consider genuine alternatives that are less about ideological tactics and posturing and more about participation in the gospel. □



The Original Prodigal Sons

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again” to “go to heaven when he died.” Rather, Jesus confronted Saul with the reality that he completely associated and identified with the “less than other”—the ones Saul considered enemies, worthy of death.



By God’s grace, we may look at those who offend us and say: “When I saw you, it is as if I had seen the face of God.”

Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, “Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.” This simple but costly discipleship is how Jesus describes the Jesus Way, the Way of the Cross where we “take up our cross” and follow him. □

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