

Kingdom Living Today

Illustrating the WAY of God's Kingdom for a Modern World

22. Those Who Follow Jesus Must Boldly Carry On His Work

“I CAME TO CALL SINNERS TO REPENTANCE, FOR THERE IS GREAT REJOICING IN HEAVEN OVER ONE SINNER WHO REPENTS. IF YOU FOLLOW ME, YOU TOO MUST SEEK OUT SINNERS AND BRING THEM TO REPENTANCE.”

With hamburgers and milkshakes in hand, Harry and his brother Scott sat down on the park bench. Since he was the one who'd asked for this get together, Scott was the first to speak. “I wanted you to know that Kim and I have gone through the *Demolishing Strongholds* workbook you gave me, and we read that *Gospel of the Covenant* article.”

“You did?” Harry responded, delightedly surprised that his older brother had actually followed through with his recommendation.

“Yes!” came the exhilarated response. “We're truly free in Jesus from those unclean spirits, (John 8:36) and together we've embraced our Father's Covenant!”

“Wow!” Harry rejoiced.

Scott grinned gratefully at his brother, whose forceful prompting had convinced him to investigate these materials thoroughly. (Proverbs 27:9) “That article certainly made it plain how living in Covenant union with our Father can have a deep effect on our marriage. This is something Kim and I both want—the changes we see that He's made in you and Jan. We can already sense that the Holy Spirit's working in both of us!” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

“I'm so glad to hear this,” Harry beamed, “and I know Jan will be excited too. Maybe our families can get together real soon.”

“Kim and I would like that,” Scott agreed, then hesitated before he went on. “Harry, I've told you about the Bible study I've been attending at work for several years, haven't I?”

“Yes, you've mentioned it,” Harry replied. “What about it?”

Scott sighed deeply. “Ever since I've been free of strongholds and embraced the Covenant Gospel, I've been having problems with the other guys that I've never experienced before. I don't even feel like sharing anything at our meetings any more.”

“Let me see if I have this right,” Harry said. “It's like you're saying things now that nobody else wants to hear. You feel like you're out of sync with the rest of the guys.”

“Yeah, that's exactly what it's like. What's going on?” Scott was desperate for some type of understanding.

With a smile Harry asked, “Let me ask you a question before I answer yours. Has your own Bible reading changed?”

“I'll say!” Scott blurted. “Kim and I want to know how to put God's Word into practice, rather than just know what it says.” (Luke 8:21) He paused then added, “And I keep getting these little internal nudges when I'm reading certain passages. Sometimes I get insights I've never had before and other times it's a prompting to align my life with what the verses are saying.” (Ephesians 1:17)

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“That’s the prompting of the Holy Spirit within you doing this.”

“What do you mean, Harry?”

Harry regarded his sibling earnestly. “Let me ask you another question, Scott. Did you and Kim really *trust* that you were the Father’s children before you embraced the Covenant Gospel?”

“It’s interesting that you’d ask that because we both talked about this very thing,” Scott answered. “We both concluded that we’d never belonged to Him before! I mean, we’d known *about* God, but didn’t know Him in the intimate sense of being united in His Spirit with Him.^(Romans 8:15-17) Why is it so different now?”

Harry firmly took hold of his brother’s arm. “Because you’ve both received the indwelling Holy Spirit!” He grinned as he went on, “Remember, our Father consummates His Covenant by sealing us with the Holy Spirit guaranteeing His part of the Covenant in Jesus.^(Ephesians 4:30) The Holy Spirit is now operating through *your* spirit. His goal is to replace the influence of your sin nature and rule your soul!”^(Romans 8:13)

A light bulb went on in his head and Scott breathed a sigh of relief. “So that’s what’s been going on! There’s a change of command going on inside Kim and me!^(Romans 8:14) But how does this factor in to the tension I’m having with some of the guys in the Bible study?”

Harry jumped in quickly, “Let’s see if I can simplify this for you. When we’re born, we receive a spirit, soul and body.^(1Thessalonians 5:23) Our spirit is what separates us from the rest of creation. Until we’re *born again* by embracing the true Gospel, we’re controlled by our soul.^(Romans 7:5) That’s our mind, will and emotions, along with our sin nature and any undemolished strongholds in us.”

“I think I see where you’re heading because something from the Covenant Gospel article just popped into my head,” Scott blurted.

Harry urged him on. “Go ahead. You connect the biblical dots.”

Scott was eager to unload his new discernment. “One of the purposes of the Spirit is to help sanctify me into becoming more like Jesus.” Harry’s grin brightened as his brother continued, “It’s like once I was listening to an AM radio—my soul—and now I’m listening to FM—the Holy Spirit. I don’t want to sound arrogant, but some of the guys in that Bible study don’t have the Holy Spirit and that’s why I’m having this tension.”^(1 Corinthians 2:14)

“Absolutely!” echoed Harry. “So many in Christendom today make assumptions that someone’s a ‘Christian’ because they claim to be, even though their lives are just like the world’s.^(Romans 8:9) And, for those of us who’ve embraced the Covenant Gospel proclaimed throughout Scripture, that’s one assumption we don’t want to make.”

Scott appreciated his brother’s insight and continued, “Those guys without the Holy Spirit seem to be always seeking more Bible knowledge but aren’t putting it into practice.^(Matthew 7:26,27) Their marriages are full of discord and their kids are out of control—by their own admission!” Sorrow and frustration filled his voice. “All they want to do is study the Bible and teach at each other, I guess so they can feel good about what they know. But I want to *live* the Word of God and see it become a way of life for Kim and me!^(Matthew 7:24,25) My goals aren’t like their goals any more.”

“I recognize that, bro.” Harry then looked directly into Scott’s eyes with a challenge. “You’re either going to have to help them understand the authentic Gospel

and receive the Holy Spirit, or else they'll force you to leave.^(2 Timothy 3:12) Like you said, you're now hearing FM while they're tuned in to AM. The two don't mix."

Scott nodded in understanding then added, "You know, you and I were raised by a non-confrontive father. He glossed over everything! That's probably why tension with others bothers us so much." He grinned ruefully. "I confess I've pretty much rolled along with the crowd until now."

That admission was no surprise to Harry. "If it hadn't been for Jack's influence in my life, I might still be trapped by the prison of apprehension. In fact, it was seeing his example that emboldened me a few weeks ago to come and see you about the strongholds you and Kim needed to demolish."

"I'll never cease to be grateful that you did," Scott smiled as he put his hand on Harry's arm. After a moment he asked, "Since I don't have a 'Jack' right now in my life, is there anything else you can share that would help me be more courageous, especially with the men in that Bible study?"^(Proverbs 9:9)

"Sure! First, let me get my Bible out of the car." Coming back to the bench Harry recalled, "One Saturday Jack spent several hours with us guys showing us why we needed to be bold and confront others when necessary^(Ephesians 4:14,15). It's foundational to exercising godly authority in our homes—the courage to be able to correct and/or exclude whatever hinders peace within our family."

Scott nodded in affirmation. "I can see by your expression that what he told you had quite an impact!"

Harry nodded. "It has. What Jack told us begins with the word 'deny.' He started off with Jesus' words recounted by Mark: *'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me and for the gospel will save it.'*"^(Mark 8:34,35)

"That's pretty heavy when you realize that a cross in Jesus' day meant just one thing — a painful death!" exclaimed Scott.

"You're absolutely right," Harry responded. "He's telling us that if we're to follow Him, we need to willingly forsake anything that would hinder us from sharing His Gospel." Then he added, "Daily choosing to walk in His steps and deny ourselves is the whole ongoing process of sanctification into Christ's likeness. And the ground floor of doing our part in the Kingdom through His Spirit begins with denying our old sinful tendencies that try to snare our mind, will and emotions."^(Galatians 5:16,17)

"I can see that!" Scott broke in. "It's not just a matter of turning off the AM "transmitter" and turning on the FM. You have to be *deprogramed* from all you learned under the AM and then learn the FM!"^(Romans 12:2)

"'Deprogramed'. That's a good way to describe sanctification in separating from the old and putting on the new," chuckled Harry.^(Romans 13:12-14) "It'd be easy if all it took was learning Bible facts like in a classroom. But sanctification means that we have to deny our old goals and values, the values that made up our worldly identity. Then we're able to take on the Christ-like ones we find in the Bible."^(1 John 3:2)

Scott smiled wryly. "I'm starting to see that acquiring and growing in our Lord's character qualities calls for a lot greater emotional determination than anything I experienced before in my spiritual life." He shook his head with a sigh. "In some of the areas the Holy Spirit has already changed in me, I felt like I was going through

the 'valley of the shadow of death.'"

"I know what you mean," Harry agreed. "That's why Jesus gives us such dramatic comparisons so we can understand the cost of following Him and being identified as 'His family.'"

Scott was puzzled. "I'm not tracking that one."

"Well," responded Harry earnestly, "think about some of the hard things Jesus taught about following Him: *'I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword; I've come to turn a person against his relatives; his enemies will be the members of his own household; anyone who loves his father or mother or siblings more than Me is not worthy of Me; and anyone who doesn't take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.'* (See Matthew 10:34-38) In fact," he continued, "Jesus tells us that if we're to be His disciples, we have to *hate* our parents and family and even our own life!" (Luke 14:26)

"Wow!" Scott was amazed. He recognized that compared to loving Jesus, any other relationships would have to come second to obeying Him. "Following Jesus the way HE calls for is serious business, isn't it?"

"It's sure a far cry from sitting complacently in a pew and then living the way you want the rest of the week," Harry countered. "This is where role models like Jack and Dee can help us identify and fulfill our Kingdom purposes." (Ephesians 2:10)

"Since Kim and I don't have a 'Jack and Dee' living near us, do you have any guidance that will help Kim and me stay on the right track in Jesus?" Scott entreated.

"I sure do," his brother replied. "Stay repentant so that when you do sin, you readily confess and restore your fellowship with our Father and His Son." (1 John 1:6,7)

"Why is staying repentant so important for us in serving as His Kingdom representatives?" (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Harry understood what he was asking. "When you confess your sins, God cleanses you from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) And when you're not tarnished by unrighteousness, you can be as bold as a lion in serving our Lord!" (Proverbs 28:1) He smiled affectionately at his brother. "And, if I can add one more thing: Keep asking the Spirit of Christ in you for the love He has for others. After all, Jesus joyfully sacrificed His own life on their behalf." (Hebrews 12:2)

"You've really helped me a lot," Scott smiled gratefully. "I don't want to leave that Bible study yet until I've tried harder to help. And if they ask me to leave because of that, so be it!"

"I'm proud of your willingness, Scott," Harry declared. "One last suggestion. A good way to safeguard yourself from a judgmental spirit about the other men is something Jack taught us: People who stay emotionally wounded will always use the Bible *intellectually*. They know what He commands and are aware of the healing Jesus could give them, but they don't do anything about it."

He paused as he looked straight at his brother. "I'd encourage you to help these men, and their families if possible, become free of strongholds. Then, whatever it takes, urge them to fill in the old ruts of attitudes and emotions that have ruled their souls for so long and pained their relationships. If they do this, they'll encounter the power of Jesus, and that makes all the difference just like it did in you and Kim."

The two men finished their time in prayer. Scott drove off with a sense of peace and gratitude for being his Father's child and having a brother like Harry. (Psalms 133:1)