

Kingdom Living Today

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

28. I Know Your Deeds, That You Are Neither Cold Nor Hot

"MANY OF YOU HAVE PURSUED THE PLEASURES AND REWARDS OF THIS WORLD. YOU'VE FAILED TO LOVE ME BECAUSE YOU'VE BEEN UNWILLING TO KEEP ALL MY COMMANDS. BECAUSE YOU ARE LUKEWARM IN YOUR OBEDIENCE TO MY WORD, I AM GOING TO SPIT YOU OUT OF MY MOUTH."

"Brett, you look awfully disturbed this morning," Harry observed as the men sat down for their Friday early morning get-together at the restaurant.

"I am," the younger man responded somewhat dejectedly. "Late last night my brother Dan's son, Luke, who's attending a junior college here and commuting from home, came over to talk with me. I didn't know he'd been going through all the materials I've been sending his father from the Restoration Ministries website."

"Well, that couldn't have been so bad," Jerome piped in, thinking anyone going through those materials would be encouraged.

"Oh, Luke was filled with joy!" Brett countered quickly. "He's been freed from strongholds and has embraced the Gospel of the Covenant. In fact, he's been sharing these truths with his friends on campus." He stopped long enough to collect his thoughts then added, "But there's a problem. As he's been growing spiritually, there's been a growing tension with Dan, his dad. It's gotten so bad that Luke is considering leaving home!"

Jack eyed his brother in Christ with empathy. "Go on, Brett. I think this is something we all need to discuss. I've encountered this kind of tension before when one family member seeks to be true to Jesus at all cost but the rest of the family rationalizes why obedience isn't necessary." (Luke 12:51-53)

Brett appreciated the chance to bring this before these men who so deeply cared for him and his family. He really wanted and needed their insights on this. "My brother is a regular churchgoer, and I thought good things were about to happen when he began to read the Bible for himself." With a heavy sigh he went on, "While our conversations focused a lot more on spiritual topics, every time it came to something Dan was called to obey in God's Word, he'd balk."

"Balk?" Jerome asked. "Isn't that what a pitcher does in baseball?"

"Yeah, and he gets penalized," Harry interjected, and everyone chuckled.

Brett picked up where he'd left off. "Every time it came to a step of faith to obey God, I found I had to get very persuasive with my brother. I figured someday the Holy Spirit would get hold of him and give him the loving courage to obey God's Word. (John 14:21-24) But after seeing the strain on Luke because of his Dad's halfheartedness, I feel like I failed to be as forceful as our Lord would have me be."

"Don't let yourself be haunted by that last thought, Brett," Jack cut in. "Can't you see that God has given you through your nephew a second witness against your brother's ongoing sin of disobedience? (Matthew 18:15,16) How did you leave it with your nephew last night?"

"He's coming back this Saturday to spend several hours with me."

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“Good!” Jack exclaimed. “Then let’s go over some of the issues that any of us needs to face when a follower of Jesus has a lukewarm relative. Especially one that’s a churchgoer, since through that person’s disobedience he’s defaming the Name of Jesus.”(Revelation 3:14-16) At that all the men nodded agreement.

Jack began, “First we need to start with the prison of strongholds that may be influencing them. Two strongholds in particular are prevalent among people who take part in services but aren’t devoted to Jesus as Lord of their life. The first is *Deceit*, especially the symptoms of rationalization and wrong doctrine or misuse of Scripture.”(John 8:43-47; James 1:22-24) Each of the men could think of people in bondage to that. “The second is the stronghold of *Religiosity and Spiritual Lethargy*, and several symptoms stand out: religious busyness, Bible knowledge without love for God, no spiritual power, and spiritual blindness.”(1Corinthians 13:1,2; Matthew 23:27,28)

“So you’re saying that Brett’s brother is stuck in a demonic prison,” Jerome clarified.

Brett was perplexed. “But Dan told me he went through the *Demolishing Your Strongholds* article I gave him.”

“Even if that’s true and he’s free from the demonic prison of these two strongholds,” Jack broke in, “I believe you may find that he’s never filled in the ‘ruts’ of rationalization with trusting faith, nor has he called out to Jesus for the empowerment to love Him with such intensity that keeping His commands is no burden.”(1John 5:3)

“I’m not sure Dan really wants these old ruts filled in with God’s ways,” Brett noted.

Jack smiled assuringly at the younger man. “I know you love your brother, and he needs to be confronted by someone who cares about his spiritual progress.(Colossians 1:28) Even though these symptoms were induced by demonic spirits, for him to keep practicing rationalization and those other symptoms is a sin. And that’s where going to your brother to confront him comes in.”(Matthew 18:15) “And believe me,” he added with a shake of his head, “I realize how countercultural this is to our ‘tolerant, anything goes’ society.”

“I see now how God has raised up two witnesses against my brother’s disobedience,”(Matthew 18:16) Brett remarked, noting the wonder of God’s timing in having his nephew come over the previous night. “I have to admit that after my conversations with Dan when I’d try to exhort him to obey God’s Word, I’d feel incredibly drained.(2Timothy 4:2) Sometimes I’d even fight off resentment toward him because he was so passive and detached from biblical commands.”

Jerome spoke up with an intense realization. “Satan would like nothing better than to drive us away from the people our God wants us to help, even if it requires confronting them!”(Luke 17:3)

“You’re right on,” Jack enjoined. “That’s why we need to see our lukewarm relatives from God’s perspective. Let’s keep in mind that when we embraced our Father’s Covenant in Christ, we joined a much more important family than our biological one. (Luke 8:21) It’s the eternal family of Jesus(Matthew 12:50) and our ‘family’ responsibility in His Spirit is love-based obedience to do everything He commands us.”(1John 3:7-10)

Young Nate, whom Jack was discipling and was now part of their fellowship family, spoke up for the first time. “I’m new to reading and applying the Bible. Can you give me an example of the consequences when we rationalize disobedience rather than obey our Lord’s Word?”

“One comes to mind right away,” Harry said eagerly. “When the twelve men Moses sent to spy out the land returned(Numbers 13), all but Caleb and Joshua discouraged the Israelites because of the formidable people there. That fear-based rationale hindered

the rest from trusting God—the same God Who sent ten plagues to free them from Egypt, Who parted the Red Sea, and Who miraculously provided food and water in the desert!” His voice dropped in sadness. “Because they relied on their fear-based rationalization, they wandered around the desert 40 years until that generation of doubters died. Only their children got to enter the Promised Land.”

“That’s a good example, Harry,” Jerome affirmed. “I have one from the Newer Testament. When the chief priests and elders asked Jesus by whose authority He was acting, He asked *them* a question about where John’s baptism came from. (Matthew 21:23-27) They rationalized that if they said it was from God, Jesus would ask why they didn’t believe John. And they didn’t want to say it was from man, because the people esteemed John as one of God’s prophets. So they didn’t answer at all. All throughout the Gospels Jesus calls men like these ‘Hypocrites!’”

“I get the picture,” Nate responded. “This is heavy. I gather that when I see a command in the Bible, God wants my first heart response to be obedience out of love for Him. I know you’ve taught me, Jack, that His Spirit in me gives me both the will and the power to obey Him,” (Philippians 2:13) the young man continued, “but rationalization would make me want to weigh pros and cons. And if I choose this as my initial step, I’ll talk myself out of doing it His way.”

“You put that well, Nate,” Jack affirmed with delight in the young man and the insight the Spirit had given him. “I committed to memory one particular stanza from the poem in the back of the *Demolishing Strongholds* workbook. It goes: *One step thou seest—then go forward boldly, One step is far enough for faith to see; Take that, and thy next duty shall be told thee, For step by step thy Lord is leading thee.*”

Harry smiled his agreement. “You’ve told us often, Jack, that you’ve never met anyone God gave *two* steps to take. I totally agree with that, and in my Bible reading I’ve found that principle to be true there as well.”

“Is that why God gives us so many examples in the Bible of first taking that one step of faith, then expecting that He’ll act?” Brett asked.

“Yes, it is,” Jack answered. “We need to see both the people who acted in faith *and* God’s response to their faith. They go hand-in-hand: one step of faith, and God responds.”

“Two examples in the Bible that spur me on to act immediately,” Harry echoed, “are when the Israelites were about to cross the Jordan River and attack Jericho. The river was at flood stage, and it didn’t stop flowing until the priests carrying the Ark stepped into it.” (Joshua 3:15,16)

Jerome cut in with a laugh. “I once envisioned myself as the first priest in line. I remember thinking, ‘I sure hope Joshua really heard from God...’” The immediate identification with Jerome’s point led everyone to chortle.

Harry continued, “The other example happened a little later when God told them to march around Jericho for seven days. That’s got to be the strangest battle strategy of all time.” He turned toward Jerome. “I bet those men who had trained for war had the same thought the priests might have had, “‘I sure hope Joshua really heard from God!’” Now everyone broke up in laughter.

Then the atmosphere returned to the soberness of the topic: how to interact with lukewarm relatives. Jack resumed with a question. “Brett, I need to ask this because

it will guide you in how to deal with your brother: Will the lukewarm be welcomed into heaven?"(Hebrews 12:25-27)

"Golly!" Brett blurted. "I've thought about that each time I've finished one of those conversations with Dan when I've tried to persuade him to obey what's in God's Word. Deep inside I sense the answer to your question is 'No, he won't be welcomed because his walk doesn't match his talk.'"(James 2:17-26)

Jack responded emphatically, "I agree! Remember, one of the stipulations we see time and again in God's Word about our way to the Judgment Throne is that our pilgrimage to our salvation calls for *forceful conviction and steadfast determination*.(1Peter 1:13-17) Father doesn't fling open heaven's gate to those who give up along the way and return to the world's values and goals,"(2Peter 2:22) he added. "That's compromise, like mixing cold water with warm. And *lukewarmness* is, in fact, rebellion against His Lordship and His Word!"

"Are we dealing here with what the Bible calls a 'carnal mind?'" Jerome asked.

"Yes, we are," Jack responded. "'Carnal' is the Bible's way of describing the corrupt nature of man which desires to sin.(Genesis 6:5) Carnality represents everything contrary to the Spirit."(Galatians 5:17) He grimaced as he went on, "The idea of a 'carnal Christian' was developed by those who teach a false gospel which separates the spirit from the flesh as the ancient Greek Gnostics did. In other words, since your spirit is 'forgiven', you can disobey God's commands with impunity."(Jude 1:18,19)

Harry added, "So they're ignoring the fact that we're on a pilgrimage TO our salvation before our Lord's Throne.(Hebrews 12:1; 2Timothy 4:7) Enroute, we have responsibilities to our Father that by His grace He's prepared us to accomplish."(Ephesians 2:10)

As they were speaking, Nate opened his Bible to a passage he'd recently read. "Is this part of the issue we're talking about? 1 Corinthians 2:13,14 says, *'This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.'*"(Also see Romans 8:5,6)

As Jack nodded in approval, Brett spoke up. "I think the Spirit gave you that passage specifically for us, Nate. It captures the tension many of us who follow Jesus wholeheartedly have with relatives and friends who are lukewarm spiritually."

"The Scriptures bear witness that there's no such thing as a 'carnal Christian,'" Jack noted. "Nate, would you read Romans 8:9 for us? And please emphasize the word 'if'."

Nate read with meaning permeating his youthful voice. *"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."* So those 'ifs' are important!"

"Indeed," Jack declared. "The testimony that the Spirit of Christ abides in us is seen in our earnest and loving desire to keep His commands."(1John 5:3; 2John 1:6) He turned to Brett. "Those like your brother who habitually choose to give way to their sin nature are revealing that the Spirit of Jesus isn't in them.(James 1:13-16) Their very resistance to living according to His commands is evidence of that. So, Brett, what would the Spirit have you do?"

Brett knew the answer. "I'm going to call my brother before I get to work. We need to talk!(Proverbs 27:5) I'll ask him to meet with Luke and me so he can hear us both."