

Kingdom Living Today

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

29. If You Obey My Commands, You Will Remain In My Love

"I AM THE VINE; YOU ARE THE BRANCHES.
IF YOU REMAIN IN ME AND I IN YOU, YOU WILL BEAR MUCH FRUIT
TO MY FATHER'S GLORY. IF YOU DON'T REMAIN IN ME,
YOU'RE A CUT-OFF BRANCH, THROWN INTO THE FIRE AND BURNED."

The intensity of emotions was as hot as the humid August heat shimmering in the backyard. "I don't get it, Brett. Why are you and Luke jumping me about sin?" yelled a distraught Dan.

Brett could appreciate the defensive position his older brother was taking. No one in their family had ever confronted sin before, preferring to ignore whatever anyone was doing. "I'm here because Luke had the courage to come to me last week. He's been going through those materials I'd been sending to you and is choosing to put them into practice."

Dan's acid response accompanied his glare at his son. "Yeah, yeah, he's starting to turn into some kind of holier-than-thou pest. Life with him has become unbearable for both his mother and me." (John 3:20)

"Dad," Luke pleaded. "You make it impossible for any kind of meaningful spiritual discussion in our home."

Dan jumped in with venom. "I get enough of that at church. We have a good home so why should I have to deal with spiritual stuff when I can be relaxing after work?"

Luke's reply was pained. "We *don't* have a 'good home'. We have a *home of darkness* where you and Mom sin against God and you don't care." (John 3:19)

"What do you mean?" his Dad snapped back.

"Remember when I brought up those TV shows with the half-naked women dancing seductively?" The young man watched his father cringe in angry silence. "And I've caught you a number of times at those porn websites." (Ephesians 5:5) Don't worry. I've been careful to keep it from Mom."

His father retorted, "So, are you threatening me now?"

"Not one bit," Luke rejoined. "I love you and Mom, and I want us to end the hypocrisy of going to church while we're entertaining sin in the rest of our lives." (Isaiah 1:16)

Brett was patient, letting his nephew get everything out that he needed to say.

"So my sanctimonious son is calling me a 'hypocrite.' Listen, my conscience isn't convicting me that I've done anything wrong," (Titus 1:15) Dan replied angrily. Yet, Brett could see that the pain in Luke's voice was getting through to the man.

Deciding to vent his ire elsewhere, Dan turned to Brett. "So why'd you join my son in this attack?"

"Attack?" Brett answered, fully realizing how difficult it had always been for his older brother to receive any input from him. "Because your son *loves* you so much, he's had the courage to address specific sins in your life. And all you've done is mocked and ridiculed him. I'm here for the second step of confronting your sin."

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Dan snarled, "What do you mean, 'second step?'"

Brett opened his Bible and quoted, "*If your brother sins, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.*" That's why Luke's come to you. It goes on, "*But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church...*"(Matthew 18:15-17) He didn't complete verse 17 because he didn't know what Dan's church would do if he and Luke went to them. He was hoping his brother wouldn't force the issue that far by refusing to listen to them.

Dan hesitated, then replied somewhat less ruffled, "I've never seen anyone use that passage in our church. Everyone just puts on their 'I'm fine, hope you're fine' face so no one knows if anyone's sinning or not the rest of the week."

Brett was hoping his brother would ditch the rationalization he'd used for so long to defend his life of sin.(1John 1:5,6) He'd so earnestly been praying that Dan would want to know and love Jesus as Lord of his life far more than he wanted to cling to darkness. And, Brett was also relying on an important scriptural principle. He turned to another passage, urging Dan to pay close attention. "*For the **word of God** is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the **thoughts and attitudes of the heart**. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. **Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.***"(Hebrews 4:12,13)

Brett closed his Bible, peering intently into his brother's narrowed eyes. "There's coming a day when every sin you're doing will be laid bare before the eyes of God."

Dan started to grumble, "I don't want to hear that kind of..." But his words trailed off, followed by a long silence. Brett knew in his spirit that the intercession by the entire home fellowship was being answered. It was the first time he'd ever seen authentic conviction on his brother's face.

Dan got up from his chair sobbing and wrapped his arms around his son. "Luke, I'm so sorry... so sorry. I've been a hypocrite for a long time. And, now you love me enough to tell me the truth." Dan let go of Luke and turned to Brett. After holding him tightly in a bear hug, he spoke sincerely. "I do want to listen to you, brother. Tell me what I need to do."(Mark 10:17)

They went over to a table together and opened the Bible to a passage Jack had suggested they use if Dan showed a repentant heart—John 15. "Dan, it all has to do with you living a life clinging to Jesus with such intensity that not only is it hard for you to sin, your *love* for Him compels you to bear fruit to our Father's glory."

"I've never even thought about that before," Dan disclosed with humility.(Isaiah 57:15) He asked Brett to go over that chapter with him, not wanting to miss a point.

Brett put his finger on the first verse: "Jesus is the Vine we must all remain attached to. And, our Father is the Gardener: HE cuts off every branch that bears no fruit. These are so-called Christians who hold onto sin and live fruitlessly for themselves."(Matthew 7:21)

"So am I being cut off?" Dan inquired anxiously.

"Not at all, Dad!" Luke interjected. "When our Father sees a repentant heart, He prunes you of those areas of your life that aren't fruitful now, and of those that are holding you back from doing His will."(1Peter 4:1,2)

Wanting to understand, Dan asked, "Is pruning less painful than being cut off?"

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“By far!” Brett affirmed. Pointing further down the page, he noted, “Look at verse 16 and what happens to the branches that are cut off: *‘If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.’*”

“We’re talking hell here, aren’t we?” Dan queried. (2Thessalonians 1:8,9)

“Yup, that everlasting place of suffering where those who don’t abide in Jesus end up,” his brother agreed sadly. “That’s why we need to be purposeful about our relationship with Jesus. The Bible repeats many times that our *love for Him* is displayed by knowing and *applying His commands* to our lives.” Gesturing further down the page, Brett pointed to verse 10: “*If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in His love.*” (John 15:10)

“I sure haven’t done any of that,” Dan responded sheepishly. “To be truthful, most Sunday mornings I daydream through the sermon and can’t wait until the service is over.” Pausing a moment, he added, “Tell me then, how does God see me now?”

“It’s right here, Dad, like we just said,” Luke jumped in eagerly, wanting to encourage his Dad. “*Every branch that does bear fruit, our Father trims clean’—He makes sure all that hinders us from producing fruit to His glory is pruned away.*”

“I want to be that kind of person,” Dan responded with hope, regarding his son with growing pride.

Brett stepped in. “If you’d like to take the first step in pruning, you need to confess your sins and repent of them, purposing in your heart to turn away from what you know from God’s Word displeases Him.” He looked at his brother with assurance. “Luke and I will stay out here praying for you. Why don’t you go inside and let the Holy Spirit show you the sins God has against you.” (John 16:8)

About forty minutes passed before Dan returned. His red eyes bore witness that he’d been crying a lot. (2Corinthians 7:10,11) Brett and Luke rose up to embrace him. As they sat down again, Dan was the first to speak. “Son, I’d like that *Demolishing Your Strongholds* article and the *Gospel of the Covenant* Brett sent me that I’ve never read. I will now!”

“I’ll be glad to help you and your family, Dan,” Brett affirmed. (Isaiah 52:7) Pointing again to John 15, he continued, “As you can see in verses 4 through 10, Jesus repeatedly urges us, ‘REMAIN IN ME’, and then He’ll remain in us. That means it takes *intentional steadfast determination* on our part to remain in Him, or else He wouldn’t have repeated it so often! This is also where we need to encourage each other.” (Hebrews 3:13)

“I want that kind of relationship with Jesus, Brett. And I know my wife does too. It’s me who’s been the spiritual hindrance here. I’ve kept rationalizing away so many proposals she’s given me over the years for our spiritual development.”

“Many fall into the rationale trap and find their faith shriveling,” Brett responded. “They don’t mean to tear down the faith of others, but their doubt and unbelief does that.” (Hebrews 3:12)

After a pause Dan observed, “I notice in your Bible that you’ve written three references—1 John 1:9, 1 Peter 3:12, and James 5:16-18— alongside John 15:7, ‘*If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.*’ And, down here you put 4/7/08 next to ‘*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*’ (John 15:13) Why do you do that?”

Grateful love lifted Brett's heart. "As I've continued to read through the Bible over the years, the Holy Spirit has shown me how interconnected different truths are. For example, in verse 7 Jesus says, 'Ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.' Standing alone, it seems like He's saying you can get whatever you want just by asking." He shook his head then went on, "But then I found that our Father has a condition for answering prayers. He calls us to be righteous in how we live! God listens to the *godly person who does His will.*(John 9:31)

Dan interjected, "That's why you had me spend time having the Holy Spirit convict me of my sins—so I could be righteous in God's sight by confessing them, receive His forgiveness in Christ and be purified from my unrighteousness." (1John 1:9)

"Yes!" Brett attested. "And 1 Peter 3:12 affirms a truth cited often in the Bible: '*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*'"(See Proverbs 15:8, 28:9; Psalms 34:15-17, 66:18,19)

"Dad, answered prayer is what got the first followers of Jesus noticed," Luke proclaimed with excitement.

"I don't think I've ever even seen an answer to prayer before," Dan replied meekly.

"You're seeing one now!" Brett exclaimed. "My whole fellowship family is praying for you while I'm here. God has worked in your heart in answer to their prayers!"

Tears again filled Dan's eyes. "Please...please thank them for me."(2Corinthians 1:11)

"I will, gladly," Brett answered. He then turned to James 5:16-18 and read it aloud to these two who were so dear to him.

"Wow!" was first word out of Dan's mouth. "I can see now what confessing our sins to our Father produces. That guy Elijah was someone just like me: righteous in God's sight because I've confessed my sins. And now *my* prayers can be heard just like his were, since I'm agreeing in the Spirit with what God wants."

"That's how God gets all the glory!" Luke beamed. "Our Father hears us when we have no unconfessed sin. And that's what I've wanted for our home, Dad."

"I promise you I won't rest until that's happened," Dan pledged as they hugged each other again. "One last question. I was pretty cruel to you two when we first got started today. But neither of you fought back.(1Peter 3:8) How come?"

Luke responded with a gleam, "It's love, Dad, the love God has given me for you and for everyone else! Once the demonic strongholds were gone and my friends in Jesus helped fill in my old ruts of behavior and attitude, love began to motivate me like never before.(1Peter 1:22) I began to realize what one of the authors of *Demolishing Strongholds* understood about the depth of God's love after the strongholds were gone in him."

Dan looked puzzled so Brett opened up to Ephesians 3:16-19: "*I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*" Did you get that? Christ is dwelling in you and me through faith! "*And I pray that you, being **rooted and established in love**, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp **how wide and long and high and deep** is the love of Christ, and to know **this love that surpasses knowledge**—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*"

"I want that kind of love I see in you two!" Dan proclaimed with heartfelt joy.

As Brett closed in prayer, they agreed to meet as often as necessary until the way of the Lord was the way of Dan's home.