

# Kingdom Living Today

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

## 31. Don't Be Afraid Of Them, For I Am With You

"SAY TO THEM WHATEVER MY SPIRIT GIVES YOU.  
DO NOT BE INTIMIDATED BY THEM. THEY MAY CONTEND AGAINST YOU  
BUT WILL NOT PREVAIL. FOR I AM WITH YOU."

Jack paused in the parking lot for a moment to pray before he entered the building. Several weeks earlier he'd received a call inviting him to meet with the local ecumenical clergy council who wanted to understand what his ministry was all about. Since he didn't want to discuss the Hebraic foundations in a vacuum, he printed out copies of the *Prodigal Church* booklet which the Moderator for the council then mailed out to each member.

After the introductions, Jack was asked to speak. "May I first ask how many of you have read the *Prodigal Church*?" About 20 of the 25 clergy present had. "How many of you were favorably disposed to what you read and wanted to investigate the topic further?" About five raised their hand.

Before he could continue, one of the five began to speak. "I went to the Restoration Ministries website and began to peruse their book *Pastoring By Elders*. Frankly, I was blown away when I found that there were no clergy in the earliest Church."

"What do you mean there were no clergy?" Belligerent response erupted from several in attendance.

Jack jumped in, "The earliest followers of Jesus were an *extended spiritual family* who met in homes. They were led by older men of wisdom who shepherded them as family leaders,<sup>(Acts 20:28)</sup> similar to the pattern of their Hebrew ancestors.<sup>(Genesis 18:19)</sup> That's why the apostles could address followers of Jesus as *brothers and sisters* over 250 times—in a very real relational sense, they were family!"

He could see looks around the room varying from puzzled to surprised to angry as he went on. "As you've read in *Prodigal Church*, Christianity didn't become a religious system until the fourth century under Emperor Constantine. Following the traditions of the pagan religions at that time, he constructed temples for the Christians to meet in and adapted the pagan priestly system." He looked around the room. "You know your religious history. Incorporating pagan ways into organized Christianity became the norm because the familiar customs kept the populace from rebelling over change."

"So we meet in public buildings. Isn't that the most efficient way to minister to more people?" blurted a clergyman with the largest congregation in the area.

Jack responded calmly, "It's not the public building that's erroneously referred to as 'the church' that's the most important issue. Rather, it's the elimination of *why* our Father purposed for individuals and families to fellowship in homes."

"Are you talking about that communal righteousness stuff discussed in the booklet?" another cleric called out.

"Yes, I am," Jack answered firmly. "The Older Testament clearly established that God could not be approached in just any sinful, haphazard manner without severe

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consequences.(Jeremiah 7:21-29) His commands made that clear! The Hebrew text also reveals through examples like Korah's rebellion, King David numbering his troops, and Achan's taking the devoted items in Jericho that God punished other people for the sins of one man, including family members."(Numbers 16:3-35; 1Chronicles 21; Joshua 7)

Those passages were familiar to the clergy present, and some began to nod in agreement as Jack continued. "That's why the Hebraic stream of Jews who sought to live by the faith of their ancestor Abraham maintained what's known as 'communal righteousness.' They realized they needed frequent access to each other in their homes in order to help each other stay repentant and therefore righteous before God.(1John 1:9) Plus as family in Jesus having ongoing contact, they were able to live out what it means to love one another."(John 13:35)

One of the others who'd taken the time to look over the website spoke up. "I can see that the Temple system was too large for individuals to help each other live uprightly. It makes sense that relational intimacy begins in the home and is supported by the home fellowship family. That's where the give-and-take of regular interaction allows them to deal purposefully with sin. They *know* each other!"

Before anyone else could speak, the leader of a congregation modeled after the Church Growth Movement interjected, "We're doing what the early Church did. The congregation's divided into small groups that meet once a month for a meal in homes. We even accommodate individual tastes by designating groups into singles, married with children, older people and so forth. That way everyone's happy."

Jack cringed inwardly but maintained a smile. "The family fellowship gatherings our Father inspired were *intergenerational*, like an authentic family! They relied on the wisdom of older men and women whose life experience was used by the Spirit to illustrate truth in action."(Job 12:12,13)

A light dawned on a few more as they perceived how God in the first century had been building on previous Hebraic relational practices. Jack added, "This relationship as brothers and sisters in the household of God was a 24-hour, 7-day a week commitment to be the first line of helping each other. Isn't that what 'loving your neighbor as yourself' is?(Mark 12:31, apperceived from Leviticus 19:18) Besides upholding communal righteousness, within this fellowship family context younger couples could turn to the older ones for help in their marriage and bringing up their children."

Another man spoke for the first time. "I think that's an important point since churchgoers in this nation have higher divorce rates than unbelievers do." A rumble of agreement stirred the room.

Then a voice cut in defensively, "I believe that citing sin turns people away. No one wants to hear they're bad! So in our services we avoid any mention of it."

"Then may I ask," Jack inquired, "how do you uphold the mandates of Matthew 18:15-17 to remove the unrepentant?" Pausing a moment he went on, "I'd like to ask all of you: When was the last time someone was removed from your congregation due to unconfessed sin? How many attend your services with unconfessed sin in their hearts, refusing to repent? Even more important, is this acceptable to our Holy God?"

Embarrassment flushed many faces. Jack was thinking about how to introduce another topic when someone asked, "How is it that we missed these truths during our seminary training?"

Jack replied, “The people at Restoration Ministries contend that the spirits of Hellenistic thought and Roman organization came upon Christendom because of the anti-Semitic stance of those Greek philosophers who converted to Christianity in the second and third centuries. You know, the men known as ‘Church Fathers.’”

“That sounds like a curse. Why would God allow that?” someone called out.

“Because He’s a God Who keeps promises,” Jack answered. “He promised Abraham that He’d curse anyone who cursed his descendants.(Genesis 12:3) So for centuries we’ve been living under a curse of Hellenistic thought and Roman organization.”

As startled glances swirled around the room Jack went on, “It may seem like our God is unjust, but we know He’s not. Consider that Romans 11 confirms that God has hardened the heart of the Jews until the full number of Gentiles enter the faith. (Romans 11:25) How would you like to be a Jew thinking that what He’s done seems unjust?”

“So when will this curse be lifted from Christendom?” a younger man next to Jack asked in earnest.

“It’s in the process of being lifted now!” Jack exclaimed. “When the Jewish people got Jerusalem back during the 1967 war, the prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled: *‘Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are accomplished.’*(Luke 21:24) As God is showing mercy to the Jewish people, He is revealing to us Gentiles the Hebraic understanding of His Word to undo the spirit of Hellenism.”(Zechariah 9:13)

One of those who were favorable to what they read in *Prodigal Church* piped up, “I read an article on the website entitled *God’s Clergy-less Kingdom*, and I’m convinced that when God declares He hates and fights against the teachings of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6,15,16), He’s addressing the clergy/laity distinction we’ve become so accustomed to.” That woke up any who’d been daydreaming! “I became convicted something has to change. I’d like to talk with you more, Jack, after this meeting.” Several others voiced agreement.

“I’d like to get back to the concept of dealing with sinners,” another broke in sternly. “In order to confront sin, that means we have to resurrect the Law. But as I understand it, we’re now under grace. The Law is meaningless to the Church today.”

“I’ve heard that distinction made before,” Jack retorted, “but it’s unbiblical. Grace isn’t just a New Testament concept! God showered grace on the Israelites in the Older Testament. How else can you account for the fact that He was willing for the death penalty for their sins to be paid by a substitute, an unblemished lamb or goat?” (Leviticus 4:27-35) He looked intently at each one then added, “The *opposite* of the Law isn’t grace, but *lawlessness*. GRACE is the power and desire to do His will. GRACE is the power of the Spirit of Jesus in us that helps us become more like Him in loving obedience.”(Philippians 2:12,13)

Several agreed with Jack’s definition as he went on, “Permit me to review for you what our Hebraic forefathers who first put their trust in Jesus understood. Through His sacrifice on the cross Jesus completely paid the penalty for our sins.”(Hebrews 9:27,28) Hearty “amens” accompanied that as Jack went on, “But we wouldn’t appreciate what Jesus did for us if we didn’t know how grievously we’ve sinned against a Holy God. (Jeremiah 3:25; Romans 1:18-32) That’s what His laws in *both* Testaments show us, as when Paul cites in Galatians chapter 6 a list of sins that abound today: sexual immorality, hatred, discord, jealousy, selfish ambition, envy, and drunkenness—and insists that

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those who live like this *will not inherit* the kingdom of God.”(Galatians 5:19-21)

“Certainly God makes clear throughout the Bible the things we do that violate His holy law,” an older cleric agreed.

Jack nodded as he continued, “Keeping the law *doesn't* make us righteous. Our righteousness is found only through trust in Jesus.(Romans 3:22) But as you said, God’s Law shows us how we sin against Him. We’re all aware that ‘*no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*’(Romans 3:20) ‘*The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.*’”(Galatians 3:24)

One of the younger men spoke up with a tone of arrogance. “I don’t think we should be even looking at the Old Testament. The Church began at Pentecost!”

“Is that so?” Jack rejoined. “The *church* actually means ‘the called-out ones.’ The first *called-out one* was the Hebrew, Abraham, who left Ur of the Chaldees in obedience to God. The eternal Covenant God promised to Abraham(Genesis 12:1-3) is the foundation for all of us whom Jesus has *called out of the world* to serve Him.”(John 15:18,19; 17:6)

Jack pressed home his point. “Paul tells us that Abraham becomes the father of all who trust Jesus.(Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:7) Also, God told Abraham the gospel in advance.(Galatians 3:8) Don’t you think that this patriarch who’s mentioned so often in both Testaments has special significance for us who are called out today?”

Sheepishly, the New Testament-only pastor responded, “I guess so...”

Jack wasn’t done. “There’s one other point I hope you’ll investigate. Jesus wasn’t the first to cite being *born again* when He brought it up with Nicodemus.(John 3) Experiencing spiritual rebirth was preached by rabbis of the Hebraic stream of Judaism 200 years *before* the coming of Jesus.” Surprise arched several eyebrows. “Being born again answered the inner appeal of God to the spirit of His people to live in covenant union with Him. In essence, rebirth represented a determination to wholly relate to God as did Abraham, whose trusting obedience to go anywhere, do anything, and believe the impossible prompted God to establish a covenant with him.”(Hebrews 11:8-12)

“I agree with you that Abraham’s faith was demonstrated in his obedient actions,” another man said. With sorrow he added, “But we’ve trained our people to be passive spectators who serve no one but themselves.”

At this point the moderator let everyone know it was approaching time to end the meeting. He asked Jack if he had one last thought to share.

“In our Father’s sight the *home* is the basic building block for spiritual development. It’s *not* your public building. Everything in the earliest Church was aimed at helping fathers fulfill God’s commands to raise a godly generation(Malachi 2:15; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Ephesians 6:4) Our home fellowships help fathers do their job. We don’t establish programs like youth groups to compensate for irresponsible fathers, nor can men out-source their families for others to train. We help them do it in their own homes.”

The meeting ended with 10 men staying behind with Jack for several hours of meaningful questions and answers. He agreed to meet with them in three weeks after they’d each read *Pastoring By Elders*, *I Hate Nicolaitanism*, and *God’s Clergy-less Kingdom* so they’d all be prepared for discussion. Jack left with a grateful heart—God had answered his prayer!