

My Brother's Keeper

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The incident in Scripture around which the subject of my article centers is God's coming and asking Cain "Where is Able thy brother?" You will recall Cain answered the Lord with a question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Mind you, he had just killed his brother in cold blood and had the audacity to answer God with this wicked question. The question Cain asked was a rhetorical one. In other words, it had an implied answer which was NO I am not my brother's keeper. Cain by his answer showed his hatred for God. God had just previous to this incident told Cain "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest no well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him" Gen. 4:7. It was soon after this that Cain killed Abel thereby showing his contempt for God and his brother. One hates his brother when he hates God. This is why the first and second tables of the law hang or fall together. Cain was a child of the devil. He hated God and this hatred despised the first table of the law. This led to his hatred of his brother and his despising of the second table of the law.

Cain knew better. He knew he was supposed to be his brother's keeper. But he willfully refused to obey God and be his brother's keeper. You and I may never repeat the question of Cain. It is a question that stems from the hatred of God. As regenerated children of God we are our brother's keeper. We love our brother because we love God. And yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we will confess that although our Heavenly Father has kept us from inflicting the death blow upon his brother in a physical manner, our hearts are none-the-less capable of being cruel to the brother. We may not dare to touch him physically, but we have our ways of getting our pound of flesh. It is because of the old man of sin that wars in our members that we must constantly remind ourselves to be our brother's keeper. Only God by the implanting of his love has made us capable of loving our neighbor. He has given us the strength by His Spirit to crucify the old man of sin so that we can love the brother. And yet we must never forget that at times we can be the most calloused haters of the brother. You and I must constantly be on our guard lest we sin against the brother and even kill him, if not physically, then spiritually. We must be as Abel who loved God and also his brother. Abel was a righteous man which was reflected in his walk toward God and his brother.

What does it mean to be your brother's keeper? In answering this question it is my particular concern to relate it to our contact with the brother in Christ as we rub shoulders with him in home, church and school. Christ, our elder brother, laid down an important principle for us in answering our question. He said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." What you seek to enjoy as God's servant, you must help your brother to enjoy. This involves all our life in its physical as well as spiritual aspects. We must seek this even as we would seek it for ourselves. This is extremely difficult in our complex life, but to be our brother's keeper is an absolute necessity.

Paul also directs our attention to being our brother's keeper in Philippians 2:3 where he writes: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." Paul is saying it take a humble child of God to be his brother's keeper. Pride will never let us be our brother's keeper because pride makes us vainglorious and incapable of loving the brother. Only if we are humble before God will we be of a lowly mind before our brother so that we can esteem him enough to be his keeper. Humility is the key that unlocks the door of our selfish pride so that we can look out for the wellbeing of others as Paul goes on to state in verse 4 of Philippians 2: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." To be humble takes hard work. We must crucify our old man which is proud and selfish. We must pray and ask the Lord to humble us before him. Only then can we be humble before the brother.

The Heidelberg Catechism also indicates what it means to be our brother's keeper. In the explanation of what is to be understood by the communion of the saints it has this to say "...That

everyone must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members.” In the explanation of the sixth commandment it states that we show our neighbor patience, peace, meekness, mercy and all kindness; that we prevent his hurt as much as in us lies and that we do good even to our enemies. Also in the eighth commandment, the Heidelberg Catechism tells us that God demands “I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may; and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others; further also that I faithfully labor so that I may be able to relieve the needy.” Finally, the Heidelberg Catechism in the ninth commandment states we are required to “defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor,” The Heidelberg Catechism is God’s gift to His church through the work of very spiritual men. What an extremely difficult task they put before us in being our brother’s keeper. Yet it is our task. When we violate these commandments we are no better than Cain who killed his brother and buried him. We too can bury the brother under the sand by failing to heed the admonitions of the Heidelberg Catechism when dealing with him in life’s walk. Regardless, we are still our brother’s keeper and as such are responsible for his physical and spiritual well-being.

Going back to the incident of the Lord coming to Cain. The Lord asked Cain “Where is your brother Abel?” The impious answer of Cain was “I know not; Am I my brother’s keeper?” The Lord also asks this question of us. Do we know where our brother is? If we are our brother’s keeper we are concerned about him and know where he is. We didn’t leave him buried in the sand by leading him into sin did we? This is easy for us to do if we forget our calling to the brother.

We can easily hurt the brother by our sinful behavior. I do not mean hurt in the sense of grieving him by our actions, but I mean in the sense we lead him into sin. We cause him to stumble by our coaxing him into sin. Christ said to the wicked Jews in Mark 9:42 “He that offends one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea,” We must never urge or lead to brother into sin. Our example is an important part of being our brother’s keeper. By our sin we can set an example to follow and by this awful example lead the brother farther and farther into sin until he becomes as skillful or better than we are. The brother’s keeper never does this. Rather, he will try to keep the brother from a sinful walk even as Able tried to do by his example. Paul in Romans 14:8 says we must live unto the Lord because we are the Lord’s.

As our brother’s keeper, we must take sin seriously and, therefore, it is of concern to us that we not only walk as living examples of Christ, but we desire the brother to walk in the same Christ-like behavior. When we see the brother sin it is of concern to us. We may never turn our backs, shrug our shoulders and walk away. We have an obligation to admonish our brother. We must see that his spiritual life is at stake. If we do not tell him of his sin we kill him and walk away as Cain did. We must admonish the brother as Able did. This is why it is important for us to set an example in our behavior. Otherwise our admonition is nullified by our deeds. In coming to the brother, we must do so in all patience, meekness and humility. The brother who is truly a spiritual brother will welcome such loving concern on our part. His reaction will be one of sorrow for sin. The hater of God will hate us for admonishing him and will ridicule us and poke fun of us but it is still our obligation to him as our brother’s keeper. We must never be an onlooker while the brother sins. We must live in God’s fear. Then and only then, will we desire to see the brother walk in his fear. It has often been said that birds of a feather flock together. Let I be said of you and me that remain attraction of others to us and we to others is our living the life of Christ. Then we will have real friends (brother) who will keep us spiritually as we will also help them. Then we will do unto others as we would have them do unto us. In Psalm 119:63, David says, “I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.”

Are you your brother’s keeper? Cain hated his brother and killed him. Abel loved his brother and he set an example and rebuked him. For this he was killed, but only physically. He received his reward which was eternal life. Can you honestly say I desire to be my brother’s keeper? It takes grace

humility which only God can give. Ask for it in prayer and you will receive it. Then live in God's fear and you will desire to see the brother walk in his fear. We must bear one another's burdens and help each other. Then we are our brother's keeper because we love the brother better than self.

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