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Should We Be Our Brother's Keeper?

Galatians 6:10: (NASB) *So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*



Sometimes there are things - seemingly small things - that can change the world. Compassion and caring, for instance. By just showing a little compassion or by acting in a way that shows you care can have a dramatic effect not only on the giver and recipient of these actions, but on those who witness them as well. A few weeks ago we talked about loving our enemies. Today we ask how can we better care for our friends? How can we, in practical terms, be our "brother's keeper"?

Let's go back to the original "brother's keeper" question: Cain and Abel.

Their births and lives are the very first thing spoken of after Adam's choice to sin and their expulsion from the Garden: Genesis 4:2-10: (NASB) ²And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. ³So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. ⁴Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions... Here are two brothers with two different and necessary focuses. Tilling the ground was about survival and about food, right in line with what God had told Adam he would have to do as a result of his sin. Immediately after the pronouncements of sin's consequences, God made coverings for Adam and Eve from animal skins. Abel was a keeper of flocks. This, too, was about survival. It was about clothing now needed in the harsher environment of the outside-the-Garden earth. ...And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; ⁵but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Perhaps the regard for Abel's sacrifice was all about remembering God's sacrificing of an animal so they could be clothed and protected both physically and emotionally as a result of sin. Perhaps this sacrifice was instituted as a constant reminder that the cost for sin is a life. The first animal sacrificed was for clothing. This cost of blood shed would be a precursor to Jesus' sacrifice. ⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ⁷If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it. God is compassionate in the face of Cain's anger and lets him know there is still hope, but that hope depends on righteous choices. The alternative is to feed sin and let it go unrestrained. God showed him how to make it right.

Similarly, Cain was self-absorbed and it changed the course of history: ⁸Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. ⁹Then the LORD said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? And he said, I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper? First a lie and then insolence, which leads to the question, Am I my brother's keeper? The mere fact of the excessive use of brother here is sufficient answer to Cain's question! It was all about his brother. ¹⁰He said what have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. God's question is piercing and includes the several steps it took for Cain to get to this point.

How Did Cain get to this point? How did he become the first murderer of the human race?

First, let's realize that our care for one another is different, depending upon our relationships with one another. Family obligations, "Brotherly" love; those in the faith, Care for our neighbor, Strangers and those who may oppose us. Should we be our brother's keeper with all of them, or do we treat them all differently?

Family obligations are perhaps the hardest area because it is so instinctively close to our heart. Cain and Abel were obviously blood brothers, and being your brother's keeper is most fully applied in this situation:

Keeper: Strong's #8104 shamar (shaw-mar'); to hedge about (as with thorns), i.e. guard; generally, to protect, attend to

The word includes the thought of building some kind of protection around that other person.

Here are some other times this word keeper is used: Psalms 17:8: (KJV) **Keep <8104>** me as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings.



Psalms 116:6: (KJV) The LORD preserveth <8104> the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me. To preserve someone is to help and nurture them.

Observations from Genesis 4 about how Cain WAS to have been his brother's keeper:

- Verse 2 - Both were contributors to their community with food and clothing. These were complimentary vocations. They both needed what each were doing.
- Verses 4-5 - Sacrificing to God appropriately was a requirement. Both had access to and shared the proper tools of sacrifice.
- Verses 6-7 - Cain's emotions and reactions were his choice and God showed him how to manage them so he could maintain his relationship with those around him instead of letting his emotions get the best of him.
- Verse 8 - Abel's life was more valuable than Cain's anger, but Cain chose blind rage. When we decide we do not want to be our brother's keeper, the principle of this verse takes over. Our anger becomes more important than the other person's experience.

Having emotions is not wrong, but we cannot let those emotions dictate our lives.

How Cain was NOT to be his brother's keeper:

- Regarding what particular occupation/contribution his brother made - each chose their actions. We each have our own ability to make choices.
- Regarding God's acceptance - each chose a path to present themselves to God. For us, we ask what is that path driven by and should we be altering the path we are on? Are we walking towards God or are we on a path of putting ourselves as God?

The emotional pathway Cain followed would leave *your* family "keeperless."

ARROGANCE: He knew what the right choice was. Proverbs 16:16

ANGER: He blew up at the result of his poor choice. Proverbs 16:17

PRIDE: He did not correct his path when given the opportunity. Proverbs 16:18

IRRESPONSIBILITY: He blamed his innocent brother. Proverbs 16:19

RAGE: He killed his innocent brother! This all led to a great revealing and consequences.

Give attention to God's word in order to diffuse rage: Proverbs 16:20: (NASB) He who gives attention to the word will find good, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD.

The rest of God's conversation with Cain - this still applies today: Genesis 4:11-12: Cain was devoured by his own series of rash thoughts and decisions! Consequences were all that he had left.

How do we apply being our brother's keeper in the broader relationships of our lives?

Let's start with the big picture, with broad strokes regarding the brotherhood, neighbors and others. **Being our brother's keeper should be an identifying trait of any true Christian:** 1 John 3:10-11: (NASB) ¹⁰By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. ¹¹For this is the message, which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another...

To practice righteousness is not merely doing nice things. This "righteousness" means doing godly things. (See CQ Rewind Full Edition Bonus Material for more on righteousness.)

Matthew 5:20: The Pharisees were all about an external show and not an internal "know." They did outward acts to make themselves look good. Our righteousness, our godly behavior, has to be far above that. Godly good brings us to selfless love.

1 John 3:12-16: The comparison is made between godly good and Cain. That is important, because when faced with the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" godly good is part of the answer. If you are trying to live in a godly good way, the answer is yes. Being your brother's nemesis is to follow Satan in the arrogance of self-service. That is what Cain was doing. Being your brother's keeper means practicing godly good *no matter the environment!*

The Christian way is to be your brother's keeper *to the extreme* as expressed through *selfless* love - caring for others before you care for yourself. This should be a trait of ours. This single



characteristic is the fulcrum on which we are able to balance our sinful and fallen lives with godly good and selfless living.

Being our brother's keeper applies to those who are taught as well as those who teach:

Galatians 6:6-10: How often do we absorb what we are taught and then just move on without reciprocating to the person who built us up? Being our brother's keeper is an outgrowth of the very basics of our physical and mental behavior. Literally, what we say, do and think will either contribute to or detract from keeping/protecting one another! There is no middle ground!

We live in a cynical world and the values of true Christianity are often looked down upon or even mocked. We may not be able to witness with words of Scripture, but we can witness with the actions Scripture has taught us. Sometimes the effect seems minimal. But *do not grow weary*. We are to continue to do good to others - it is what we are made of. How do we do good? We watch, listen and then respond to the needs of our brotherhood.

Cain raised the question of being our brother's keeper out of anger. We are required to be our brother's keeper, our brother's protector! Two broad and foundational points:

- Being our brother's keeper should be an identifying trait of any true Christian.
- Being our brother's keeper applies to those who are taught as well as those who teach.

We get into a self-absorbed trance of not noticing things outside of "ME ME ME!"

BEING OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER MEANS KEEPING JUDGMENT OF OTHERS AT A MINIMUM AND IN PERSPECTIVE.

Matthew 7:1-5: Is my judgment of my brother or neighbor protective of him or trying to expose his weakness? What is your motivation? Wanting to judge is where the problem begins and reveals whether we are keeping or killing our brother. By inappropriately judging, we are actually killing our own relationship with God and others.

Sound brother's keeper/neighbor's keeper judgment advice: Romans 14:10-13: Keep them moving forward! God judges us on how we treat others.

BEING OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER MEANS KEEPING OUR JUDGMENT OF OURSELVES ALWAYS IN GEAR

Without proper and attentive self-judgment, we are at risk! 1 Corinthians 11:27-31: This is a warning against not taking our Christianity seriously. It is not a social organization where we join to get things and to feel good. It is a way of life that changes your focus, activities and thoughts. Galatians 6:4-5

BEING OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER MEANS LITERALLY BEING ON CALL TO HUMBLY PROTECT AND HELP THEM.

Galatians 6:1-5: To bear other's burdens is to help them carry their own load and can only be done if you care about them. Caring is paramount, but humility in our actions is crucial as God views our heart before our works. Helping someone bear their burdens does not take away the consequences of a bad choice, but it helps them get through it and learn from it.

This humility in bearing another's burdens will be tested when things get dicey between us. Sometimes we may not want to protect, as we might feel slighted or wronged by the one needing protection. It is in this circumstance that the depth of being our brother's keeper needs to find expression.

1 Corinthians 6:1-7: Here we have a case of Christians bringing lawsuits against each other. We should be beyond pettiness. Do we believe in the wisdom of God working in the lives of our brotherhood - even those with whom we have issues? We need to handle our differences all while giving glory to God. Being our brother's keeper in this situation will meet with its greatest challenges - are we willing to accept the wrong and accept it without retaliation? Or have we already lost this battle against our own wits and pride? We do have to stand up for issues of godly principles and righteousness.

BEING OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER MEANS PUTTING THEIR BEST INTEREST BEFORE YOURS.

James 5:16: *Confess your faults one to another* - this implies vulnerability. *That ye may be healed* - the context tells us this means spiritual healing, not physical. *The effectual fervent*



prayer of a righteous man availeth much - in the context of praying for your spiritual brother or sister - not for ourselves. While this does not mean we should not pray for ourselves, it means we can have great results from praying as our brother's keeper. This selfless love should inspire us!

Philippians 2:3-4: Protect and defend! Like the military, we want to put the welfare of others ahead of ourselves.

BEING OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER MEANS SETTING AN EXAMPLE THAT HONORS GOD.

Matthew 22:15-22: (NASB) ¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap him in what he said. ¹⁶And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, Teacher, we know that you are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for you are not partial to any. This is purely a setup - they feigned honor and respect and then pounced upon Jesus! Notice how Jesus not only diffused the plot, but how he was willing to protect them in their ignorance... ¹⁷Tell us then, what do you think? Is it lawful to give a poll tax to Caesar, or not? ¹⁸But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, why are you testing me, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the poll tax. And they brought him a denarius. First, Jesus exposed their attitude and hypocrisy. He was honest in his assessment of them as they were dishonest in their deviousness. ²⁰And he said to them, whose likeness and inscription is this? ²¹They said to him, Caesar's. Then he said to them, then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's. Second, he answered them in a way that was unarguable. His answer was profound advice for them to follow if they were themselves wanting to be about the business of serving God. ²²And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving him, they went away.

Matthew 6:33: Being our brother's keeper means setting the example of following God. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

BEING OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER MEANS KNOWING WHO TO PROTECT THEM FROM.

How can we know who is who and what is what? Check yourself first! We do not want our brother or sister to need protection from us! If we, with our interaction with others, have that self-absorbed, self-serving approach, others need protection from us.

Matthew 7:13-18: (NASB) ¹³Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Realizing that appearance is merely an introduction - what follows it?

¹⁵Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

Pay close attention to the fruits of those who would deceive, for there are always signs of darkness and evil that cannot be fully hidden as their agenda eventually shows itself!

Watch out for charismatic Christian leaders who are all about riches and personal glory - their focus is obvious!

Colossians 2:6-8: Here are some other things we need to protect our brother against: philosophy and empty deception, the tradition of men, elementary principles of the world.

Protect and defend! That is what being our brother's keeper is all about. We need to learn to say, "I need to protect and defend YOU, my brother, because I care about you. You are more important to me than I am, and I have the privilege of helping you walk in Christ." Even if our neighbors are not Christians, we are to be kind and compassionate and inclusive with a sense of community. We must be good to even those who do not like us, showing them love and grace. If we do this in every aspect of our lives, we become walking epistles of Christ.

*So, should we be our brother's keeper?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*