

Am I My Brother's Keeper? No!

I want to preach to you on the question "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer that I'm proposing is "No!" This question comes directly from scripture found in Genesis chapter 4; "Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother, Abel?' 'I don't know,' he replied, 'Am I my brother's keeper?'"

The story has been told of a little six year old boy who crawled up on his daddy's lap when his father came home from work late in the evening. The little boy said, "Daddy, I have a question to ask." But the father was reading the evening newspaper; he did not want to be bothered by questions. So, he pushed the little boy to one side and continued to look at the paper. But, you know how little children can be very insistent. The little boy pushed the paper away and he said, "Daddy, I have an important question to ask you." The father said, "Well, what is it? Hurry up and ask, so I can get back to reading my paper." The little boy said, "Daddy, what is a Christian?" Well, the father dropped the paper. He then realized this was an important question and he thought, "I cannot give a lightweight answer to this question. I've got to give the correct answer." So, he began to scratch his chin and he said, "Well, son, that is really a big question. What is a Christian? Well, it's like this son, a Christian is someone who believes in God with all their

heart. A Christian believes that God's Son, Jesus, came into this world to save us from our sins. A Christian believes the Bible is the Word of God and we must live by the teachings of the Bible. A Christian doesn't hold any grudges. A Christian forgives his enemies. In fact, son, a Christian is someone who tries everyday to be exactly like Jesus." The little boy then looked at his daddy and he asked this question, "*Daddy, have I ever seen a Christian?*"

I want each and every one of us to ask the same question. It's a very thought provoking question, isn't it? Have I ever seen a Christian? As we ask ourselves that question, it also causes us to go back to the first question ever propounded by any member of human society. It was a question that was asked by a murderer. Am I my brother's keeper?

Cain's Question

You remember in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, He also created a man and then from a rib taken from the man's side He created a woman. This man and woman were placed in a beautiful garden and were allowed to live there and enjoy everything that God had created. The first two children that were born to Adam and Eve were named Cain and Abel. Cain was a farmer and Abel was a herdsman. When the two brothers came to present their sacrifices to God, God looked with favor upon Abel's sacrifice, but He was not impressed with Cain's sacrifice. We are not told exactly why God rejected Cain's sacrifice. Some people have suggested that maybe the smoke from the sacrifice did not go up when Cain offered the fruits of the ground as a sacrifice to God. Others have suggested that maybe Cain had not offered the right proportion, that maybe in the very beginning God had asked for one-tenth and maybe Cain did not offer that proportion. Others have suggested that instead of Cain offering the best of the fruits and vegetables that he offered some of the leftovers. We don't know exactly what was wrong, but we do know that Cain did not

offer the sacrifice in perhaps the right spirit and, therefore, God rejected his sacrifice. Cain was very angry and jealous of his brother, Abel. It all resulted in murder. After the murder had been committed and the body had been buried, the blood of Abel rose up to witness against Cain and cried out to God from the ground. It was at this point that God came and approached Cain with the question, "Where is your brother, Abel?" With a shrug of his shoulders and an apparent air of indifference, Cain replied by saying, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" This subtle answer of Cain's was designed to settle the matter forever in a lightweight manner and dismiss it completely.

No!

The rest of the sacred scripture that follows gives us the correct answer to Cain's question. God's answer which is found in all the rest of the Bible is, "No, you are not your brother's keeper, but you are your brother's brother." That makes all the difference in the world.

Keeper? or Brother?

The brother idea is the essence of democracy. The keeper idea is the underlying essence of nazism, socialism, and communism. For a few seconds let us apply this brother-keeper idea to areas of life that we are all concerned about.

A. Let's think about industry, the employer and the employee. Sometimes the employer considers himself a keeper of the employees. On the other hand the employees get together and they look askance at their employer and say, "It is we who are keeping the boss." Bloodshed and lock-outs become unavoidable, when either the employer or the employee looks upon the other as if they are the keeper. We are not our brother's keeper, but we are

our brother's brother. If every employer would look upon the workmen as his brothers then, of course, the employer would see that the workmen get the very best that industry can afford. If the workmen would look upon the boss as their brother then they would give their very best on the job, working a full eight hours a day and making sure that they did not cheat their employer in any way. The trouble always comes when we look at one another as though we were the keeper.

B. Let's look at the United Nations. God tells us in the Bible that He has made of one blood all nations of people who dwell on the face of the earth. In other words, we are brothers. As long as any nation prides itself upon being the keeper of another nation, then that long the war gods are going to suck the bloodstream of humanity. Pray that all nations might hear the voice of God and say, "We are brothers under God."

C. During the days when the British empire stretched around the world and the saying was, "the sun never sets upon the British empire," the proud British people considered themselves the keeper of all the other nations of the world. So, there was trouble. Constantly there was trouble, until finally, one by one the nations demanded their freedom and the great British empire collapsed. America should beware because the whole world, at least the free world, looks upon America as the keeper. The slave world looks upon Russia as the keeper. This is wrong. Even in our lifetime we have come to see every nation in the world hate America. The slogan everywhere these days is, "Yankees go home." They do not like us because we look upon ourselves as the keeper of the nations of the world. We need to get this idea out of our minds; we are brothers and not keepers.

D. Let us consider foreign missions. Many people in the church today say, "Why don't we do what is needed at home first? Let's forget about those pygmies over in Africa. Anyhow, I think the heathen are going to be saved without the Gospel. We are not our brother's keeper. "No, of course we aren't, and even the heathen themselves would resent our coming if we were coming as

their keepers. But, it makes a world of difference if we go as our brother's brother. The question is not "Will the heathen be saved without the Gospel?"; the question is "will we be saved ourselves if we do not win our brothers to the Lord Jesus Christ?"

A Fool for Christ

Rudyard Kipling, in one of his books, tells about touring the foreign lands. On one occasion he met General Booth, the Salvation Army leader of that day. Rudyard Kipling describes in his writings how he saw General Booth walking backwards over the wharf, his cloak blown upward in tulip fashion over his grey head, while he beat a tambourine in the face of a singing, weeping, praying, emotional multitude, who had come to see him off. During the boat journey that followed, Rudyard Kipling told of how he met General Booth on the boat and had a visit with him during the voyage. Kipling says "Like the young fool that I was at that time, I expressed distaste for such a sensational, emotional demonstration at the wharf as General Booth told his followers goodbye." Kipling said, "The General shook his long, shaggy eyebrows at me and he said, 'Young fellow, if I thought I could win one soul to Jesus Christ by walking on my head and playing a tambourine with my big toes, then I would learn how to do it.'" Now what is the kernel of that story? It's the all consuming desire of a dedicated soul to win his brothers to the Lord Jesus Christ, even if the occasion demanded him being called a "fool for Christ's sake."

Our Personal Responsibility

Cain's lie and alibi has grown to a horrible crescendo of wild, weird discord. On every hand there are those who fill up our church membership rolls, who are uttering the feeble question, in the form of an excuse, saying, "Am I my brother's keeper?" What

the average church member is seeking to gloss over is his personal responsibility for being his brother's brother.

Let Them Come to the Church House

Years ago when I was the minister at Catlin, Illinois, there was an elder in that congregation that used to get all bent out of shape every time that I would preach a message about soul winning. Every time I would preach a missionary message this elder would always violently disagree with me. He would come out the door and argue with me. His argument would go something like this, "Preacher, why should I have to take my valuable time and go out in the community and knock on people's doors and invite them to come to church, when everyone knows that the church doors are open? I say, 'if they want to be saved, let them come to the church house. Let them hear the Gospel preached in the church house. Let them be saved in the church house, because everyone is welcome in the church house.'" The idea this elder had was, "I am my brother's keeper and I am keeping him by maintaining this church house. I am not my brother's brother, I am under no obligation whatsoever to go out and knock on anybody's door, because that is taking my valuable time to do that."

What About Church Members?

The same thing applies to our fellow church members. Every one of us can think of members of this church that are absent consistently, Lord's Day by Lord's Day. Do you know why they're absent? Have you gone to visit them? Have you even so much as picked up the telephone to call and inquire if they are ill or what is wrong? Chances are, if you haven't done it, it's because you say, "Well, am I my brother's keeper? After all, they are members. Their name is on the church book. They know it's their obligation

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to be here and worship God. If they don't, well, that's their loss. Why should I have to call them on the telephone? Why should I have to go out and visit them? Why should I be concerned? I am not my brother's keeper." That's right, you are not your brother's keeper, but you are your brother's brother. And because every one of us is our brother's brother, therefore, we ought to be concerned enough to inquire about their well being and when they're absent we should find out why.

I wept for my child who was fevered and ill. I pleaded, "Blessed Lord, make her whole." But, I am humbled and shamed as I call upon His name. How long since I have for a soul? I've wept for my loved ones now gone from this world, though they are with the Savior I am told. Then from somewhere above, Jesus questions in love, "How long since you've wept for a soul?" I weep for the moments of pleasure I've missed, for the lack of life's gain and its gold, but before you condemn, let me ask you my friend, "How long since you've wept for a soul?"

Share a Meal

If we are our brother's brother then I want to go one step further. Because we are our brother's brother, have we invited people to our own home to share a meal? If not, why not? May I put that question to you very bluntly, how long has it been since you've practiced biblical, Christian hospitality? That is, preparing a meal and inviting one of your Christian brothers or sisters to come to your home and eat with you. There is a scripture that we find in the New Testament in Hebrews 3:13. That verse says, "But encourage one another daily as long as it is called today, so that none of you be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." I want you to think about that verse for a few seconds. How can we encourage one another daily? I have been told, and it is my own shame that I've heard this from not one, but from many members of this congregation. They say, "I go to church on Sunday and everybody is so kind, so loving, so

friendly, I feel so welcome. But then I don't see them, I don't hear from them for all the next week until we meet back in church again the next Sunday." The question that I have to ask myself is "Am I guilty?" I hope each one of us will be like the disciples there at the Last Supper, "Is it I Lord? Am I one who comes to the services on Sunday and just greets everyone very friendly, very loving, but the moment we walk out the door, that's it! It's over! It's finished!" It ought not be that way because we are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ and the scripture plainly teaches us, "Encourage one another daily." We cannot do that by just saying, "howdy" on Sunday. It's important that we stay in contact with each other on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday that we might keep encouraging one another daily.

Hard Hearted!

Medical science is searching for a cure to relieve this frail temple of hardening of the arteries that renders our bodies useless. Oh, how we fear that term, "hardening of the arteries." It is a terrible thing, but I fear something worse than I fear hardening of the arteries. I fear hardening of the soul. Oh, how clever the devil is. There was a time when we first accepted Jesus and our heart was so tender that we would weep over a dead canary or dead dog or a dead cat. But, now through the years we have become so hardened that we cannot even weep over a dead soul.

Too many of us have to make the confession along with the poet who said:

I remember. I remember the house where I was born. The little window where the sun came peeping in at morn. He never came to wink to soon, nor brought too long a day, but now I often wished the night had born my breath away. I remember. I remember the fir trees dark and high. I used to think the slender tops were close against the sky. It was such a childish ignorance

but now 'tis little joy to know that I'm farther off from heaven
than when I was a boy.

Afraid for my Soul

There is a young lady down in Miami, Florida, who calls Esther and me her mom and dad. The girl is about 29-30 years old. She was a dedicated member of the Miami Springs Christian Church back in 1980. She was a soul winner. She was a Sunday School teacher. She was involved in everything in the life of the church. Then gradually, through the years, she began to withdraw. She began to be unconcerned. She stopped attending on Sunday night. She stopped going to prayer meetings. She stopped going to Sunday School, and finally, she even stopped attending morning worship. On Mother's Day, that girl called long distance to say to Esther, "Happy Mother's Day, Mom." We appreciated that very much. I got to talk to her, too. It was really heart breaking. Before the conversation was over she said, "I am afraid for my soul. I know it is unbelievable for you to hear me say this, but do you know that I don't even go to church anymore? That's how far I have drifted away from God." She did close on a happy note. She said that she was quitting her job in Miami and she was packing all her belongings up and moving away to another community. She is going back to the midwest, where there are a lot of Christian Churches and lots of Christian people and she is going to re-dedicate her life to Christ and get back into the Church. I hope so. I pray that she will before it's too late.

It's amazing how this can happen to any one of us. It starts with a little bit of drifting and little bit of indifference and a little backsliding here and a little backsliding there. Pretty soon we say, "How did this ever happen?" Because it does happen, my brothers and sisters in Christ, I plead with you to keep your eyes open, to keep your ears open and when you see people slipping a little bit, be a brother, be a sister, go after that person when they start to drift

away and show your love by drawing them back into the fold before it's too late.

In the writings of Admiral Byrd, he tells about the time that he journeyed all by himself to the South Pole. He lived there for some length of time. He had no contact with the outside world except his radio. He had told everybody to leave him alone; he wanted to experience what it would be like to live there and survive all alone, without contact with any human being. There came a day when Admiral Byrd was desperate for a contact with human beings, because the batteries in his radio failed. Shortly after the batteries in his radio failed and he was totally cut off from the rest of the world his stove broke and the house he was living in started getting cold. There was no hope of contacting anybody. He set off his flares. He knew it was hopeless because he knew nobody would be coming. He had not sent out any SOS before the batteries in the radio failed. As time went on, his body temperature began to go down. Admiral Byrd began to realize that death was very near. When he knew there was no hope left and that he was going to die, he had one flare left. As one last desperate effort, even though he knew it was useless, he set off that flare. As it went up in the air and lit up the sky, suddenly in the distance he saw a tractor coming. He realized then that his friends, when they failed to make radio contact, knew that something was wrong and they were coming to the rescue. Admiral Byrd stated that in that moment, when that flare went off and he saw that tractor coming, he said, "I felt like that everybody in the world was my brother."

I pray that love may permeate this congregation, and that we might show such loving concern for all of our brothers and sisters in Christ that those who are being reclaimed, one by one, might feel like Admiral Byrd; they might feel like everybody in the church is coming to their rescue. That's the way God intends for the church to operate. Am I my brother's keeper? NO! But I am my brother's brother. May God help me to be that and may God help you to be that!