

# "MY BROTHER'S KEEPER"

## The Disciple's Support

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:24-25, KJV)

Cain is the first person ever born and is remembered for committing the first murder. God confronted Cain by asking him, "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain compounded his sin by lying when he replied "I do not know." Then, in a futile effort to absolve himself of any responsibility that he had with regard to his brother, he asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9).

Cain's reply was a protest against God's right to hold him accountable for his brother. Echoing the sentiments of our self-centered world, Cain suggested that he was not responsible for what happened to anyone else. This was not true for Cain, nor has it ever been true for anyone. God's word makes it clear that we are our brother's keeper in many ways.

Who is my brother? In one sense, everyone is my brother. However, in the context of this study of discipleship, this lesson will focus upon the responsibilities that we have towards other disciples – our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are members together in the body of Christ. As such, we have responsibilities towards one another. Let us consider some obligations that we have toward our brethren.

### 1. Love

There are many different books, seminars, and programs offering to help people get out of debt. Some debts can and should be paid off, but the obligation to love our brother is a perpetual debt (Rom. 13:8-10). Love ensures that we will fulfill God's will towards one another (Matt. 22:36-40). Love fills our hearts and lives with the right characteristics, motives, and actions (1 Cor. 13:4-7). We should never act as if we have loved our brother enough.

Everything we owe our brother can be summed up in the word "love." However, the Bible teaches that this love for our brother is shown in some specific ways. As you proceed through the

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rest of this lesson, give serious consideration to the way love is expressed through the other points that are made.

## **2. Consideration**

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The Greek word that is translated “consider” means to observe fully, to fix one’s eyes or mind upon. There is a temptation for us to become so focused upon ourselves that we lose sight of the needs of others. Most of us live very busy lives. We have responsibilities towards our families and jobs. However, the Bible tells us that we are to observe our brethren and take notice of the things that they are going through.

We are to think about the needs of others (Phil. 2:4). We need to be mindful of those who are sick and shut-in. We need to show genuine concern for those who are facing challenges in their lives. One of the most basic things that I owe my brethren is consideration.

## **3. Provocation**

The Greek word translated “provoke” in Hebrews 10:24 means to incite or to stimulate. The word can be applied to things that are good and bad. In the context of this passage, it is obvious that we are to provoke or stimulate brethren on to good things.

In sports, teammates often cheer one another on during a game. These cheers are intended to encourage them to do their best. There are times when brethren need to cheer on one another. We are to provoke one another unto love and good works. We are to stimulate one another by our consideration and sincere interest, by our good example, and by our good deeds.

## **4. Exhortation**

The Hebrew writer goes on to tell us to exhort one another (v. 24). The word “exhort” is translated from a Greek word that literally means to call to one’s side. This word calls for a greater involvement on our part than the words “consider” and “provoke.” Instead of observing or cheering one on, we are to go to their side and put an arm around their shoulder, doing what we can to prop them up and keep them on track.

Exhortation may be expressed in a variety of different ways, depending upon the needs of a given situation (1 Thess. 5:14). We exhort when we warn the unruly (1 Cor. 4:14), when we console and comfort the fainthearted (1 Thess. 5:11; Rom. 12:15), when we support the weak (Heb. 12:12), when we relieve a burden (Gal. 6:2), when we encourage (Rom. 12:8; Acts 4:36), and when we teach (Tit. 1:9).

## 5. Restoration

"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). To restore means to thoroughly mend or repair. There are times when we find brethren who are so broken and beaten down that they are in a spiritual state of emergency. Just going to them will not do; they have to be restored.

Sometimes brethren fall into sin and depart from the Lord. We are to go to them and try to turn them back (James 5:19-20). If we don't, who will? The easy thing to do is to just let them go. However, we are our brother's keeper, which means we are responsible for one another. The Lord taught that we have an obligation to leave the ninety-nine and to go after the one who is lost (Matt. 18:12-14). It is well worth the effort of going after the one who is lost. When one is falling away, he is dying spiritually. None of us would stand by and watch someone die physically. Love demands that we try to stop the spiritual death of a brother in Christ.

## 6. Good Works

Sincerity and good intentions are commendable, but they do not meet urgent needs (Tit. 3:14). Love is an action. The needs of our brethren are not satisfied by feelings, but by actions (1 John 3:17-18). Pure and undefiled religion is not identified by claims and confessions, but by charitable actions shown towards those who are truly in need (James 1:27).

The Lord is described as one who went about doing good (Acts 10:38). The early church is characterized by good deeds (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37). We are told that as we have opportunity, we are to be ready and willing to do good to all people. However, the needs of our brethren should especially get our attention and our response (Gal. 6:10).

## 7. A Good Example

All of us are examples to others. The apostles are examples (2 Thess. 3:9). Evangelists and elders are to be positive examples (1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Pet. 5:3). Paul said that all faithful Christians are examples and patterns to be followed (Phil. 3:17).

The power of our influence and example cannot be denied or disowned. God holds us responsible for the way we influence our brethren (Matt. 18:6-7). Strong Christians are to be mindful of the fact they are being watched and have an influence upon their brethren (1 Cor. 8:7-13). Being their brother's keeper, they are to be conscious of how their actions will be interpreted by weaker Christians. Paul stated that he was willing to go so far as to deny himself of a liberty for the sake of his brethren.

## 8. Patience

Patience or longsuffering is a part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). As such, it is expected in the lives of Christians. There are times when patience must be shown toward brethren.

We may all be members in one body, but we are never at the same level of maturity. Those who are strong and mature in the faith are to patient with those who are weak (Rom. 15:1-3). It takes time for a baby to grow and develop, and it takes time for Christians to grow and mature. Sometimes new Christians say and do the wrong things. They need their brethren's patience as they go through the process of learning the will of Christ and changing life-long habits.

Also, we are to be patient with one another when it comes to our own opinions and peculiarities. We must abide in the doctrine of Christ. However, God has left some of our decisions up to our own judgment. We are all different, having different likes and dislikes. We come from different backgrounds, have our own ways of thinking about things, and our own reasons for making certain decisions. Such differences can become a source of contention, but that should never be the case for brethren. We are to bear with one another in love (Eph. 4:2). That phrase literally means "to put up with one another." In matters of judgment we each have the right to our own judgment, but no disciple has the right to destroy the body of Christ for the sake of his judgment.

## **9. The Benefit Of The Doubt**

We are told that love "... believes all things, hopes all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). This does not mean that love is gullible. It means that love compels us to give our brethren the benefit of the doubt.

Gossip has the power to destroy one's character and reputation. Sometimes we hear accusations being made against brethren. Other times we see or hear things ourselves. We may be tempted to interpret such situations in the worst possible light, but love will not allow us to do so. We must remember that any story or rumor can sound incriminating until we go to the individual and hear all of the facts (Prov. 18:17). Unless I have the evidence that proves otherwise, I owe my brother the benefit of the doubt. Isn't this what I would want from him (Matt. 7:12)?

## **10. Forgiveness**

The Lord places a strong imperative upon His disciples to forgive one another (Matt. 18:21-35). If we have been forgiven by God, we are obligated to forgive our brethren. When a brother sins against us, we are to go to him about the matter. If he repents, we are to forgive him (Luke 17:3-4; Matt. 18:15-17). When an erring brother returns to the Lord, we are to forgive him (2 Cor. 2:6-9). We are to be quick and ready to forgive one another, knowing that we stand in need of God's forgiveness ourselves (Col 3:13).

## **Conclusion**

Disciples draw strength from their Savior, just as the branch draws strength from the vine, the athlete draws strength from his training, and the soldier draws strength from his armor. However, our strength also comes from another important source. God has seen fit to join disciples together into one body for a reason. We are connected to Christ, but we are also

connected to one another. We are to strengthen and support one another as we serve Christ together. We need one another; thus, we are our brother's keeper.

## Questions

1. Why should we "owe" our brethren our love? Consider Romans 13:8-10 and 1 John 4:10-11 in your answer. \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. Why is it hard for some to consider others? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. What do Romans 12:10 and Philippians 2:4 teach about our attitude towards others?  
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4. How can we provoke or stimulate our brethren on to love and good works? \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. The word "exhort" is translated from the Greek word **parakaleo**. What does this word literally mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. Describe some ways that we can exhort our brethren. \_\_\_\_\_  
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7. Who is responsible for restoring erring brethren (Gal. 6:1)? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What does Jesus teach about the worth of our brother's soul (Matt. 18:12-14)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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9. How is love to be shown (1 John 3:17-18)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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10. As they have opportunity, Christians should be especially willing to do good to those who are of the \_\_\_\_\_ (Gal. 6:10).
11. Why do we need examples (Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:9; 1 Tim. 4:12)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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12. What should mature Christians keep in mind regarding their weaker brethren (1 Cor. 8:7-13)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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13. Identify some times when patience must be shown among brethren. \_\_\_\_\_  
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14. How does patience help the body of Christ to remain strong? \_\_\_\_\_

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15. Why must we be willing to forgive our brother when he repents (Matt. 18:35)? \_\_\_\_\_

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16. What are we to do when an erring brother comes back to the Lord (2 Cor. 2:6-9)? \_\_\_\_\_

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