

Sunday, August 27, 2023 am

CLOSER TO GOD (52)
Disciples (8)
Am I My Brother's Keeper?

As we continue our theme, "Closer to God" with our current focus on discipleship, we continue to notice various areas of life that we can learn from and make spiritual application. In our last (2) lessons, we addressed how we are all parts of His. Today's lesson is a follow-up to those lessons as we notice how we are to treat each other as brethren.

I. Am I my brother's keeper?

- a. This goes back to Genesis 4, the first recorded act of worship and rejected worship by God. But sadly, this also led to the first murder as Cain murdered his brother Abel. When God appeared to him after the deed, He asked Cain where Abel was. He replied, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9). Not only did Cain lie, but he sought to absolve himself of responsibility. Of course, it did not work.
- b. As varying parts of the body of Christ, we are reminded that we are also a family. Continually we are referred to as "brethren" or "brothers and sisters". This of course was not new, as the concept goes back even to the LOM and the patriarchs.
- c. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are reminded that we too are "my brother's keeper". This means that we have responsibilities toward one another. In this lesson, we will notice some of these with an emphasis on "one another" passages.

II. "One another"

- a. The expression, "one another" is found some 87 times in the NT, with 26 times being found in the gospels and Acts, where it usually was addressing interactions between 2 or more parties. That leaves ~60 times in the epistles where the expression often is used to describe our treatment of each other. Let us notice a few of these descriptions.
- b. **Love** –
 - i. We will not camp on this, as we discussed it as "the more excellent way" last week (1 Corinthians 12:31, 13:1-8).
 - ii. Jesus emphasized it in John 15:12, 17. Also John 13:34-35 – love for one another.
 - iii. Other verses include – Romans 13:8, 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 4:9, 1 Peter 1:22, 1 John 3:11, 23, 4:7, 11-12, 2 John 5, etc. Love for one another is the most often NT usage of this expression.
 - iv. AND our love for one another is the catalyst that will be factored into the rest of the "one another" passages.
- c. **Greet one another** –
 - i. Romans 16:16 – 1 Corinthians 16:20 – Holy kiss, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Peter 5:14.
 - ii. The first sign of civility and care is seen in the way we greet each other when we come together. The occasion should not matter.
 - iii. We ought to look forward to being with "one another". After all, we are the family of God and it is our hope that we will spend eternity together.
 - iv. There are some who avoid "one another" rather than even greeting each other. Others will choose to not participate with activities because they don't like it. Yes there are things that come up and reasons one cannot participate in everything, but often times you CAN choose to be with your brothers and sisters in Christ just for the sake of being with them. So what if you would prefer a different restaurant or activity, etc.
- d. **Be kind** –

- i. Again, this is just plain courtesy. 1 Corinthians 13:4 notes that love suffers long and is kind.
 - ii. Romans 12:10 – be kindly *affectionate* and *prefer one* another. The word for affection is a compound Greek word that involves both familial and affectionate (genuine care – “brotherly love”) care for each other. We need to develop a relationship with each other so that we cherish each other. Recall the promise of Jesus in Matthew 19:29 spoke of those who had left houses and various relationships who will receive “*a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.*”
 - iii. The expression, “preferring one another” literally means to be preeminent. Paul’s point, when it comes to love we ought to outdo one another in showing that love (and NO it is not intended as a competition). The ESV says “*outdo one another in showing honor.*”
 - iv. Ephesians 4:32 also emphasizes this along with a number of other qualities.
- e. ***Bearing with one another –***
 - i. Colossians 3:13 notes that we put on tender mercies, kindness, humility... bearing with one another and forgiving one another. Ephesians 4:2 – bearing with one another in love,
 - ii. We need to be willing to put up with our differences and even various idiosyncrasies. In our last lesson we emphasized each “body part” is different and needed. I want to focus on the fact that we ARE different. We come from different backgrounds, upbringing, education, socially, etc. Also, people think differently and process situations differently. Most of us have habits and mannerisms that are annoying to others – some can be worked on, but others are just who someone is. Are we willing to put up with those differences and even embrace one another with them?
 - iii. What about if someone does or says something you do not agree with or like? Are you willing to give the benefit of the doubt? 1 Corinthians 13:7 – love gives the benefit of the doubt? Are you willing to yield for the sake of unity and brotherly love? James 3:17 describes the wisdom from above.
 - iv. Romans 14:13 – let us not judge one another...; In dealing with “liberties” this becomes very prevalent. We need to look out for one another’s wellbeing. Matthew 7:1-5, while abused as a passage, in its proper context it does include the type of judging that is based on appearance rather than accumulating ALL the facts (not just the facts you WANT or like).
 - v. Bearing with one another is a key to the unity we ought to be striving for.
- f. ***Forgiving one another -***
 - i. Often tied to the previous point, this is how far we ought to be willing to go as we bear with one another.
 - ii. Ephesians 4:32 – forgiving one another, Colossians 3:13.
 - iii. Of course, this goes a step further as it involves times when you are wronged or mistreated. And, it has a bearing on our salvation. Matthew 6:14-15.
- g. ***Exhorting one another***
 - i. True caring is not only manifested when things are going well. It is actually TESTED when there are problems. Because of our differences AND our doctrinal concerns for truth, there may be times when what we MUST do is confront a difficult situation.
 - ii. Romans 15:14 – calls for us to be able to admonish one another; Hebrews 3:13 – we exhort one another daily to keep us from being hardened to sin. Hebrews 10:24-25 – what prompts us to not forsake our assembling? We consider one another and exhort one another.
 - iii. Galatians 6:1-2 – warns of one who is overtaken in a trespass. We are to restore such a one... And we help them “bear one another’s burdens.” James 5:19-20 concludes that letter with a similar admonition.
- h. ***Comforting and edifying one another***

- i. Not only are we to exhort and admonish when needed, quite often we simply just need to be there for each other. We need to be a source of comfort when our brothers and sisters are struggling or hurting.
 - ii. 1 Thessalonians 4:18 – addressing our hope and that of those who have lost loved ones, we comfort each other with good words.
 - iii. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 - Comfort and edify one another just as you are doing.
 - iv. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 notes how we are comforted by God and thus we comfort those who are in any trouble.
 - v. Proverbs 17:17, *A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.*
- i. **Filled with good works toward one another -**
- i. Galatians 5:13 calls for us through love to serve one another. Serving means we will help each other in whatever way we can. Our lives need to be filled with good works, especially toward one another – Galatians 6:10
 - ii. Both James 2:14ff and 1 John 3:17-18 are clear that we show our faith to be genuine by helping each other, even when it means we have to sacrifice, and even with our material possessions and abilities. Consider Matthew 25:31-46 where Jesus pictures one aspect of the judgment scene – it involves helping one another in whatever way is needed.
- j. **Submitting to one another**
- i. One reason we can be the family God wants us to be is that we do not think about ourselves. Rather, we are continually thinking about each other. Hence these “one another” statements.
 - ii. At the foundation is a willingness to humbly submit to each other. We want peace and unity to prevail to the point we are willing to yield to one another. Philippians 3:3-4.
 - iii. Ephesians 5:21 – submitting to one another in the fear of God. 1 Peter 5:5, *Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”*
- k. **Confession and prayer**
- i. Our final passage is James 5:16 – confess your trespasses to one another & pray for one another.
 - ii. There are times when we need to confess our failures, especially when they involve our brethren. Jesus emphasized this in Matthew 5:23-25 – if you bring a gift to God and remember that your brother has something against you, go to him first...
 - iii. If we are as close as God intends for us to be, we ought to be able to open up to one another with our failures, struggles and weaknesses, WITHOUT being harshly judged. We can see this in many of the qualities we have addressed in this lesson – love, compassion, caring, comfort, forgiveness, etc. I am fearful many cannot come before their brethren with their struggles and sins because there is not enough trust that they will be treated fairly and with love. That ought not to be. Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:6-8 emphasized this – a brother repented, and they needed to forgive and comfort him and *“reaffirm your love to him.”*
 - iv. We also need to “pray for one another”. In context, it involved what is confessed, but continually scripture emphasizes our need to be praying for each other. Ephesians 6:18 after describing our armor he notes, *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—*

These are a few descriptions of how we are brethren and what that means in the way we treat each other. Cain used the declaration “Am I my brother’s keeper?” in an attempt to absolve himself of his responsibility and guilt. It did not work as we know. When it comes to you and me, we can clearly see that “YES, I am my brother’s keeper”. Now, what will you do about that? Will you accept it and act

accordingly, of will you like Cain, deny it. Either way there are consequences to the decision you make. So, HOW are you acting toward your brethren? Think about it1