
My Brother's Keeper

by: Ronald L. Dart

"And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, where is Abel your brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:8, 9).

Cain was a murderer and a liar. And in two terse sentences, he revealed the kind of character that led to these sins: Cain was the center of his universe. No one mattered but him. He accepted responsibility for no one but himself.

Jude called it "the way of Cain" (Jude 10). It was the way of Cain to concern himself solely with his own needs, his own wants, and his own rights. Let the other man look out for himself. Since Cain did not want, in any way, to accept responsibility for others, God sent him away from others. As he was a spiritual isolationist, God gave him all the isolation a man could ever want.

The way of Cain is remarkably persistent. We find it in every age of man, and in every place even in the church. Paul warned Timothy, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, haters of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*: from such turn away" (II Timothy 3:1-5).

In the very last days of man on this earth, there will be people walking in the way of Cain. They will be people who have a *form of godliness*. They will be *church* people. Like Cain, they will be spiritual isolationists. They may enjoy fellowship, but they will want to avoid all responsibility to others or for others. They are people who insist on their rights, their freedoms-even the freedom to commit sin without it being anyone's business. Were God to ask about another member, they might well reply, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Our Rights

Just how responsible are we to be? How much are we expected to sacrifice in order to avoid hurting another person-especially a brother? Have we no rights at all?

The Corinthians believed that they had certain rights relative to one another-rights that could be enforced *in court* if necessary. Paul was shocked. Brother was going to law with brother and that

before the unbelievers. "Now there is utterly a fault among you," he declared, "because ye go to law one with another. *Why do you not rather take wrong? Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?*" (I Corinthians 6:7).

Yes, we do have rights relative to one another, but there is a limit beyond which we must not go to enforce those rights. We may be called upon to sacrifice those rights rather than cause harm to another. It is the way of Cain to blindly insist upon our rights at the expense of our brother.

As it happens, the Corinthians had imbibed deeply of this way of thinking. Paul had plainly taught them to abstain from the pollution of idols (Acts 15:20, 23, 29). This was not accepted without argument. Someone had replied, and his reply had run along these lines: "Why should we have to abstain from such a good, plentiful, cheap source of clean meat. We have *knowledge*. We *know* that this idol is nothing. It is just stone, and it has no effect on the meat being offered. Meat is meat, and it makes no difference to me what the butcher had in mind when he slaughtered it. Why should my liberty be judged of another man's conscience?"

Paul understood their argument and realized that, while there was some truth in it, the argument included a fatal error—it was based on the way of Cain.

"Now as touching things offered to idols," Paul began, "we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but charity edifies. And if any man think that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know." (I Corinthians 8:1, 2).

With this rebuke, Paul begins an important explanation: "As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and there is none other God but one... *However, there is not in every man that knowledge.* "

And there lies the point. You are not living on this planet alone. You have responsibilities.

Paul acknowledged the obvious: "But meat commends us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak." (verse 9).

How could this be? Paul explains: "For if any man sees thee which hast 'knowledge' sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through thy 'knowledge' shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?"

But is it really all that serious? Paul continues, "But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world stands, lest I make my brother to offend." (verse 12, 13).

Paul's reaction is about as far from the way of Cain as one can get. Is it really necessary to go that far? Take another look at the consequences and then ask that question. Jesus said that such offenses would take place but pronounces woe upon the man causing the offense. "It was better

for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones" (Luke 17:2).

It's My Business

But supposing no one knows. What difference can it make to my brother (even if it is a sin) if I keep the whole thing to myself? Isn't it my business how I run my life? There was a man once who reasoned that way. His name was Achan.

Everyone knows about the battle of Jericho (Joshua 6). But unless you have read the story, you may have missed the most important lesson in the whole thing.

God had cursed the city of Jericho. The city, everything and everyone in it were to be destroyed. The things that wouldn't burn (silver, gold, iron and brass) were to be brought into the treasury of the Lord (Joshua 6:19). But a man named Achan found an expensive imported garment, a wedge of gold, and some silver. He took them and hid them in his tent. Maybe God would be displeased, but he would have to chance it. No one would know, and God rarely acted immediately to punish specific sins. He could repent later.

But it turned out to be much more serious than that. You can read the story in Joshua 7. The wording is interesting: "*But the children of Israel* committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan...took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel." Achan sinned, and *the children of Israel* were guilty!

When I was in the Navy, I recall that the principle of collective punishment was the order of the day. If one man lost points on an inspection, the whole company suffered. Needless to say, there was much muttering about the fairness of the whole procedure. Why should all of us suffer because of the laziness of one feckless (irresponsible) sailor? But when we saw that the rule was not going to change, we all began to put pressure on the laggards in our midst. It worked, but that wasn't the real lesson. The real lesson was that we all depended on one another, and that in battle, one man's negligence could cost us all our lives. We had to accept responsibility for one another.

So, it was that when Israel next went into battle, they were defeated. Thirty-six men lost their lives because one man walked in the way of Cain. Achan could have argued that his sin was his own business. As it turned out, it was very much the business of the thirty-six men who died at a little town called Ai. God wanted all Israel to understand how the sins of one man affect everyone around him

Woe Is Me

There is yet one more characteristic of the way of Cain and one more man who walked in that way. When Cain was caught in his sin, he might have repented. Instead, *he felt sorry for himself!* There was no pity for his dead brother, mind you. All he could do was groan, "My punishment is more than I can bear" (Genesis 4:13).

There was a man named Baruch, who had the unenviable task of acting as a scribe for the prophet Jeremiah. Only after reading these prophecies can we understand the depression that must have settled on Baruch's shoulders. But Baruch could spare no pity for Israel. He could only feel sorry for himself: "Woe is me now!" he lamented, "for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest" (Jeremiah 45:3).

Listen to God's reply' "Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even the whole land. And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh," says the LORD. "But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go." " (Jeremiah 45:4, 5).

Here we are, living in the last days of man's misrule on this planet, and some of us can only think about *our* rights, *our* feelings. We could be the custodians of God's last message for mankind, and still be worried about whether we are getting the credit we are due.

What this all means is that we can't spend the rest of our Christian life by the "every man for himself" philosophy. We are indeed "our brother's keeper," and as such, we need to spare a little thought, a little consideration, a little pity for our brother.

It all comes down to a question of whether we will be self-centered and walk in the way of Cain, or whether we will be God centered and walk in the way of Jesus Christ. His way is different, you know. Paul described that way thus: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*: who ...made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:1-5).

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you witnessed instances of people acting like Cain did, not wanting to be responsible for others even in God's Churches?
2. Have you ever been guilty of falling into the 'way of Cain'?
3. What do you think of Paul's statement: "Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded" instead of going before unbelievers in court?

4. Are we, as God's children, just as bad at being selfish as the world is?
5. Can you imagine what the world would be like if people "esteemed others better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3) rather than only thinking of themselves?
6. Can you imagine if God's people acted in that way consistently what His ecclesia would be like?
7. What do you think of the idea that all suffer if one sins?
8. What does it mean to you to be your brother's keeper?
9. If we all were each other's keeper we all would have an advocate that had our own back, how much easier would it make our Christian walk if we all helped each other?
10. Are you willing to be your 'brother's' keeper?