



“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body,” Hebrews 13:3.

My Brother’s Keeper

Covenant: We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love: to remember each other in prayer; to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech . . . We moreover engage that when we remove from this place, we will as soon as possible unite with some other church, where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God’s Word.

Aim: to further the realization that He who gave the privilege of the Gospel to the world gave the privileges of active fellowship to His church.

Text: James 1:17-27; Hebrews 13:1-3.

INTRODUCTION — Christian brotherhood is a most blessed union. It is based upon a common relationship which believers have with Christ Jesus. It is expressed in deeds of helpful service. It is rewarded by increasing affection between brethren and the further revelation of God to the believer’s heart. It is not surprising, therefore, that reference to Christian brotherhood is included in the Church Covenant.

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The church is the body of Christ, I Corinthians 12:12-27. Individual members are as vitally related to one another as members of the physical body. They share a sincere concern for one another. The devout Christian

will hardly desire to desert the church nor break his relations with the brethren who compose her membership. Rather he will thank God for the privilege of being a part of that body and in his dedication to the Heavenly Father will be his brother's keeper.

To be your brother's keeper does not mean to meddle in his business. It rather means to be concerned about him, to pray for him, and as opportunity permits to help him. It is the very opposite to meddling. It involves concern about his physical and spiritual welfare. Through such relationships the church will "make increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love," Ephesians 4:16.

EXPOSITION

I. BASIS OF CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD

1. A common relationship to God the Father is the basis of Christian brotherhood, James 1:17. God is the creator of all. "Every good thing given and every perfect act of giving" is the work of the Father. This same Heavenly Father has given His Son, Jesus Christ, and through Him has perfected redemption. Therefore Christian believers are joined in a holy brotherhood because of a common relationship with Him, Romans 8:17. All that the believer is, as well as all he has, resulted from the greater and more perfect gift of God.

Now God calls upon His children to manifest this brotherhood by imitating His willingness to give for the welfare of others. Encouraged both by the act of giving and the thing given by the Heavenly Father, believers watch over one another as partakers of a holy brotherhood in Christ: "for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren," Matthew 23:8.

2. A common salvation in Christ is the basis of Christian brotherhood, James 1:18. God's good will toward men is manifest in his redemption. After all, God does not will the death of any but that all should come to repentance, II Peter 2:9. Those who have shared in the cleansing new birth bear a common likeness. As children of the same Heavenly Father, they naturally share a sympathetic concern for one another. This likeness is expressed in mutuality of spirit, deeds of helpfulness, and remembrance in prayer. Brethren in Christ do not find it a burden to serve one another in love.

3. A common prospect for eternity is the basis of Christian brotherhood, James 1:18b. God's redeemed saints are a kind of "firstfruits" of ultimate redemption. Just as Christ is the "first-fruits" of the resurrection,

so the redeemed among men are a promise of the coming redemption of his material creation. Examine this amazing truth as set out in Romans 8:19-23.

All the redeemed are a witness to the world of the faithfulness of God. They are a sort of promise of the ultimate completion of His total redemptive program. They are also a witness to one another that God is faithful and will go on through with the redemption He has begun. Hence, they watch over one another with brotherly affection as those who share a common destiny in the Lord.

It is to be observed that Christian brotherhood is not based on relationship in the flesh but in the spirit. It is not to be expressed in concern for material welfare alone but for spiritual things as well. It is not a temporary relationship to be concluded upon one's pleasure, but is eternal because of an abiding relationship. It is not solely a relationship in the family of God but also is a brotherhood in the church which is the body of Christ. What a holy brotherhood, indeed.

II. EXPRESSION OF CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD

1. Christian brotherhood is expressed through self control, James 1:19-20. It has been observed that God gave man two ears and one tongue that he may hear twice as much as he speaks. There is an attitude of outspokenness which is hardly conducive to the highest relations of Christian brotherhood. Words urged forth in the heat of anger may have serious results indeed.

James positively states that man's anger never does produce the things relating to the righteousness of God. (The word for anger in the Greek language is **orga** and actually means "a temper tantrum." This kind of kind of anger never works out well.) Indeed, Christian brotherhood is best expressed when one bears with the faults of a brother without vexation or anger. See Galatians 6:1. Self control is one of the highest evidences that one lives in divine grace, Proverbs 16:32. A person relating a particular event said, "So naturally it made me angry." Yes, "naturally" many things would, but spiritually one can control passion to the glory of God.

2. Christian brotherhood is expressed through purity of life, James 1:21-25. There is no sufficient substitute for humble obedience to God's word. As a dirty garment is removed and laid aside, so all excesses in evil speaking and anger are to be put away. Each brother is to be marked with the quality of meekness in relation to every other brother. Thus the Holy Spirit will make the Word known to the seeker.

The Word of God gives the message of salvation. Since it tells of Jesus it is said to be “able to save your souls.” That is, it tells the way whereby one may be saved. This is not its only ministry, however.

The Word of God is the proper guide in Christian living. To hear and not to do its bidding is to deceive one’s self. To hear and obey is the way to be blessed. Many people come to church to listen to a Bible lesson and a sermon. They recognize the truth when they hear it presented. If error is presented, they can immediately recognize it. But the Word has little actual influence in their conduct. This is the people of whom James writes. Brethren know the Word and obey it.

3. Christian brotherhood is expressed through proper speech, James 1:26. The church member obligates himself to “courtesy in speech.” This forbids all tattling and back-biting in conversation. James insists that discretion in speech is better than fluency in speech. See James 3:2-13. He greatly commends the religion of a controlled tongue. In fact, James insists that if one’s religion does not make a difference in his speech—making it Christian in purpose, tone, and content—that person’s religion is empty, worthless and hypocritical. True religion will control the conversation.

These words should be read solemnly by all those who delight to speak disparagingly of a Christian brother. Gossips or all types are herewith condemned. Think about this: If there were none to listen, the gossips could not tattle! Do not participate in evil speaking by either talking or listening to it. Show brotherhood in conversation.

4. Christian brotherhood is expressed through care of the needy, James 1:27. The Baptist church member is obligated to aid those who are in distress. True religion is expressed by imitation of the mercy of the Heavenly Father in providing for those in need. Again this teaches that service to God is rendered by serving men. To care for those in need is a high expression of love to God and concern for brethren.

This Scripture makes valid all the benevolent work of the churches. Because of this command many churches have a “Benevolent Fund” in their treasury to care for needs in the membership and community. Many churches give monthly offerings to support homes for needy children. This is right and proper. Christian brotherhood makes us concerned about all of those who are in need.

5. Christian brotherhood is expressed through love of the brethren,” Hebrews 13:1-2. The Church Covenant obligates the members to “watch over one another in brotherly love . . . to remember one another in prayer.” Brotherly love is a special type of love, II Peter 1:7. It is a holy affection. It should continue in the practice and emotion of every church member. It is no

temporary expedient but a continuing spirit. It is expressed to strangers as well as toward friends.

Being of like nature to the love of God, brotherly love is never extended for one's own sake. It is always for the good of the other person. It never seeks its own advantage. It never demands its own rights. Surely such affection is a valid witness to the reality of one's religious profession.

It is no wonder that God has promised reward to all those who faithfully serve one another in love. **“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister,”** Hebrews 6:10.

6. Christian brotherhood is expressed in sympathy for the suffering, Hebrews 13:3. The Church Covenant obligates us “to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling” as well as “to aid each other in sickness and distress.” Prayers and acts of kindness should be directed to the relief of those who suffer. The very unity of the body of Christ (the church) is such that when one member suffers all members suffer with it, I Corinthians 12:26. It is as natural for a brother to move to relieve the sufferings of a brother as it would be for him to seek relief of his own sufferings. The spirit of Christ has taught us to love one another as He has loved us, John 15:12-13. Love is manifest best by deeds of kind helpfulness. I John 3:16-18 says that to see a brother in need and refuse to help him is to declare that one does not have the love of God in himself! Where is the spirit of brotherhood if brethren neglect one another in need? The words of James might be changed to read, “Show me your love without your works and I will show you my love by my works.”

III. MAINTENANCE OF CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD

The blessed fellowship in the church should not be broken. So long as a man lives in a community he should maintain his relationship with the local church. Neither neglect nor any other matter should break the relationship of brotherhood.

Ours is a mobile population, however. Baptists move from city to city. When a Baptist moves to a new community he ought immediately to seek out a church of “like faith and order” and place his membership there. An inactive Baptist is a disobedient Baptist. In joining a Baptist church he covenanted to try to keep his church membership where he lived. To fail to do so is to betray his pledge.

This principle applies to the person who has his “church letter” in his possession. The “letter” is not one's membership but only a certification of membership. Many letters will read that when the named person is united

with another church he ceases membership in the former church. No one can be “in between churches” because he has a letter in his possession. Once one unites with a Baptist church he is a member until death or until he is excluded.

Look at the solemn Covenant into which you entered when you joined a Baptist church. The Lord has commanded that He is to receive glory through the church, Ephesians 3:21. Hence, to neglect church membership is to be guilty of a serious sin of omission. If any such person reads these words let him hear this admonition: Repent quickly and take your place of service in the church lest the chastisement of God overtake you. Remember the words of Jesus, **“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you,”** John 15:14.

CONCLUSION—This concludes the study of the Church Covenant. These thirteen lessons have demonstrated that the principles embodied in that Covenant are Scriptural. If one lived according to it, his life would be worthy and his service fruitful. Go back and read it over again. Memorize it. Let it become a challenge to you day by day.

QUESTIONS

1. What portion of the Covenant is considered today?
2. What is “Christian brotherhood”?
3. How does Christian brotherhood differ from any other relationship?
4. What is the basis of Christian brotherhood?
5. How does self control express brotherhood?
6. How is brotherhood expressed in speech?
7. How does benevolence express Christian brotherhood?
8. Why should a Christian keep his church membership where he lives?
9. Why is the Church Covenant important?
10. How have these thirteen lessons benefited you personally?