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*“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**

**Aim:** To further the realization that He Who gave the privileges of the Gospel to the world gave the privileges of active fellowship to His Church.

**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.

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

INTRODUCTION — Christian brotherhood is a most blessed union. It is based upon a common relationship to Christ, each church member being a child of God through faith in Him. It is expressed in deeds of helpful service. The church offers a channel through which the brotherhood among believers may be expressed. Here we “watch over one another in brotherly love” for the good of the brother and the glory of God.

The church is to see after the physical and spiritual welfare of its members. It will be remembered that the first deacons were chosen that the physical care of the needy members might not be neglected, Acts 6:1-7. James sets out this obligation in his definition of true religion: *“To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world,”* James 1:27b. However, this care is to extend to spiritual things also. Brethren are to pray for one another, to serve one another in love, to do only that which builds up a brother, and to help recover the brother who falls into sin. This is the expression of a true brotherhood in Christ. (See the Church Covenant quoted above.)

The church is the body of Christ, I Corinthians 12:12-27. Individual people are members of that body and thus vitally related to one another. They should share a sincere concern for one another just as parents and children share a concern. The devout Christian will hardly desire to neglect or break his connection with the Lord's church nor the brethren who compose its 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!

## **EXPOSITION**

### **I. The Basis of Christian Brotherhood.**

1. God's gift is the supreme example of grace, James 1:17. This verse literally says, "Every good act of giving and every good thing given" is from the Heavenly Father. He is the Creator of all and there is no change in Him. This same Heavenly Father has given His Son, Jesus Christ, and through Him has perfected redemption. Believers are joined into a holy brotherhood because of their relationship to 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 which exists between them 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.

2. God's gift is best expressed in that new birth, James 1:18. The writer clearly states that God's good will toward us (His desiring only good things for us) is manifest in our redemption. This salvation is the greatest demonstration of God's concern for us. Moreover, it is a "once-for-all redemption" (I Peter 1:3, 23) which need not be repeated again. All those who have shared in the cleansing rebirth—who are new creatures in Christ Jesus—bear a common likeness. As children of the same heavenly Father they naturally share a sympathetic concern for one another. The likeness produced in the new birth does not end there. It is expressed in deeds of helpfulness through the years that follow. Brothers in Christ do not find it a burden to serve one another in love.

3. God's redeemed saints are a "first-fruits" of ultimate redemption, James 1:18b. Just as Christ is the "first-fruits" of the resurrection, so the redeemed among men are a promise of the coming redemption of creation, Romans 8:19-23.

Thus all the redeemed (whether members of a Baptist church or not) 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. Thus all believers are to watch over one another as brothers in Christ. When God has joined a group together in a church body (Acts 2:47) this obligation of brotherly concern is even greater. God will surely not hold guiltless him who neglects it.

## **II. The Expression of Christian Brotherhood.**

1. It is expressed through self-control, James 1:19-20. Some ancient Jewish rabbi has observed that God has given man two ears and one tongue that he may hear twice as much as he speaks. An attitude of outspokenness is hardly conducive to the highest relations of Christian brotherhood. If one's words are urged forth by the heat of anger, the results may be serious indeed! Let no man be hasty to be the teacher of another nor let him become soon vexed at the failures of another. Man's anger never does produce the things relating to God's righteousness. Indeed, true Christian brotherhood is best expressed when one can bear with the faults of a brother without vexation nor anger, Galatians 6:1. Self-control is the higher expression of the control of divine grace, Proverbs 16:32.

2. It is expressed through purity of life, James 1:21-25. There is no substitute for humble obedience to God's word. As a dirty garment is removed and laid aside, so all excesses in speaking and anger are to be put away. Instead, each brother is to be mild toward the other and thus in "meekness" to receive the Word which the Holy Spirit makes known to the earnest seeker. The truth of this Word saves the soul and is the proper guiding principle for Christian living. To hear and not do its biddings is to deceive one's self. To hear and to obey is to be blessed in the way of obedience. Purity of life results only from self-denial (Luke 9:23) and obedience to God's Word. One does not truly "love the brotherhood" if his life is unworthy of membership therein.

3. It is expressed through proper speech, James 1:26. The church member obligates himself to "courtesy in speech." This forbids the tattling and back-biting which was mentioned in a previous lesson. James insists that discretion in speech is better than fluency in speech, James 3:2-13. He greatly commends the religion of a controlled tongue. In fact, James insists that if one's religion does not control his speech, making it Christian in purpose, tone, and content, that person's religion is vain. A "vain" religion is empty, worthless, and hypocritical. True religion will control the

conversation!

4. It is expressed through care for the needy, James 1:27. Again, the idea of brotherly helpfulness is expressed. The Baptist member has obligated to “aid in distress” those who need help. Self-deceit and hypocrisy have no place in religion. True religion is expressed by imitation of the mercy of the Heavenly Father in visiting those in need. Again, this teaches that service to God is rendered by serving men. There is no such thing as serving God without serving men. To care for those in need (fatherless and widows) is a high expression of true Christian brotherhood.

5. It is expressed through love for the brethren, Hebrews 13:1-2. The Baptist member engages himself to “watch over one another in brotherly love . . . to remember one another in prayer.” “Brotherly love” is a distinct type of love, II Peter 1:7. This holy affection is to continue in the practice and emotion of the church members. It is not a temporary expedient but a continuing opportunity. It is expressed toward those who are strangers as well as toward friends. The stranger of whom one may be first suspicious may be a messenger of God! There could be no more blessed duty than caring for his needs. God's servants in every generation have been blessed by the faithful provision of His people. Surely such service shall not go unrewarded, Matthew 10:40-42. *“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister,”* Hebrews 6:10.

6. It is expressed through sympathy for the suffering, Hebrews 13:3. The Baptist member is obligated “to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling” as well as “to aid each other in sickness and distress.” This scripture admonishes that prayers and acts of kindness should be directed in behalf of those who suffer. The unity in Christ is such that one believer suffers when another believer suffers! All are subject to sufferings and each may show the spirit of Christ by serving others in need. (See Matthew 25:31-45.) Where is the spirit of brotherhood if brethren neglect one another in their need? Surely such is not the spirit of Christ who taught us to love one another as He has loved us, John 15:12-13. This love is manifest best by deeds of kind helpfulness, I John 3:16-18.

### **III. The Extension of Christian Brotherhood.**

The blessed fellowship in the church ought not to be broken. When a Baptist moves to a new community he ought to immediately seek out a church of “like faith and order” and place his membership there. The inactive Baptist is the negligently disobedient Baptist! We have agreed to

keep our church membership in the community where we live, if there is a true church there. To fail to do so is to betray our pledge! (This will apply to the person who fails to transfer his membership and the person who has his “church letter” in his trunk thinking that thereby he does not hold membership in a Baptist church. The fact is the “letter” is not one's membership but only a certification of membership. When one joins a Baptist church he is member from then until he dies or is excluded!) God has commanded that He be glorified in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, Ephesians 3:21. Surely He does not look lightly upon any one who neglects this holy opportunity.

Perhaps someone reads these words who is neglecting the church. He may have left his membership in a community of former residence. He may be neglecting attendance and support of the church where his membership is presently counted. If so, let him look again at the Covenant which he made before God and his brethren when he united with the church. To neglect this holy oath is to sin against the God of grace who adds to each church as He deems wise, I Corinthians 12:18. Let him repent quickly and take his place of service lest the chastisement of God overtake him! *“Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you,”* John 15:14.

## QUESTIONS

1. Define “Christian brotherhood.”
2. Briefly discuss the church as a body, I Corinthians 12:12-27.
3. What is the basis of Christian brotherhood?
4. What is the relationship between brotherhood and self-control?
5. What relation exists between serving God and serving men?
6. Discuss Hebrews 13:1-2.
7. What is the obligation of the last paragraph of the Church Covenant?
8. Have special prayer for the members of your church.