

Am I My Brother's Keeper?

By Bill Scheidler

Introduction

We all have many questions that we would like God to answer for us, but there are also questions that God would like us to answer for Him. To Adam: “Where are you Adam? Who told you that you were naked?” To Moses: “What is that in your hand?” All meant to provoke us to thought and to help reveal to us our inner self.

Today I want to look at a question that God asked of the first born son of all mankind—Cain.

Genesis 4:8-9 – God holding Cain accountable for his brother.

8 Now 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 killed him. 9 Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?”

Let's look at some key verses that may help us to answer this question, “**Am I my brother's keeper?**”

Genesis 14:13-16 – Abraham rescuing and being an instrument of restoration to his brother.

*13 Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they were allies with Abram. 14 Now when Abram heard that his **brother** was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. 15 He divided his forces against them by night, and he and his servants attacked them and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. 16 **So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people.***

Lot was actually Abram's nephew but in verse 14 he is referred to as his brother, some translations translate “relative”. In either case, he was of his “blood” and he carried the same “DNA”.

Notice here that Abraham expended whatever personal resources that he had and did whatever was necessary to rescue his kin. This was not a time to count the cost. Abraham reacted from the heart at the risk of everything that he had.

He was not focused on his own personal preservation; he was focused on his brother in need.

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Genesis 38:6-10 – Onan killed because he did not act in his brother’s best interest.

*6 Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. 7 But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him. 8 And Judah said to Onan, “**Go in to your brother’s wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother.**” 9 But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother’s wife, that he emitted on the ground, **lest he should give an heir to his brother.** 10 And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also.*

Aren’t you glad that you are living in the New Covenant and the age of grace? Under the Old Covenant God just killed people that He didn’t like.

Commentators disagree on Onan’s sin in these passages. Those who are anti-birth control would use this to promote the idea that God was displeased because he emitted on the ground, thus preventing conception. The way I see it is that God was at issue with the fact that he did not want what he produced to have his brother’s name on it. God was disturbed with him because he was not willing to honor his brother and do what was in his brother’s best interest. He was not willing to build up his brother’s house.

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Deuteronomy 15:7-11 – God gives commands regarding ministering to your brother in need.

*“If there is among you a poor man of your **brethren**, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor **brother**, 8 but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. 9 Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,’ and your eye be evil against your poor **brother** and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you. 10 You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. 11 For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘**You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.**”*

In verses one to six of this passage you have the laws regarding the year of release. Every seventh year loans were cancelled (some expositors say renegotiated). If you weren't careful you could get hard hearted in the sixth year realizing that you might not get anything back out of this loan.

God is saying that you are always going to have those in need among your brethren. It is your responsibility to care for the needs among your spiritual family, even if you never get anything back out of it. True generosity never seeks reward.

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Deuteronomy 22:1-3 – God gives instructions about watching out for that which belongs to your brother.

*“You shall not see your **brother’s** ox or his sheep going astray, and hide yourself from them; you shall certainly bring them back to your **brother**. 2 And if your **brother** is not near you, or if you do not know him, then you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall remain with you until your **brother** seeks it; then you shall restore it to him. 3 You shall do the same with his donkey, and so shall you do with his garment; with any lost thing of your **brother’s**, which he has lost and you have found, you shall do likewise; **you must not hide yourself.**”*

When you observe a situation where your brother is in jeopardy of suffering loss or being damaged, you just can't ignore it. You need to get actively involved and do your best to keep your brother from losing out on that which belongs to him.

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Deuteronomy 23:19-20 – God gives instructions about not taking advantage of a brother who is down but help him if you have the power to do so.

*19 “You shall not charge interest to your **brother** — interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. 20 To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your **brother** you shall not charge interest, that the **LORD** your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess.”*

God is saying here that we are not to exploit our brothers and sisters in a time of their calamity. We are not to extract personal gain by virtue of their trouble.

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Deuteronomy 25:5-10 – God challenges brothers to build up the house of their brothers.

*“If **brothers** dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband’s **brother** shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband’s **brother** to her. 6 And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. 7 But if the man does not want to take his **brother’s** wife, then let his **brother’s** wife go up to the gate to the elders, and say, ‘My husband’s **brother** refuses to raise up a name to his **brother** in Israel; he will not perform the duty of my husband’s **brother**.’ 8 Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him. But if he stands firm and says, ‘I do not want to take her,’ 9 then his **brother’s** wife shall come to him in the presence of the elders, remove his sandal from his foot, spit in his face, and answer and say, ‘**So shall it be done to the man who will not build up his brother’s house.**’ 10 And his name shall be called in Israel, ‘The house of him who had his sandal removed.’”*

We don’t need to go into potential polygamy or adultery issues here. We are focusing on our obligation to our brothers.

A man who refused to do this for his dead brother to ensure that his descendents did not lose their name and their land inheritance was considered a “worthless” person (a real “heel”). It is interesting that this man was one who would not build up his brother’s house.

Sometimes we get so focused on what we are doing and the house that we are building for ourselves that we lose sight of how are brother’s house is doing and can we assist in any way to make his work prosper.

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Psalm 50:16-23 – God rebukes those who speak slander against their own brother.

*16 But to the wicked God says: “What right have you to declare My statutes, Or take My covenant in your mouth, 17 Seeing you hate instruction And cast My words behind you? 18 When you saw a thief, you consented with him, And have been a partaker with adulterers. 19 You give your mouth to evil, And your tongue frames deceit. 20 **You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother’s son.** 21 These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes. 22 Now consider this, you who forget God, Lest I tear*

*you in pieces, And there be none to deliver: 23 **Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; And to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God.***

Notice that those who speak against a brother are put in the same category as thievery and adultery. Verse 23 is a song, but look at the context, “God wanting to tear us to pieces.”

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Proverbs 17:17 – A friend in need is a friend indeed.

*A friend loves at all times, and a **brother** is born for adversity.*

Proverbs 18:24 – A brother is the highest example of sticking close and a committed relationship.

*A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a **brother**.*

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Zechariah 7:8-10 – Brothers are to exercise mercy and compassion toward one another and never plan evil toward a brother.

*Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, 9 “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion everyone to his **brother**.*

*10 Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his **brother**.’”*

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Matthew 5:21-26 – You must never curse your brother, and you must keep the relationship pure (offense-free).

*“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his **brother** without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his **brother**, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire. 23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your **brother** has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your **brother**, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with*

him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.”

God is not interested in our gifts and sacrifices if our relationship to our brethren is not pure. It is like sitting at the dinner table with your family for a nice meal and all of the siblings are at each other’s throats.

Matthew 18:15, 21 – Don’t hold grudges and be willing to extend forgiveness repeatedly.

*15 “Moreover if your **brother** sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, **you have gained your brother....”***

*21 Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my **brother** sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”*

Romans 14:14-21– I am responsible to make sure that the liberties that I walk in do not have a damaging effect on my brother and cause them to stumble.

*I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 Yet if your **brother** is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.*

*19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. 21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your **brother** stumbles or is offended or is made weak.*

1 Corinthians 8:12 speaks to the same issue of offense where it concludes “when you thus **sin against the brethren**, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.”

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1 Corinthians 6:1-6 – It would better to be defrauded than to take a brother to court in front of the heathen.

(Don't Read)

*Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? 4 If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? 5 I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? 6 **But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!***

I John 3:16-17

*By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the **brethren**. 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his **brother** in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?*

1 John 4:20-5:1

*If someone says, "I love God," and hates his **brother**, he is a liar; for he who does not love his **brother** whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his **brother** also.*

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Message:

New Season of Life

- Our children are out of the home.
- We are enjoying the new blessings of grand parenting (nine of them)
- We are enjoying some new found freedom (pick up and go)
- We are enjoying financial blessing (less for groceries, no college, etc.)

A Season of Transition

- Loss of my parents in the last few years
- Becoming the family patriarch (oldest son)
- Becoming my brother's keepers

Getting Older

- The older you get the more you appreciate family.
- The older you get the more you value relationship.

The older you get the more thankful you are for your heritage and the impact that various people have had in your life.

The older that you get the more you treasure the intangibles (health, family, friends, purpose, fulfillment, peace and joy). Material things lose their value.

MFI Fellowship

Just like individuals, churches and fellowships go through transitions.

City Bible Church transition and generational shift from Dick Iverson to Frank Damazio

People wondered whether or not Bible Temple could live without Dick Iverson. It is alive and well and flourishing.

Now I have heard people ask regarding MFI, “Can it out live the vision of Dick Iverson.”

First of all let me say that we are praying, “Long Live the King”. There is no one like dad and we are praying daily for his health, strength and prosperity. I know that he feels that he has many more years of leadership to give to his fellowship.

#1 Question

What will happen to MFI should anything happen to brother Dick?

I try to be diplomatic. He is in good health. Don't worry God will help us. There is a process for placing a new chairman into the MFI saddle.

But it is a **valid question** to ask. No one knows the future. Would to God we all live and thrive until we are 100.

But in the position I have been, I know that this is a very real question on the hearts of people. Bro. Iverson is a rare man. Sister Edie is a rare woman. They have served us well and given us a great sense of security. No one will ever replace them. No one will ever be in that father and mother role in the same way that they have been.

But does that mean that life as we know it ends should something happen to them? Is the life span of MFI tied to the life span of its founder?

Absolutely Not!

If this thing called MFI is a God-idea and not just a good idea, it is worth contending for to the generations to come.

I had a graphic illustration of this in my natural family. I love my parents. They were parents who loved me and my two other brothers and my sister. They have been a blessing to our lives and to the lives of our children. They were great grandparents.

Since we have matured, our parents have been the main focal point for our families to keep in touch. They have been our common denominator.

In this last two years we have seen them both pass away. One expectedly and one unexpectedly. That is life. It will happen to us all.

The question is, “Does their death mean the death of our family and my relationship to my brothers and sister?”

I don't think so. In fact, we have seen a greater pulling together, a more frequent communication and a strengthening of the bonds between us.

The question asked in Genesis has more and more meaning, “Am I my brother's keeper?”

A few years ago I was asked to share at one of our elder's retreats. I felt the Lord move on me to talk about the change of the guard. Often as a son or daughter we look to those over us for sustenance, counsel and mentoring. We have expectations that we place of those that we feel owe us a Paul/Timothy relationship. We want spiritual fathers who will take care of us.

I shared with the elders that because of our age (my age) at some point we need to become the fathers that we have looked for rather bemoan the fact that we did not get all that we wanted.

It is amazing to me that no matter how old you get you find yourself in settings where you can revert back to being the child. Now that my parents are gone, I have lost that place.

Now my grown children come to my house to act like dependents.

MFI is a group of ministers of like heart and vision who have a similar call and who understand the need for walking together into the purposes of God. Nothing about our rationale for existing as a movement will change if any one of us is no longer here.

All of the reasons for MFI to exist still remain and, therefore, the need for MFI and organizations like it will remain as well.

This group of ministers is a family. It is a family as opposed to a fellowship because of a common strand of DNA. We have the same spiritual DNA. That is why we have gravitated to each other in the first place. In a very real sense we are a “band of brothers.”

If you would read our vision book you would find that a key part of the vision of MFI is to create a context where ministers can find relationship with like-minded leaders. In that context it is believed that meaningful and purposeful relationships will develop that will be beneficial to all.

MFI consists of quality ministries who can fulfill the demands of the brother/sister relationship of edifying, comforting, exhorting, admonishing, praying for, caring for and serving one another.

MFI is a fellowship of ministers touching ministers. It is not merely a collection of ministries under an Apostolic Leadership Team that only receives ministry from the top down. In fact, some of the greatest, most meaningful and most personal ministry comes horizontally as we get involved in the lives of others.

I would hope that our relationship is not just based on a relationship to spiritual fathers and mothers that are over us in the Lord, but that our relationship is based on a covenant relationship with each other as well.

I love Dick and Edie Iverson, they have been my pastors since the day I walked in the doors of Bible Temple 33 years ago. But being a part of that work I have some other loves in my life. I love Ken & Glenda Malmin, I love Frank & Sharon Damazio, I love Wendell and Gini Smith, I love Jack and Libby Louman, I love Bob & Jane Isabell, I love Bob & Sharon Wagar, I love Art and Randy Johansen, I love Mark and Susan Jones. All people that I have come into relationship with by virtue of my connection to Bible Temple and Dick and Edie Iverson.

When it comes to my involvement in MFI, I love Dick and Edie Iverson and have appreciated the place that I have had working so closely with them. But I now have other people that I love almost as much. I love Mike & Barbara Servello. I love Danny & Gisselle Bonilla. I love Alfredo & Gloria Pabon. I love Rick & Susie Snow. I love Dave & Donna Patterson. I love Ted & Jeanne Hoit. I love Gilbert & Eileen Silva. I love Don and Mary Curry. All people that I have come into relationship by virtue of my connection to MFI and Dick and Edie Iverson.

Do you see what I am saying? If something happened to Dick and/or Edie Iverson, it would not affect the way I feel about the rest of my friends. In fact, if it worked out like it has for me in the natural, I would be more dependent on them than ever.

In MFI, “We are a band of brothers and we **are** our brother’s keepers.”

That means that these verses that I read apply to my relationship with you.

That means that:

1. Just as Abraham was an instrument in the life of Lot to bring protection and restoration, I want to be that for the band of brothers. You see, I am my brother’s keeper.

2. Just as God expected Onan to be willing to look out for and build up the house of his brother, I want to be one that does not just look out for myself and what I am building, but I want to do what is in the best interest of my brother and raise up heirs for him and see his house built. You see, I am my brother’s keeper.

3. Just as God commanded Israel to care for the poor and needy among their brethren, I want to be sensitive to the needs of my brothers and open my hand in generosity and love. You see, I am my brother’s keeper.

4. Just as God instructed his people to watch out for the possessions that belonged to their brethren, I want to watch out for your stuff and make sure that you do not get ripped off by an enemy. You see, I am my brother’s keeper.

5. I want to be known as a brother who does not speak evil of another brother, who is a friend in need, who exercises mercy and compassion, who holds no grudges, who forgives without limit, who promotes peace, who settles matters early. I want to be one who places a high priority on relationship and treasures the most important thing—people.

Paul summarizes what our attitude should be in Philippians 2:1-8

*“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, and any affection and mercy, fulfill by joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being in one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind **let each esteem other better than himself.** Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the*

form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

Notice the three “lets”. These three admonitions help us to define three ways of responding to each other as a fellowship of ministers.

1. You are more important than I am, “Let each esteem other better than himself.”

No member of the body is more important than another member. But we treat them as if they are. How do you treat someone who you view as more important than yourself?

2. I am interested in what you are interested in, “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also the interests of others.”

It isn't just all about my department, my church or my ministry. We are able to see things from the perspective of others.

3. I am here to serve you, “Let his mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...” He demonstrated His greatness by serving.

There is no pecking order in MFI, only servants.

Closing

Make statements of commitment

“You are more important than I am”

“I am interested in what you are interested in”

“I am here to serve you”

This is committed relationship is still the path to Commission Fulfillment
(there, I said it—the theme of the conference).

Prayer