

OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS CHRISTIANS

(The Sermon directly below is by Pastor Russell from The Bible Students Monthly, 1916. Vol. 8, #9, P. 3.)

“Am I my brother’s keeper?”—Genesis 4:9

No one can dispute that individualism, personal independence, personal responsibility, have done much for the development of our race. The serfdom and paternalism of the past were unfavorable to individual thought, responsibility and action. No wise and good man would desire to rob his fellows of independence of mind.

One Extreme, Then the Opposite

We are in danger, however, of going to the opposite extreme—in danger of carrying the subject of personal independence too far—in danger of neglecting some who should have assistance—in danger of thinking of all men as being not only free but equal. While we all **should have** proper freedom of will, yet all are more or less handicapped in the exercise of the will. As St. Paul said, “We **cannot** do the things which we would.” We are slaves of sin and death, some more and some less. The Prophet David’s explanation applies to us all, “I was shapen in iniquity, in sin did my mother conceive me.” Psalm 51:5.

It was in view of such inequalities of the flesh that St. Paul wrote to the Church, “We that are strong should bear with the infirmities of the weak, and not please ourselves” [merely]. (Rom. 15:1) This principle, applied by the Apostle to the Church, would certainly be appropriate and beneficial in the natural family. And as our hearts enlarge we should all come to realize more and more the oneness, the solidarity of our race—the entire human family of which St. Paul says, “Of one blood God created all men, to dwell upon the face of the whole earth.”—Acts 17:26.

“Where Is Thy Brother?”

God’s inquiry of Cain implied Cain’s responsibility, and teaches us a lesson respecting our responsibility in God’s sight for one another. We will begin with the Church, the highest type of brotherhood imaginable: We should not be content to split into sects and parties. Whatever was the ignorance of the past, which led to the formation of the various creeds and denominations, there can be no excuse for these now, because Christians of all denominations have come to discredit the old creeds. Should there not, then, be a movement toward heart unity and fellowship, outside of denominational and creedal lines, amongst those who recognize God as Father, the Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer, and the Bible as the Divine Revelation?

It is not proper to say as did Cain, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Every true Christian should realize that today Christianity is being assaulted in its own house and by its professed friends. In the universities, colleges and seminaries of all denominations a battle is raging, which threatens the destruction of our Christian faith. Possibly a few are blind to the situation, but the insurgents—the Higher Critics and Evolutionists—realize the situation, and are craftily saying to the people, “We are the Watchmen upon the walls of Zion! Hearken to our cry: All is well!” These Higher Critics seem to have no conscience. They claim that the people must be gradually taken by guile. They encourage them to “sleep,” while they raise over them the banner of infidelity called Higher Criticism.

Many who see the killing of this antitypical Abel shirk the responsibility by saying, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” not realizing that from the Divine standpoint they have a responsibility toward every other Christian with whom they are in contact. They should realize that loyalty to God means that they “should show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

In a word, every true Christian who has made a full consecration of himself to the Lord, to walk in the footsteps of the Saviour, should waken to the fact that we are in a critical time. We are in the time mentioned by St. Paul, when “every man’s work shall be tried so as by fire.” (1 Cor. 3:13) The testing will be along the lines both of faith and of works. Only those holding firmly to “the faith once delivered to the saints” will be able to bring forth such fruits, such good works, as the testings of this hour require. This class, awake to their responsibility toward God and the brethren and the Bible, and full of zeal, therefore, will thereby be kept in this “evil day.” God will bless them in their endeavors to glorify Him.

My Brother’s Keeper—Socially

In the days of slavery and serfdom, every master, every feudal lord, recognized a responsibility for his servants or slaves. He was interested in their health and in their morals, for they were his property, and any depreciation meant financial loss to him. Thus selfish interest kept him alive to his responsibility, to a considerable degree. But now all that has changed. Serfs and slaves, released from obligation, are without supervision and care. The less fit of our race are in serious danger of being crowded to the wall. Our lawmakers have recognized the fact and have thrown around the weaker sex and children safeguards in the laws, protecting them from designing people who would exploit them for selfish purposes.

Nevertheless with all that human law has yet been able to accomplish, the danger is increased. As knowledge increases, trusts and combinations selfishly boost the price of

life's necessities and luxuries. Those members of our race less favorably equipped for the battle of life are seriously disadvantaged, some by reason of less intellectual powers, others by reason of unfavorable circumstances and environments.

Under such conditions it is not surprising that all who are able are banding together into unions for their own protection; nor should it surprise us that these, also, selfish and hard of heart, should sometimes be unjust in their demands, and sometimes cruel and ready to slay their brother who joins them not in their organization. In their desire to promote the best interests of their craft they may indeed, reasonably exhort fellow-craftsmen to support the organization and may show its advantages, but beyond that they dare not go without infracting the principles of justice and bringing Divine condemnation which, sooner or later, in one way or another, will surely be meted out. Seen from this standpoint, unionism has a responsibility toward brethren not members of the union—to treat them justly, kindly, helpfully. And no doubt this attitude would bring the larger blessing and truer prosperity.

My Brother's Keeper—Financially

Gradually the world is realizing its responsibility to the weak and incompetent and aged. The Orphanages, Hospitals, Homes for the Poor, etc., are all proper recognitions of the brotherhood of man—aside from the higher brotherhood in Christ. We cannot claim that these institutions are the product of pure benevolence. We must admit that politics has much to do with them. The desire for contracts and for labor in connection with these institutions, has, of course, much to do with their existence. The expenditure of such enormous sums as annually go to these institutions naturally enough draws an army of political heelers and onlookers.

The Day of Recompense

The All-Seeing eye of our Creator keeps watch over the affairs of His creatures today as it kept watch over Abel's interests. God allowed Cain to have his way; allowed him to kill his brother; allowed the righteous to suffer: yet Cain did not escape, but was held accountable for the death of his brother. God's sentence upon him separated him from his brethren until he cried out that his punishment was greater than he could bear. And, similarly, we may be sure that the Cain class of our day will be held accountable for the willful slaying of their brother, especially to the extent that the brother despised may be a child of God. As God declared that the blood of Abel cried to Him from the ground cried for justice—so the intimation of the Scripture is that all injustice of every kind, everywhere, will bring a "just recompense of reward."

St. James figuratively represents the laborers, the toilers in the field of labor today, as crying out to God, and as being heard, and its resulting in a great "time of trouble," in

which the great, the mighty and the rich shall weep bitterly. (Jas. 5:1) As these are not the union men, generally, who are crying out at the present time, we may look more especially amongst those on the outside; but the lesson is that those who suffer oppression will ultimately have Divine power exercised in their defense and for their relief. St. James intimates that this relief will come to this class at the coming of Messiah, in power and great glory, for the establishment of His Kingdom of Righteousness in the world. To those who are the Lord's people he says, "Have patience, brethren, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." The Lord speaks of this "Day of Recompense" as a "time of trouble"—of the overthrow of oppression, the uplifting of the poor and those that have no helper.—Psalm 72:12.

"The Desire of All Nations Shall Come."

Those who are entirely satisfied with present conditions are the comparatively few who have special advantages. The masses are discontented—some of them properly so, and others of them more discontented than is reasonable. All but the very poorest and worst situated are better off today than were their grandfathers—yet less contented. The spirit of discontent, selfishness and a failure to note and to enjoy the great blessings which God has provided so bountifully, as well as wonderfully, in our day, prevails. Nevertheless, some have reason for discontent; and some, looking into the future, are fearing worse conditions, as the monopolies have gained a firmer grip upon all the necessities of life.

Surely their forebodings are not without grounds. Unless something shall occur to lift matters out of their present rut, human intelligence sees, at a not far distant day, a new serfdom, with masters directing all the forces of the world, and with the common people at their mercy, glad to have a sufficiency of work and wage for life's necessities.

Long ago we harbored the theory taught us in our creeds, that mankind is totally depraved; but surely none are totally depraved except the idiotic. We believe that there is an element favorable to righteousness in every member of our race, and that sin is largely the result of unfavorable environment; and that the majority of mankind would be glad, indeed, if some Divine interposition were to lift them and their affairs out of present conditions and put them upon a plane of absolute righteousness, justice, equity. This, we believe, is the desire of a large element in every nation, a predominating class. Such a reign of righteousness, justice, equity in the world, will speedily result from the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom, for which we pray, "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Most explicitly do the Scriptures declare this saying, "The desire of all nations shall come." (Hag. 2:7) This declaration is in conjunction with the foretelling of the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom. The reign of righteousness which it will inaugurate will be the ideal of the masses of mankind, although quite probably the

overthrow of Trusts and Combines will, for a time, not be viewed sympathetically by the rich, the wise, the preferred, the favored class, under present conditions. As it required time for the slaveholders of the past to become reconciled to loss of their slaves and to see the righteousness of their being freed, so it will be with those who at present are closely identified with great institutions which are bringing mankind into slavery. Our Lord sized up the situation, saying, Blessed are you who weep and mourn, for you shall be comforted. Woe unto those who are full, for they shall have distress.—Luke 6:21, 25.

The reign of justice and righteousness will ultimately appeal to all in heart harmony with Jehovah, and all who fail to thus come into heart harmony with Him will be accounted as unworthy of His gift of everlasting life; for “He who loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how could he love God whom he hath not seen?” The thousand years of Messiah’s reign during which His Bride, the Elect Church, will be associated with Him, will be quite sufficient for the equalization of all of life’s affairs for the entire race. “In His day shall the righteous flourish,” and not merely the strong. In His day evil doers and not well doers will be crushed. It is written of His Kingdom that it “shall lift up the poor out of the dunghill, and shall bring down the mighty from their seats.”

The Disciplines According to Previous Character-Development

The whole world of mankind will then be transferred into the hands of Messiah, who will take them **just as they are**. They will be in various conditions. Some will be more depraved, others less depraved; some will be more seared in their consciences and some less; and these deficiencies of character will depend upon the way in which each one accepted or rejected light and opportunity in the present time. Those who **knew not** His will and **did it not** will receive few stripes; those who **knew His will** and **did it not** will receive many stripes, because of previous hardening of character. Everybody will be required, eventually, to come up to the full standard of Divine requirements. Those more depraved will have greater difficulty and those less depraved will have less difficulty and receive fewer stripes, in the coming up to Divine requirements.

Those who most willingly and most gladly assent to the leveling process, will most quickly receive the Divine blessing, and make the most rapid progress along the Highway of Holiness, back to full human perfection and eternal life. And those who now in advance of the establishment of the Kingdom, love righteousness and hate iniquity, come at present into favor with the King of kings, and thus are specially favored with light and knowledge, and are invited to become associates with Messiah in His glorious Kingdom, which is to effect the long-promised, great reformation of earth’s affairs. Let us all take to heart and apply well the lesson, but especially those who have heard and who have responded to the Divine invitation to become heirs of God and joint-heirs with our Redeemer.