

## My Brother's Keeper

*"Wherefore if meat causeth my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh for ever more, that I cause not my brother to stumble" (1 Cor. 8:13).*

Long ago God faced Cain with the question *"Where is Abel, thy brother?"* to which Cain responded, *"I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?"* (Gen. 4:9). Countless are the times this phrase is found and it is appropriate that the cited words from our text should hint at these words and resoundingly imply that we are our brother's keeper.

It is astonishing that in the subject of our responsibilities to weak brethren Paul dealt a fatal blow to Calvinism when he wrote, *"For through thy knowledge he that is weak perisheth, the brother for whose sake Christ died"* (1 Cor. 8:11). A similar passage with identical thought is found in Romans 14:15: *"For if because of meat thy brother is grieved, thou walkest no longer in love. Destroy not with thy meat him for whom Christ died."* The doctrine of "Limited Atonement," one of the essential blocks in Calvinism, states that Christ died only for the elect; none of whom will perish. In short, not a single individual whom Christ died for will be lost! The Corinthian text speaks of a weak brother, for whom Christ died, perishing; the Roman text says the same, save that in that passage the brother is destroyed for whom Christ died. I am sure Calvinists have some forced, artificial explanation how that the weak brother could perish, be destroyed, yet not be lost for eternity, but all such "explanations" evade God's eternal truth. Some, most of those for whom Christ died, will be lost -- because Christ died for all.

We are our brother's keeper and it behooves us that we seek out those brethren who are teetering on the edge of falling into sin, even which perilous state we are not responsible for. Furthermore, not only are we to keep a wary eye open for the well-being of all our brethren, we must exercise caution and prudence in using liberties we have lest our action lead a weak brother to follow our example, violate his own conscience, and be damned because he did not act in faith (Rom. 14:23).

In 1 Corinthians 8 Paul validates buying and eating meats in the market place without questions as to where from whence that meat came. Jesus had made all meats clean (Mark 7:14-23), thus brethren were free from the restrictions of the law regarding clean and unclean animals; and since an idol is nothing, there are no meats, which although offered in sacrifice to an idol, which could constitute an inadvertent, ignorant worship of that idol.

Paul addresses another subject in 1 Corinthians 8: attending and participating in the worship in an idol's temple. *"For if a man see thee who hast knowledge sitting in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols?"* (1 Cor. 8:9). Although Paul, in chapter eight, shows that man with liberty might eat meat offered in sacrifice to idols; in chapter ten he emphatically states that the deliberate worship of idols, although an idol is nothing, is sinful. Thus he said, *"Flee from idolatry ... What say I then? that a thing sacrificed to an idol is anything? but I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, not to God: and I would not that ye should have communion with demons. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; ye cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and of the table of demons ..."* (1 Cor. 10:14; 19-21). An idol might be nothing, but worship of it was idolatry -- always wrong in God's sight.

In 1 Corinthians 8 Paul did not address that subject of deliberate worship of idols. He showed that even though an idol was nothing, a Christian's presence eating in an idol's temple might be devastating to a weak brother and therefore, even from the standpoint of liberty, counseled, "Don't do it."

We are to love one another and seek each other's good whether our brother has a strong or weak conscience. And, if in the exercising of my liberty (eating meat) I might cause my brother to stumble, I must imitate the attitude of Paul: *"I will eat no flesh for ever more, that I cause not my brother to stumble."*

Jim McDonald