

POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

"THIS THY SON" - ACCEPTING THE RESPONSIBILITY TO BE OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER (PART 1)

by Matthew Jones

The question is as old as the first brothers to walk the earth: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (King James Version, Gen. 4:9), and God's answer has always been the same.

This struggle has echoed down through time even to the time of Christ when he told "the pearl of parables," highlighting a troubled elder brother. It is of great importance when considering the elder brother, as described in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, that the student look to himself. This study will take into consideration what responsibility, if any, each Christian has in consideration of both his wayward and his faithful brethren.

The focus will be mainly upon the Christian's response and responsibility in matters concerning those who have come home, and it will be fourfold: a pronoun problem, a crucial contrast, a reasonable response, and a simple solution. What should a Christian learn about his responsibility to be his brother's keeper from the elder brother as he is described in Jesus' parable (Luke 15:25-32)?

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he

heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as **this thy son** was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

A Pronoun Problem

A pronoun is a word that stands in place of a noun. In the following sections particular attention will be

paid to the possessive pronouns used by each of the individuals portrayed in the parable. The thought to keep in mind is that among possessions and people, men only truly take care of that in which they have a personal investment. In the case of human relationships, this would be appropriately described as belonging to one another, or in one word - family (Parker 352)

The Prodigal's Pronouns

There is no need to dwell greatly upon the prodigal's condition or attitude since this volume has sections wholly devoted to those topics; however, for the sake of understanding the brotherly responsibility to prodigals, it is useful to notice briefly the prodigal's pronoun usage in his various states.

First, consider that even in the depths of his despair and filthiness of his sins he refers to the father as "my father" (Luke 15:17-18).

Second, upon his repentance and return he regarded himself unworthy of the father using the possessive pronoun "my" in calling him "my son," and remarked, "And [I] am no more worthy to be called thy son" (Luke

Continued on page 2

"THIS THY SON" - ACCEPTING THE RESPONSIBILITY TO BE OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER (PART 1)

Continued from page 1

15:19). Even feeling unworthy, he calls the father, "My father."

The Elder Son's Pronouns

The elder son does not claim ownership of his brother. He responds to the father's entreaty with, "Neither transgressed I at any time **thy** commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this **thy** son was come which hath devoured **thy** living" (Luke 15:29-30). "He could not see that if his father had gained a son, he had gained a brother" (Lightfoot 123).

When a Christian considers his role as his brother's keeper, he can quickly learn from the elder brother's speech that pointing a finger and distancing self from the penitent sinner is not acceptable. His error is seen clearly in the treatment of his brother, but it began in a lack of love for the father: one must love the Father in order to properly love his Father's sons (Parker 23).

The Father's Pronouns

The Father's pronouns are particularly striking and instructive to the one who desires to respond properly to the one coming home from the far country of sin. Upon hearing his son say that he is unworthy to have his father call him his son, he responds, "This **my** son was dead, and is alive again" (Luke 15:24).

This shows the paternalism of the father who wanted nothing more than to have the family whole again (Butler 310). Furthermore, the reader notices the answer to the elder brother's "this thy son" statement with, "This thy brother was dead and is alive again" (Luke 15:32). The father changes only two words from his previous statement in verse twenty four, but teaches volumes to one who has responsibility toward his brother - **My** son is **thy** brother.

The Non-Family Pronouns

It is easy to look over the servant of whom the elder son makes his inquiry, but such would be a mistake for his speech is the key to seeing the full picture of the pronoun problem in this parable. Notice that he did not say "our father" or "our brother." Why not? He is not in the family. This pattern of speech on his part should not be read into too much, but it is a good example of how one speaks as an outsider to a family. It is a further indictment of the elder brother's "thy, thy, thy" attitude (Lange 291).

Likewise when a Christian speaks of brethren, the wayward, or those who are returning without the delicate possessive pronouns, at least implied, "our" and "my," he should see it as an indication that his heart is not in the right place to be his brother's keeper. He is taking the neutral, at best, stance of one not in the family.

A Crucial Contrast

The above section fleshed out the heart problems that kept the elder brother from being his brother's keeper, and now a contrast will be made between two brothers in order to draw a Biblical picture of a true brother. What a great difference can be seen when Jesus Christ, the greatest Brother that ever lived, is contrasted with elder brother in his parable.

As is discussed at length in other sections of this volume, the elder brother represents the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day. Knowing this, a Bible student can see immediately the polar differences in the two, and he can immediately take lessons from Jesus' confrontations with these sects. Keeping the elder brother in the confines of the parable's description of him, however, also yields a strong contrast between him and the greatest Brother, Jesus Christ.

Investment In The Pre-Prodigal

There is no evidence at all in the beginning of the parable that the older brother had any close connection or strong bond with his younger brother. When the prodigal decided to leave, there was no brotherly sentiment holding him back, no interjection by the older brother seeking for the young man to stay. How different this is from the attitude and

Continued on page 3

"THIS THY SON" - ACCEPTING THE RESPONSIBILITY TO BE OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER (PART 1)

Continued from page 2

relationship Jesus has with men who are faced with temptation and trial.

In contrast to the picture of the elder brother standing silent as the prodigal began his journey into sin, see Jesus reach out His hand to a struggling, sinking Peter (Mat. 14:30-31). See the good example of our Brother when He counted us worthy to be called brethren, "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11).

Actions Toward The Prodigal

Consider God's patience toward the wayward throughout time. Historically, God has had patience even with stubborn and difficult men. Brown commented concerning this patience:

Now, *First*, This is designed to represent to us the goodness of God; how strangely gentle and winning he has been towards those that were strangely forward and provoking. He reasoned with Cain: *Why art thou wroth?*

He bore Israel's manners in the wilderness, Acts xiii. 18. How mildly did God reason with Elijah, when he was upon the fret (1 Kings xix. 46), and especially with Jonah whose case was very parallel with this here, for he

was there disquieted at the repentance of Ninevah, and the mercy shown to it, as the elder brother here; and those questions, *Dost thou well to be angry? And, Should not I spare Nineveh?* Are not unlike these expostulations of the father with the elder brother here. (750)

This patience and pleading with the wayward stands in stark contrast to the attitudes and actions of the elder brother. Where in the parable is the elder brother's attempt to bring his brother home? One might say, "The father did not make an attempt, so why would the brother be indicted for failure to do so?"

The answer again is found

when one views the actions of the Christian's Brother, Jesus Christ.

Jesus left His place in heaven to come to this far country that was full of sin in order to bring his prodigal brothers home. "Was it not an 'Elder Brother' who left home, and went into the far country 'to seek and to save that which was lost, and to give his life a ransom for many'" (Buttrick 200)?

There is an excellent section in this volume that instructs as to how one might reach out to the prodigal and bring him home. The Father did not come; the Brother did. The purpose here is merely to establish that a Christian must be like one of the two brothers under consideration. The question echoes, "Am

Continued on page 4

GREAT CHARACTER STUDIES

The Prodigal Son: A Young Man Who Came To Himself & Came Home To His Father (2011) - \$16.00, plus \$2.50 S & H.

Moses: The meekest man in all the land (2010) - \$16.00, plus \$3.00 S & H.

Simon Peter: Who Walked On Water With Feet Of Clay (2009) - \$12.00, plus \$3.00 S & H.

David: The Man Who Had The Heart To Be King (2008) - \$12.00, plus \$3.00 S & H.

These books are also available on CD. The books can be purchased individually on CD for \$10.00, plus \$3.00 S & H. However, for \$20.00, plus \$3.00 S & H, you can have all the past lectureship books on CD, including the three listed above (18 books in all).

Great Listening

All past lectureships are available on Mp3s.

Individual years can be purchased for \$10.00, plus \$3.00 S & H.

All eighteen years can be purchased for \$100.00, plus \$3.00 S & H.

POWER

November, 2011
Volume Twenty-One, Number Eleven



Deuteronomy 5:32

Wade Webster, Editor

POWER is a monthly publication overseen by the elders of the Southaven church of Christ, Southaven, Mississippi.



SUBSCRIPTION TERMS (USA):

Free Upon Request

Donations toward offsetting the cost of publishing POWER are gladly accepted and much appreciated.



Phone (662) 393-2690

FAX (662) 342-7152

E-mail: shavenpreacher@gmail.com

VISIT OUR WEB SITE:

www.southavencoc.org



SOUTHAVEN
CHURCH OF CHRIST

POWER

P.O. Box 128
SOUTHAVEN, MS 38671
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

"THIS THY SON" - ACCEPTING THE RESPONSIBILITY TO BE OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER (PART 1)

Continued from page 3

I my brother's keeper even when he is gone, lost in a seemingly hopeless state of sin?" Jesus was.

Reception Of The Penitent

The part that seems easiest to some would be the reception of one coming home. This is a victory, something men are accustomed to celebrating in day-to-day life. "When a sinner comes to Christ that is a great event Far greater than a political victory or sports victory. We need to rejoice in these spiritual victories more than we rejoice in the earthly victories," commented Butler (310).

When considering the far greater victory of one coming home to the Lord, it seems that there would be a natural reaction in a positive way to the realization that one who was lost is found; one who was dead is alive. The brother from Luke 15 had no such reaction. He distanced himself from his brother physically and verbally. Buttrick noted "Many a man has been driven back to the far country by the lovelessness of the elder brother" (200).

The first step to tending to the needs of a brother is to come near to that brother. This is true no matter the state of the brother, but it should be particularly relished when that connection has for some time been severed by the ugliness of sin. Furthermore, this embrace should be sweetened by the fact that the recipient of the prodigal was a constant companion and encourager to the prodigal before he began his deviant journey and because of the countless hours spent in prayer on that one's behalf. The recipient ought to tear up at the thought of all the failed attempts he made to bring the prodigal home, and after all that, here he is, washed, clean, restored: this my brother. No such attitude is found in found in the elder brother, neither such actions. "And Jesus reckons as lost every loveless man, every man who looks upon his brother with cold and critical eyes, regardless of how utterly his despised brother may have wasted his substance with riotous living" (Chappell 171-72). However, our Savior, our Brother, is in the presence of the angels and therefore rejoices greatly at a prodigals return (Luke 15:10). Never a moment goes by that one of His who went wayward is in a state of sin that His pain is not great, but He is no longer here to reach them directly. It is up to the brothers in the world to be the keepers.

Non-Profit
Organization
U. S. Postage
PAID
Southaven, MS
Permit No. 24
