

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL BROTHER Pt.1

Everyone knows the story of the Prodigal Son, but few people realise that it is actually a two part parable; the second part, deals with what I have called the Prodigal Brother. Before considering the Parable, we need to address the issue of Brothers. The whole area of Brotherhood today, is often misunderstood and only a study of what scripture says on this matter will shed any true light on the issue.

The Bible has a great deal to say on the topic of brothers, both Good and Bad. There is clear evidence on how Brothers should behave towards each other, but unfortunately, there is equal evidence of how they actually related; the ideal and the reality. This begins in Genesis with Cain and Able, and continues throughout both testaments. Let's examine a selection of these scriptures, beginning with those that cover the less than ideal situations.

BAD

(Gen 4:8 KJV) And 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 slew him.

(Gen 4:9 KJV) And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?

Note, the first reference to brothers involves murder and God's response to it. The Principle of 'first mention' is in operation here. All other references, must be guided by this one. Conflict between brothers seems

to fill not only the pages of the Bible, but the pages of History as well. Yet, God's answer to the age old question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is always a resounding YES. God doesn't change and neither does His answer. Today, you are still your brother's keeper; you are still responsible for him.

Of course, the obvious next question is, "Who is my brother?" That was asked of our Lord and He answered with the 'Parable of the Good Samaritan' which is a separate study.

(Gen 27:41 KJV) And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.

(Gen 27:42 KJV) And these words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah: and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee.

(Gen 27:43 KJV) Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran;

Again we see murder in the heart of a brother. True, as with Cain and Able, there are other issues at work, but the final response is the same. The less favoured brother wants to kill the more favoured!! However, in this, note the Good reference. Rebekah is willing to send her son to Her brother. This speaks of a healthy relationship between them, one that reflects what God intended.

(Gen 37:26 KJV) And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?

(Gen 37:27 KJV) Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content.

(Gen 42:21 KJV) And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.

The story of Joseph is another well known example of brother against brother. Verse 21 of chapter 42 is interesting. They knew they had done wrong; they admit, at least to each other, their guilt, but there is no sign of any true repentance, rather they are using it as an excuse for their current predicament. How often do we see this today, one brother blaming another for their predicament?

We are also given instructions for how to deal with situations involving brother against brother.

(Psa 50:20 KJV) Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son.

(Deu 19:18 KJV) And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother;

(Deu 19:19 KJV) Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.

God's response is also set out clearly in the following passages. He does not approve of conflict between brothers.

(Amos 1:11 KJV) Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever:

Note, of the 4 related transgressions, attempting to kill one's brother comes first and the judgement is simple and direct.

(Oba 1:10 KJV) For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever.

Some final scriptures of warning in this area. No comment is necessary.

(Mal 2:10 KJV) Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?

(Rom 14:10 KJV) But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

(1 Cor 6:6 KJV) But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers.

Let us now examine the other side of the coin; what the Bible emphasises as the appropriate attitude between brothers.

GOOD

Brothers should help each other and be there for each other in times of need. That is just as imperative today as it was then. These few scriptures should suffice.

(Gen 14:14 KJV) And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.

(Gen 29:15 KJV) And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?

(Lev 19:17 KJV) Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.

(Lev 25:25 KJV) If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold.

(Lev 25:35 KJV) And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee.

(Lev 25:36 KJV) Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee.

(Deu 15:7 KJV) If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:

Some other OT scriptures that offer insight into our relationship with a brother are:

(Prov 17:17 KJV) A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

(Zec 7:9 KJV) Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother:

(Zec 7:10 KJV) And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

The message here, should be obvious. God expects us to love, care for and support our brothers. Why don't we? Let's turn our attention to the New Testament and see how it compares with the Old.

In the NT, both Jesus and Paul had a great deal to say about brothers. Most of these passages are very well known and indeed, are frequently used as the basis of separate messages. Each are worthy of much deeper study than I have time for here, so meditate on them this week.

(Mat 5:22 KJV) But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

(Mat 5:23 KJV) Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

(Mat 5:24 KJV) Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

(Mat 7:4 KJV) Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

(Mat 18:15 KJV) Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

(Mat 18:21 KJV) Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

At least we all know the answer here, seventy times seven.

(Mat 18:35 KJV) So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

(Luke 6:42 KJV) Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.

(Luke 17:3 KJV) Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

Surely here, the over-riding theme is one of Forgiveness and Reconciliation. It can be argued that this is in actuality, the theme of the entire Bible. Our entire relationship with our brothers, especially our spiritual ones, must be based on these principles.

You will remember that the first question asked in the Bible about a brother was Cain's, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Paul has much to say on this issue. Here are a few related scriptures from him and a couple from James that tie in well.

(Rom 14:21 KJV) It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

(1 Cor 8:13 KJV) Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

(1 Th 4:6 KJV) That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

(James 2:15, 16 KJV) If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

(James 4:11 KJV) Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

The difficult area of how we should relate with people who through sin or disobedience, or rebellion, or for whatever reason, have fallen out of right relationship with God, is also dealt with. Here we must be very careful, since our eventual hope, should be to win back that brother. Forgiveness and reconciliation within Biblical guidelines should always be our ultimate aim. However, where this proves impossible, these commands are given:

(1 Cor 5:11 KJV) But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

(2 Th 3:6 KJV) Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

I think that the Book of 1 John best sums up God's attitude to the issue of brothers. To finish this introduction to the Parable of the Prodigal Brother, let me offer these verses.

(1 John 2:9 KJV) He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

(1 John 2:10 KJV) He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. (We only stumble in the dark after-all.)

(1 John 2:11 KJV) But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

(1 John 3:10 KJV) In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

(1 John 3:14 KJV) We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

(1 John 3:15 KJV) Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

(1 John 3:17 KJV) But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

(1 John 4:20 KJV) If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

(1 John 4:21 KJV) And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

There is not much room to manoeuvre here. If you do not have a right heart attitude towards your brother, you go directly to Hell, do not pass Go, do not collect \$200. God is very clear throughout His Word that we **MUST** have right relationship with our brother. Or, at the very least, **WE** must do all we can to bring about forgiveness and reconciliation. If our brother refuses to be reconciled, then they will eventually be answerable before God. Let's make sure that our hearts are right and clean not only before God, but with our brother also. Amen.

With this introduction in mind, we can now turn our attention to the Parable of the Prodigal Brother.