

“Being My Brother’s Keeper”

James 5:19-29

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Introduction: How responsible are we to our fellow man? Two questions come to mind. How responsible am I towards my fellow **believers** and how responsible am I towards my fellow **man**. These two questions are important because they take into account salvation and repentance.

Am I responsible for the lost man who dies in his sin? Am I responsible for the wayward believer who is clearly living an open rebellious lifestyle?

Both great questions, and James doesn’t deal with all areas of this question, but other scriptures will help us with our conclusions.. We will need to do some searching. First lets deal with our text.

James 5:19-20

19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

NIV

James 5:19-20

19 Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

20 Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

KJV

This verse seems quite simple at first but the obedience in following this imperative raises up a few questions.

Many of you right now have sweaty palms because you have such fear about sharing your faith or correcting a brother. For the most part, we don't exercise church discipline anymore because we are afraid of losing members.

Also we are not biblically knowledgeable enough to know where our responsibility lies. We also just don't want to deal with it. To go and talk to another person about their sinful witness is hard and extremely volatile. We usually sit back and watch the carnage because of the emotional stress that comes with confrontation.

We also know that most people are not walking with Christ close enough to even be able to confront another person. Nonetheless, James opens this up as one of our responsibilities as a church body.

Let me say this... you are your brother's keeper!!!

Verse 19:

- **Tis-** someone or some "thing." An enclitic indefinite pronoun. "If anybody."
- **Ean-** conditional particle. "if"
- **Planao-** to err, (APSub) Wander (NIV) to leave truth or safety. To be led away or to go on your own.
- **Aletheia-** what is true, just and verity.

Epistrpho- turns him, to revert morally, to get him to come again. We call it repentance. (AASubj) Although not the normal or more popular word for repentance.

Verse 20:

- **"Let him know"** an imperative.
- That if he can get that sinner to turn around from his wandering and come home... he can save a man from death and cover over a multitude of sin. We know what James means. No man can forgive another man's sin but if we can

change his life we can help him avoid many sins. Just think of the sin that would be in your life without Christ.

- **Sozo a psuche**- save a soul from death.
- **Kalupto**- hide or cover. We get kleptomaniac from this word.
- **Plethos**- a multitude, a company, bundle.

Now, we learn that this endeavor is first of all worth it if we succeed. What James does not do is go into detail about how to do it and what may happen when we do.

What might happen?

1. You may actually get through to your friend and they convert.
2. You might find a humble soul who is tired of the life they are living and they cry and come running home.
3. You might also get a door slammed in your face.
4. You might be asked to stop bothering them.
5. You might get *called holier than thou, holy roller or "goodie two shoes."*
6. You will grow spiritually through it all... promise!!!

One thing I was surprised at when I began to search passages that dealt with this topic is that there is a smaller portion of scripture than I thought on the subject. Obviously, the scripture need only to teach a principle once for it to be valid, but for all the teaching we have about accountability it was unique to see how much we teach on the topic. After a lot of study I came up with a few scriptures I think will help us. Some speak to the topic directly and some indirectly.

Luke 15

15 Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

3 Then Jesus told them this parable: **4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.**

In this chapter we set the context for three great parables or better yet one parable supported by three vignettes. ***The first 7 verses directly speaks to the lost sheep.*** You will notice here with me that there are a few questions to be asked. **Most of my friends who are pastors have called me when they preach through these passages and asked me how I preached it. Are we talking about a lost sheep or a sheep that left and needs to repent.** Scholars differ on the way these passages should be treated and preached. I have also struggled with what the main context is.

I have taught you what I believe that the Holy Spirit has taught me. **When you don't know the exact context just preach the application.** These three parables are a perfect example of this. Some preachers are adamant about this context. Some say it's about the lost. Others say it's about those who need to repent. I have found that the most effective way to approach this text is to just preach the truth of the passage and let the Holy Spirit apply it. I preach it to both the lost and the backslidden. It has always worked well for me.

The passage teaches us that God places great value on the lost soul that is away from His fold. He also places great value on the life of the believer that has lost his way and needs to come home.

Several things that are of great importance I want you to see.

~ No one has more influence over the sheep than the Shepherd. The Shepherd gets better results than anyone else.

~ Notice that the Shepherd carries the sheep back. The sheep may not be able to walk well after the discipline. Also they will be able to talk a lot on the way home.

~ The Shepherd has joy in doing this.

8 "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The same lessons apply in this vignette. Something was lost and then searched for. Once the coin was found there was great rejoicing.

~ Have you ever had a Mama or Grandmama light a lamp and look for you? Anybody ever keep a lamp burning for you?

The next parable seems to be a bit clearer but many still debate if the prodigal son was saved before he left or was simply repenting as he came home.

Exegete Text:

11 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

13 "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went

and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ 20 So he got up and went to his father.

~ One stranger thing here is that the Father never came looking for this boy? You may need to do the same.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and

your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

28 "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

31 "My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

NIV

You will also notice that the last parable is about two sons not one. The older brother never left the farm but was less likely to repent than the brother who left. This brings more meaning the statements in scripture about lukewarm Christians. Generally people who stray get broken and repent. Many people that never stray live in spiritual poverty and do great damage to the kingdom without ever leaving. They are less likely to repent as well..

Genesis 14:1-24

Obviously we cant read all these texts in our time allotted but let me share the context with you. The king of Sodom has gotten himself in a mess and other kings in the region have formed an alliance and they attack and Lot is taken in the fight. Lot should not have been in Sodom to start with. Now his Uncle has to go get his sorry self and rescue him. Lot chose this life and now Abraham has lived for God and has friends to help him so off they go to rescue lot. Some of us would have left Lot there. Too bad big boy. We learn from Abraham how separated he was from the

world. Look what he says after the battle concerning the booty that came with the win.

Gen 14:21-24

21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."
 22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath 23 that **I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'** 24 I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me — to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share."

NIV

We have also been given this ministry of reconciliation:

2 Cor 5:17-21

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and ***gave us*** the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

NIV

This next passage adds to what Christ has already said and brings in the matter church discipline. Jesus also reveals the idea of amputation. This passage is also one of the most misquoted and misunderstood passages in the bible.

Matt 18:10-20

10 "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

12 "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? 13 And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. 14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

18 "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19 "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

NIV

The next passage in Hebrews is also a difficult passage but let me bring some clarity to it for us.

Heb 6:1-6

6 Therefore let **us** leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, **we** will do so.

4 It is impossible for **those** who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 if **they** fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to **their** loss **they** are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to **those** for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. 8 But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

9 Even though **we** speak like this, dear friends, **we** are confident of better things in **your** case — things that accompany salvation. 10 God is not unjust; he will not forget **your** work and the love **you** have shown him as **you** have helped **his people** and continue to help them. 11 **We** want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. 12 **We** do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate **those** who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

NIV

The one aspect of this passage that I want you to see is that many people that claim to be saved are not. They speak the language and mix among us but many turn from the only solution to a life of death. Many even taste of the heavenly gift without being born again. How can we tell who they are?

In Hebrews 10 there are some of the most frightening words I have ever read. Many people are playing church and living in the world and think God approves of their lives. I got some sober advice for ya!!!

Heb 10:19-31

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. 28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

NIV

John brings out the teaching about the sin unto death.

1 John 5:16-21

16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

18 We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. 19 We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. 20 We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true — even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

21 Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.
NIV

Paul speaks to us directly about restoring our brother.

Gal 6:1-5

6 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, 5 for each one should carry his own load.
NIV

Many will wait until it is too late to choose.

Luke 16:27-31

27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

30 "'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

NIV

Don't forget that even Christ had one stray from His fold as well. We are also blessed to have in John 21 a conversation of reconciliation that Jesus had with Peter after he quit the ministry.

John 21:15-23

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. 18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but

when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") 21 When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." 23 Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?"

NIV

This is likewise a much misunderstood passage. This is a passage about judgment.

Ezek 3:16-21

16 At the end of seven days the word of the Lord came to me: 17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. 18 When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. 19 But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.

20 "Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. 21 But if you do warn the righteous man

not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took warning, and you will have saved yourself."

NIV

Don't brag about your stability. You can fall too.

John 13:36-38

36 Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."

37 Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."

38 Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, **before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!**"

NIV

Jesus knew this world would be difficult for us. He prayed for us because He knew we would be in a fight to not only protect our brothers but ourselves as well. When greater men than I fall; it scares me!

John 17:15-23

15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to

complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

NIV

John 18:25

25 As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?"

He denied it, saying, "I am not."

NIV

1 Cor 10:12

12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

KJV

2 Thess 3:13-15

13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.

14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

15 Yet count him not as an enemy, **but admonish him as a brother.**

KJV

1 Peter 4:7-8

7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. 8 Above all, love each other deeply, because **love covers over a multitude of sins.**

NIV

Closing: Tell a good story of one who repented and came back strong to do good works for Christ.