



*"...The heart of the sons of men
is full of evil,
and madness is in their heart
while they live..."
(Ecclesiastes 9:3)*

*Wherewith shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before the high God?
He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;
and what doth the LORD require of thee,
but to do justly, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with thy God?
(Micah 6:6,8)*

am I my brother's keeper?

Genesis 4.⁹

There has perhaps never been an uglier sentiment expressed in more beautiful words than this arrogant question. In fact, it does not really seem to be a question so much as a statement—a challenge posed in the form of question. It is an arrogant assertion that “I *am not* my brother’s keeper.”

Let’s take a moment to review the context for this arrogant assertion. After Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden, Genesis informs us that Eve had two sons: Cain and Abel. Something of each man’s life and character is implied by their names.

Abel’s name means something like “breath” or “vapor.” It might signify the shortness of his life, or focus on the fact that his is the first death, the first human to experience the exhalation of the final breath.¹

Cain’s name means something like “acquire,” “gain,” or “profit.” It signifies much more than Eve’s having “acquired” a son from God. It tells us that he was a man of acquisition. He lived for gain and profit. We see this most clearly in Moses. Cain murders his brother Abel. Before killing his brother, Moses records Cain as saying, “Truly I am Mahan, the master of this great secret, that I may murder and *get gain*.”² After murdering his brother, the same source has Cain

¹ We are not doing “history” here. The text doesn’t care anything about the possibility of deaths before Abel’s. Genesis is telling a story, making a point.

² Moses 5.³¹

exulting, “I am free; surely *the flocks of my brother falleth into my hands.*”³

Cain’s drive to acquire drives him to violent action against his economic competitor. It is at this point that God challenges Cain with his question, “Where is your brother?” and Cain fires right back with, essentially, “How should I know, I don’t have responsibility for or to my brother.”

Now, let us here observe just how extraordinary all of this is. We are being informed of the very first human events after the expulsion from the garden. One can image the incredible series of “firsts” that might have been reported: the first fire, the first meal, the first prayer, the first kiss.... On and on it might go. We can image the first of the many billions of words that might have been spoken in those initial days, weeks, and years: “I love you,” “tastes great, hone,” “What do you suppose is the purpose of this?” “God is magnificent,” etc., etc., etc.

So, the writer of Genesis is up to something when the very first story he tells is of a death—and a violent death at that. The writer is up to something when the very first words he records as having escaped the human tongue contain an arrogant assertion that one had no obligation for anyone other than oneself.

When God warned that partaking of the tree of knowledge would bring death, he wasn’t simply speaking of dying, but of dying violently. “Earth,” the author declares, “is a violent place. The violence flows from the contracted human heart that only considers itself and its own needs. Too often, those personal needs take priority over the needs of others, and, in the pursuit of meeting those needs, personal violence against others is justified, and then institutionalized. It is, in fact, how one gets ahead, acquires, gains, and profits in a fallen world. It is how the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.”

This is the Bible’s first revelation about mortal man. What a revelation it is! Do we believe it? We disbelieve it at our own peril.

³ Moses 5.³³ It is of interest and worthy of more thought that Cain associates “freedom” with the power to acquire at any cost to others.

Well, as things turn out, the second story is also the story of murder!⁴ This murder is committed over a slight suffered at another's hands. This murder is about restoring one's "honor" or "reputation."⁵ In the next story, the lead up to the flood, we learn that the violence in the founding acquisitive murder and the violence in the honor killing has grown into a contagion.

"...YHWH saw that human evil had spread world-wide, and that *every* thought devised in the heart was *only* evil *all* of the time."⁶

"In full view of 'ēlōhîm, the earth had come to a complete and willful ruin. Earth was full of oppressive cruelty. As 'ēlōhîm looked upon the earth, he beheld a world in ruins; for, throughout the world every nation had dashed God's hopes. So 'ēlōhîm warned Nōah, "Because those on earth are engrossed in oppressive cruelty, the end of all mortal life is coming; for I am about to destroy them."⁷

With this, the flood wipes out human civilization; a human civilization built on these wicked and destructive foundations—the vice of avarice and false honor.

We go now to Genesis 12. Here we meet a man name Abraham. He travels with a nephew, Lot. Together, they have great possessions, including large flocks of sheep and cattle. Soon they are in competition for grazing rights. As conflict breaks out, our hearts sink. The text has conditioned us. We know what to expect. Violence is about to break out. Someone is going to die. Or, more aptly and succinctly, someone is about to turn murderous. The first one to pull his gun and shoot, wins.

But the text surprises us. We see a remarkable thing.

⁴ Genesis 4.¹⁹⁻²⁴. Throughout our discussion, we pass over the "genealogies," looking only at the narratives.

⁵ We Americans do not appreciate today the pervasive nature of this reason for killing. But it is not alien to our American history. The duel was all about maintaining honor. "Honor killings" are found to this day in many parts of the world.

⁶ Genesis 6.⁵ Author's translation and emphasis. Not the multiplication of "superlatives:" "every," "only," "all."

⁷ Genesis 6.¹¹⁻¹³

“And Abram said unto Lot, ‘Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.’”⁸

Something new is to be found in this man, Abraham. He cares about and looks after the needs of others, even if it means that he must sacrifice himself and his needs for another. He is willing to suffer economic loss to avoid the inevitable acquisitive conflict and violence that comes when one puts oneself and one’s needs above those of others. “Honor” means little to him, for he knows his value in the sight of God.

The descendants of this remarkable man, Abraham, are not always quite so “progressive.” Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, reverts in a number of ways to the old attitudes, “I am not my brother’s keeper.” However, his conflict with his brother, Esau, does not turn murderous, though it is a close call. The descendants of Israel (Jacob) have a spotty history in respect to the temptations of acquisitiveness and violence. The Old Testament prophets bear witness that the nation finally lost its battle with this temptation, and were exiled because of their having yielded to the cursed attitudes and actions of the antediluvian Cain.

But, it was not without a fight. We see Yahweh trying, through the laws he gifted the nation, to control their urges to place their economic needs above those of others; trying to help them understand that they were indeed their brother’s keeper. Just one example of many that could be cited is found in Leviticus.

“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.”⁹

What a statute! How this cuts into one’s “profit margin”! How this threatens one’s “economic

⁸ Genesis 13.⁸⁻⁹

⁹ Leviticus 19.⁹⁻¹⁰

viability.” How many would contenance such foolishness in our modern American “business climate”? Not many. And those few who might attempt it would be named dupes.

But, we can easily see in this statute the attitude and behavior of the great Israelite progenitor, Abraham, the friend of God. We also seem to see Abraham’s attitudes and actions reflected in the later admonitions of another descendant of Abraham, Paul.

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”¹⁰

We see it again in latter day revelation.

“And again I say unto you, let every man esteem his brother as himself.”¹¹

It does not seem radical or inappropriate to ask how the attitudes and actions of American citizens and the greater American culture, specifically our business culture, stack up against such Biblical standards and warnings.

American Christianity confronts, albeit selectively, American culture with Biblical standards in matters having to do with sex. How is it that they do not do so in matters of economy? Why are they so quiet when it comes to matters related to mammon? One becomes suspicious and skeptical about their sexual tirades when they are so negligent in their critic of the economic iniquity that is pervasive and institutionalized in American politics and business. Something smells very fishy here. Do they care more about reaping the profits of their wealthy, economically immoral congregants than about standing for truth? Are gay people easy targets because there is no economic downside to attacking them?

Because of this bizarre and suspicious silence, even American Christians come to think of economics as *amoral*. Perfectly good people accept business practices and economic policies that

¹⁰ Philippians 2.³⁻⁴

¹¹ DC 38.²⁵

are as ugly and violent as those of the immoral Cain.

Christian shepherds, wake up! Sound the alarm. Your flocks are perishing in a flood of acquisitiveness, materialism, and economic violence—the root of all evil.

Here is but one example of many, many we could identify, if we were only willing to risk our economic wellbeing for the wellbeing of others.

Put simply, an economic development incentive is an offer of cash, buildings, worker training, tax breaks, etc. offered to a business by a state or local government in order to induce said company to locate (most often *re-locate*) their business or certain business enterprises in the state or local area offering the incentive. Initiated by either business or government agencies, these incentives move business and jobs from one American community to another. They look something as follows.

Company XYZ currently employs 350 workers in Flint, Michigan to manufacture a company product. Columbus, Ohio offers XYZ 50.2 million dollars in tax breaks over 10 years as well as 11.5 million dollars toward the construction of a new facility if it will move its production from Flint to Columbus. As is common, negotiations take place, not only between the company and Columbus officials, but between the company and Flint officials. Flint and Columbus and XYZ make offers and counter offers until, finally, Columbus wins the bidding war and XYZ moves the facility from Flint to Columbus.

Consequently, 350 employees in Flint are out of work. They have lost their jobs and all that comes with them—for example, health care coverage. In addition, several businesses dependent upon the incomes of those fired employees suffer losses, causing them too to downsize or, worse case scenario, go out of business entirely. Those 350 lost XYZ jobs quickly turn into 700 lost jobs in Flint. The local housing market takes a dive. Scores of families lose their homes, while renters are evicted and forced into inadequate lower-priced apartments. Cars are repossessed making getting to the new lower-wage job a crap-shoot. Stress wrecks individual's health, causes marital turmoil, produces a rash of divorces, and breaks the heart of innocent children separated from a beloved parent.

In addition, with the loss of jobs comes a loss of income for the local government. There is less money for road repair, less money for schools, less money for the homeless shelter, less money to help the very people hurt by this immoral practice, etc., etc., etc. Individuals who might have moved to Flint reconsider and chose to live elsewhere due to the local economic depression and all that comes with it—poor schools, etc.

But what about Columbus? How are things going down there? Surely things are looking up for the folks there—such that we can justify the harm that has been inflicted on their Flint brethren. Remember, though, whatever the economic status of Columbus, Flint will remain as it has been described.

But, alas, things are not so great in Columbus either. There are 350 people now working at XYZ. However, these individuals were already in the local economy, so, XYZ has directly brought no new jobs into the community. The community has seen a few new jobs indirectly. These are mostly low-paying service industry jobs. The salary of the 350 new employees at XYZ is no more than that which they were previously making, so no new tax dollars are coming into the local government coffers—and, actually, the salary paid to the 350 employees in Columbus is less than that which was being paid for the same work in Flint.

No one new has moved into the area for the jobs, so the impact on the local housing market is minimal. Due to the loss of taxes devoted to the economic incentives provided to XYZ, the roads are more pot-holed than they were previously. Local school teachers find that, with fewer tax dollars available, not only will they not receive the measly 2% raise that they had been promised, they are actually asked to accept a cut in their benefits. Teacher moral falls and school children suffer.

We could go on. Need we do so?

Oh, but what about XYZ? How are they doing? They have a brand spanking new building that cost them nothing. Let's just name it for what it is: the result of corporate welfare. XYZ sold their old building in Flint, not for a huge amount of money, but every little penny helps. They

have already shown that they feel no obligation to their employees. Now, for the next ten years they have no financial obligations to Columbus—at which time, they can find another community who is willing to enter a bidding war with Columbus.

The company's "financial obligations" to shareholders is being fulfilled quite nicely—stock prices are up, dividends are going great guns, and CEO compensation is through the roof. What a marvelous 10 year run it will be for XYZ. No obligations to the community. No assistance with repairing and widening roads—not even the one right out front of their business. This will all be taken care out of the local government's tax coffers into which XYZ pays not one red cent while taking 50.2 million in tax payer money.

Besides the fact that this entire scheme is, at best, a zero sum game—no new jobs created (only stolen by one community from another), no new local government revenues (rather, a loss to both communities, either through loss of private incomes or business incentive costs), and victims everywhere—it is most unseemly.

No, that is to buy into the lie that economics is an amoral stage on which humans play. We must be true to the Biblical ideal: **THIS ECONOMIC PRACTICE IS IMMORAL!!** It is un-Biblical. It is ungodly. It is unholy.

It is, in very fact, akin to the acquisitive violence Cain practiced against his brother. After having stolen jobs from Flint, it is as if we hear Columbus say to God: "It's not my fault. I am not my brother's keeper." It is as if we hear American business glory, "I am free—a "free market" being a violent market in which the acquirer is free to pillage and plunder whatever he wants at anyone and everyone else's expense."

This simply ought not to be allowed to fly in a supposedly "Christian nation." Christians ought not to be silent about such abomination. Far from increasing the economic well-being of individual citizens, or our nation at large, this "put yourselves first" lie will end in famine: both a "famine of bread" and a famine "of hearing the words of the LORD."¹² It will end in Spiritual death—spiritual death of individuals and spiritual death of the nation.

¹² See Amos 8.¹¹

But, though false “Christian” watchmen remain mute, God will not be silent. His voice will be heard—heard through the voice of those who follow Abraham’s example, through the voice of true disciples of Christ, and in the alarm sounded by those who are faithful and true prophets. His voice is heard by those who have ears to hear, and eyes to see, and hearts to feel.

“Behold ye, the people of this great city,
and hearken unto my words;
yea, hearken unto the words which the Lord saith;
for behold, he saith that ye are cursed because of your riches,
and also are your riches cursed because ye have set your hearts upon them,
and have not hearkened unto the words of him who gave them unto you.
Ye do not remember the Lord your God in the things with which he hath blessed you,
but ye do always remember your riches,
not to thank the Lord your God for them;
yea, your hearts are not drawn out unto the Lord,
but they do swell with great pride,
unto boasting, and unto great swelling,
envyings,
strifes,
malice,
persecutions,
and murders,
and all manner of iniquities.
For this cause hath the Lord God caused that a curse should come upon the land,
and also upon your riches,
and this because of¹³ your iniquities.”¹⁴

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

¹³ “Because of these ‘economic’ iniquities, i.e., the manner of acquiring them, the uses to which they are put, and the “unnatural affections” place upon them.

¹⁴ Helaman 13:²¹⁻²³