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## “Brother's Keeper”

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One of the consequences of mortality is the necessity of earning our daily bread (see **Gen. 3:19; Moses 4:25**). We do so as employees, as business people, and as investors. In all of our earning activities, we have the challenge of dealing fairly and considerately with others.

Our duty is clear. The Savior gave us the Golden Rule: “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (**Matt. 7:12**).

Satan's position is the opposite. He sponsors self-interest, raw and unrefined by any other consideration. One of his most effective tools is the temptation to take unfair advantage in order to get gain. It has been so from the beginning.

Cain set the pattern of the world. Cain coveted the flocks of his brother Abel, and Satan showed him how to obtain them (see JST, **Gen. 5:14, 23; Moses 5:29, 38**). Satan taught Cain that a man could get worldly wealth by committing some evil against its owner (see JST, **Gen. 5:16; Moses 5:31**).

Cain killed Abel. The scriptures say that he did so “for the sake of getting gain” (**Moses 5:50**), the flocks of his brother (JST, **Gen. 5:18; Moses 5:33**). Seeing this, the Lord asked Cain, “Where is Abel thy brother?” Cain first attempted to cover his sin with a lie: “I know not.” Then he added a rationalization: “Am I my brother's keeper?” (**Gen. 4:9; Moses 5:34**).

Are we our brothers' keepers? In other words, are we responsible to look after the well-being of our neighbors as we seek to earn our daily bread? The Savior's Golden Rule says we are. Satan says we are not.

Tempted of Satan, some have followed the example of Cain. They covet property and then sin to obtain it. The sin may be murder, robbery, or theft. It may be fraud or deception. It may even be some clever but legal manipulation of facts or influence to take unfair advantage of another. Always the excuse is the same: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Those who follow the example of Cain fulfill a Book of Mormon prophecy. Seeing our day, Nephi prophesied that many would say, "Lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this" (**2 Ne. 28:8**).

We live in a world where many look on the marketplace as a ruthless arena where the buyer must beware, where no one is obligated to do more than the law requires, and where fraud isn't fraud unless you can prove it in court.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ have a higher standard. President Harold B. Lee said, "The standard ... in the Church must be visibly higher than the standard ... in the world" (*Ye Are the Light of the World*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1974, p. 13). We are commanded to live the Golden Rule.

Despite that high standard, some who profess to be Christians seek to earn their living by systematically victimizing their neighbors.

Some seize wealth by trafficking in illegal drugs or pornography. Traders in these products enrich themselves by transactions that ruin the bodies, minds, or morals of their customers.

Other criminals live by stealing. And not all stealing is at gunpoint or by dark of night. Some theft is by deception, where the thief manipulates the confidence of his victim.

The white-collar cousin of stealing is fraud, which gets its gain by lying about an essential fact in a transaction.

Scheming promoters with glib tongues and ingratiating manners deceive their neighbors into investments the promoters know to be more speculative than they dare reveal.

Difficulties of proof make fraud a hard crime to enforce. But the inadequacies of the laws of man provide no license for transgression under the laws of God. Though their method of thievery may be immune from correction in this life, sophisticated thieves in white shirts and ties will ultimately be seen and punished for what they are. He who presides over that Eternal Tribunal knows our secret acts, and he is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (**Heb. 4:12; D&C 33:1**).

Most of us can be relatively comfortable when a message on the Golden Rule in the workplace uses examples like illegal drugs and theft by deception. What follows is more challenging. And it should be. We cannot expect to be comfortable if we measure our conduct against the Savior's command, "I would that ye should be perfect even as I" (**3**

**Ne. 12:48**). To follow in the footsteps of the only perfect person who ever lived, we must expect to stretch our souls.

Followers of Christ have the moral responsibility of earning their livings and conducting their financial transactions in ways that are consistent with the principles of the gospel and the teachings of the Savior. Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should not be involved in employment or other activities upon which they cannot conscientiously ask the blessings of the Lord.

Persons who prosecute frivolous lawsuits do not measure up to this high standard. Groundless litigation rewards some plaintiffs handsomely, but it injures everyone else by raising the price of products and services.

An employee who receives the compensation agreed upon but does not perform the service agreed upon earns part of his living by injuring others.

So does an employer who is unfair to his employees. An idealistic young professional wrote Church headquarters about the plight of migrant farm workers. He had observed treatment that was probably illegal and certainly unchristian. When I read his letter, I thought of the positive example of Jesse Knight, the great benefactor of Brigham Young Academy. At a time when most mine owners exploited their workers, this Christian employer paid his miners something extra so they could earn their living in six days' labor and rest on the Sabbath. He did not require them to patronize a company store. He built his workers a building for recreation, worship, and schooling. And Brother Knight would not permit the superintendent to question his workers about their religion or politics (see Jesse William Knight, *The Jesse Knight Family*, Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1940, pp. 43–44; and Gary Fuller Reese, "Uncle Jesse," master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1961, pp. 26–28).

Of course, we understand that what an employer can pay his employees is limited by what his business can obtain for its products or services in a competitive marketplace. Contracts also impose limits on legitimate economic expectations.

Christian standards should also apply to those who earn a living by selling or advertising products in the marketplace.

The marketplace for products and services has many potential buyers who are vulnerable because they are poorly informed or excessively trusting. For example, a friend told me of a young student couple who didn't have enough money for rent, groceries, and tuition but were persuaded to sign up for an expensive self-improvement course. Can a seller ever justify obtaining personal profit by persuading someone to assume a financial burden he cannot wisely bear in order to acquire something he does not really need? The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that Latter-day Saints should deal justly with their neighbors and mercifully with the poor (see *History of the Church*, 5:401).

To cite another kind of example, an owner who keeps his business open on Sunday prevents his employees from attending worship services and being with their families on the Sabbath. Modern-day prophets have encouraged us not to shop on Sunday (see, for example, Spencer W. Kimball, *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, p. 6). Those of us who shop on the Sabbath cannot escape responsibility for encouraging businesses to remain open on that day. Essential services must be provided, but most Sabbath transactions could be avoided if merchants and customers were determined to avoid doing business on the Lord's day.

Last year the *Deseret News* carried an article about a Salt Lake City pharmacist who stopped selling cigarettes in his drugstore. He explained, "It's just incompatible for a profession dedicated to saving people's lives to sell a product that does nothing but kill" (20 Dec. 1985, p. B1). That merchant was more concerned about his customers' welfare than his personal profits.

Sister Oaks called my attention to a similar example in the world of advertising. The magazine *Women's Sports and Fitness* does not accept cigarette ads, thus foregoing much-needed revenue. A woman columnist and physician, Dr. Joan Ulliyot, praised this policy and contrasted it to the practice of another organization:

"I am dismayed that a prominent women's sport, tennis, continues to take support from a cigarette company. Surely the top women in this sport, none of whom smoke, have the [courage] to say no to this hypocrisy and stop lending their names and prestige to sanction and glamorize a lethal product. Any role model in sport who accepts support or sponsorship from a company whose products destroy health and fitness should take a hard look at what she is, by association, endorsing" (*Women's Sports and Fitness*, Sept. 1986, p. 12).

Wouldn't it be wonderful if this same attitude of looking after the interests of others governed Latter-day Saints who are making a profit from the sale or promotion of alcoholic beverages? Consider the terrible effects of alcohol. Alcohol-related accidents are the leading cause of death of those under twenty-five. The physical, social, and financial effects of alcohol ruin marriages and family life. By dulling inhibitions, alcohol leads to untold numbers of crimes and moral transgressions. Alcohol is the number one addictive drug in our day.

The consumption of alcohol is increasing among youth. Targeting young audiences, advertisers portray beer and wine as joyful, socially desirable, and harmless. Producers are promoting new types of alcoholic beverages as competitors in the huge soft-drink market. Grocery and convenience stores and gas stations stock alcoholic beverages side by side with soda pop. Can Christians who are involved in this commerce be indifferent to the physical and moral effects of the alcohol from which they are making their profits?

Other examples could be given, but these few are sufficient to illustrate the principle that the Golden Rule applies to our earning activities. We *are* our brother's keeper, even in the marketplace.

I am aware that this is a high standard which cannot be met overnight. But it is important to recognize our responsibility and begin to work toward it. And we should do so joyfully. The gospel is the good news. Commandments lead to blessings. The Prophet Joseph Smith told our first missionaries that when preaching we should “warn in compassion.” We “have no right ... to scare mankind to repentance,” he said. We should preach the gospel as “glad tidings of great joy unto all people” (*History of the Church*, 1:280).

We should also remember that the principle that the Golden Rule governs our earning activities is difficult to apply in practice. We should not consider employees responsible for policies they regret but cannot control. A decision that is made by the owner of a market should not inflict feelings of guilt on a conscientious but powerless Christian who runs the checkout stand. Similarly, a part-owner does not have freedom to impose his standards on business policies if he has partners who do not share his moral concerns. An incorporated business may be controlled by stockholders who have no concern for the destructive human effects of a profitable product or policy.

We live in a complex society, where even the simplest principle can be exquisitely difficult to apply. I admire investors who are determined not to obtain income or investment profits from transactions that add to the sum total of sin and misery in the world. But they will have difficulty finding investments that meet this high standard. Good things are often packaged with bad, so decisions usually involve balancing. In a world of corporate diversification, we are likely to find that a business dealing in beverages sells milk in one division and alcohol in another. Just when we think that our investments are entirely unspotted from the world, we may find that our life insurance is partially funded by investments we wish to avoid. Or our savings may be deposited in a bank that is lending to ventures we could not approve. Such complexities make it difficult to prescribe firm rules.

We must rely on teaching correct principles, which each member should personally apply to govern his or her own circumstances. To that end, each of us should give thoughtful and prayerful consideration to whether we are looking after the well-being of our neighbors in the way we earn our daily bread.

The motive of Cain is at the headwaters of wickedness. Cain's sin was murder, but his motive was personal gain. That motive has produced all manner of wickedness, including murder, thievery, and fraud. That motive is also at work in the legal but immoral practices of those who get gain by preying on the weaknesses or ignorance of their neighbors. Always such activities involve Cain's ancient rationalization: “Am I my brother's keeper?”

In contrast, the Savior taught us to “love [our] enemies, bless them that curse [us], do good to them that hate [us], and pray for them who despitefully use [us] and persecute [us]” (**3 Ne. 12:44**). When we have that duty toward our enemies, we cannot allow ourselves to do less for our partners, our customers, our employees, and others with whom we deal in the marketplace.

What a beautiful and happy world this would be if all of us would strive to live these principles to the fullest. Our efforts and influence would affect millions. Examples improve society more than sermons. Most people would rather see a sermon than hear one.

In those brilliant generations that followed the appearance of the resurrected Christ in the New World, “there were no contentions and disputations among [the people], and every man did deal justly one with another” (4 Ne. 1:2). Fourth Nephi records: “Surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God” (4 Ne. 1:16). We should be striving to regain that condition. As modern revelation declares: “Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness” (D&C 82:14). One of the ways prescribed to achieve that increase is “every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God” (D&C 82:19).

May God bless us to live the Golden Rule in our earning activities. As we seek to be our brother's keeper, we will be attempting to follow in the footsteps of the Master. I testify of Jesus Christ, our Savior, whose blood has atoned for repented sins and whose resurrection has broken the bands of death for all. The fulness of the gospel was restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. His successor, President Ezra Taft Benson, holds the keys of the everlasting gospel in our day. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

*Gospel topics: commandments, honesty, Word of Wisdom*