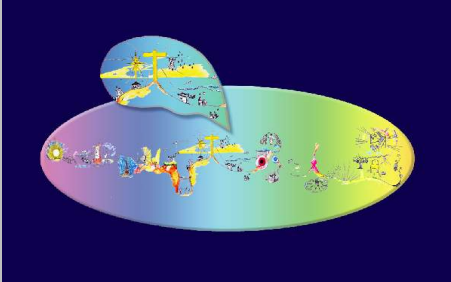


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Eternal Fellowship News Bulletin

We believe in one GOD, in three persons; FATHER, SON and HOLY SPIRIT. We regard the Bible (both Hebrew Bible and New Testaments) as the only infallible authoritative WORD OF GOD.

HULDAH MINISTRY aims to return to the Word Of God, founded on Hebrew background and to interpret it from Hebraic perspective, acknowledging that Jesus is a Jew and the Jewish-ness of His teaching as a continuation from the Hebrew Bible. The Ministry also aims to put His teaching into practice, to have a closer relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ, and to regularly have a Christian fellowship so that this-worldly kingdom of God will materialise in the midst of the followers of Jesus here and now, as well as earnestly seeking Christ's Return to establish the otherworldly Kingdom of God on earth.

All activities are free of charge and no obligation whatever. Just enjoy our fellowship!

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HULDAH MINISTRY

LETTER TO THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST

【 ALREADY AND NOT YET 】

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served...he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him...When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

JOHN 13:1-17.

"Suppose one of you had a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

LUKE 17:7-10.

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to

return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. LUKE 12:35-37.

As we approach the most spiritually significant season of the year, Easter, our hearts are naturally drawn to the Passion of Jesus Christ –His self-giving ministry; suffering, death, burial and resurrection.

Jesus' ministry on earth reached a turning-point after Peter correctly identified Christ's deity in a pagan region around Caesarea Philippi. After that incident, Jesus began to share His shocking and extraordinary mission of suffering and death, heading for Jerusalem with His core disciples: ***'he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and (that) he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life'*** (matt.16:21). Jesus explained that the nature of His mission was not to be a political/religious/national Messiah but to be a suffering servant to give His life for others. It was exactly what was prophesied by the prophet Isaiah: ***'See, my servant will act wisely...He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. ... Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed...by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities...For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors'*** (Isa.52:13-53:12). Jesus' disciples might have been shocked by such a statement of their master and by His teaching about the cost of discipleship. His teaching seemed very hard for them: ***'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it'*** (matt.16:24-25).

Christ's teaching on discipleship reveals a revolutionary dimension of action, in which while the invitation for entry into the kingdom of God is a free gift, Jesus then turns to His disciples to teach them the lesson of living a self-denying life. He elaborates on the meaning of true leadership through personal demonstrations. One of the examples was the washing of His disciples' feet, which was quoted at the beginning of this letter. His demonstration must have brought the significance of humility home to them because His action of washing their feet would have taken place probably during the meal. There must have been no voluntary servants present at the time and consequently, the disciples had unwittingly started eating without foot-washing. The impact of His radical action must have made an unexpected, deep impression upon the disciples. Concerning leadership, what Jesus taught through His own action was completely different from secular ideals. At least, He would have expected His disciples to learn to give and not to count the cost and also, to serve one another with a heart of love. In other words, it meant to learn to deny themselves and then follow Him wholeheartedly, which Jesus had already, occasionally taught them, so that such actions would be a part of their nature: ***'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves'*** (Lk.22:25-27).

The other passage quoted at the beginning is one of Jesus' parables, which teaches about true servant-hood. This ***"parable of the unworthy servants"*** was taught His disciples somewhere on the way to Jerusalem, passing through the borders of Samaria and Galilee. The term 'servant' or 'servants' in the parable usually speaks of bond-slaves, i.e., love-slaves who chose not to be let free after a six year servitude to his master because of his love to him. Christ's true followers are expected to be such bond-slaves of Him. Under such a condition, their whole-beings, having been bought with a price, are not their own any longer but Christ's. Also, their total obedience to Christ is unquestioning. The servant is always obliged to be there to do thankless tasks for his master, the master comes first in everything. This servant's sincere and selfless attitude is a focal point of what was meant by Christ in the following teachings; ***'ask first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well,'*** and ***'no-one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life'*** (Lk.18:29-30). This teaching requires from Jesus' followers a wholehearted obedience and humility

to genuinely serve Him. Regarding these requirements, all Jesus' disciples would have fallen short of them because they would sometimes shamelessly argue about the greatest among them and at other times they sought the best position in the coming kingdom. They could not get rid of the idea that those who were obedient to Him would without doubt be merited some privilege such as place, position, status, role, recognition, approval and favour in the worldly sense. However, Christ's disciples are simply required to fulfil their obligation to do God's will with a pure and self-denying motive and with a heart of love.

This seemingly contradicting parable of selfless servitude with Jesus' other teaching of "rewards", however, is not to end here but can be coupled on to the other "**parable of the watchful servant**", quoted at the beginning. This parable was spoken to His disciples as well as to others who might have been there. Jesus taught this in the context of the warning about keeping awake applicable to all generations, but above all, especially to the last generation immediately before the Lord's second coming. The Lord's servants should expectantly be waiting for His coming by being always watchful. Christ's coming is often paralleled to that of a thief in the night, so that not only the unwatching and unready secular world but also even believers if they are unwatchful and unfaithful to the Lord their master, would be found sleeping. Sleepiness is the opposite to watchfulness (being alert, vigilant and attentive). In the New Testament, the Roman division of four watches of the night; 9 p.m., 12 midnight, 3 a.m., 6 a.m. is assumed to be used and the Lord's servants are warned to be responsible to be watching and waiting in their allocated watch and role, so that they will be ready to open the door to Him. However, this short parable contains a significant facet of the coming glorious kingdom, where Jesus amazingly promised that it would be He Himself that dresses to serve as a servant and waits on them. When He returns and finds His disciples awake and ready, then He will make them sit down at the table and He Himself will serve them. In other words, those who wholeheartedly served Christ will then in turn be served by Him, their Lord. It is the time when His faithful followers will be rewarded for their individual service.

Through these two parables, Jesus taught an "**already and not yet**" factor of the kingdom of God. As the former "**parable of the unworthy servants**" which is set in more of an earthly context, depicts, so the Lord's followers are not to expect any recognition or praise from Him on this side of the grave on earth. However, in the coming kingdom, they would fully and appropriately be rewarded and given commendation, as the latter "**parable of the watchful servant**" which is set in a heavenly context or more precisely speaking, otherworldly earthly setting, depicts. The main point of this parable is about the importance of keeping awake. Such servants that would keep awake at all times for their master's return with readiness to welcome him and to let him in will be welcomed and entertained by the master. On the contrary, if the servants fall asleep, they will be found unprepared for their master. This parable speaks of three important messages concerning the Lord's return. First, it speaks of the responsibility of His disciples as His closely related servants to represent Christ during His absence. Secondly, there is some information hinted that the Lord is going away, and leaving His disciples behind long enough for some of them to be tempted to fall asleep. When He comes back, the kingdom of God that Jesus brought in on earth in His first coming will ultimately be consummated. Thirdly, the consummated kingdom of God will be utterly different from the present one, in that the master himself serves his servants, which Jesus demonstrated Himself by washing the disciples' feet at the last supper. Consequently, this "**antithesis**" of worldly pattern of leadership, "**the master is also servant**" well reflects Christ as both a suffering servant and victorious King over the earth. This is the very model of Christian service for each individual as well.

It was His immediate disciples, Peter and John that obediently followed the pattern of Christ, their master after His death. Peter's two epistles reveal how he advocated the way of self-denial and servanthood as taught by Christ. In the following teaching, Peter well comprehends what he has learnt through apprenticeship under Christ: *'Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.'* John who along with James son of Zebedee was given the name '*Boanerges*,' which meant "Sons of Thunder", became great advocator of love. *'Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who believes Jesus is the*

Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God' (1Jn.5:1-5). The apostle James, a half-brother of Jesus Christ, encouraged persecuted Christians by teaching the resultant reward in the end, ultimate victory over the present perseverance, and exceeding cost of discipleship for the present: ***'Be patient, then brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! ...As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy' (james5:7-11).***

In early Christianity there was a predominance of the path of self-giving life so as to remain in union with Christ to the end, even to death. Paul is the one who explored the solemn meaning of union with Christ both in death and resurrection. All followers of Christ are called to share in His death and resurrection through the baptismal life, which lie at the heart of the Christian life. When Paul argued the "doctrine of sanctification" (the process by which believers grow to maturity in Christ), he drew baptism as a result of believers' union with Christ through faith and he amplified that unless they were united with Christ in His death, Christians would not be united with Him in His resurrection. Accordingly, although Christ made the victory possible over self-centredness and selfish humanity on our behalf when He died on the cross, we shall not enjoy the victory as our own unless we are willing to die to ourselves first, i.e., having ourselves dead to the temptations that drive us back to self-centred and sinful life, and then confidently depend on Him alone who completely dealt with our sin. If we are determined to unconditionally surrender to the Lord as His bond-slaves on daily and hourly basis, and to continually yield the whole parts of our body to His use, then sin will no longer reign or dominate in our lives. To put it differently, for true believers who are enjoying this regenerated life, it is essential to first die with Christ and then to be raised with Him, i.e., to daily share His dying and rising life. Paul put it in Romans 6, ***'We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin...offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.'***

Self-giving Christian life is characterised by several ways; forgiving others, seeking to please the Lord in everything, practising upon the Word of God, putting others as well as the Lord first. However, the reality which surrounds us in this present age seems to be the opposite of the Lord's teaching of self-denial. The sweeping movement in Christianity is dominantly of growth- and success-oriented triumphalism, which claims for now what belongs to the otherworldly-earthly kingdom that is to be embodied in Jerusalem as a restored Davidic kingdom under the kingship of the Jewish Messiah. The present fashionable "Faith" gospel emphasises too much on what effectively appeals to the secular world; miracles, healing, deliverance, prosperity, victorious living, church growth, praise and joy by the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than the suffering, pain and the cross-bearing of the Christian life. Such movement is spreading powerfully worldwide because of its acceptability by many, that is, because it appropriately suits man's desires and appeals to their senses. Success, prosperity, quick and easy solutions, spiritual experience and superiority, direct divine revelation, "heaven now" happiness, positive confession producing triumph and so on, all these heretic elements appeal to hedonistic, self-centred and power- and fantasy- hungry carnal man.

We are reminded that although we believers in Christ were freed from God's wrath, from sin, from law and from death through Christ's once and for all sacrificial death on the cross, we are still in the midst of the eschatological tension—the **"already" and the "not yet"**—being delivered but still failing and daily facing the consequences of our sinful nature. This struggle will continue until the time of consummation which will be inaugurated by the Lord's second coming, as long as we are bound to our

present physical bodies. Lest we should fall into unbiblical extremism, exaggeration and emotional experimentalism, we should firmly be guarded within the written God's Word alone.