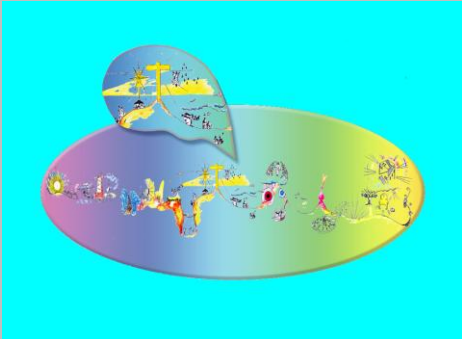


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We believe in one GOD, in three persons; FATHER, SON and HOLY SPIRIT. We regard the Bible (both Hebrew Bible and New Testament) as the only infallible authoritative WORD OF GOD.

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

[NOT VENGEANCE BUT LOVE]

But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise. "If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the tooth.

EXODUS 21:23-27.

If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you. The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you. Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

DEUTERONOMY 19:16-21.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what

reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even Pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. MATTHEW 5:38-48.

Last month we examined the difference in the ways of God's kingdom to the ways of the worldly kingdom. Christ demonstrated the distinctive nature of His kingdom through His mission on earth, and His disciples had to learn it at a great cost, of letting their master fall into their enemy's hands without resistance. If His disciples had believed that they would only have a chance to exercise justice and vindicate themselves in this world, they would not have allowed the violent men to arrest Christ so easily. Likewise, unless we understand the biphasic nature of God's kingdom brought in by Jesus Christ in His first coming, we will miss the significance of Christ's teaching about it. Acknowledging the fact that this present world can never be just and fair because of man's coherent wickedness and the devil's influence behind the scene, no matter how earnestly man tries to change political, economic, religious and domestic structures of the world, is very important. Even long after the advancement of the civilisation, the sad reality of this world today is injustice, unfairness, unrighteousness and wickedness. We have still been confronted by the same problems as the Old Testament prophets unanimously grieved, ***'Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their pray and robbing the fatherless' (Isa.10:1-2), 'For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things. No-one calls for justice; no-one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil...Their deeds are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands. Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no-one who walks in them will know peace'(Isa.59:3-8), 'Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us" '(Micah 3:9-11).***

The social situation has not changed since Isaiah's and Micah's time, 2700 years ago. As long as human history continues there will be no way out of this vicious cycle of injustice and unrighteousness. But the Bible declares the reality of ultimate divine judgment. In this world, only a very limited form of justice has been administered, but a time will come when God judges all human-beings, regardless of the time of history in which they lived, according to all their actions, words, and ways. Christ's stern warning against the oppressor is serious: ***'Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell' (Matt.18:7-9).*** Undoubtedly, we are to give account for all our deeds done by our bodies on earth because ***'a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out –those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned' (Jn.5:28-29).*** Accordingly, when we live with this perspective of eternal justice, then our earthly lives will be lit by hope and take a meaning of significance. There will be nothing meaningless or uncounted in our present lives. Justice, injustice, fair, unfair, everything matters.

As we have already examined, the kingdom of God is the reign of God, free from any

geographical or political restriction. In order to enter the kingdom we need to have a proper relationship with God. There are several factors that need to be understood for entering into His kingdom. First we need to recognise the utter difference of us, i.e., mere creatures, from the Creator, God. God is holy and so, we are to be holy. For this purpose, we need to accept the standards of His holiness for our earthly lives as the author of “The Epistle to the Hebrews” taught: ***‘Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord’ (He.12:14)***. God’s holiness is likened to a burning fire that immediately consumes anything unholy. When Moses encountered God on the mountain of God, Horeb, while he was tending the flock, and when he was given the Ten Commandments there, and when Isaiah received a prophetic commission from the Lord, and also when the Holy Spirit came on the disciples at Pentecost and so on, the sign given was a fire, a consuming fire.

Secondly, we need to recognise what we are in the presence of the Lord. We are all sinners. We have all fallen short of the standards of God’s holiness. Sin is a fact and not a mere feeling of guilt. We are slaves to sin as Christ taught. There are many different ideas of what the word ‘sin’ means. Sometimes it refers to the various evils and social evils. Other times it refers to the breaking of the laws in a religious sense. However, the teaching of Christ about sin is different from what we usually think, which is something that is represented by David’s words in one of his psalms: ***‘Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me’ (Psalm 51:2-5)***. This passage suggests that there is inherently something wrong with human-beings right from the beginning of their lives. This built-in tendency of sin is passed on from generation to generation. In our daily lives we are always witnessing that children seem to already know how to be bad, and this insight certainly fits with what we observe in practice. We are responsible for our own emotions, thoughts, decisions and deeds, though we are not responsible for the sinful tendency. A time is coming finally when we have to give account for all our deeds.

Thus, Christ taught sin as something that is rooted in the very nature of human-beings. Due to this nature we instinctively put our egos (our own selves, our own desires, our own plans, our own significance, our own values, and so on) first instead of putting God first. As a result, by putting our own egos first, we find ourselves guilty of violating the first commandment: ***‘You shall have no other gods before me’***. Sin means that we have other gods besides God and the number one god is our own selves. The apostle Paul expounded this truth in his teaching over the victorious assurance in the Lord: ***‘If God is for us, who can be against us?... neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God’ (Romans 8:31-39)***. In these rhetorical questions, Paul argues that there is certainly nobody or nothing in heaven and earth that separates us from Christ, but we should not overlook one omission in this passage. Only our ‘egos’ are implied to be a factor which sets us against God. So when Christ talked about being a slave to sin, He meant that we were utterly unable to worship God as the moral law of God’s kingdom demanded of our lives, because we are inherently unable to put Him at the centre of our lives. We are slaves because we have no power and ability to achieve His demand on our own.

Significantly, the tenth commandment in the Decalogue uniquely deals with the state of the heart rather than outward conduct. This means that only God can judge whether or not the last commandment has been broken. In other words, the breaking of the tenth commandment: ***‘You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour’*** could not be prosecuted in a law court. The inclusion of this law which human beings cannot

rightfully deal with in Israel's prime law would be another proof that the Decalogue is of divine origin. The importance of this commandment lies in the fact that lust for another's property often led to the breaking of the sixth through the ninth commandments. Christ poignantly pointed this out in the Sermon on the Mount. It is actually impossible for man to conquer the ceaseless mental activity of an envious spirit within. This means that sin in its worst forms cannot necessarily be seen. There would be more hidden sins than revealed ones in our lives. In this respect, this tenth commandment made people aware of their total inability to keep God's law.

Thirdly, this stern and inescapable fact leads us to the next factor. We need to recognise that we cannot enter God's kingdom by our own effort and good deeds. The degree of the shortfall from God's holiness might be quite different from people to people. Even so, the fact that we have all fallen short of God's standards and that we are all sinners does not change. It is also fact that there are many good moral and ethical teachings, and good deeds, and great religious leaders in the world. However, as examined in factor two, none of these facts solve the root problem on man's sin. In the presence of the omniscient God who can read all the intents of our hearts and who desires not outward deeds but our hearts to genuinely be right before Him, any detail of formal, religious, ceremonial or correct moral conduct will make no sense.

Fourthly, with an open mind, we need to recognise and accept Jesus as our Saviour. Proclaiming 'Jesus is Lord, the only way of salvation' was a really revolutionary statement for monotheistic Jews in the first century when the apostle Peter first started to preach the good news of the kingdom of God in Palestine. Though for many this statement might be the hardest fact to accept, extraordinary things that Jesus achieved and what Jesus claimed written in the Scripture are all facts. Otherwise, the whole story of His life and teachings in the New Testament and even the prophecies in the Hebrew Bible will turn to be complete rubbish. Among many, the fact that Christ correctly and yet consistently interpreted the Mosaic law in His many revolutionary teachings would be one of the clear proofs that He was the one that revealed God Himself to man as the promised Messiah in His earthly life.

As quoted at the beginning of this letter, Christ interpreted the real meaning of the "law of *lex talionis*", which was misapplied by the contemporary religious leaders in His time. The familiar passages of the law of equal retaliation: "*eye for eye, tooth for tooth*" saying, in Exodus and Deuteronomy show that the words were not meant to be taken literally, and instead, the principle of the seemingly harsh law was designed to encourage fair compensation in case of physical damage among God's chosen people. Actually, the application of this law marked a sharp contrast between the Moses' law and foreign laws such as the Semitic Code of Hammurabi and the Hittites' in Moses' time. Among the Hittites, restitution was always emphasised, sometimes being encouraged more than equal punishment. Similarly, among Babylonians under the Code of Hammurabi, equal restitution was administered. However, among God's community, Israel, even in cases where malicious and false testimony was proved beyond doubt, this law was not used as license for vengeance. Instead of encouraging vengeance, it rather limited vengeance and was used as a guide for a judge so as to fix a suited penalty to the crime. Christ, when He quoted this saying in the Sermon on the Mount, corrected the wrong application of the law by limiting its use to courts of justice alone. As He declared: '***Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them***' (Matt.5:17), what Christ denounced severely was not the law itself but its wrong application, in that over the centuries its original legal context tended to be overlooked and it was being used as a means of personal revenge. Such a use was completely contradictory to the way of God's kingdom. The way of God's kingdom was the way of peace but not of violence nor of vengeance. As Christ Himself demonstrated God's way by quietly capturing people's hearts and mind through love, so he commanded His disciples to follow His perfect way because their heavenly Father is perfect.