

“Hell? Really?! Really.” Mat 18:15-20

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

We are so blessed. We live in this prosperous Western culture, we enjoy these fruits of Christianity. Justice, freedom, social and medical welfare systems, technologies that makes our lives so much easier, and longer, and so on, and so on. We need to learn to be grateful to appreciate all these blessings.

At the same time there are so many things in our culture, which are the very opposite to God's blessings, and we are influenced by them as well. Life in such a prosperity provides the most fertile soil for very essence of sin, self-centeredness.

Everything becomes more and more about me. These days the pursuit of happiness is understood as the very purpose of our lives. Ask people, what is the purpose of their lives, and so often you will get exactly this answer: 'To be happy'.

Everything that advances our happiness is good, anything that can threaten our happiness is bad. So often we wrongly believe that fulfilment of all our desires can make us happy. That's lie, of course, but so many fall for it.

It simply doesn't work. It's like drinking salt water and hoping that thirst will go away. But on the other side, any attempt to restrict us, or to guide us into different direction is perceived as one of the greatest evils these days.

To secure that we can do whatever we want and nobody is going to stop us our culture has introduced very efficient system of defence. This is called a culture of tolerance. By this I don't mean mutual respect. Every human being is created in God's image and it gives us the highest possible dignity.

It is oversimplification, but essentially today tolerance means that you can't not call a sin a sin anymore. For it can be offensive. It can endanger someone's pursuit of happiness.

So we call a murder of unborn children a choice. We call greed determination for success. We call adultery freedom and we call sodomy alternative sexuality. The list goes on, and then we think we have 'sacred' rights to do all of this.

Everything ought to be tolerated. The only thing that cannot and will not be tolerated is when you call a sin a sin. That crosses all lines. That is called hate speech, bigotry, hypocrisy and so on.

So here we are stuck as Christians in this culture. This culture was shaped by Christian virtue, by Biblical understanding of who we are and why we are here. Now, when we are so blessed, the culture has become hostile to anything that stands for the Creator to whom it owes everything.

We may wonder why our Bibles still contain these verses, which we read today. Even so many churches have embraced this highest commandment of tolerance. Some actually strive to make this tolerance their new gospel. Their message then sounds 'don't worry, sin is OK, for Jesus loves you'.

So, Jesus, what did you think when you said these words. **"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.**

These commands cross all red lines. How can you be so unloving! What can we do? You can tell me, what in our culture usually is done, when our brothers and sisters sin? We smile, turn away and try to find another topic for our conversations.

How to understand these words? What to do with this Jesus command today, when the world around us is so strange and we are afraid that our actions will make people to think that we are haters, unloving fundamentalists, bigots, etc.

The system of defence against this Jesus command functions very well, and we are scared to go against it. I can admit, I am. I don't like when people think that I'm unloving fundamentalist. That I hate people and only search for ways to offend them and put them down. I'm afraid of it.

Let us remind ourselves about one part of Jesus message which we somehow ignore. I guess we think that if we'll ignore it, it will go away. You will recognize this topic in a minute. I hope this topic help to make sense of this Jesus' command as well.

Let me ask you - why did Jesus, the Son of God become man, suffered and died? Why? Think about it. To save each of you by delivering to each of you the forgiveness of sins. That's true. But why would He do it?

This is quite a big step for the Creator of the Universe to become man. But then to suffer all that Jesus suffered, to be crucified and to die?! Why would He do it? Look around, look at us, look at people in our society.

Do you have the impression that they are looking for the forgiveness of their sins, or that they need to be saved? Saved from what? From bad neighbours and annoying relatives? Sure. From taxes? Yes. From bad mood?

Saved from what? Even if everything is not ideal, this life is still so good. Why would someone need to be rescued from it? Does it make sense? Be honest, do your sins bother you that much, can't you live with them quite happily?

Let's put the question in a slightly different way. What will happen with those who are not saved? This is what we need to ask. What will happen if someone doesn't receive the forgiveness of sins? Think about it... we know the answer... we just don't like it.

What did Jesus say, what will happen if you sin and your sins are not forgiven? What are Jesus words? Think... You'll be thrown into the eternal fire (Mat 18:8), into the unquenchable fire (Mar 9:43), you will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Mat 8:12)

Do you know who in the New Testament speaks about the hell so often? Jesus. It makes sense, for this was the reason He came. He knew the sin and evil has to be destroyed. He knew that our very hearts are homes of the sin.

He knew that God is angry about our sin, for it destroys what He has created. It destroys us and this beautiful planet. Jesus came to save us from God's wrath. To save us from this terrifying eternal destruction.

He knew what was going to happen. He loved us, He loved you so much that He was ready to sacrifice Himself so that only we don't need to taste this terrible fate. What kind of love is this?

Love that enables to lay down your life to save ... your enemies. For this is what we were before the Holy Spirit changed our hearts. Enemies of God. As are all who still reject their Creator. Jesus Christ, true God sacrificed His life to save you, to save you from eternal destruction in hell. This is why He came.

Your salvation is not your achievement. There is nothing that you can give for your soul. Your trust to the Father, your reliance that you are saved by Jesus comes as a gift from the Holy Spirit. It is your Father in heaven who draws you closer to Himself. And no one can snatch you from His hand.

This hell, what is it like? I don't know. I know only as much as Jesus tells about it. But we can certainly get some ideas. This is a place where God *is not* present. You see, everything good, beautiful, joyful, peaceful, exciting comes from God.

He is the Creator of this Universe and every living being on this planet. Besides He daily maintains order, and restricts evil. Now, picture a place where the evil is left on its own. Where is nothing but evil.

Think about the potential of evil that we as human being are capable of. Think about intelligent people who conducted genocide during WWII, slaughtering, torturing, experimenting with millions.

About serial murders, rapists, child abusers, sexual perverts, about our own desire to destroy those who have hurt us, about our anger, envy and jealousy which we sometimes can't control. Think about presence of evil which can scare us in dreams so that we tremble with our whole being.

All these people, who didn't wanted God to restrict their passions, will be left on their own. With their passions. There will be no laws, no police or army. Darkness. Pure evil. Gnashing of teeth and weeping.

How could God do this? Do what? Those who don't what to be with Him, who deny the reality of sin and evil, will simply receive what they want. They will be where there is no God. That all. They will have a change to be like gods.

God warned Adam: "Trust me, stay with me, or you will die." Adam didn't believe it. Is he still alive? God said He will wipe out evil with flood. One family listened to Him, they were saved. Sodom, Gomorrah. Canaanites.

Read carefully the Old Testament. Was there any time when God didn't punish the evil? Israelites, Assyrians, Babylonians? You think God is joking, that He is not angry with our shameless rebellion that corrupts and destroys His good creation?

If He is the Creator, that is obvious solutions for Him - to destroy all evil and to restore the goodness of His creation. If you have a beautiful garden and there is a sickness that corrupts it, you will have to wipe it out, there is no choice.

This is exactly what God is going to do. We are so blessed that Jesus has rescued us. When He returns, we'll enter into God's holy presence. To those who rejected God's salvation in Jesus, He will say: "Sure, let your will happen."

I hope by this time we can look with slightly different eyes to this Jesus command.

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

Every sin separates us from God. In Jesus we have forgiveness of all, of all [!] our sins, as soon as we thirst for it. As soon as we realize that God's wrath will destroy every evil. Forgiveness and salvation is here. Every Sunday. As God's gift for you.

Every time when your conscience accuses you, when you fear God's wrath, your brothers and sisters can deliver you Jesus message: "I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. You are saved."

The problem is that even Jesus can't forgive us those sins, which we want to keep on doing. He gives us this freedom, to reject this precious gift, forgiveness and salvation, which He bought with His death. What an incredible grace and patience!

When we sin, we know we are guilty against God. When we are guilty, we don't want to come to Him. We fear His condemnation. Rightly. Thus our conscious sins alienate us from God more and more. The further we are from God, the more we think about Him as the Judge, or... try not to think at all. May be He will go away.

This is why Jesus came, to reveal the Father's attitude. He ought to destroy the evil, but He desires to save every single human being so much that even His life is no too high a price to pay. This is how much God loves you. Each of you.

Now, why would we tell our brothers and sisters that they sin? This is about their salvation from eternal destruction. Jesus gave up His life to save them. Now Jesus uses us to continue His work. We are not here to be happy. We are not here to make others happy.

We are here for the Son of God has rescued us so that we can do our best rescuing others. When we see that false gods drive people away from God's life giving presence, that instead of loving God they love themselves and this world, we need to go and do our best to rescue them. For they are heading into destruction.

When we see our brothers and sisters ignoring Jesus invitation, neglecting the Word of God, dishonouring families, committing adultery, being greedy, and desiring everything else more than their salvation, let's not ignore it, their sins, their apathy to the Gospel are going to cost them life, eternal life.

Pray, go and talk with them. Do your best to save them, for if they listen to you, you'll have gained them. For Christ. For life. You will have saved them. Imagine your joy when you will see them in God's Kingdom, rejoicing in God's presence.

We are rescued. You are saved from God's wrath. You are God's child. You are rescued from the hell. This is not our merit. This is the Father's gift. Now we are waiting for Christ's Kingdom to be revealed. Kingdom of true joy and wellbeing. Your Kingdom.

But so many of our brothers and sisters are still on very dangerous path... And, of course, we won't succeed with all of them. No. They have this freedom to remain in their sins, in their apathy to the Gospel. We can only deliver Jesus message.

Remember Jesus promise. **For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.** Whenever we strive to bring our brothers back from their sins, Jesus is with us. We do this not on our own, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. Remember, He is with us till the end of this age, and you will be with Him when this age is over. Amen.