

Biblical Interpretation of The Lex Talionis In the Old Testament and The Role of Christian Education in Educating Church Members

Demsey Jura
{demsey.jura@uki.ac.id}
Universitas Kristen Indonesia

Abstract. Law in community life exists as part of an effort to organize a better and civilized community life. That is why every rule is made to become a guideline for someone in living life, in which there are norms, ethics, and civilization. There are several laws introduced to regulate the order of human life, and one of them is lex talionis. The lex talionis principle is known as the law of compensation. There is a strong suspicion that the application of this law has been there since the Babylonian era as stated in the laws of Hammurabi (1780 BC). The study in this article is about the lex talionis principle which was introduced to the Jewish community and later became known in Christian life. In the Torah, namely the book of Moses, the lex talionis principle was introduced as the law "Eye for Eye", where this is alluded to in the book of Exodus 21: 22-25, Leviticus 24: 19-21 and Deuteronomy 19: 16-21. The general principle in this law emphasizes that humans are so valuable and need to be protected from every threat. In the church age, the concepts of gift and grace were introduced, and many people misunderstood them when the impression appeared as if they were to dispense with the laws that were applicable in the Old Testament, including the lex talionis principle. In order not to misunderstand it, it needs the correct and justified biblical interpretation. The study of hermeneutic for this needs to be done correctly. Furthermore, the role of Christian Education in educating church members to understand the lex talionis principle needs to be done properly so that it is avoided the perceptions misunderstanding. The research conducted in this article uses descriptive qualitative methods, where the data source in this study is through literature review. This research begins with describing the lex talionis in the Old Testament and the biblical interpretation of it then the role of Christian Education in educating church members.

Keywords: Lex Talionis; Bible's Interpretation; Christian Education; Church Members

1 Introduction

Humans and violence are eternal themes in human civilization in this world. If Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) emphasized the brutality of humans like wolves (*homo homini lupus*), which then through their existence by fighting others (*omnium contra omnes*); it seems not an exaggeration to say that this has been entrenched in his life. What Hobbes conveyed through his book, *Leviathan* (1651) can ultimately be seen as cultural-determinism, as was the view of the two well-known anthropologists, Melville J. Herskovits (1895-1963) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942); namely, that violence is commonplace. Even Nicolo Machievoli

(1469-1527) actualized a culture of violence through his book *Le Prince*, where he glorified violence as part of an effort to build a strong and authoritative country.

To maintain the dignity and safety of mankind, the law was born as the guarantor of the intended safety. Everyone must be held accountable for their actions, and the law of *lex talionis* created in response to this outbreak. There is a strong suspicion that *lex talionis* existed long before it appeared in Exodus 21: 22-25, and it is found in the law of Hammurabi. The law of *lex talionis* in the Old Testament and its biblical interpretation is interesting to study because it has to do with respect for human life, and its protection.

The role of Christian Education in educating church members to understand *lex talionis* as part of the law that protects everyone by ensuring that their life will lead humans to a better civilization. Educated humans with more humane behaviour. This means that every individual need education that will enable him to become educated and capable of managing life and leading a better life [1].

Theories

In a simple sense, the law is a set of rules (orders and prohibitions) that govern the order in a society and must be obeyed by that community [2]. However, in a complete study, the law is so broad, that it is difficult to define it. It is said that what law is about is a question that has more than one answer according to what approach is used because the law is abstract [3]. In line with the above, L. J. Van Apeldoorn stated that it is impossible to provide a definition of law, which really can be sufficient in reality [4], however, it can be said that in general, every legal scholar sees law as several rules, or a collection of rules or rules that have content that general and normative. In this case, it is generally because it applies to everyone and is normative because it determines what should be done, what should not be done, or should be done and determines how to implement compliance with these rules [5].

One of the laws that are widely discussed is *lex talionis*. The term *lex talionis* comes from Latin which means "the law of retaliation" or what is known as the law of retaliation. This legal concept refers to the idea that punishment for guilt should be based on a form of equality, not just retribution for what has been done [6]. The allegation of the practice of the *lex talionis* law existed long before Moses instituted the law for the Israelites. A French explorer in 1901 managed to find ancient Biblical inscriptions containing 282 laws enacted by Hammurabi, king of Babylon. In the Code of Hammurabi, there are things that various crimes committed by people at that time, such as injustice, false testimony, the medical world, trafficking; all of which are detrimental to others, and the *lex talionis* element is stated [7].

The law of *lex talionis* in the Old Testament appears in full in Exodus 21: 23-25, and in its shorter form in Leviticus 24: 19-20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. The interpretation of this law needs to be done carefully because, in the New Testament, it is as if it is refuted by the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 5: 38-19 with the law of love. Biblical interpretation will give birth to correct understandings of the meaning of a text. The Bible was written with a specific purpose and purpose, and to understand it sometimes requires a separate method of interpretation. This biblical hermeneutics is popularly known as Biblical Interpretation [8]. That is the exegetical method used to interpret the purposes and objectives contained in a biblical text. The word hermeneutics comes from the Greek word, namely the verb *hermeneuin*, which means to interpret, and the noun *hermenia*, namely interpretation. Hermeneutics in general can be defined as a theory or philosophy of meaning interpretation [9].

The role of Christian Education in educating church members is very important because it involves maturity in thinking and acting. Educated church members will be able to actualize themselves as educated individuals. Education is believed to be able to bring enlightenment to

society and is considered to be able to build a better civilization in human life [10]. In the context of the church, Christian education is applied. Christian education is a process of teaching and learning based on the Bible, centered on Christ, and depending on the power of the Holy Spirit to guide individuals at a growth stage through contemporary teaching towards knowing and experiencing God's plan and will through Christ in every aspect of life, and equipping them for effective, glorious service and commandment that matures the disciples [11]. Christian education is based on the Bible as the Word of God, and Jesus Christ as an example in it. Through Christian Education, it is hoped that students will be enlightened and even come to know Christ. Thus, Christian Education is needed in an effort to educate church members.

2 Research Methods

The research conducted in this article uses descriptive qualitative methods, where the data source in this study is through literature review. The research begins by describing lex talionis in the Old Testament and biblical interpretations of it and the role of Christian Education in educating church members.

3 Results and Discussion

The emergence of the law of lex talionis in the Old Testament raises theological questions because long before that, it had been introduced during the reign of Hammurabi. If you pay attention to the calendar, then the lex talionis law already existed in Babylon, which is about 400 years before the same law was accepted by the Israelites. In comparison, it is strongly suspected that the book of Exodus was written between 1445-1405 BC. The application of the lex talionis law has also received mixed responses, so the church needs to provide answers to the questions that arise because of the law.

Lex Talionis Law

The establishment of the lex talionis law in the Babylonian domain remains a memory throughout history. Laws that aim to make people's lives more orderly have been stipulated and colored human civilization. Emory S. Bogardus, in his book *The Development of Social Thought*, states that: The most prominent Semitic culture in the post-Sumerian rule was Hammurabi's government which made Babylon their capital. He is considered to be the first great ruler in the world to make concrete laws and regulations the oldest law ever [14]. Hammurabi became king of Mesopotamia based in Babylon, allegedly ruling from 1792-1750 BC [15].

With time, this kind of law also appeared in Roman law, as stated Andrew Stephenson, in his book, *A History of Roman Law: With a Commentary on the Institutes of Gaius and Justinian*, that: "The expression "lex talionis" comes from the first compilation of the Roman Law, written in 450 BC and known as the Twelve Tables and written: If a man has broken the limb of another man, unless he makes his peace with him, there shall be like for like, Talio esto [16]."

The legal system is known as the Codex Hammurabi with 282 principles in various legal elements in it, including criminal, civil, property, debt, marriage, health, and trade law; has become a standard model in the preparation of other written laws. Walter T. Wallbank and Alastair Tylor, in *Civilization Past and Present*, stated that "eye for an eye" for someone who

injures another's eye, then he is punished with the same kind of punishment. For a child who hurts or hits his parents, the punishment is cutting off the finger. Likewise, with the corruptors, a person who builds a house, and because it is not sturdy, collapses and overflows the owner, if he dies, the punishment for those who build the house is the death penalty [17].

In connection with the laws he enacted, Hammurabi was known as the ruler to establish laws that were both balanced and at the same time unfair. On the one hand, the law is enforced by imposing penalties that are appropriate for the perpetrators of crime, but at social strata, including gender; it seems that this law is well implemented. This is evident from the comments of Walter T. Wallbank and Alastair Tylor, who at the same time criticized it but also defended it, saying: Although this code of law is aimed more at the male world, the status of women is somewhat upheld. Besides, there have been very important developments in business procedures with the use of documents [18]. In Hammurabi's law, injuring a nobleman will receive a much harsher punishment than injuring someone from a lower class [19].

Lex Talionis Law in Old Testament

The Old Testament Bible presents the verses related to the law of lex talionis, clearly, among them in the book of Exodus are: "... if the woman had an accident that brought death, then you must give life for life, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth. a tooth, a hand for an arm, a leg for a leg, a scuff for a cut, a wound for a wound, swelling for swelling. " (Exodus 21: 23-25), in the book of Leviticus, it is written: "When a man blemishes a neighbor, as he has done, so must be done to him: a broken for a broken, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; as he has made another man flawed, so must be done to him. " (Leviticus 24: 19-20), and the book of Deuteronomy says: "... because it applies: life for life, eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." (Deuteronomy 19:21). These Bible verses encourage the Israelites to apply the law of retaliation for a crime they have committed.

Regarding the context of the Jewish community at that time, where lex talionis was present, Gordon J. Wenham stated that "Old Testament times there were no police or public prosecution services, so all prosecution and punishment had to be carried out by the injured party and his family. Thus, it would be quite possible for injured parties not to insist on their full rights under the lex talionis, but negotiate a lower settlement or even forgive the offender altogether [20]." The impression is that the Jewish community must take a fair stance on every criminal behavior that occurs, and it must be done with a high awareness. That is why the law of lex talionis is mandatory to practice. Whoever makes a mistake, then the big mistake he did will be accepted as a fair responsibility.

In later developments, the New Testament affirms the law of love, whereby everyone is required not to return evil for evil (cf. Matthew 5:43). This is different from the application of the lex talionis law which implements retaliation in kind for a crime committed.

Lex Talionis Law in Biblical Interpretation

In Hammurabi law, the lex talionis principle applies only to fellow classes, whereas in the Bible this principle applies to all people regardless of class [21]. There is equality before the law for all social groups, including foreigners and migrants [22]. Regarding the book of Exodus, David JA Clines states that: "Among the five books of the Pentateuch, Exodus, in particular, takes up the element of relationship with God, both in terms of God's deliverance of his people from Egypt and the establishment of his covenant with them at Sinai [23]". The Exodus book records a great momentum for the people of Israel, namely liberation from Egypt and the establishment of God's promise for them and efforts to organize a civilized social life through a more civilized social order. The Ten Commandments were given as an effort to structure it, as

stated by Kenneth Barker, that: “The Ten Commandments are the central stipulations of God's covenant with Israel made at Sinai. It is almost impossible to exaggerate their effect on subsequent history. They constitute the base of the moral principles found throughout the Western world and summarize what the one true God expects of his people in terms of faith, worship, and conduct [24].”

As a nation that has just arranged its life, Israel feels the need to have moral laws in their lives, and that is why, in addition to having the Law as mentioned above. They also adopt other laws which it considers to be able to organize the lives of their people in a better direction, one of them is the lex talionis law. The subject of this adoption is still much debated by Bible scholars. However, researchers can understand how lex talionis was applied by Moses when leading the Israelites. There is a strong suspicion that Moses' knowledge of the law was acquired when he lived as a child under the leadership of the Egyptian ruling family at that time. Moses was adopted as the son of Pharaoh's princess (Exodus 2:10). Thus, he received court education, with various knowledge in the fields of science, law, morals, war, art, culture, and so on. The goal is to make him a superior human. This special thing was owned by Musa as a prince in Pharaoh's palace.

The role of Christian Education in educating church members

Efforts to educate church members through Christian education are very important. This is to bring them to a true understanding of what they are students. In simple terms, education is a conscious effort made by the family, community, and government, through guidance, teaching, and/or training activities, which take place inside and outside the school throughout life, to prepare students so that they can play a role in various environments. live appropriately in the future [25]. What appears among the people as the subject of discussion must be well understood.

Concerning lex talionis, the role of Christian education needs to be strengthening so that there are no misinterpretations in the lives of church members. If not understanding the law well enough, there will be a law of the jungle where a crime will be rewarded with evil. The purpose of the lex talionis law is to provide a deterrent effect so as not to commit crimes. Likewise with the law of love taught by Jesus Christ, which aims at forgiveness but does not neglect justice. That is why Christian education is based on the Bible as the Word of God, and Jesus Christ as an example in it. Through Christian education, it is hoped that students will be enlightened and even come to know Christ [26]. And ideally, the implementation of Christian Religious Education is not just forming intelligent humans through the mastery of various sciences and technology, but intelligent efforts in shaping people who believe in Christ and think and act based on the principles of Christian faith [27].

4 Conclusion

Lex Talionis law is a law established to maintain human life in an orderly manner. This law is applied to provide a deterrent effect, that is, a crime that is committed will be rewarded according to what has been done. In the Old Testament, this law appears as the same effort, namely maintaining the orderliness of life. Musa applied the law of lex talionis as an effort to put life in order. In New Testament times, the existence of the law of lex talionis was perfected by the law of love taught by Jesus Christ, namely the matter of forgiveness. Strengthening

Christian education for church members plays an important role in educational efforts so that there is no misunderstanding of the lex talionis law.

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