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# *Covenant Reformed News*

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## **Judge Not! (1)**

In our day, there is a very popular, but terribly wrong, interpretation of Matthew 7:1: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” This means, many say, that absolutely all judging is wrong. You must not judge religions or churches or doctrines or people or principles. For did not Jesus say, “Judge not, that ye be not judged”? According to this view, one cannot say that pagan religions are idolatrous (Ex. 20:3; I Cor. 10:20), abortion is murder (Ex. 20:13; Ps. 139:13-16), free will is false doctrine (John 6:65; Rom. 3:11) or homosexuality is an abomination (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26-27). “Judge not, that ye be not judged”! In fact, the only thing that is wrong is judging that various things and people are wrong, and the greatest virtue is tolerance of everything. “I’m OK and you’re OK!” There are no absolute standards, everything is relative and only judging is forbidden. In fact, judging is sin—if there is such a thing as sin any more!

This view and this interpretation of Matthew 7:1 is foolish and logically contradictory. If all judging is forbidden, then it is also forbidden to judge someone for judging! After all, judging someone for judging is also forbidden by this (false) interpretation of Jesus’ words, “Judge not, that ye be not judged”!

Moreover, the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7)—in which this text is found—requires judging. Consider our Saviour’s words in Matthew 5. He condemns murder and even being angry with one’s brother without a cause (21-26); adultery, even looking on a woman to lust after her (27-30); divorce, except for fornication (31-32); and various sorts of sinful swearing (33-37).

Judging is also required in order to obey Christ’s instruction in Matthew 6 concerning alms or charitable deeds (1-4), praying (5-15) and fasting (16-18), for one must not do these things, like the Pharisees, in order to be seen. The Lord Jesus judges the following as sinful behaviour: laying up for ourselves treasures on earth (19), trying to serve God and money (24), and worrying about our earthly needs (25-34).

Matthew 7 is similar. In order to obey Christ’s prohibition of casting our pearls before swine, we need to recognize the people whom He characterizes here as “dogs” and “swine” (6). And how can we heed Jesus’ warning against false prophets, if we are not to judge them by their fruits, as He requires (15-20)?

There are many other situations in which (proper) judgment is required. I Corinthians 6:2-3 tells us that, at the last day, believers will judge the ungodly world and angels. From this, Paul encourages the saints in the church to judge rightly now (1, 4-5). Obviously Christ’s word, “Judge not, that ye be not judged,” does not forbid this.

Magistrates are called to judge in civil affairs. A murderer is arraigned before the court or a thief is brought to trial. It will not do for someone to stand up in the gallery and shout, “Judge not, m’lord!” appealing to the false view of Matthew 7:1!

Parents, too, must judge. Was their son’s or daughter’s behaviour sinful (according to the principles of the Word of God)? What is the most appropriate form of loving discipline in this case? Verbal admonition? Or does it warrant physical chastisement?

Church consistories or sessions are also called upon to judge righteous judgment. A member goes the way of Matthew 18:15-20 with another member. Sadly, the brother does not repent after being frequently admonished. So the matter is brought to the elders, according to the procedure laid out in the Church Order.

Congregations are called to judge church leaders biblically. The church at Ephesus was commended by Christ for condemning false apostles (Rev. 2:2). The congregation at Thyatira was rebuked by the Saviour for tolerating a Jezebel who taught and seduced the saints (20).

Each believer is commanded to judge himself or herself according to the Scriptures, as I Corinthians 11:28 commands, “But let a man examine himself ...” This is especially our calling as we prepare for the Lord’s Supper, as the context in I Corinthians 11 shows (Belgic Confession 35; *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 81).

In fact, the child of God is commanded by his heavenly Father to judge in various capacities and ways. The believer is, after all, a prophet, priest and king. As kings, we must judge, exercising righteous judgment in conformity with the mind of Christ, as revealed in Scripture.

Martin Luther famously declared, near the start of *The Bondage of the Will*, his celebrated rebuttal of the humanist Erasmus, that a professing Christian must judge (in accordance with biblical standards) or else he reveals that he is not a believer. "To take no pleasure in assertions is not the mark of a Christian heart; indeed, one must delight in assertions to be a Christian at all. Now, lest we be misled by words, let me say here that by 'assertion' I mean staunchly holding your ground, stating your position, confessing it, defending it and persevering in it unvanquished ... And I am talking about the assertion of what has been delivered to us from above in the Sacred Scriptures ... Take away assertions and you take away Christianity. Why, the Holy Spirit is given to Christians from heaven in order that He may glorify Christ and in them confess Him even unto death—and is this not assertion, to die for what you confess and assert?" Then Luther asks Erasmus (and all modern, politically-correct sceptics), "What is this new-fangled religion of yours, this novel sort of humility, that ... you would take from us power to judge men's decisions and make us defer uncritically to human authority? Where does God's written Word tell us to do that?" Where indeed!

The Christian judges according to his position or station in life (e.g., parent, magistrate or elder), taking due cognizance of the facts (on both sides), with mercy (allowing for mitigating circumstances), in love (for the Triune God, for His truth and for his neighbour), in humility (as a servant not a lord) and according to scriptural principles.

Next time, Lord willing, we shall consider the (sinful) judging that our Lord forbids and in which we must not engage. *Rev. Stewart*

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### Did Moses Sin in Killing the Egyptian?

"And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand" (Ex. 2:11-12).

"And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: for he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not" (Acts 7:24-25).

A brother asks, "Was it right of Moses to kill the Egyptian in the light of Acts 7:24-25 or was it murder?"

The question is an interesting one and has some elements to it that are of special significance.

The first point of interest, though only indirectly related to the question, is the fact that the instruction Moses received from his parents, when still only a small child, was used by God to protect Moses spiritually in all his years in Pharaoh's palace. It could not have been more than four years after Moses' birth that he went to live with Pharaoh's daughter. And he was in the palace for almost forty years. Yet he remained faithful to Jehovah. Hebrews 11:24-26 makes that clear: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

Undoubtedly, his parents taught him when he was a baby or little child that Israel was God's chosen people and the object of His love; that Jehovah would deliver Israel from the bondage of Egypt some day; that God would fulfil the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that he (Moses) was destined to play an important part in Israel's deliverance (Heb. 11:23). That instruction, though given when he was a child, persisted in Moses for nearly forty years and kept him faithful. This certainly underscores for us the importance of covenantal instruction for our children from the time they are born.

Moses' act of killing the Egyptian, therefore, was not a sin. He knew his calling was to lead Israel from Egypt and the bondage of Pharaoh. He knew that the warfare he and the nation had to fight was the destruction of the enemies of Israel. He knew that this would involve the destruction of the Egyptians. And so, his act of killing the Egyptian was not murder but an act of faith. That is, he thought that he would begin his work when he saw one of his brethren wrongfully misused.

Acts 7:25 is clear. Moses was expressing his faith described in Hebrews 11; he was to defend his brethren, one of God's people. He "avenged" his brethren by smiting the Egyptian because he knew Jehovah Himself would destroy the Egyptians, for he understood the principle laid down by Isaiah many years later: Zion is redeemed through

judgment (Isa. 1:27). Thus, I consider the killing of the Egyptian to be an act of faith.

Nevertheless, there is sin involved. Moses' sin was not the killing of one of Israel's oppressors, but his sin was taking matters in his own hands and not waiting for Jehovah to perform the work. After all, God had specifically said that He would deliver His people (Gen. 15:13-14).

Whatever may have gone through Moses' mind is unknown to us. Maybe he could not bear any longer the oppression of his beloved brethren. Maybe he mistakenly thought that, now that he was forty years old, he ought to begin his work of delivering Israel. It seems from Acts 7:25 that he thought his brethren would understand that he was signalling the beginning of the revolt that would lead to Israel's deliverance. Maybe he was impatient and thought that God was waiting too long, and that he ought to take matters into his own hands. And maybe, even, he had too high an opinion of his own ability to lead Israel out of bondage.

But whatever may have gone through his mind, he failed to do what Scripture tells us we ought to do: Wait on the Lord (cf. Ps. 27:14). The work of delivering Israel had to demonstrate that deliverance is wholly God's work. How crucial that was for Moses and is now for us. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt was a type of the deliverance of all God's people from the bondage of sin. To understand this, all we need to do is read the introduction to the law, which law is still valid for us, and in which the Most High reminds His people: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2).

Only God can do that. He may be pleased to use a man, as He did with Moses. But He does not need any human help in this great work. He can do it all by Himself if He so wishes. What can Moses do? He needed deliverance as much as all Israel. If Jehovah were pleased to give Moses a minor role in this great drama of the ages, even the role Moses would fill could be carried out by him only through the power of faith.

Thus we read in Hebrews 11:27: "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." Although the king sought to execute him for killing an Egyptian, that did not frighten Moses nor cause him to flee. He now understood that it was not yet God's time to deliver Israel and he was not spiritually ready for such a task. So God sent him far away to Midian so that for forty years he could be moulded and prepared to fulfil his calling when Jehovah Himself would perform His mighty work. Finally, God even had to become angry with him to force Moses to go to Egypt to start his work (Ex. 4:14). When Moses shrunk back from the heavy responsibility of God's role for him, then Moses was ready to play a part in the Lord's work. What powerful lessons for us! *Prof. Hanko*