

God and the Death Penalty

Jeffrey Dahmer raped, killed and ate parts of at least thirteen men. As punishment, the government was planning to feed, clothe, educate, medicate, entertain, and legally represent him for the rest of his life. Families of his victims would pay taxes, in part, to keep Dahmer comfortable, warm in winter and cool in summer. That type of punishment should scare the dickens out of other mass murderers. Interrupting the governments plans for Dahmer however, an inmate beat the cannibal to death in prison.

Some oppose the death penalty on practical grounds, arguing that it is not a deterrent. However, in the late sixties, when there were an average of 6,000 murders a year, the United States Supreme Court struck down the death penalty as unconstitutional in the way it was administered. Six years later, when it was re-instituted in the early seventies the number of average annual murders had jumped to nearly 16,000 victims per year. In countries like Saudi Arabia, which enforce a swift and certain death penalty, violent crime is rare. Singapore and Los Angeles have equivalent populations, yet in one year Singapore had 58 murders (most followed by swift execution) while Los Angeles had 1,063. Criminal sub-cultures like the Mafia show that the death penalty is a powerful deterrent even among career criminals, since few will ever double-cross their superiors, fearing the repercussions.

Others oppose the death penalty on moral grounds. The "morality" arguments of atheists are not persuasive because if there is no God, then there is no absolute morality, only arbitrary and subjective opinion. The anti-death-penalty morality arguments of some Christians, on the other hand, are persuasive to many. They base their arguments on statements made by Jesus Christ and therefore many listen attentively.

These "moral" opponents of the death penalty often intimidate good people into shying away from execution. Many Christians claim society should forgive criminals and instruct them to "go and sin no more." Ideas have consequences and the popularity of this idea parallels a huge sustained crime epidemic.

There *is* a right way to deter criminals and to end the crime epidemic. That deterrence, however, does not lie in telling Dahmer to "go and eat no more."

"And will you profane Me among My people... killing people who should not die, and keeping people alive who should not live...?" Ezek. 13:19

Death Penalty Opposition

Biblical arguments against execution consist primarily of six arguments:

First, Jesus said:

- "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I

tell you... whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." Mat. 5:38-39

Second, Jesus forgave the woman "caught in adultery, in the very act." To those arguing that she should be put to death, Jesus said:

- "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." John 8:7

Third, Jesus taught believers to forgive:

- "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Mat. 6:15

Fourth, the New Testament teaches Christians not to judge:

- "Judge not, that you be not judged." Mat. 7:1

Fifth, Paul taught believers to:

- Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse... Repay no one evil for evil... do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I Will repay," says the Lord." Rom. 12:14, 17, 19

Sixth, the Ten Commandments teach "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13).

Biblical History of Execution

In the first crime in the Bible, Cain murdered his brother Abel. Cain intuitively believed that everyone would think themselves justified in executing a murderer.

- "It will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me." Gen. 4:14

So God forbade capital punishment:

- "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him. Gen. 4:15

Without the death penalty, lawlessness reigned on earth:

- So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them..." Gen. 6:12-13

Within ten verses of the account of Noah's departure from the ark, God instituted the death penalty. Interestingly, the first three commands given to man after the flood parallel the very first three commands given to man before the flood.

| Before the Flood | After the Flood |
|---|--|
| 1st Command: "Be fruitful and multiply... have dominion... over every living thing that moves on the earth." <u>Gen. 1:28</u> | 1st Command: "Be fruitful and multiply... And the fear of you... shall be... on all that move on the earth..." <u>Gen. 9:1-2</u> |
| 2nd Command: "Of every tree... you may freely eat; but... of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat..." <u>Gen. 1:29</u> | 2nd Command" "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you... But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is its blood." <u>Gen. 9:3-4</u> |

3rd Command (Death penalty forbidden): "Whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." Gen. 4:15

3rd Command: (Death penalty commanded): "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed..." Gen. 9:6

These were the *only* three commands given to mankind before the flood, and the *only* three commands given to mankind after the flood and before Israel's covenant of circumcision.

Thou Shalt Not Kill

The rendering of the sixth commandment in the King James was very unfortunate. "Thou shalt not *kill*" in recent versions (like the NKJV, NIV, RSV, ASB, NASB, etc.) is accurately translated "You shall not *murder*" (Ex. 20:13). In Hebrew, as in English, the words for "murder" and "kill" can be used interchangeably, but their different meanings are easily understood from the context.

The Hebrew word for *murder* (*ratsach*, which appears in Ex. 20:13) is translated by the King James as *murder/murderer* 17 times, *slayer/slain/slayeth* 21 times, *kill/killing* 6 times, *manslayer* 2 times, and *death* once. The Hebrew word for *kill* (which appears in Ex. 13:15-harag) is translated by the King James as *slay/slayer/slain* 132 times, as *kill* 27 times, *murder/murderer* 3 times, *destroyed* once, *out of hand* once, and *made/put/surely* 3 times.

The Ten Commandments forbid murder, not killing "He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death." Ex. 21:15 "He who kidnaps a man... shall surely be put to death." Ex. 21:16 "He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death." Ex. 21:17 "If an unborn baby is killed] you shall give life for life." Ex. 21:23 It is not plausible to suppose that God contradicted Himself just a few sentences after delivering the Ten Commandments to Moses. Clearly God prohibited murder but insisted upon execution of murderers and others. Some Christians, however, are so influenced by the world's philosophy that they are ashamed of the Lord's own words in Exodus 21. Others talk as though God was a bad God in the Old Testament but that now in the New, He is a much nicer God, as though He has gone through a rite of passage. God forbid murder, and commanded the lawful execution of murderers.

Execution Not Optional

As punishment for murder, the death penalty was applicable to each and every murderer:

- "**Whoever** kills any man **shall surely be put to death....** You shall have the same law for the [foreigner] and for one from your own country; for I am the Lord your God." Lev. 24:17-22

The death penalty was not a maximum penalty, nor was it optional. As the Lord said:

- 'Moreover you shall **take no ransom for the life of a murderer** who is guilty of death, but **he shall surely be put to death...** So you shall not pollute the land where you are; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the

land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.'
Num. 35:31-33

Did God change this law in the New Testament? Consider that Jesus supports the death penalty in Matthew and Mark, and so does John in Revelation, and Paul in Acts and Romans, as does the book of Hebrews.

Jesus Supports Capital Punishment

Jesus affirmed the Mosaic Law even to the keeping of the "least of these commandments" (Mat. 5:17-19). He blasted the Pharisees for giving their own ideas precedence over God's commands:

- "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying... 'He who curses father or mother, **let him be put to death.**' But you say..." Mat. 15:3-4
- "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men..." [Jesus] said to them, "All too well you **reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said,** 'Honor your father and your mother; and **'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'** But you say..." Mark 7:8-11

Jesus reaffirmed the capital statutes of God's law. Not only the murderer (Rev. 13:10; 1 Tim. 1:8-9; Rom. 13:4), but even the one who curses a parent must be put to death (Ex. 21:17 and Lev. 20:9) just as God commanded. God's commands to execute the one who strikes or curses a parent are the death penalty statutes that liberal Christians are the most embarrassed over. However, Christ was not at all embarrassed over His Father's commands. Jesus repeated these commands without caveat or reservation. Laying aside the commands of God has its consequences. In America, murder has become the number one cause of death among young black males, and suicide is the number three cause of death among all teenagers. There is a death penalty when children disrespect their parents. If Jesus' telling of God's command is ignored, countless children will die terrible deaths at the hands of other children and by their own hands. On the other hand, if God's command were enforced, rather than ridiculed, the shedding of innocent blood would virtually disappear in our land. God's wisdom would save thousands of children. man's wisdom destroys them.

While Jesus was on the cross the Romans inflicted the death penalty on the two criminals² next to Him. Christ said nothing in their defense, or against their crucifixions. One of those two mocked Christ. In response, the other criminal (whom Jesus would immediately declare righteous, Luke 23:43) said of their punishments, "we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41). What did this forgiven criminal, this newly justified man, say about the death penalty? Bottom line: *the criminals were getting their just punishment*. The dying criminal knew the truth, as he said, "we indeed" are "justly" punished.

Revelation Supports Capital Punishment

The angels in heaven also recognize the principle of just punishment.

- And I heard the angel of the waters saying: "You are righteous, O Lord... because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due." Rev. 16:5-6

God will equip the two witnesses of Revelation 11 to execute those trying to harm them.

- And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. Rev. 11:5

The Apostle John also taught that you reap what you sow:

- **...he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword.** Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. Rev. 13:10

Paul Supports Capital Punishment

The Apostle Paul did not object to the death penalty. He knew his rights as a Roman citizen and defended them. Yet while on trial, he volunteered the following endorsement of capital punishment to Porcius Festus, Governor in Caesarea:

- "For **if I** am an offender, or **have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying**; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar." Acts 25:11
- Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!" Acts 25:12

Vengeance is inherently good. God said, "Vengeance is Mine." Individuals, however, are not to avenge themselves, but are to allow God to avenge in His way:

- Beloved, **do not avenge yourselves**, but rather **give place to wrath**; for it is written, "**Vengeance is Mine**, I will repay," says the Lord. Rom. 12:19 (see also Lev. 19:18)

While Paul instructs people not to seek their own revenge, but to "give place to wrath." Paul then explains that the proper channel for wrath is the "governing authorities." The government is the "place" for wrath and vengeance:

- Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities... For **rulers are not a terror** to good works, but **to evil**. Rom. 13:1, 3

Godly rulers are a terror to evil doers. Note that God's two witnesses in Revelation "tormented those who dwell on the earth" (Rev. 11:10).

God through Paul specifically commands earthly governments to execute criminals with the sword:

- For [the governing authority] is God's minister to you for good. But **if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath** on him who practices evil. Rom. 13:4

A sword is not used for scourging but for killing.

Paul instructs believers to "not avenge" themselves, "but rather give place to wrath." Governments are the place for wrath for they are "God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath." Individuals have one role, governments have another. Individuals do not avenge themselves, the government does. Believers forgive³, governments execute. So, if the governing authorities are to obey God, they must not bear the sword in vain but execute wrath on the criminal, for they are God's minister to avenge and bring terror on him who practices evil. Thus God commanded execution in large part to meet out vengeance against capital criminals.

Hebrews Supports Capital Punishment

The author of the book of Hebrews also supports the death penalty. The certainty of punishment under the Mosaic law proves the certainty of punishment for rejecting Jesus Christ:

- Anyone who has rejected Moses' law **dies** (present tense) **without mercy** on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much **worse punishment**, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot... Heb. 10:28-29

Temporal punishment through the law teaches men of the certainty of God's eternal punishment. If the government neglects the death penalty, then the people will scoff at the second death (Rev. 2:11; Rev. 20:6, **Rev. 20:12-14**; Rev. 21:8).

- Be afraid of the sword for yourselves; for wrath brings the punishment of the sword, that you may know there is a judgment. Job 19:29
- The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance... So that men will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; Surely He is God who judges in the earth." Ps. 58:10-11

Further, showing mercy to the wicked does not produce repentance. As Isaiah wrote:

- Let grace be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness... Isa. 26:10

And as the proverb states:

- A man of great wrath will suffer punishment; for if you rescue him, you will have to do it again. Prov. 19:19

While the Old and New Testaments strongly support the death penalty, some Christians think Jesus repealed capital punishment during an event that John described in his Gospel.

The Woman Caught In Adultery

Does the story of the woman caught in adultery, forgiven and released (John 8:3-11) negate the death penalty?

God Forgave Adulterers Before

Gomer was an adulteress yet God forgave her (Hos. 3:1). Still, He demanded that His

people obey His law (Hos. 4:6).

King David committed adultery and murder (2 Sam. 11). Yet God forgave him (Psalm 32:1-5).

It was a conscious decision on God's part to not execute David. As Nathan said to David:
As Nathan said to David:

- "The Lord also has put away your sin; you *shall not die*. However... by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme..." 2 Sam. 12:13

Still, God's law remained in effect (Ps. 1:2; 19:7; 78:1, 5-8; 89:30-32; 119).

God forgave the New Testament adulterer just as He forgave Old Testament adulterers, in neither instance revoking His law. God has all authority to forgive the criminal and disregard temporal punishment. Contrariwise, Men must obey God and cannot ignore punishment.

The Pharisees Wanted to Trap Christ

The Pharisees wanted to accuse Jesus of rebelling against the Roman Empire:

- This [the Pharisees] said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. John 8:6

Rome had revoked the Jews' authority to put a criminal to death (John 18:31). A straightforward answer to the Pharisees would have brought Jesus into premature conflict with Rome before His "hour had come." Jesus solved this problem stating, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7). Christ often frustrated the Pharisees giving clever answers that thwarted their wicked intentions (Mat. 22:15-22; 21:21-27; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26).

Jesus Did Not Repeal The Law

Without the law, lawlessness cannot exist. Yet as Christ said, "because *lawlessness* will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Mat. 24:12). Christ will throw "those who practice *lawlessness*... into the furnace of fire" (Mat. 13:41-42).

Jesus was born under the Old Testament law:

- ...God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law. Gal. 4:4

The Mosaic law was still in effect in the New Testament according to Jesus:

- **"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets... Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great..."** Mat. 5:17-19
- And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and **offer the gift that Moses commanded** as a testimony to them." Mat. 8:4
- "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you

to observe, that observe and do..." Mat. 23:2-3

- [Jesus said,] "**Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law?** ... Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that **the law of Moses should not be broken**, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?" John 7:19-23

Some argue that all this changed after the resurrection. Yet after His resurrection, Jesus said:

- "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... **teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.**" Mat. 28:19-20

And years later, "James and all the elders" said to Paul:

- "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and **they are all zealous for the law.**" Acts 21:20

Paul Used The Law

Paul teaches that the unrepentant world is still under the law, and that the law is designed to show guilt and to bring people to Christ:

- But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless... and for sinners... for murderers... for sodomites, for kidnappers, for perjurers... 1 Tim. 1:8-10

All the world is under the law:

- Now we know that whatever **the law says**, it says **to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God...** Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law. Rom. 3:19, 31
- Therefore the **law was our tutor to bring us to Christ**, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. Gal. 3:24-25

Christians who are untutored in the evangelistic role of the law oppose the foundation of the criminal code upon God's law.

Turn the Other Cheek

- "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." Mat. 5:38-39

Pacifists have an unworkable interpretation of this passage. Imagine applying the pacifist view to a woman being raped? Does a father tell his daughter to not resist the rapist?

Pacifist father to daughter being raped: "Don't resist the evil man, honey. Remember, Jesus said, 'Love your enemy.' If he wants you for one hour, stay with him two."

Rather, this teaching is similar to Paul's teaching, "Do not avenge yourselves," knowing that the government is to bring wrath and vengeance against the perpetrator. The

command to not avail oneself of "an-eye-for-an-eye" is not a strictly New Testament concept. Many falsely presume that this is a New Testament teaching which opposes Old Testament teachings. However, the command to avoid personal vengeance was just as applicable to Old Testament believers as to us. "Do not say, 'I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work'" (Prov. 24:29).

Graciousness from the believer in his personal life is an enduring virtue and not a new concept.

Further, a slap "on your *right cheek*" would normally be a back-handed slap such as an insult. A punch to the face would usually land on the *left cheek*, as most men are right-handed. Thus Jesus was not talking about a full-fledged violent attack, an attempted murder or a rape.

Jesus was not here repealing the Mosaic law, but was teaching patience, forgiveness, and self control for the individual.

It Is Personal, Not Governmental

The Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5-7) does not lay down rules for governments but principles for an upright heart.

- "Blessed are the poor **in spirit**... You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder'... But I say to you that whoever is **angry** with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment... Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that **your brother has something against you**, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way... I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her **in his heart**." Mat. 5:3-28

In this very sermon Jesus made the distinction between individuals and governments:

- "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, **the judge hand you over to the officer**, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny." Mat. 5:25-26

Jesus did not tell the judge or the officer to turn the other cheek or to void the law. God wants the governing authorities to uphold the law without mercy (Heb. 10:28; Rom. 13:3-4).

The Other Laws Remain

With the following words, did Jesus repeal God's law that He referred to:

- "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you... whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Mat. 5:38-39).

If Christ here repealed "An eye for an eye," as some suppose, did He at the same time repeal the other Mosaic laws that He mentioned in the exact same manner? Few would even begin to argue that He did. Jesus used the words "You have heard... But I say unto you..." to show the personal application of the laws on murder and adultery. He said:

- "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder...' But I say to you..." Mat. 5:21-22
- "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery...' But I say to you..." Mat. 5:27-28

The punishment side of God's criminal justice system in the Mosaic law is directed to governments who were commanded to execute the criminals, it was not directed to individuals. Thus, individuals who used these laws to justify their own lack of forgiveness were misapplying the law. Jesus here repealed neither the prohibitions against murder and adultery nor the command to love your neighbor. Rather, He was correcting misinterpretations. Thus, in the same way Christ was not repealing "an eye for an eye" but explaining the right heart attitude of a believer.

An Unusual Formulation

Old Testament quotes are typically introduced with the phrases "It is written," or "That which was spoken by the prophet," or "Moses said." The formulation used in the Sermon on the Mount indicates that Jesus was not directly addressing what was written, but rather, what was said about what was written. "You have heard that **it was said.**" Jesus was not criticizing God's law, but the misinterpretation of the law. This becomes obvious when it is realized that at one point, He corrects a command that does not even appear in the law:

- "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love you neighbor and **hate your enemy.**' But I say to you, love your enemies..." Mat. 5:43-44

"Hate your enemy," does not appear in the Mosaic law. *Jesus is not adjusting the law!* He is correcting the misapplication of the law.

"You have made the Word of God of no effect by the traditions of men." Throughout this sermon Jesus is rebuking men for misinterpreting the law. And what do men do, they completely misinterpret this sermon.

Pacifists Only Go So Far

Many churches claim to literally "turn the other cheek" (Mat. 5:39). After losing a lawsuit, however, not many churches would give double the judgment amount to their opponent (Mat. 5:40). Further, in the context of evil requests from evil people, Jesus said to "Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away" (Mat. 5:42). The members of a church which publicly claimed such a policy would end up poorer than church mice, and with less shelter. Wicked people would take everything they own.

No Contradictions Here

If Jesus in Matthew 5:39 revoked part of the law, He would have severely contradicted His own statement made just 20 verses earlier:

- **"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets... Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great..." Mat. 5:17-19**

Hence Jesus command to turn the other cheek is not a repeal of God's command to governments to apprehend and punish criminals but a command to individuals to love one another.

But Who Can Forgive Whom?

Some argue that we are to forgive murderers. These same people insist that we incarcerate murderers and make thieves pay restitution. They say "forgive," but actually demand punishment. These objectors do not sincerely believe in forgiveness, they only want to decide on the penalty themselves while rejecting the penalty God has commanded.

You can forgive a debt owed to you, but not one owed to your neighbor. If your friend owes you \$100 dollars, you can cancel that debt if you like; however, if your friend owes me \$100, you have no such authority to cancel that debt. You can forgive a sin against you, but not a sin against your neighbor. Only God has authority to forgive a murderer and even He will not forgive the unrepentant murderer.

A murderer has also assaulted the community, the law and God Himself. You can only forgive the wrong done against you, not that done against God or your community. When Jesus spoke of forgiveness, He did not confuse this simple truth. He taught clearly that you must forgive those who sinned against you, not those who sinned against your neighbor. For as He taught Israel to pray:

- "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" Mat. 6:12

Jesus forgave sins and the scribes reasoned in their hearts, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). Thus Jesus realized that men would want evidence for His claim to be able to forgive sins:

- "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" - He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise..." Luke 5:24; Mark 2:10-11

So parents of a murder victim should forgive to the extent that they have been hurt, which requires a tremendous amount of forgiveness to cover a tremendous amount of hurt. In America, sadly, their sorrow is agitated and increased by a government that mocks their grief through mercy to the murderer. How does a mother's broken heart heal when the wound is reopened each time her daughter's murderer is up for appeal, or sues the jail, or gets a photo in the newspaper.

Do Not Judge?

But does the New Testament teach believers to not judge? Jesus did say: "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Mat. 7:1)? Jesus gave that teaching to hypocrites (Mat. 7:5) however. For He specifically commands His followers to judge:

- "Do not judge according to appearance, but **judge with righteous judgment.**"
John 7:24

"Judge not" is the Hypocrites Golden Rule. For "judge not" (Mat. 7:1-5) is simply a hypocrites application of *do unto others as you would have them do unto you* (Mat. 7:12). "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged" (Mat. 7:2). *Judge others as you would have them do unto you inverted is Judge not if you do not want to be judged.* Therefore the hypocrite does not judge. As Jesus said, "Judge not... you hypocrite" (Mat. 7:1, 5 KJV; Ezek. 16:52).

Jesus warned against judging falsely or with hypocrisy. For immediately after saying "judge not," Jesus taught just how to judge correctly:

- "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?... Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to **remove the speck out of your brother's eye.**"
Mat. 7:3, 5

Christ kept this theme throughout His ministry. "Hypocrites," Jesus said, "why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right?" (Luke 12:56-57). Still, His own followers have mostly ignored the Lord's harsh rebuke: "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye" (Mat. 7:5). "Judge Not" is the Hypocritical Oath and hypocrite haven. He who lives in a glass house should not throw stones. Such Christians, though, should relocate. Move into "the temple of the great God, which is being built with heavy stones" (Ezra 5:8).

Jesus paid a compliment to Simon [not Peter] when He said:

- "**You have rightly judged.**" Luke 7:43

Paul commands Christians to judge:

- Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And **if the world will be judge by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?** Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? **I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?** 1 Cor. 6:2-5

Paul elsewhere teaches:

- **...he who is spiritual judges all things...** 1 Cor. 2:15

Moses and the law of God condemns and judges sinners, as Christ said:

- "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you 'Moses...'" John 5:45

Paul teaches this also:

- Whatever **the law says**, it says **to those who are under the law, that** every mouth may be stopped, and **all the world [is] guilty before God.** Rom 3:19

God has always approved of giving warning to those who commit crimes:

- ...those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come

upon them. Prov. 24:25

Then Why Is the Death Penalty Not a Deterrent in America?

God promises that the death penalty is a reliable deterrent:

- "So you shall put away the evil from Israel. And **all the people shall** hear and fear, and **no longer act presumptuously.**" Deut. 17:12-13

Yet, the death penalty as executed through American courts is not much of a deterrent. Wise King Solomon 2,900 years ago explained why this is so:

- **Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.** Eccl. 8:11

When a murderer is executed, three appeals and 12 years after his crime, society has largely forgotten about him. His death has almost no deterrent effect on crime. Further, a life sentence cannot be executed speedily. The swift death penalty deters crime and aids evangelism. Thus Christians, in obedience to God, should support the death penalty.

If you would like to comment or debate the content of this article please [CLICK HERE](#).

1 "But if he strikes him with an iron implement, so that he dies, he is a murderer (ratsach as in Ex.20:13); the murderer shall surely be put to death." Num.35:16

2 Criminals, that is, robbers not from the Greek kleptes for a typical thief, but kakourgos (Luke 21:39) and lestes (Mat.27:38; Mark15:27), for a thief who steals openly (Mat.21:13). This is the same word lestes used for the thieves who attacked the man helped by the good Samaritan. These robbers "stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead" (Luke 10:30), that is, attempted murder.

Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, speaks of many robbers, one of whom was Judas, son of Ezekias, who, in the aftermath of Herod's death, assaulted the palace in Sepphoris in Galilee, stole its weapons, and was purposely vicious with everyone to build a reputation for himself. Robbers, were also murderers. Elsewhere, Josephus speaks of the Judean Procurator Felix, in AD 52 hiring robbers to kill the High Priest. After that accomplishment, the robbers returned again and again to murder others in the city and in the temple itself. Josephus claims that this is likely the reason God rejected Jerusalem and its impure temple and brought the Romans upon the Jews (AD 70).

3 The prohibition of personal vengeance has precedence in the Old Testament. "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge but you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Lev.19:18). No one could successfully argue that the prohibition of vengeance in the Old Testament negated the death penalty then. And no one can successfully argue the same today.

Listen to *Bob Enyart Live* which airs around the world via the Internet at KGOV.com and

throughout Colorado on 50,000-watt AM 670 KLTT. Also, you can get The Plot, Bob's best-selling unpublished manuscript about the Bible, at our KGOV store or by calling 1-888-8Enyart (836-9278)!