

## **CAPITAL PUNISHMENT**

Lesson for 5/30/10

**Genesis 9:5-6** *5 "Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man."*

### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Whenever an execution is imminent, questions are often raised...
  - a. Should capital punishment be acceptable in a civilized society?
  - b. Is it morally right for a government to administer capital punishment?
  - c. What is the purpose behind capital punishment, and is it accomplished?
2. How do we find the answers to such questions?
  - a. We could turn to various sources, and receive conflicting answers
  - b. For Christians who believe the Word of God to be complete and all-sufficient we must look to it for the answers:

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** *16 "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

**2 Peter 1:3** *"...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue..."*

In this study, we shall endeavor to glean from the Bible what it has to say on the subject. Turning to the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings, we read of...

### **I. THE BEGINNING OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT**

## A. BEFORE THE FLOOD...

1. Cain received protection from God against capital punishment:

**Genesis 4:13-15** 13 *"And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! 14 "Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me." 15 And the LORD said to him, "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."*

2. Lamech, descendant of Cain, presumed even more protection against capital punishment after killing a young man:

**Genesis 4:23-24** 23 *"Then Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; Wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, Even a young man for hurting me. 24 If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."*

3. By the time of Noah, mention is made of the corruption and violence which had filled the earth (might this be the consequence of a society without capital punishment?):

**Genesis 6:11-12** 11 *"The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth."*

4. God's solution for the wholesale corruption and violence: capital punishment on a mass scale! (i.e., the flood):

**Genesis 6:13** *"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 with the earth."*

## B. AFTER THE FLOOD...

1. Man is immediately given an awesome responsibility:

**Genesis 9:5-6** 5 *"Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of*

*man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man."*

- a. God now requires a reckoning from those who kill
  - b. He now requires a killer to be killed by his fellow man
2. The reason God requires this of man: "For in the image of God He made man"
- a. To kill one created in God's image is a serious offense worthy of death!
  - b. Because man is created in God's image:
    - 1) He possesses the ability to exercise justice and righteousness
    - 2) He is capable of being a worthy administrator of capital punishment

While the evidence is scarce, it appears that before the flood people took God's word to Cain as a license to kill without consequence. With the flood, God Himself administered a form of capital punishment upon the violent and corrupt. After the flood, He charged man with the responsibility to take the life of those who shed blood.

Now let's take a look at...

## **II. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT UNDER THE OLD COVENANT**

### **A. GOD GAVE THE LAW TO GOVERN THE NATION OF ISRAEL...**

- 1. The Law was both a civil and religious law, and has served as the basis for criminal justice in many other civilizations since first given by God
- 2. In it, we find that capital punishment was proscribed for the following crimes:
  - a. Premeditated murder - **Exodus 21:12-14**
  - b. Parental abuse - **Exodus 21:15**
  - c. Kidnapping - **Exodus 21:16**

- d. Cursing parents - **Exodus 21:17**
- e. Striking an expecting mother which causes the child to be born prematurely and dies - **Exodus 21:22-25**
- f. Failure to keep a killer animal from killing - **Exodus 21:28-29**
- g. Killing a thief in revenge - **Exodus 22:2-3**
- h. Sorcery - **Exodus 22:18**
- i. Bestiality - **Exodus 22:19**
- j. Adultery - **Leviticus 20:10**
- k. Incest - **Leviticus 20:11-12**
- l. Homosexuality - **Leviticus 20:13**
- m. Marrying both mother and daughter - **Leviticus 20:14**
- n. Being a medium or spiritist - **Leviticus 20:27**
- o. Breaking the Sabbath - **Numbers 15:32-36**

**B. WAS THE LAW A GOOD LAW?**

1. Paul said that it was "holy and just and good":

**Romans 7:12** *"Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good."*

2. While the religious aspects of the Law was temporary, the civil law served its purpose well: to govern and preserve a nation:

**Galatians 3:23-25** *23 "But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."*

3. Who would be so presumptuous to say they could improve upon such a civil code of ethics?

- a. Many have arrogantly presumed they could do better
- b. And countries have gotten worse, not better!

Certainly under the Old Covenant capital punishment was ordained of God. But we live under the New Testament, not the Old; what does the New Testament say?

### **III. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

#### *A. THE PURPOSE OF THE NEW COVENANT...*

1. Unlike the Old Covenant, the New Covenant is not designed to govern or regulate civil governments

a. It is designed for those in Christ's kingdom, which is spiritual in nature:

**John 18:36** *"Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.""*

b. Its purpose is to help man achieving and maintaining a right relationship with God

c. So for the most part, it does not concern itself with telling men of the world how to regulate their civil affairs

2. But in defining our relationship to civil authorities while subject to a Higher Law, there are references which reveal God's attitude toward capital punishment

#### *B. REFERENCES TO CAPITAL PUNISHMENT...*

1. Take a look at:

**Romans 13:1-7** *1 "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For he 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. 5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. 7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor."*

- a. Governmental authorities are established by God
  - b. They serve as ministers of God, as "an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil"
  - c. When a government fulfills its responsibility upon those who are evil...
    - 1) It "does not bear the sword in vain"
    - 2) This is a clear allusion to the administration of capital punishment!
- Thus the NT supports the government's right to exercise the death penalty!

2. Consider what Paul said in Acts 25:11:

**Acts 25:11** *11 "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."*

- a. He was willing to die if he "committed anything worthy of death"
- b. A clear implication that in Paul's mind some crimes were worthy of death!

While the New Testament is focused upon the responsibilities of disciples of Jesus in His spiritual kingdom, there is certainly no indication that it is wrong for government to administer capital punishment when necessary. The principle established in **Genesis 9:5-6**, given to all of mankind before the Old Covenant, remains a responsibility placed upon the governments of men!

But what about objections commonly raised whenever the issue is discussed?

#### **IV. COMMON OBJECTIONS TO CAPITAL PUNISHMENT**

##### *A. THE BIBLE SAYS "THOU SHALT NOT KILL"!*

1. The word "kill" is best translated "murder"
  - a. Cf. **Exodus 20:13** *"You shall not murder."* (NKJV, NASV, NIV)
  - b. This command forbids killing with malice and premeditation
2. In the next two chapters, God prescribes the death penalty for nine different crimes! – e.g.:

**Exodus 21:12-17** *12 "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. 13 However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. 14 But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die. 15 And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. 16 He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death. 17 And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."*

-- The command not to murder is directed toward individuals; one must ignore the context and twist the Scriptures to apply it to the issue of capital punishment!

##### *B. THE BIBLE SAYS THAT GOD HAS NO PLEASURE IN THE DEATH OF THE WICKED!*

1. It is true that God says He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked:

**Ezekiel 18:32** *32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "Therefore turn and live!"*

2. But consider the context of this statement:
  - a. The soul that sins shall die; one shall not bear the iniquity of another:

**Ezekiel 18:4** *"Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father As well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die."*

b. Certain sins makes one worthy of death:

**Ezekiel 18:10-13** *10 "If he begets a son who is a robber Or a shedder of blood, Who does any of these things 11 And does none of those duties, But has eaten on the mountains Or defiled his neighbor's wife; 12 If he has oppressed the poor and needy, Robbed by violence, Not restored the pledge, Lifted his eyes to the idols, Or committed abomination; 13 If he has exacted usury Or taken increase--Shall he then live? He shall not live! If he has done any of these abominations, He shall surely die; His blood shall be upon him."*

c. God encourages the wicked to repent and do what is right:

**Ezekiel 18:21-23** *21 "But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. 22 None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. 23 "Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord GOD, "and not that he should turn from his ways and live?"*

d. But even the righteous person who begins to do wickedness shall die if they do not repent!

**Ezekiel 18:24** *24 "But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die."*

-- The whole thrust of the passage is this: Repent before it is too late; God may have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that doesn't prevent Him from carrying it out! (cf. God's death penalty on 24,000 in the plains of Moab - **Numbers 25:1-13**)

**C. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT DOESN'T WORK, IT DOESN'T DETER CRIME!**

1. This is true to a certain extent, when it is not carried out quickly:

**Ecclesiastes 8:11** *"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."*

- a. But it does prevent the person executed from ever killing again!
- b. Its ineffectiveness in preventing crime by others is an argument against our system of administering capital punishment, not the idea of the death penalty itself

2. "Determent" is not the only purpose, there is also the issue of "justice"

- a. Justice demands that the punishment fits the crime
- b. As God explained when He proscribed the need for capital punishment:

**Genesis 9:6** "For in the image of God He made man"

- c. Some crimes are so heinous, any punishment less than death is not justice!

*D. INNOCENT PEOPLE ARE SOMETIMES PUT TO DEATH!*

1. This can happen...

- a. But again this an argument that pertains to a system in which capital punishment is administered
- b. It not an argument against the idea of capital punishment itself

2. In the Old Testament...

- a. Capital punishment could not be applied unless the crime was seen by two or more witnesses –

**Deuteronomy 17:6** *"Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness."*

- b. If a single witness made an accusation that proved false, it could fall back on him!

**Deuteronomy 19:15-21** 15 "One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established. 16 If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, 17 then both men in the controversy shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. 18 And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, 19 then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. 20 And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you. 21 Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

3. Personally, I prefer to seeing the death penalty limited to certain cases...

a. In which there are two or more eyewitnesses, and there is no doubt

b. Where the conviction is not dependent upon laboratory evidence

-- Where there are no eyewitnesses, then perhaps the maximum penalty should be life in prison (in case the laboratory evidence is later proved faulty)

## **CONCLUSION**

1. Does God approve of capital punishment? We have seen...

a. That God gave mankind the responsibility of carrying it out after the flood

b. God's own illustration of justice in the government He gave to Israel

c. How Christians today are to acknowledge the right and responsibility given by God to governments to be His ministers in avenging wrath on the evildoers

2. Certainly any civilized nation abhors violence and bloodshed; but civilization cannot exist...

a. With violence and corruption running rampant

b. When government fails to administer justice with punishment that fits the crime

3. How does God view governments that fail to carry out their responsibility to execute wrath to the evildoer?

a. As with anything that takes away justice: woe!

**Isaiah 5:20-23** *20 "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight! 22 Woe to men mighty at drinking wine, Woe to men valiant for mixing intoxicating drink, 23 Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away justice from the righteous man!"*

b. As with anyone who fails to fulfill their responsibility: cursed!

**Jeremiah 48:10** *"Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD deceitfully, And cursed is he who keeps back his sword from blood."*

Many may refuse to accept what the Bible has to say about capital punishment. But let those who profess to be Christians and accept the Bible as inspired acknowledge that capital punishment is ordained of God!

## **INVITATION**

This lesson has not been designed to instruct those who are not Christians to render obedience to God. But we never close a service without providing the opportunity for those who have already come to a knowledge of God's word to submit to his will. In addition, we also provide this opportunity for any Christians who may have fallen away to come back to God or who have any other need or request they wish to share with the congregation.

If you have learned what you must do to make yourself right with God and have made a decision, we encourage you to take action now. If there is anything we can do to assist you with this or any other need, please come forward to the front row as together we stand and sing the song that has been selected.