

PASSING THE BATON 15
Should a Christian support Capital Punishment?

28th June 2008

'And every man did what was right in his own eyes.'
Judges 21:25

Introduction:

We looked at biblical submission earlier in the year when we examined five specific areas of submission:

Submission to God
Submission to Christ
Submission within the family, i.e. husband, wife, children
Submission to authorities, i.e. government
Submission to leadership in the church

We concluded that unless we were submitted to God, we would not submit to anyone else, except in an ungodly way. Unless Jesus is Lord, as well as Saviour, we only have half a gospel and submission – even to the laws of the land – will be difficult for us.

If you accept Jesus as Lord, then you **must** do what He says and not what I or someone else says.

If we see God's authority over us, then we have to obey those in authority over us in society. We saw this when we looked at Biblical submission. You cannot say you are a Christian and not obey the law of the land. Romans 13, whole chapter.

As God is in charge, it is really under Him we are submitted, and prayer is the most powerful weapon we have.

If we have a confrontation facing us between what society says on one hand and what the word of God says on the other, we have to choose who we will believe which will govern how we will act. Who has the greater authority? God or society?

Before we start to examine the pros and cons of capital punishment, we need to see the principles of anarchy and rebellion. The bible gives us a number of accounts of anarchy and rebellion – *'rebellion, or foolishness,'* it says is *'bound up in the heart of a child'* – now there's a thing – *'But the rod of correction will drive it far from him.'* **Proverbs. 22:15.**

What price those who don't agree with discipline for their children? They are breeding the next generation of anarchists.

The consequence of anarchy and rebellion is unhappiness.

The last words in the book of Judges are *'every man did what was right in his own eyes.'* This nation, Israel, had set aside God's laws and had followed *"the devices and desires of their own hearts"* with disastrous consequences.

What God is looking for is obedience, and if we obey Him there will be blessing.

Guaranteed.

Let's just have a look at the result of anarchy and rebellion because the accounts in the Bible are there to show us what will happen if we rebel against God.

1 Samuel 10:1-8

God anoints Saul as King.

*¹Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said 'Is it not because the Lord has anointed you commander over His inheritance?' ²When you have departed from me today, you will find two men by Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelah; and they will say to you. 'The donkeys which you went to look for have been found. And now your father has ceased caring about the donkeys and is worrying about you, saying "What shall I do about my son?"' ³Then you shall go on forward from there and come to the terebinth tree of Tabor. There three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you, one carrying three young goats, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine. ⁴And they will greet you and give you two loaves of bread, which you shall receive from their hands. ⁵After that you shall come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is. And it will happen, when you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with a stringed instrument, a tambourine, a flute and a harp before them; and they will be prophesying. ⁶Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man. ⁷And let it be when these signs come to you, that you do as the occasion demands for God is with you.' ⁸You shall go down before me to Gilgal and surely I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and make sacrifices of peace offering. **Seven days you shall wait**, till I come to you and show you what you should do.'*

Here Samuel gives Saul a specific instruction "wait, I will come, I will offer, I will show you what to do."

Subsequently, as we know, in chapter 13:11,12 we find Saul failing his test of obedience, the people deserted him because they were afraid, he waited 7 days, but Samuel didn't come, so he took the law into his own hands.

When Samuel arrives he says this

1 Samuel 13: 11,12

*¹¹When I saw that the people had scattered from me, and that **you did not come** within the days appointed, **and that the Philistines gathered** together at Michmash.. ¹²I felt compelled and offered a burnt offering.'*

This act of disobedience cost him the throne.

He was being tested and didn't realize it.

Our obedience isn't tested when things are going well, our true obedience to God is tested when things are going wrong, and we don't agree with what God is allowing in our lives, or

even if we straightforward don't agree with what the Word of God says on any particular subject, because we have our own ideas about it.

Saul's disobedience lost the throne. He had his own ideas. If Saul had been obedient, then Jesus would have been a Benjamite instead of coming from the line of Judah. Saul lost everything because of his disobedience.

Our love for God which we profess, is shown by our **obedience** to Him. He says, if you love Me, you will obey My commandments, you will do what I say.

To accept that we are all rebels at heart is more difficult for some of us than others.

If you resist the truth of the total depravity of mankind, you are doing yourself a disservice and a truly submissive heart towards God will not be yours without struggle and pain.

In our study on Biblical Submission, (Passing the Baton number 12), I said we must first consider –

The inerrancy of the Bible, the Word of God.

If we belong to the camp which says *“that was just Paul's opinion”* or *“I don't believe the creation account”* or *“creation is not incompatible with evolution”*; *“I don't agree with that”* *“What about this or that?”* or whatever, we are already putting ourselves and our understanding **above** the revealed word of God, we are exalting our understanding above the knowledge of God **2 Corinthians 10:5**, and incidentally, putting ourselves on the wrong side of God.

So we need to settle it at the outset, the Maker's instructions contained in this book are for us - all of them. Genesis to maps.

Scripture for that statement –

2 Timothy 3:16-17

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God [literally God breathed], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Or an Old Testament scripture *“Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”* **Deuteronomy 8:3**; it is also found in **Matthew 4:4** and **Luke 4:4**.

When God says something once, He means it, but when He says it three times or more, He means it...watch out.

If you have difficulty accepting man's total rebellion towards God, have a look some time at **Revelation 20:7-9**.

This is where Satan has just been bound for 1,000 years, the curse has been all but lifted from the earth, and in the final analysis, he is let out to test the hearts of mankind, and the majority

follow him.

Gives the lie to those who say, Satan made me do it, or if I could see Jesus I would believe. If you want to know more about this, we have just done a series of teachings on the book of Revelation which are available for you.

We must believe, therefore, that the Bible is God's Word and that it is without error and is historically and scientifically true. As such, it is the **supreme authority** for both life and conduct. We may not necessarily understand it all, but by faith, we accept its inerrancy. God is more than able to protect His word.

The Bible is called 'the Canon' of scripture. The word 'canon' comes from the Greek word 'kanon', which had a very specific meaning.

It was a straight edge used in building in the ancient world, a measuring rod or ruler. It was used by a surveyor to see if a builder's wall was straight, upright, and correctly proportioned. It was equivalent to today's plumb line or spirit-level. The word came to mean a standard rule by which things were judged. So, the Word is a **straight edge** against which we should test our lives. As we come to it, we not only read it, but it also reads us.

Submission - a definition:

Let's start then, with some definitions.

Subject, subjection, or submission are mutually interchangeable words which come from the same root. In the Greek it is the word **HUPOTASSO** which is primarily a military term meaning to rank under. Hupo, under, tasso to arrange. Therefore to arrange under in rank or order. So, when the Bible says submit yourselves, or be in subjection to, it is saying, in effect, get in rank get in order.

Get in line Winifred!

Dictionary definition: **subject**, rule: under the control of somebody or something such as a ruler or a law and obliged to **obey**. A subject nation.

A related word is hupakoe which is to listen with a view to **obedience**. Again the prefix 'hupa' which is 'under'. We are listening with a view to doing what is being said **HUPAKOE**.

Submission and obedience go together. Loving submission and willingness to obey. Hopefully that is what we will be doing today submitting our hearts to the word of God.

The word submit itself is **HUPEIKO** which is to retire or withdraw. Again hupo, under eiko, to yield. Therefore, to yield under, to submit, this is seen metaphorically in **Hebrews 13:17** where it is used of the body submitting to, getting in rank under, spiritual guides in the church.

"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."

Notice please, for whom it would be unprofitable. Not for the leaders, but for *you*.

Dictionary definition: **submit:** yield to somebody: to give in to somebody's authority, control, or demands, to agree to undergo something, to defer to another's knowledge, judgment, or experience. 14th century. From Latin *submittere*, literally 'to send under', from *mittere* 'to send' - the source of English *mission*.

'Submit' is a word which probably causes Christians the most problems.

In this study we will be looking at submission to authorities, e.g., the government God has placed over us and the laws of the land. We will have a look to see whether what is in place in this country lines up with the Word of God, and if not, why it doesn't.

In looking at this subject we will also examine the principles of anarchy and rebellion and what they are, why they are there and operate so strongly within us and the society in which we find ourselves. Next month we will be doing an in-depth examination of the whole subject of anarchy and rebellion.

Capital punishment:

Capital punishment is a prickly, controversial and in some ways, very difficult subject. Capital punishment, in our land, was abolished for murder in **1965**.

Although never applied, it remained on the statute book for certain other offences, such as treason, until **1998**.

Although the law has abolished the killing of another person *lawfully* for the act of murder, it is still a subject that has a lot of debate in Parliament from time to time.

Whilst some people may wish to see this punishment reinstated, there is another lobby that speak out against it, and there are many Christians who would not want to see this law brought back onto the Statute Books.

However, although we will look at both sides of this argument, the only view which really counts is – what does God say about it?

Whatever He says, is the view that we need to take.

This may mean that you will have to do some rethinking today.

Repenting, changing of your mind.

So, let's have a look first at the two opposing views: both sides think their view is right so the first thing we need to do is to look at *why* they think the way they do.

There are four main points on both sides. Let's look at those who are opposed to it first.

1. They say capital punishment does not harmonize with the love of God. They say God is love and a God who is all loving like our God would have nothing to do with forcibly taking a person's life. They would say that it is against the character of God.

2. Capital punishment cannot be allowed because mistakes are made and people who have done nothing wrong are by mistake put to death, and if one person is put to death by mistake, that is enough to make it not good enough. So, it follows if you don't have capital punishment these mistakes cannot happen. That of course is a very powerful argument.
3. They would also say capital punishment does not hold to the sanctity of life.
4. Finally, they would observe that capital punishment does not deter crime and as such it serves no useful purpose whatsoever.

Those are the four main points of those who say capital punishment is wrong.

Those who speak for capital punishment today would say this:

1. Opposing capital punishment means you are siding with evil, and evil flourishes when good men do nothing.
2. If there is no capital punishment you are showing more concern and regard today for the criminal than you are for the victim. They say the criminal's life is protected, whereas the victim was given no such choice. Powerful argument.
3. They would say no capital punishment weakens our legal system. In other words, you have pulled the teeth from our law and there is now no ultimate deterrent or bite.
4. Finally, they would say if you do not have capital punishment you encourage murder and violence generally.

These are the four main points of those who support capital punishment. I should add also, that of those who support capital punishment often there is a need for revenge that runs through their objections.

As Bible believers, we can see that both points of view are wrong biblically because the main point which is missing from both arguments is ***what is God's view on all this?***

Very often people, even Christians, take the ***humanistic*** viewpoint on this rather than looking at what the Bible says.

As Christians we should not base our views on anything, including capital punishment, on what we 'feel' ,about any given subject, but on what the word of God says. So it isn't a question of who is right and who is wrong, or who has the strongest case, but ***what does the bible say?***

To answer this question, we need to go back to the beginning, to the seed bed of the Bible, the book of Genesis – the book of beginnings.

Genesis 1:28,29

*"²⁸Then God blessed them and God said to them "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth".²⁹And God said "See I have given you every **herb** that yields seed which is on the face of the earth, and **every tree whose fruit yields seeds**; to you it shall*

be for food”.

Here we see Adam was to have dominion over the animal kingdom and at this point he is vegetarian so, this is Adam’s mandate – be fruitful, multiply, have dominion and eat seeds.

All goes quite well until mankind becomes so corrupt and degenerate after the fall of Adam, that God has to bring the universal flood upon the earth, and in **Genesis 9:1-3** we see God speaking to Noah after the waters of the flood have subsided.

Noah and his family are the only people now left on the earth to repopulate it, and here is **Noah’s** mandate -

*“¹So God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth² and the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that moves on the earth, and all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand.³”**Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.**”*

Verse 1,2 are exactly the same commandment God gave to Adam in **Genesis 1:28,29** -

Be fruitful, multiply, have dominion, but wait – there is a change regarding what he can eat - now in verse 3 –

*“**Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.**”*

And in verse 4 He qualifies this -

“But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.”

Verse 3 sees the start of the changes in the command God gives to Noah.

Man can now eat meat. Before the flood mankind was not permitted to eat meat; they were vegetarian, after the flood; things changed.

Before the fall animals did not eat one another, roses did not bear thorns, weeds did not grow, man did not sweat, nor did he get sick. The fall brought about all these changes. And now God issues a decree that meat is on the menu.

This is the first reference to capital punishment as we will see.

So, after the flood meat was given to man for food and meat eating today is quite right. But there is a rule regarding the eating of meat and we in Britain today keep this – strange isn’t it when we are so far from God, we still instinctively carry out His requirements in this regard –

Genesis 9:4

“But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood”

We still drain our meat in accordance with **Genesis 9:4**.

Had you ever wondered why we drain meat?

There's your answer.

Now we are coming to the verses that really interest us in this study –

Genesis 9:5,6

“⁵Surely 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'.⁶whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed: for in the image of God He made man.”

These verses concern the **life** of human beings.

And they are unequivocal.

That is, they allow for no doubt or misinterpretation.

God has made Himself very, very, clear on this point and this is why - every person conceived or born on the face of the earth has **the image of God** on them. That is what this means – God is stating **ownership** here – the earth is the Lord's and **everything** in it.

Notice too that the life is in the blood and God alone owns life.

God is teaching respect for Him, and respect for each other, in terms of ownership and image.

Every person has a dignity that comes from God.

Every person has dignity in God's eyes, conferred on them by God himself, because they bear His image and likeness.

Not because of what or who they are, or what they do, or how clever they are but because of what **God** has made them.

It does not matter whether you are a tramp or a king, both are equal in value in God's sight, because He made them.

It is the **value** of people that makes the Christian culture different from any other culture on the face of the earth.

We of all people should be the ones who live with honour and respect for others, whether we agree with them or not.

From this scripture we clearly can see that God will *demand an account* from every person for the death of another person, because everyone bears that image of God upon them.

That is why in the bible if you see another person being murdered and you stand by you are held as guilty as the murderer before God, and He will demand an account from you, because it was up to you to try to **prevent** that murder taking place, not standing idly by watching what is happening.

Whilst I was doing this study, I suddenly remembered Moses killing the Egyptian – I had a

problem for a moment. So, I prayed and sought the Lord, and as usual when I least expected it, He answered.

This was what He said, *“Moses killing of the Egyptian came into this category, he didn’t stand idly by but defended one of his own countrymen.”* If you know the story, he was subsequently accused by a Hebrew slave of the murder, and he did a runner into the desert.

We will look at the cities of refuge which God provided for such eventualities later. But Moses ‘crime’ was not a crime but killing during prevention of a crime, which makes it manslaughter, a completely different thing.

Exactly the same principle applies regarding animals.

If an animal kills someone, God demands that that animal should be put to death.

Something we really do need to get in our thinking is that God is a God of **principle** – the way He has done something in the past, is the way He will always do it. We saw this when did our foundational study of Revelation. God is consistent you always know where you are with Him.

So, what do we see from this verse? What happens when a murder takes place? Capital punishment.

“From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man’.⁶whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed: for in the image of God He made man.”

You couldn’t have it much clearer than this could you?

This has nothing to do with **vengeance**; this is God’s righteous judgement, and indeed there must be **no** motive for vengeance in it whatsoever.

This is the Biblical principle, a life for a life.

God says putting someone in prison for 30 years does not pay the price for a life because that puts a value on life, and life is priceless.

It is not ours to give and it is not ours to take away.

In this context, I do not propose to address the abortion issue in this teaching but consider this scripture in the light of our ‘abortion on demand’ policy. It is murder. Did you know that the shedding of innocent blood defiles the land if it is not cleansed?

All life is God’s. **All** of it. Only He has the right to take it. He feels very strongly when someone interferes with the creation of life – I’m not talking about birth control here - or the taking of life, in **Genesis 38:8-10** Onan refuses to consummate his marriage in the way God designed, and God kills him.

God wanted a people for Himself, and this man was refusing to play his part. Just have a look at the story sometime. God takes him out.

When you imprison someone for premeditated murder, you put a value on the person who was murdered – that value is the price it costs to imprison the offender for 30-35 years – to

take away their freedom. Say it is £1m – what you are saying is when that £1m is spent, that's paid the cost of the life. Not so, even without the word of God, we can see that is not right.

The only thing that will satisfy God's righteousness is to replace one priceless thing with another. So, Jesus had to come to die for us. One priceless thing for another. Right the way through the Bible you will see the principle, a life for a life.

Another thing we see from verse 6 is that God doesn't remove the murderer. He demands that **society** take responsibility for that.

This is our mandate.

Human responsibility.

The institution of human government:

One of the things that God did after the flood was to institute what we call human government on the earth.

This was established to carry out God's righteous requirements on earth. After the flood, **man** had the **responsibility** to see that justice was done, according to God's standard. And this verse tells us what the role of government is – it is to resist evil in the land and to deal with that evil - that is actually what the role of government is. Government must have judges and police and an army at their disposal; that is part of their God-given mandate.

When we covered the doctrine of war, you will remember there were, after the flood, four God given institutions, and the institution of human government was one. If you want to see more of this you need to get Passing the Baton 9 – the 'Doctrine of war' and have a look in there.

What God is saying here is, unlike before the flood when it was God and God alone who dealt with evil doers, now he is **delegating** that authority to man - **men** were to be appointed to deal with evil in society. Men now are going to carry out capital punishment.

That does not mean that individual men are to do it - it's not a lynch mob - it means a plurality of men to carry out this delegated responsibility. This isn't licence for man to take the law into his own hands. This is people in positions of authority, these are people, delegated by God, who will judge a man for his sin and carry out the sentence.

Clearly then, God has instituted government and that is what is meant by national government. So, a king, a prince, a prime minister, a member of the police force, a magistrate or a judge, the authorities over us, are God's ministers in a society. It's not saying that they are born again or anything like that, but they are *God's ministers* within a society.

What is happening in this country, and indeed globally, is that we have humanism developing at an alarming rate.

A definition of **Humanism** is a belief in human-based morality – a system of thought that is based on the values, characteristics and behaviour that are believed to be best in human beings, rather than on any supernatural authority. The secular cultural and intellectual

movement of the Renaissance that spread throughout Europe as a result of the rediscovery of the arts and philosophy of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Source: Encarta dictionary.

Humanism then, is the denial of any power or moral value superior to that of humanity; the rejection of religion in favour of a belief in the advancement of humanity *by its own efforts* – the tower of Babel all over again.

This is setting the stage for the end time unveiling of the Antichrist.

Everything is moving inexorably towards the culmination, the climax of the history of mankind.

The stage is set and in God's timing, the Antichrist will walk on to it.

Humanism will believe anything but the truth and will tolerate anything but righteousness.

It is a very dangerous thing.

Humanism and 666:

Here's a few interesting little facts. In the book of Revelation, we see the number which will represent the fullness of man's iniquity – 666. The cup of man's iniquity, **dictionary definition:** wickedness, evil, sin, vice, injustice, crime, extreme immorality, will be full and it will be time for judgement.

God's righteous judgement, that is what the book of Revelation is all about.

God's judgement when mankind's sin is full, is complete. Sin must be judged.

It is this **exaltation** of man which is the force which will finally give rise to the Antichrist whose name is the number of man 666 – he will be the personification of evil, so God uses the number of completion - simple as that, this is the reason behind the number, it is totally, 100% man or humanism, fallen man's idea of government.

Numerically his name will probably add up to 666 as well.

It is Mystery Babylon unveiled.

Man was created on the 6th day and 666 is the culmination, the fullness, of man's rebellion against God, just as 13x13x13 was the culmination of evil when Jesus was crucified on the cross. This in numerical terms is what was written above Jesus head - 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews' when the totality of sin was laid upon Him at Calvary.

Numbers are very important in the Bible and have a significance all their own. Spiritual arithmetic. Both Hebrew and Greek letters have a numerical value. Maybe we will do a study sometime – very interesting. The name Jesus adds up to 888 – eight is the number of resurrection, so be encouraged.

Have another one, 'the devil who is called Satan' adds up to 13x13x13, the fullness of sin which was laid on Jesus at the cross.

But if you don't accept His offer of free pardon, then judgement comes. It has to; right now we are in a time of grace, before judgement.

So, the role of government is to **resist** evil in the land and to deal with that evil – that is the Biblical role of government. So, they must have judges and police to deal with the evil in society.

Before the flood, God did the judging:

Prior to the flood no man had the right to take another's life and there was no such thing as capital punishment -

Genesis 4:8

"⁸Now Cain talked with Abel his brother, and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose against Abel his brother and killed him."

The first murder. One of Adam's sons, Cain, kills his brother because he is jealous of God's acceptance of Abel's offering and rejection of his own.

He gets Abel in a field, raises the knife and shouts – *"You want blood, have this!"* and slits his throat.

You will ask how I know that this is the way he killed Abel, in **Genesis 4:10** God says Abel's blood is *'crying from the ground'*. Before the flood God dealt with this. He would not allow mankind to carry out judgement on each other, He did it.

After the flood, had Cain killed Abel, he would have been put to death by the delegated authority God gave to man.

In **Genesis 9** we have the role of government.

The duty of every government is to carry out God's righteous judgements in the land, **but it must never be in vengeance or anger**. This is why, any person who carries out the execution must be someone who is not involved at all. The official executioner. The person carrying out the execution is God's representative, carrying out God's judgement.

Exodus 21:12-14 in my bible it is headed up *'Rights of persons'* –

"¹²He who strikes a man so that he dies, shall surely be put to death. ¹³But if he did not lay in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. (city of refuge) ¹⁴But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbour, to kill him with guile (treachery), you shall take him from My altar, that he may die".

Capital punishment. These verses support it for **premeditated** murder.

But there is also provision for accidents.

In verse 13 we see that there is also provision for accidental death – when the axe head flies off and hits someone and he dies.

Notice that God **allows** the death to happen – He doesn't cause it, He allows it. This verse is also saying that if someone dies in an accident, God bears the responsibility for it. So, if you

have a car accident and someone is killed, God bears the responsibility for that, you are totally free from all guilt. Unless of course, you drove straight at them purposefully.

Verses 12 and 14 of Exodus 21 have nothing to do with vengeance but deal with God's righteous standards.

Numbers 35:30-33 – notice the Bible has a lot to say about this subject.

*“³⁰Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses: but one witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty.³¹Moreover, you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. ³²And you shall take no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the priest. ³³So 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.”*

Verse 33 is why God demands the death of a murderer.

This verse is saying that every innocent victim that has been murdered, if their life is not fully accounted for to God's satisfaction, the land in which they died is polluted and God looks at the government and the people of that land and they are under His curse automatically because if they do not put the murderer to death, they are not upholding God's righteous judgements.

The more innocent victims that die, the more their blood cries from the ground. And God hears. So, it is a nonsense, in our land, to think that we are fulfilling God's righteous standards by locking people up in a prison for a number of years.

What this means is this, since 1965 our land has been getting worse and worse in God's sight and gets worse as it goes on. This land of Great Britain cannot be cleansed until we see a reintroduction of righteous laws and capital punishment.

This is not my view, this is what God says.

You may say, and someone said to me recently, “*what about Jesus...?*” meaning that Jesus was meek and mild, and God was a God of wrath in the Old Testament, but He is a God of love in the new, and surely He abolished the death penalty.

Beloved, one of the things about God is that **He never, ever changes. He is immutable, so He must be the same in the New Testament as in the Old.**

The whole problem lies with our understanding of the scriptures, God's love and God's righteousness and our humanistic approach to the Word of God.

In **Psalm 50:21** He says “*You thought I was altogether like you*”. In this psalm, which is a psalm speaking of the Lord being the judge of all people, He calls us to account for “*casting My word behind you, consenting with thieves and partaking with adulterers*” – look it up sometime and you can see for yourselves.

Where then in the New Testament do we find support for capital punishment?

Matthew 23:34,35 Jesus is here speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, condemning them for

their unrighteousness –

*“³⁴Therefore indeed, I send you prophets, wise men and scribes, some of them you will kill and crucify and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, ³⁵that **on you** may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”*

Romans 13:1-4 the classic passage which shows us exactly how to conduct ourselves under the government of our country.

*“¹Let **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.²Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgement on themselves.³For 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. ⁴For 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.”*

Remember, human government came in **Genesis 9** after the flood. Verse 2 is not saying you cannot say when a government is wrong, it is saying you must not be anti-establishment or revolutionary. You will never be blessed as a Christian if you are anti-establishment or a revolutionary. The best way to see a government removed if they are anti God (opposed to Him) is to pray about it. If you see things are wrong, pray about them, do not go on marches to demonstrate about them.

Verse 3 Romans 13 and here we have the role of government. At the time Paul is writing you have a madman on the throne of the Roman Empire, Caligula – totally insane. But despite this, Paul writes that government must be maintained and prayed for.

Verse 4 is the one we want. This verse speaks of capital punishment. See the word “sword” this is not the Greek word for a regimental sword, the Greek word here is the word that was used for **capital punishment**.

This verse is saying that government has the right to capital punishment, and it should be used when necessary.

By the way everybody who has ever written on the book of Romans agrees that **chapter 13:4** is a reference to capital punishment.

In **Acts 25:9-11** we see Paul before Festus, having been brought before him by the “*high priest and the chief men of the Jews*”.

“⁹Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favour, answered Paul and said ‘Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?’ ¹⁰Then Paul said ‘I stand at Caesar’s judgement seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong as you very well know. ¹¹For if I am an offender, or have committed anything worthy 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.”

Paul is saying here in **verse 11** – “*I am willing to die if I have done anything wrong*”, he is not

saying, *“I am a Christian and capital punishment is not of God because God is love”*. Paul accepts that capital punishment is correct, and he is prepared to die if necessary.

God demands that if a person kills another person deliberately, they are to lose their own life. He further demands that the sentence is to be carried out by the government of the land.

That is the simple statement of what the Bible teaches about capital punishment.

God is love:

It is all based on God’s righteous standards. His character and the other characteristics of Him. But that is not enough, I do want to deal with those who say that it is out of character with God, the people who have problems with capital punishment.

1. They say that capital punishment cannot be in harmony with God because God is love. With this lobby the “God is love” emphasis is all. They leave out all the other characteristics of God and major on love. Well, yes, God is love, that is absolutely true, but He is also absolute righteousness and justice – Jesus would not have had to go to the cross if there was only the issue of love at stake. In fact, it would make the cross a nonsense. If God was only love, He would have said *“enjoy yourselves, I understand, I will overlook everything, I just love you to bits, I don’t care what you do, I just love you”* – we **are** accepted **in** the Beloved. We **are** accepted because our sin has been paid for by Jesus and for no other reason. God **does** love us, but He would let us go to the lake of fire had we not believed on the price paid for us. The shed blood of Jesus.

In his absolute righteousness, holiness and justice, God is **offended** by sin. And because He is absolutely righteous, sin has to be dealt with and Jesus was the only one found good enough to pay that price. Beloved, sin is not something we do, it is something we are. In Adam, all die, in Christ, all live.

Let me show you how love operates in the case of capital punishment.

If a person who has committed premeditated murder is sentenced to death, and during the time they have before that sentence is carried out, they receive Jesus as Saviour and Lord, God *forgives* them of the crime they have committed and such is the love of God that the moment they die, they are face to face with the Lord.

An example would be Von Ribbentrop, one of the Nazi war criminals who put thousands of Jews to death; three days before his death sentence was due to be carried out, he was led to the Lord and received Jesus as his Saviour. He was still put to death because the law of the land had to be fulfilled, but he was face to face with Jesus and you will meet him when you get there. Grace.

Luke 23:39-43 and the story of the thief on the cross -

“³⁹Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us”. ⁴⁰But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong”. ⁴²then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom”.⁴³And Jesus said to him “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

Jesus was murdered.

2. Human agencies are fallible and innocent people may die, this is the second objection. That is true, that is why God always insisted on two or three eyewitnesses to the event. One witness was not enough. Circumstantial evidence was not enough. There had to be two or three eyewitnesses. There is something else here too while we are here, the worst case of an innocent person being put to death for a crime they did not commit was – Jesus. This was the grossest miscarriage of justice ever recorded. God allows in His wisdom what He could easily prevent by His power.
3. Capital punishment does not hold to the sanctity of life. Does abortion? Capital punishment, properly executed, holds fully to the sanctity of life in a way nothing else does.
4. Capital punishment is not a deterrent. That is totally irrelevant because it is not the question, the question is one of God's righteous standards.

Now the study is not quite complete, because there are certain people who know the Bible and they will say you must not use the Bible as a basis for capital punishment and they give three reasons to support their objections to the Biblical view of capital punishment.

1. Capital punishment disagrees with the sixth commandment – you shall not kill.
2. You cannot get capital punishment from the Bible because if you do, there are many other offences that are found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy and they say if murder is a capital offence, you have got to start putting children to death and homosexuals and they will then list some of the other offences and they say that capital punishment is wrong and you must not use the Bible as the basis to support it.
3. Jesus Himself opposed capital punishment.

These are valid objections, and we must face things like this and not try to skirt around them. So, let's have a look at them –

1. Capital punishment is against the sixth commandment.

Exodus 20:13

'You shall not kill'. In the King James Version, you have the word 'kill' and the Hebrew word for kill here is used 49 times in the Old Testament and it means **premeditated murder**. The NIV has murder, as does the New King James Version. If anyone would like to debate this point with you, you can ask them to explain

Exodus 21:12,14.

"¹²He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.'¹⁴ 'But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbour, to kill him with guile (treachery), you shall take him from My altar, that he may die".

So that is an easy one to deal with. By the way only two types of killing are acceptable as far as God is concerned:

- Capital punishment, and
- Warfare.

We learned this second one when we studied the doctrine of war.

2. There are many other offences that are capital punishment offences. In Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, you will find a total of 40 other capital offences. But the other capital offences, which they cite, relate specifically to the **nation of Israel**. Israel was a theocracy, which meant God was King over Israel, and God was the lawmaker, they didn't have a government, they had Him, as we will in the Millennium – those of you who attended the recent course on Revelation will be aware of this. So those offences related *solely* to Israel.

Remember, this prohibition regarding unlawful killing was made **before** the nation of Israel existed. This prohibition was given to Noah just after the flood. Let's just remind ourselves of the scripture –

Genesis 9:5,6

“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”.⁶whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed: for in the image of God He made man.”

So what we have in **Genesis 9** is for **all nations**. It is a **universal prohibition**.

Law and a theocracy:

What about those people who want to lump together all the other times when God said, the offence was unto death? To do this we must take a little detour and look at what it means to live under a theocracy.

If God is your King, it is a capital offence to worship a foreign god or idol. That would be a bit difficult in this day and age to enforce, particularly in Britain with our mixed culture and religions.

From this you will see that these prohibitions only related to Israel.

Exodus 19:5,6

“⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep my covenant (this was their marriage covenant - remember Israel is the wife of Jehovah just as the church is His bride, speaking of relationship here, not sexuality) then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.⁶And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

What God is saying here is that **Israel** as a nation, would be set apart from all the other nations to be **His** nation, a **Holy** nation, and God established in Israel what we would call a theocracy. Israel rejected God as King and wanted a king like the other nations around them, you can find this in **1 Samuel 8:1-8**.

In most nations there are two capital punishment offences, but the nations who keep these are getting less all the time – those of you with a computer look in Wikipedia the online encyclopaedia under ‘capital punishment’ and it will show you how nations are stopping this all around the world today. So, the two capital punishment offences in this country used to be –

- Murder
- Treason

In Britain today treason is no longer a capital offence, this was abolished in 1998 and in 1965 the law on capital punishment was done away with.

“Among countries around the world, almost all European and many Pacific Area states, including Australia, New Zealand, and Canada have abolished capital punishment. In Latin America, most states have completely abolished the use of capital punishment, while some countries, such as Brazil, allow for capital punishment only in exceptional situations, such as treason committed during wartime. The United States (the federal government and 36 of the states), Guatemala, most of the Caribbean and the majority of democracies in Asia (e.g. Japan and India) and Africa (e.g. Botswana and Zambia) retain it. South Africa, which is probably the most developed African nation, and which has been a democracy since 1994, does not have the death penalty. This fact is currently quite controversial in that country, due to the high levels of violent crime, including murder and rape.”

That was information from Wikipedia.

But if you lived in a theocracy, these are a few examples of the rules you would live under:

- (a) Sins that come in a category that refuse to worship God as He demands. When God is King things have to be done His way as He requires and if you refused to worship God as He required, then it was a treasonable offence because you were overthrowing His law and order.

So, in a theocracy, failure to circumcise your children was a capital offence. Mixing holy oil when you were not allowed to – that was also a treasonable offence.

- (b) Sins that are idolatry. If God is your King and you worship a foreign god, that is treason because you are worshipping another God and in doing so you are not doing what the King demanded. There are many offences in the category of treason, and capital offences such as homosexuality, but again it is not so in society today.

So, these other 40 odd crimes were specifically applying to the nation of Israel and not to us because they were under a **theocracy** at the time. There is your answer to objection number two.

3. Finally, the third objection - Jesus Himself was against capital punishment. They say Jesus said it was wrong and they quote– they quote other passages as well but I will use this one as an example -

“¹But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.²But early in the morning He came again into the Temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. ³Then

*the scribes and the Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery, and when they had set her in the midst,⁴they said to Him “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. ⁵Now **Moses in the law**, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?”*

⁶This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. ⁷So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them “He who is without sin among you, let him throw the stone at her first.” ⁸And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. ¹⁰When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹She said “No one, Lord”. And Jesus said “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more””.

Several issues here, not the least that Jesus is speaking to Jews and the Bible is a Jewish book. We must always remember this if we are to rightly divide the word of God.

Jesus did not say no capital punishment. On the contrary, He said, “*if you are without sin yourself, you carry out the sentence.*” What He was saying is “*this is not applicable with you as witnesses because your testimony is suspect*” – they had a hidden agenda, which was to accuse Jesus in order that they might do away with Him. Jesus found them out. They are using this woman to try to get to Jesus. Jesus sees right through what they are trying to do and turns their accusation back on themselves, and they walk away.

So that is not a problem passage. Jesus is **not** saying the law has been done away with, He is saying, you are not fit witnesses, nor are you fit to carry out the sentence. So, people who say that Jesus spoke out against capital punishment are not correct.

The law was given to Israel because the nations around them had no form of justice, and the punishment oftentimes was cruel and did not fit the crime.

For instance, if a boy was found stealing a loaf of bread, he could be flayed alive.

Israel was intended to be a *light* to the nations, drawing them to see the One true God and His righteousness.

Justice must not be carried out in vengeance; the Bible brings true justice into the world. So we see Jesus in **Matthew 5:38-42** - this actually is another passage people will use to try to say Jesus was against capital punishment -

³⁸You have heard that it was said ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. (Here He is quoting Deuteronomy 19:21) ³⁹ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also ⁴¹ and whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴²Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”

This whole passage is about retaliation, it is about letting the punishment fit the crime.

Jesus starts off by quoting from **Deuteronomy 19:21** – “*eye shall not pity: but life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*” In other words, the **punishment must fit the crime**. And if a life has been taken, a life must be paid.

Let the punishment fit the crime.

The clear word of scripture is that if a person commits premeditated murder they must be put to death by the state.

This is done without vengeance or anger and in no way is capital punishment to be thought of as a deterrent – it is to meet the righteous requirements and standards of God.

To make our decision then, let’s look at what it would have been like to be under a theocracy and see how much better the system that Israel had was than our own.

Israel had no police force. It was the responsibility of every citizen to act as a policeman. If you saw evil being perpetrated, you had to deal with it. God’s system produced maximum involvement and responsibility of the individual. They did not have big courts like we do. They had many small courts, and the trial was held as soon as possible after the offence.

No-one could be under the threat of capital punishment unless there were two or three eyewitnesses. One witness was not enough. God also put restraint in His law on the witnesses.

The execution in those days was carried out by stoning, and the eyewitnesses had to throw the first stone. A false witness was dealt with in a very good way. If there was a deliberately false witness given, whatever the punishment the accused was to bear, you got it yourself!

The ultimate deterrent.

If a crime was committed in your locality and the person who did the crime was never found, the locality had to make a lump sum payment to the victim’s family.

That would make people keep a watch as to who was doing the crime, because if you did not catch the culprit, it would cost you. That seems to me a very clever system. If there was vandalism in your local area, you had to pay for it if the culprit was not caught. So, you as a citizen were the local police force and this system worked wonderfully. Neighbourhood watch!

God made judgement real, and He also made sure that the punishment fitted the crime exactly. If a murder was involved, the person who did the murder was put to death.

If the crime required corporal punishment – beating – that was applied, but justly.

The third sentence was fining. If you let your neighbour’s ox fall into the ditch and did nothing, ox for ox! It would cost you.

Those were the three sentences, no imprisonment. Today in our society we have lost the fact that judgement is real and that one-day people will have to stand before God and give an account for how they have lived – not the believer I hasten to say, only your works will be judged – I am talking here about the unbeliever. So, with these sentences, judgement was

real, everybody knew what the system was and equally knew what the punishment would be. Imprisonment is anti-biblical. If you put an evil doer amongst other evil doers, they will be twice as bad when they come out.

The bible gives us sentences and if we were to apply these things, beating, fining, and letting them go, the Bible says they will not do it again. Of course, this does not apply where murder is concerned.

So, there you have God's 'spin' on justice and capital punishment in particular. You should have enough information now to make up your own mind about what you believe.

God bless you and thank you for listening.

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