



The Death Penalty

As I was listening to the radio last week, one topic that had everyone's attention was whether or not a mother convicted of drowning her five children should be put to death or be given life in prison. People from both sides of the issue passionately presented their arguments in trying to convince others of their viewpoint. While everyone is most certainly entitled to his or her opinion, I want to address a common theme I heard throughout the program. The theme I heard most often was, "The Bible says not to murder and that's what the government does when they put people to death." Their reasoning was the death penalty is wrong because God does not allow it. They would then quote Commandment number six (You shall not murder) of the Ten Commandments. This is a popular thought. However, as in all things, what does the Bible say? Can the government, whether state or federal, execute someone for violating the law of the land?

First, we must differentiate between executing someone for violating a law and murder. Murder is "the unlawful killing of a person." Execute is "to inflict capital punishment on; put to death according to law." The difference between the two is clear – one is going against established law and one is fulfilling the consequences established law!

Second, we must understand the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. To make a long story short, let us realize we are no longer under the Old Law (Old Testament). Therefore, the Ten Commandments are no longer binding on us. Paul said in Galatians 3:15-29 the purpose of the Old Law was to serve as a tutor (schoolmaster) to bring people to Christ. In Hebrews 8:6-13 we're told the Old Law was not perfect therefore a need for a more perfect law arose. In chapter 9:15-17 we're told Jesus instituted that new law with His death. In short, when Jesus died on the cross, He ordained a new law that we are expected to observe today, not the one of old (Col. 2:12-14).

Third, we must understand government is ordained by God. Paul said, "*Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God*" (Rom. 13:1). Whether we agree or disagree with how the government operates, we are obligated to subject ourselves to its authority, unless of course, it tells us to do things contrary to the will of God. Whenever we fight against the government (blowing up buildings, etc.) we are, in reality, fighting against God (Rom. 13:2).

Fourth, we must understand God authorizes the government to exercise capital punishment if it so desires. Paul wrote in Rom. 13:3-4, "*For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it (government, KC) is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it (government, KC) does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.*" Paul set forth a warning that if a person was going to participate in evil, he'd better be prepared to face the consequences, which could very well include capital punishment.

As I said earlier, people are free to hold whatever opinion on this matter they wish. However, let it not be said God is opposed to capital punishment. As we've seen, God actually **authorizes** its use in whatever capacity determined by the government He has ordained.

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