

Is Capital Punishment a Moral Act?

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Christians disagree on the answer to the question posited in the title of this paper. However, when it comes to questions regarding life and death, it does not matter one iota what you or I, as Christians, think or believe. The only Person qualified to comment on a vital issue such as this is the Author of life Himself, the infinite, sovereign, personal God of the universe. Thus it behooves each of us to reserve our finite opinions until we have consulted the infinitely, omniscient opinion of God Himself.

God has clearly stated His authority on matters of morbidity (I.e. sickness) and mortality when He said, *See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life. I have wounded and I will heal and no one can deliver out of my hand.* (Deuteronomy 32:39) God may decide to put a person to death or He may compel others to do that in His place. If God has ever commanded an act of capital punishment, for whatever cause, then it must of necessity be a moral act. God, being an infinitely holy and just being, could not command that which would be considered immoral or unjust.

We have all seen some well meaning but misinformed Christians parading outside of a state or federal penal institution where someone is about to be put to death by lethal injection, the electric chair or the gas chamber. The all-night vigil looks very impressive as the believers sing, pray and carry signs which carry such statements as "God is love" or "Vengeance is mine I will repay says the Lord" or "Thou shalt not kill." Each of those statements, when taken in their proper biblical context, is absolutely true. What they fail to convey however is God's incontrovertible command that those who commit certain crimes must be put to death, not by God but by man.

In Genesis chapter nine we find that God established the death penalty; the societal rule of capital punishment. He had just dealt that penalty on every person on Earth, except for the eight members of Noah's family, and He was then giving Noah a new commandment that would serve him in the remaining years of his life and every life to follow among those of his posterity; which includes us.

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. Genesis 9:6 The shedding of blood is no mere laceration, it has to do with murder. If we paraphrase the verse it would read that who ever murders a human being, is to be put to death by another human being; not by God. God administers His Vengeance in eternity.

A reading of the Old Testament laws in the book of Leviticus will show that God demanded the capital punishment for crimes that we would either consider minor offenses (dishonoring parents, or sodomy) or in which we would consider the death penalty to be cruel and unusual punishment.

Critics of we Christians who agree with the issuance of a death penalty for the commission of certain violent acts say that we are being inconsistent in our disfavor of the supreme court's decision regarding Roe v. Wade. By saying that a bay should not be aborted, and yet agreeing with capital punishment we are expressing a hypocritical ideology. That is just not so. When an abortion is performed, the one who is murdered has no debt to pay to society, other than the inconvenience that his or her life has brought to the person wishing to have the murder committed.

Well meaning Christians who oppose the death penalty say that Jesus did not recommend it. They say that the New Testament has done away with the Old Testament. On the contrary, Jesus clearly stated the following: *You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not commit murder,' and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement...will be in danger of the fire of hell.* Matthew 5:21-22 The judgement of long ago was capital punishment and Jesus never said to eliminate that. In fact, Barabas, who was exchanged for Christ on the cross was to be put to death for his crimes as were the two thieves who were hung there with Christ. Christ never condemned the death penalty.

Jesus also said; *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets...* Matthew 5:17. The Law and the Prophets was a way of naming the Old Testament. A reading of the sermon on the mount will show that Jesus even embellished the Old Testament laws making them more stringent.

Some would add that by putting a person to death we have eliminated any chance that they will repent and be saved. God is sovereign in matters of salvation and if a person has been chosen to spend eternity with God He will see to it that they confess Jesus as Lord before they die.

Here are some facts concerning which you may be unaware:

In 2004 38 of the 50 states and the federal government had capital laws on the books.

In 2003 only 6 persons were put to death for crimes; in 2004 the number rose to 59.

Of those put to death in 2004 36 were white, 19 were black, 3 were white Hispanics and 1 was Asian. All were males. 58 died by lethal injection and one by electrocution.

To oppose the death penalty is to oppose the Word of God; it's that simple.