

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT DEFINED

Capital Punishment is:

- Taking the life of a person who has committed an extremely serious crime;
- Based on the violation of the laws in a particular society.

CHURCH POSITIONS REGARDING CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

SOUTHERN BAPTIST

Approves in certain cases

ROMAN CATHOLIC

Opposes in most cases

METHODIST CHURCH

Opposes in all cases

MENNONITE CHURCH

Opposes in all cases and encourages speaking out against it

ARGUMENTS AGAINST CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

1. It gives man a responsibility that belongs only to God.
2. It is inhumane and barbaric.
3. It does not deter crime/murder.
4. It is disproportionately high among blacks, other minorities and the poor.

5. It violates the sixth commandment “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex. 20:13).
6. It was abolished along with the law of Moses.
7. There is too great a chance to punish the innocent and not be able to rectify it.
8. It contradicts the New Testament teaching of love and forgiveness.

THE BIBLE AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

1. After destroying a world filled with violence, wickedness and corruption (Gen. 6:5-11) by the Great Flood, God instituted a new order of government for mankind. One of the laws that He established was a “life for a life” (Gen. 9:5-6).
2. The Mosaic Law required the death penalty for several Israelite offences:

Premeditated murder (Exodus 21:12-14,22-23; Leviticus 24:17; Numbers 35:16-21);
Kidnapping (Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7); **Striking or cursing his parents** (Exodus 21:15,17; Leviticus 20:9);
Rebelliousness (Deuteronomy 17:12). The next six capital crimes can be identified as more specifically pertaining to religious matters;
Sacrificing to false gods (Exodus 22:20);
Violating the Sabbath (Exodus 35:2; Numbers 15:32-36); **Blasphemy** (Leviticus 24:10-16,23); **Human sacrifice** (Leviticus 20:2);
Divination (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:26,31;

20:27; Deuteronomy 18:9-14); **Adultery** (Leviticus 20:10-21; Deuteronomy 22:22); **Bestiality** (Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 20:15-16); **Incest** (Leviticus 18:6-17; 20:11-12,14); **Homosexuality** (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13); **Premarital sex** (Leviticus 21:9; Deuteronomy 22:20-21); **Rape** (Deuteronomy 22:25-27).

3. Christ had several golden opportunities to denounce capital punishment in the Law of Moses and He did not do it. (Jn. 8:1-11; Matt. 5:21; cf. Ex.21:12; Matt. 26:52).

4. Paul acknowledged capital punishment.

- He recognized the right of the Roman government to execute capital punishment (Acts 25:10-11).

- He said that the government is God’s minister (Rom. 13:4). Based on this verse we can draw five conclusions on the government’s role in capital punishment:

1. *The government is to bear the sword.* The sword symbolizes death and the government has the right to exercise capital punishment

2. *The government is to serve God.* The government is God’s servant (diakonia), acting on His behalf.

3. *The government is a “revenger”* (the one who carries out God’s penalty).

4. *The government is to execute wrath* (punishment based on God's anger; see also Psalm. 7:11 and Romans 1:18).

5. *The government is authorized by God to deal with evil doers.*

SOCIETAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

1. It should be administered under a God-honoring government (Rom. 13:4).

2. In the rare cases when capital punishment is called for, there should be absolutely no doubt regarding the guilt of the criminal. In the Old Testament you needed two or three eye-witnesses (Deut 17:6).

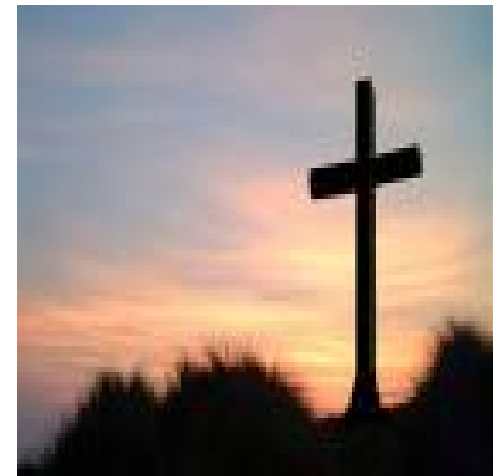
3. Laws concerning capital punishment should be not written arbitrarily. They should only be put in place after much thought and consideration. Moses implemented laws regarding capital punishment only after spending much time in the presence of God (Exodus-Deuteronomy).

4. Societies filled with prejudice, racism, inequities and corruption cannot carry out capital punishment in the manner in which it was intended (Eccle. 4:1).

CONCLUSION

There are varied opinions in the Body of Christ concerning capital punishment. Regardless of one's position, all have to agree that the Bible supports the concept of capital punishment. It must further be acknowledged that we live in a sinful world and there is the grave danger of inappropriate application and misuse of capital punishment. Therefore only in extreme situations (ex. brutal premeditated murders, serial killings, etc.) should it be considered and only after there is clear and convincing evidence of guilt. It should also be done without consideration of the race or financial status of the guilty party.

THE BIBLE AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT



By

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