

The Death Penalty

Timothy McVeigh's execution has brought the debate over capital punishment to the forefront once again. Of course, there are those for it and those against it. One recent Fox News Channel pole revealed that nearly 70 percent of the nation approves of it. However, the majority is not always right. God's word is right, and it reveals the death penalty to be not only just, but necessary.

First, God has taught the taking of a life is sinful and is to be punished in kind. When Noah left the ark, God told him, "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. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man" (Genesis 9:5-6). Again, God said, "Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death" (Lev. 24:17).

Second, some complain that the death penalty is nothing but vengeance killing. They say, "Eye for eye" is wrong. The death penalty has nothing to do with vengeance. Rather, it has to do with controlling and limiting evil within a society. "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. The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. **So you shall put away the evil from among you**" (Deut. 17:6-7).

Third, some may say, "You have quoted from the Old Testament, but not the New. Isn't our authority to come from the New?" Authority definitely is to come from the New Testament (Col. 3:17). It gives authority for the death penalty. The Spirit said,

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. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 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. 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 (Rom. 13:1-4).

The "sword" is a reference to capital punishment, and thus authorized by

God. When a man stands against the death penalty, he stands against God.

Fourth, some say that standing for the death penalty and against abortion is hypocritical. It is true that we who oppose abortion believe in the sanctity of life. Man was created in the image of God and is, therefore, precious in His sight (Gen. 1:26-27). Even so, God, the One who created man, has authorized taking the life of one who has committed crimes worthy of such. Babies are innocent; they have committed nothing and are guilty of nothing. There is no authority from God to take their life; He condemns it (cf. Ex. 21:22-25). What is hypocritical is to promote the killing of defenseless, innocent lives while opposing the execution of vile criminals.

As with all matters, so with the death penalty, we must allow God's word to be our guide. It supports putting to death those who commit certain crimes. Let us stand behind this precept for the betterment of society as a whole and a deterrent to men individually.

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