



*"The Churches of God Outreach Ministries provides leadership, information, and biblical teaching in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19-20"*

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## Mini Study

### Capital Crime

*"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to [execute] wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:1-4).*

Violent dictators have stalked the earth since Nimrod some four thousand years ago. Perhaps most, but certainly not all, have escaped the hangman's noose. Some, like Mussolini, have met a grizzly end at the hands of their once oppressed subjects. King Nebuchadnezzar ruled the area known today as Iraq in the sixth century BC. For his sins, he was literally turned out to pasture and lived like an animal for seven years. Saddam Hussein believed he was the reincarnation of that ancient king, and spent half a billion dollars re-building in Nebuchadnezzar's image. The "chattering classes" of today's world are horrified when such wicked men are executed. Should Christians be equally horrified?

- The premature death of any human being is tragic: a child torn from loving parents, an accidental death, or a life taken by violent hands. But a memorial service for someone with a fine reputation built over years of dedicated endeavour is a cause for celebration. As King Solomon wrote: *"A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death, than the day of one's birth."* (Ecclesiastes 7:1). But what of "the wicked?"
- What of a callous killer or one of those violent dictators? Society recognizes that in the interests of justice and security such should be removed from opportunity to kill again. The sentence is what is in dispute, and as often as not it is an all-to-short term in prison, with unrepentant murderers, pedophiles and rapists back on the streets seemingly in no time. It is evident that "rehabilitation" rarely works. What do the Christian Scriptures teach us about "crime and punishment" - especially of murderers?
- Opinion makers, including Christian opinion makers and leaders of churches, lobby vigorously for an end to "capital punishment," the death penalty; (one English bishop calls it "humiliating.") Political leaders create "collateral damage" in their unnecessary wars but hypocritically reject the death penalty. They won't rest until it is banned in every nation. For such Christians the imposition of death for murder or rape is seen as a reversion to barbarous "Old Testament" practice. The implication is that it is obsolete and that we are now more "civilized."
- Death for serious offences is indeed a law found in the Old Testament: *"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed"* was decreed by God in man's earliest days. And why? *"For in the image of God made he man"* (Genesis 9:6). They are God's words, His prescription for orderly human society. Israel's justice system is built on this, with death for a number of crimes against the person. Government failure to deal properly with crime in accord with Biblical teaching leads to the breakdown of society (Ezra 7:25-26,

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Ecclesiastes 8:11).

- Every nation has its criminal justice code, and surely even those of any faith would not doubt its necessity. The “Ten Commandments” are the foundation principles for all such codes, as they were for ancient Israel’s Constitution. Very few rulers would deny them a place, and the *Christian* Scriptures are no exception. As the apostle Paul states (see beginning paragraph of Romans 13:1-4). It is God who has delegated this obligation to mankind. His reference, of course, is to normal government, not to the psychopathic despot who murders and tortures his citizens.
- The Bible perfectly understands human nature. God’s Word recognizes that most of us are law-abiding (it is for our personal benefit) needing only a statement of what is and is not permissible. It also recognizes that there are “the wicked,” and has imparted the authority to appoint judges, and to pass appropriate sentences on the law-breaker. Exodus 20-23 provides examples of even-handed justice and natural equity. The Law also builds in the option of mercy in appropriate circumstances at the discretion of the judge, who, whether he understands it or not, is answerable to God. (Forgiveness by the victim is a personal matter.) Paul sums it so: “*We also understand that it [law] wasn’t given to control people who please God, but to control lawbreakers, criminals, godless people, and sinners. It is for wicked and evil people, and for murderers, who would even kill their own parents. The Law was written for people who are sexual perverts or who live as homosexuals or are kidnappers or liars or won’t tell the truth in court. It is for anything else that opposes the correct teaching*” (I Timothy 1:9-10 CEV).
- Crimes against the person - murder, rape, kidnap, sexual deviation, family violence *etc* - merit the ultimate penalty: *death*. These defile the very image of God in man and are, in God’s eyes, the greatest of all crimes and must be publicly seen as such. Carried out by the State it deters personal vengeance, revenge, blood feuds, and removes the wicked from the earth until resurrected for judgment (John 5:28-29). To reject capital punishment, with appropriate safeguards, flies in the face of the teachings of Scripture. Those who embrace true Biblical Christianity are few among earths billions. As wrote Paul, they are law-abiding. But society in general, requires the rule of law with appropriate penalties - up to and including the hangman’s noose. It is *God’s* remedy - anciently and today.

*(All Scripture references are KJV unless otherwise noted.)*

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