



## Just War, Self Defense, and Capital Punishment

These topics might not be a heavily talked about subject until there is war between countries or more. I want to address this based on what the Lord has shown and taught me. One thing is very clear though about God. He is a good God and He values life as the creator of it. His heart is not to kill. However, there are certain instances where God permits it. Let me also make this very clear. I'm not writing this to promote killing. Far from that. My heart is to shed light and bring about some understanding by the grace of God.

As much as there is legal and Biblical ground for killing, murder is not permitted. Exodus 20:13 says "Thou shalt not kill." (KJV)

The NIV Bible translation translates the word "kill" as "murder". There are two Hebrew words for the word "kill"—harag and raw-tsakh. "raw-tsakh" is the Hebrew word for the word "kill" here, which means "murder". So, it is right to say, "Thou shalt not murder".

Also, if this is saying "thou shalt not kill", then it will be taken by many to say that you can't kill an animal for food, no capital punishment (killing of the killer by civil authority) and no going to war. These would be extremes that violate the Word of God.

On the other hand, some have taunted the King James Version as an inaccurate translation because of the way this "kill" word is translated here in Exodus 20:13. So, is the correct word "kill" or "murder"? Which is which? I believe it could also be that the meaning is in between murder and killing because God can translate a Bible into another without error if He could write one through man. That could be the reason why the King James Version has Jesus quoting Exodus 20:13 in one place using the word "kill" (Matthew 5:21), and in another he used the word "murder" (Matthew 19:18).

Killing, such as murder, is prohibited in the Word of God and that is probably why the King James version translates Exodus 20:13 as "thou shalt not kill." However, even though the killing of a fellow human being is prohibited, Ecclesiastes 3:3 says there is "a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;" The Hebrew word for "kill" in this verse is the word "HARAG" which simply means to smite with deadly intent.

Killing is Biblically permitted in instances such as capital punishment, the killing of animals for food, sacrifice, and war. Not just one word is used to express God's heart on the issue.

### **Capital Punishment/Civil Punishment by Death**

Capital punishment is killing/death that is administered by an authority, such as government, for crimes committed, such as the murder of another person.

When Paul was advocating grace over the law, he was referring to salvation. No one can be justified before God by their own good works. One can only be saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), nothing more—not even your good works on your best day.

Even though we have been saved by grace it does not eliminate the law or the rule of law. We must still obey the laws of the government. The law will take its course whether someone has been justified by grace or not. The law is required because not everyone has a revelation of grace or functions perfectly in it.

According to Romans 13:1-7, government (authorities) are to be a terror to those who do evil, but praise to those who do good works. The authority was put in place by God to bring wrath upon evildoers. The Word calls this leadership and authority "ministers of God" for good. One of the ways they minister good is by removing the evildoer. This is one of the reasons some people are put to death. There are some things worthy of death, even under grace. Acts 25:11 says, "For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar."

Someone can experience the death penalty, yet if he believes on Jesus, or has believed in Him, goes straight into the presence of God.

Rather than oppose the death penalty that is clearly spelled out in Scripture, the body of Christ should ensure that as the evildoer worthy of death is headed to the gallows, we have ministered salvation by grace to him, even if he is to die by the law as executed by the authorities (Romans 13:1-7).

Simply put, there are consequences to evildoing, both to believers and unbelievers, such as capital punishment.

- a) Romans 13:1-4 points out that God has given the government authority to execute wrath on those who do evil.
  - i) This includes the death penalty.

- ii) Capital punishment limits the spread of evil and sin. It was instituted to put in check and lessen the amount of crime in order to better protect the innocent. Imagine a world where evil people never died. What a messed up world that would be! Praise God for death in this sinful world; it limits sin.
- b) “Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” —Matthew 26:52
  - i) They that take the sword shall perish by the sword.
  - ii) This is a reference to capital punishment.
- c) “For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.” —Acts 25:11
  - i) This verse demonstrates that there is an evil which is worthy of death. Imagine a society without capital punishment. This civil punishment by death serves to establish a limit to certain kinds of crimes.
  - ii) Capital punishment is crucial because it places value on the life of the murdered victim. Often, many people place tremendous value on the life of the murderer and the scare of capital punishment, but consider very little the value of the life of the deceased.
  - iii) Capital punishment also serves as a major deterrent to others carrying out the same evil, but mainly to stop that very murderer from murdering another person.
  - iv) Capital punishment is a deterrent and we see it all through the Scriptures.
- d) A killing that is premeditated is murder and the man who does so shall be killed (capital punishment) for killing the other man.
  - i) The blood of the slain, in this case, shall be avenged. See Deuteronomy 19:11-13 and Numbers 35:16.
- e) “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee. But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.” — Exodus 21:12-14

- f) 1 John 3:15 says that murder is not only just the very act, but that a thought or desire to do so is the same as the very act of murder in God's eyes.
  - i) To God, hatred in one's heart=murder.
  - ii) Murder is not justified killing, but unjustified killing.

### Self-Defense

Although I have separated war and self-defense, many times there is self-defense during war.

- a) "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." —Matthew 5:39
  - i) We must know when to fight back and when to turn the other cheek.
  - ii) This verse is not instructing us to let evil have its full course, but that we should not repay evil for evil. Does this mean that we should not do a thing about evil? God forbid.
  - iii) Through the Scriptures, there is room for self-defense, just war, and punishment by civil authorities, which may include capital punishment.
  - iv) This passage of scripture above is speaking about resisting the person rather evil itself. We are to resist the devil and the evil itself, not the instrument or vessel being used by the devil. For instance, the devil uses money many times to do evil. We are to resist the act of evil not the medium of evil, which is money in this case.
- b) David showed mercy to his enemy, Saul, but went on to fight against all other enemies.
  - i) If we are being persecuted for Jesus' sake and/or for righteousness' sake, we should turn the other cheek. We should not retaliate.
- c) A killing that is done ignorantly, or as an accident, or even in self-defense, is not murder. (Deuteronomy 19:4-6).
  - i) It is manslaughter, and the man who does so shall not be killed, (capital punishment) according to the Scriptures.

- ii) In order to protect such a man, the Lord commanded a section of the land to be a land/city of refuge for this manslayer. He would flee to that city (Numbers 35:11) and be there until the high priest died. If he left that city and was found by the avenger, it was his fault if he was killed.
  - Deuteronomy 19:1-14
  - Numbers 35:9-28
  
- d) If a thief is killed while breaking into someone's house, this is not considered murder and the owner of the house (slayer) shall not be killed (Exodus 22:2-3).
  
- e) "Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm." —Proverbs 3:30
  - i) There is a place for just striving and that's only if it is with a cause or someone has done you harm. Self-defense and a just war can come under this Scripture.
  
- f) "A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood," —Proverbs 6:17
  - i) If there is shedding of innocent blood, there is equally shedding guilty blood.
  - ii) God abhors unjustified killing This is innocent blood. The killing of animals for food, self-defense, and just war is all not considered shedding innocent blood. These kinds of killing are justified killings.
  - iii) The killing of children in the womb is also unjustified killing—murder (Exodus 20:13).
    - The killing of a child in the womb through abortion is truly innocent blood. All babies are innocent.
  - iv) Infanticide is also ungodly and killing of a baby that has survived abortion.

#### Just War

Although there can be a war between two different groups within a nation or state, the kind of war I'm referring to is when one nation goes into armed conflict with a different nation to protect its citizens or retaliate for the killing of its people.

Also I must mention that I'm not for war. Not all wars are righteous war. Some nations go into war in a ungodly way just because they are mad at another nation. Others go to war as an imperialist nation to take over the sovereignty of another nation.

And Moses said unto them, If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the LORD to war, And will go all of you armed over Jordan before the LORD, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him, And the land be subdued before the LORD: then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the LORD, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD. But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out. —Numbers 32:20-23

- a) Moses was encouraging the Israelites to go before the Lord to war to drive out His enemies from before Him and the land that was subdued before Him. If they did this, they would return guiltless before the Lord and all Israel and they would have the possession of the land before the Lord, but if they refused to go to war, their sin (sin—singular of not going to war) would find them out or catch up with them.
- b) Moses took a refusal to fight in a war as sin against the Lord. This shows that not all war is evil and not getting involved as required can be sin before the Lord.

Because there will be war, nations shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom (Matthew 24:4-9), there is a need to:

- i) Prepare for war. (Joel 3:9-10)
  - ii) Teach men and women to war. (Judges 3:1-2)
    - Ecclesiastes 3:8
    - 1 Chronicles 5:19-22
    - Numbers 1:1-3
    - Jeremiah 6:14
    - Psalm 27:3; 91:7
    - Proverbs 20:18; 24:6
    - Psalm 120:6-7
  - b) Sometimes peace is gained through military or armed conflict; otherwise, peace will always be temporary. Sometimes war is the only option for peace.
- John 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. —John 18:36
- a) This verse reveals what Jesus would have done if His kingdom were a physical kingdom. His servant would have fought had His kingdom were to be a physical one not a spiritual one.

Just war, self-defense, and capital punishment are not murder. Murder is the premeditated killing of another human—not an animal. This was and is not permitted based on the Word of

God and results in capital punishment (Exodus 20:13). It is important to note that manslaughter (Involuntary killing) due to negligence or self-defense is not considered murder, hence, the city of refuge was set up to protect the killer (Numbers 35:25-28).

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