

Capital Punishment- *A Divine Decree*



A Collection of sermons preached by
W. E. Best

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Spring Assembly of Christ

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October 2014

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Capital Punishment—A Divine Decree Part 1

(Gen. 4:1-16)

W.E. Best

The punishment of death for murder is a Divine decree. Death for murder is recognized from the beginning of mankind. This truth was written on the conscience of Cain, the firstborn of Adam and Eve. He said, "...I shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and it will come about that whoever finds me will kill me" (Gen. 4:14 NASB).

Cain deserved to die, but God did not will that he should die immediately. His long, miserable life as a vagrant would be a terror to others to not commit such a heinous crime. Who but the sovereign God could prevent the guilty person's death for a greater lesson at that particular point in human history?

Cain's mother mistook him for the promised "seed of the woman" (Gen. 3:15; 4:1). Cain could not be the Christ who would bruise Satan's head. The angel Gabriel was not sent to Eve. He passed by Eve, Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, Elizabeth, and all the other mothers in Israel and visited the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:26-38).

Eve's mistake of thinking Cain was the promised seed (the Christ Man-child) was not her first. She was made for an inseparable unity and fellowship with Adam. The manner of her creation laid the foundation for the moral ordinance of marriage for all time. By this, the priority of the man and the dependence of the woman on the man are established as an ordinance of Divine creation, not evolution. This ordinance forms the root of that love with which man loves the woman as himself. Therefore, marriage becomes a type of love and life that exists between Christ and His assembly (Eph. 5:22-32).

Like the stars, man and woman differ in their glory (I Cor. 15:41; 11:7). Each has characteristics that are peculiar and distinctive. Man is known for his courage, strength, and stability. Woman, who is man's completion, is known for her beauty, grace, and dependence. Therefore, man and his completion were not Adam (man) and Steve (man), but Adam (man) and Eve (woman). Will the laws of our government allow us to teach the Bible? The Scriptures destroy the assumption that homosexuality is another lifestyle or sexual orientation. When the government recognizes homosexuality as another lifestyle, it will be forced to legalize polygamy, incest, and all other unnatural things.

Genesis 2 records the words of God through Moses that are written to reveal the truth that marriage is the deepest corporeal and spiritual unity of man and woman. Monogamy must be held before the eyes of all mankind as the form of marriage ordained by God.

The woman was the last in creation, but she was first in sin. Eve's first mistake was to act apart from Adam. Adam's mistake was to listen to his wife instead of God.

Adam is the inclusive head of the human race. All human beings are derived from him. Therefore, it was necessary that woman not have an independent but a derived existence, an existence derived from the head of the human race. That is the reason the man and woman were not created the same as the animals. They were created and then brought together. As Eve was derived physically from Adam, who was head of the human race, the assembly of Christ is derived spiritually from Him. Christ is head of the assembly; therefore, it is necessary that believers not have an independent but a derived existence, which destroys Arminianism. A deeper sleep fell on Christ (Eph. 5:32; Acts 20:28) than that which fell on Adam when Eve was derived from him (Gen. 2:21). Eve's derivation from Adam is a deathblow to evolution.

Both Cain and Abel were worshippers, but their worship differed by reason of the difference in their persons and sacrifices (Gen. 4:1-8). The order of these two sons is significant. Cain foreshadowed those not chosen and Abel prefigured the chosen. The order here revealed what we all are by nature (fallen in Adam) and what some become by grace (made alive in Christ). As sin entered the angelic realm through Lucifer, sin entered the human realm through Adam. Man was created an upright being (Eccl. 7:29), but he was peccable in his uprightness. As the entrance of sin in the angelic realm did not affect the elect angels (I Tim. 5:21), the entrance of sin in the human realm will never affect the deliverance of the persons chosen in Christ (Eph. 1:4; II Tim. 1:9).

The Lord's interrogation of Cain in Genesis 4:6-10 included five questions. Three New Testament writers contributed to the answers to those questions:

1. "Why are you angry?" (Gen. 4:6 NASB). Cain was angry because "...the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard..." (Gen. 4:4, 5 NASB). The New Testament records five references to Cain and Abel, which show that the two men differed in character, offering, and faith (Matt. 23:34, 35; Heb. 11:4; 12:24; I John 3:11, 12; Jude 11).

Cain's character is revealed in his being of the evil one (I John 3:12). He was under the power of the evil world system as well as his own depraved flesh (Jude 11). Furthermore, he was living the life of a religious hypocrite. Without any reference to Cain, Abel's "righteous blood" is mentioned in Matthew 23:34-35. Observe the last two "woes" in Matthew 23:27-36. The most scathing language Jesus Christ used is found in Matthew 23.

The first question the Lord (Yahweh) asked was to arouse Cain to his realization of a heinous sin he was about to commit—murder. In an objective way, the Lord let Cain know what he was on the verge of doing. Therefore, he would have no one but himself to blame. (See Rom. 1:19-21.) John gave the answer to Cain's anger when he said, "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous" (I John 3:11, 12 NASB).

All reprobates go “the way of Cain” (Jude 11), whose way may be summed up in the following manner: (1) Human thought is opposed to Divine revelation. (2) Human willfulness is opposed to Divine revelation. (3) Human hatred is opposed to Divine love. (4) Human hostility is opposed to Divine favor. (5) Human loneliness is opposed to Divine fellowship.

2. “Why has your countenance fallen?” (Gen. 4:6 NASB). The words “If you do well” of Genesis 4:7 do not teach that forgiveness is achieved by doing good deeds. Therefore, a person is incorrect to impute that meaning as being from the Lord in Genesis 4:7. (See Rom. 4:2, 4; 11:6.) The sinner does not merit forgiveness. Abel’s faith was the gift of God, and by his work of faith he obtained witness that he was righteous (Heb. 11:4).

Faith does not bestow reality where there is none. Subjective faith, which is God’s gift to the elect in regeneration, is only the channel through which objective faith flows. Subjective faith alone does not save. If it did, all cultists would be saved. Abel’s faith is mentioned, but there is no reference to Cain’s faith. He did not have God’s gift of faith. Distinction must be made between the act of believing and that which is believed.

3. “Will not your countenance be lifted up?” (Gen. 4:7 NASB). If Cain had done the right thing, he would have been lifted up with pride. However, he did not do the correct thing in the correct way because he could not. His way was the “way of Cain” (Jude 11), not the way of the Lord. Before someone offers objection to this, he should read the words of Christ in John 10:1-26.

Following this third question the Lord said, “And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Gen. 4:7 NASB). Cain had nothing but stubborn silence in response to what the Lord said. His jealousy that culminated in hatred for Abel was the sin crouching at the door. His hatred was as inexcusable as the hatred the religious Jews had for Christ’s message in the synagogue (Luke 4:14-29) and the world has for Christ and His people (John 15:18, 19). Cain wasted no time in rising up against his brother. He murdered Abel. God foreordained that Abel become the first Christian martyr.

4. “Where is Abel your brother?” (Gen. 4:9 NASB). God does not ask questions in order to secure information. The question was in order to get Cain to confess his crime or harden himself by pleading not guilty. God knew what he would do before He asked him, but He asked for the benefit of other human beings.

This was the second cross-examination found in the Scriptures. The contrast between the first and second is revealing. Adam and Eve were evasive and full of excuses when God asked Adam, “Where are you?” and Eve, “What is this you have done?” (Gen. 3:9-13). The first cross-examination found Adam and Eve ashamed, although given to excuses. However, the second found Cain brazenly immodest and hardened.

Cain lied when he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9 NASB). Cain was a murderer and a liar; therefore, he had something in common with the Devil

who was and is his father (John 8:44). There are three kinds of liars. All mankind without exception are liars. All go forth from the womb speaking lies (Ps. 58:3). The elect of God are liars, but we repent because the Devil is not our father. God is our Father. The nonelect are liars because they are of their father the Devil (John 8:44).

Cain thought he was clever when he asked the Lord, "Am I my brother's keeper?" In Cain's wicked mind, he thought he had trapped the Lord with his question. Not only that, but since God approved his offering, he questioned God's providence.

5. "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground" (Gen. 4:10 NASB). God revealed that He knew Abel's blood had been spilled on the ground. Cain was trying to make a trivial matter (a matter of very little importance) of a capital crime—murder.

Those who oppose capital punishment say that God's mark (sign) on Cain protected him from being put to death for murdering Abel (Gen. 4:15). They think Cain's repentance, although weak, kept him from being killed. Some go so far as to say that God's desire was to manifest His forbearance and grace and by His longsuffering lead Cain to repentance. H. Bonar, the puritan, said, "How desirous is Jehovah not to curse, but to bless; not to smite, but to heal; not to destroy, but to save." How does this compare with God choosing some and passing by all others? Did God choose Abel and pass by Cain? Did He love Jacob and hate Esau? No one can believe in Divine election without believing in its opposite, reprobation.

The context prior to and the one subsequent to Genesis 4:14-15 unfold a mode of dealing with the first murderer that is at first somewhat difficult to understand. However, we must not forget that the sentence of death was already pronounced on Adam and all his posterity (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:6-21; Rom. 5:12-19). This sentence included Cain. The great crime of crimes was disobedience to the Divine will. Therefore, the wrong done to Abel could not be compared with the wrong done to the Creator. Moreover, the criminality of every social sin is its practical disregard for the authority of the Most High God.

At that point in time, God held the sword of justice in His immediate hands. He had not delegated this authority to any human tribunal. The delegation of the sword of justice did not occur until the new world order following the flood of Noah's time (Gen. 9). The world subsequent to Noah is the new world under which we are living in A.D. 2000. Therefore, God's law of Genesis 9:6 is the law under which we live. It is a law for the execution of murderers in spite of exceptions in man-made laws.

A religious hypocrite killed righteous Abel (Gen. 4:1-16). Christ said to the Pharisees, "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar" (Matt. 23:34, 35)

NASB). Paul said of righteous Abel, the first mentioned in the hall of faith, “By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks” (Heb. 11:4 NASB). The apostle also said, “and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel” (Heb. 12:24 NASB).

All those who have been regenerated and converted follow Abel’s example in worship: (1) God is the One to be worshipped (John 4:24). (2) God must be worshipped through sacrifice (I Pet. 1:17-21). (3) God must be worshipped through atoning sacrifice (Heb. 10:19-25). (4) God is to be worshipped through atoning sacrifice responded to by God-given faith (Luke 7:50). (5) God is to be glorified by a life of faith (II Cor. 5:7). (6) God should be glorified by a life of faith that expresses itself in righteousness (Heb. 12:14).

The enemies of God are always enemies of God’s people. Paul used an expression that is true in every age of human existence: “But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also” (Gal. 4:29 NASB). That takes in the time before the flood, the time subsequent to the flood, the time of Abraham, the time of the Israelites, the time of Christ, and the time of the assembly of Christ. By the time of Christ, degeneration had reached a new low. How much lower can our age of the new morality go?

Capital Punishment—A Divine Decree Part 2

(Gen. 9:1-19)

W.E. Best

Genesis 9 records the beginning of the history of the new world. New principles were brought forth under Noah. The old world from Adam to the flood was brought to a close, and our world's history began. Scripture says nothing prior to the flood about eating meat. An indication of the nature of blood appears in Genesis 9:3-4. This points to Leviticus 17:11—"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement" (NASB). Blood foreshadows the law of atonement (Lev. 16), and the atonement points to the atonement of Christ (Heb. 9-10). Blood is the life of the flesh; therefore, it must not be eaten but poured out on the ground like water (Deut. 15:23).

Noah was the new head of mankind in a new world that God promised by covenant to never again destroy by water (Gen. 9:8-17). After nearly 2000 years, God decreed capital punishment for murder as a deterrent against that crime (Gen. 9:6). Death for murder is recognized from the beginning of sin in the human race. Typically, death covered Adam's sin (Gen. 3:21). Death was written on the conscience of the first murderer, Cain (Gen. 4:14). Those who oppose capital punishment for murder challenge God's decree. They are about as wise as an ant challenging an elephant.

God not only decreed capital punishment for murder, but He also gave reasons for the decree: (1) Man was made in God's image: "Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..." (Gen. 1:26 NASB). (2) Murder, which is a capital sin, is a sin against God's image: "...Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him" (Gen. 4:8 NASB). (3) Sin brought death on all men: "...sin reigned in death..." (Rom. 5:21 NASB). (4) Christ's death on behalf of the elect was capital punishment: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45 NASB). (5) Christ's capital punishment on behalf of the elect was because the sins of the chosen ones were imputed to Him: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf..." (II Cor. 5:21 NASB).

A person would be heretical to say that Christ was made guilty, because guilt involves depravity. Christ was made a sin offering in the sense of being condemned to a criminal's death. The doctrine of imputation is never used in the sense of any transference of moral character. Imputation means to reckon, whether by calculation or imputation. It may be used two ways: (1) It may refer to the debt of one set down to the account of another, as in the case of Onesimus: "But if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account" (Philem. 18 NASB). (2) Imputation can also mean to reckon that to one which was antecedently his, as in the case of Phinehas: "Then Phinehas stood up and interposed; And so the plague was stayed. And it was reckoned to him for righteousness..." (Ps. 106:30, 31 NASB).

In the study of imputation, certain parallels must be avoided. For example, the imputation of Adam's sin to us and Christ's righteousness to the elect cannot be the same. Sin bearing is more than a mere penal satisfaction. Christ was made a sin offering for us, made a curse for us, bore our sins, etc. However, we never read that Christ sinned or was constituted a sinner. The righteousness Christ wrought at Calvary is both imputed and imparted to the elect. The merit of Christ's obedience is indivisible; therefore, the whole of it is imputed to each believer. For example, a thousand believers do not obtain by imputation a one thousandth part of Christ's sacrifice. Each receives the total merit of Christ's sacrifice.

The imputation of Adam's sin rests on a different kind of union from that of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. There is no race unity in redemption. All men without exception were in Adam when he disobeyed, but all men without exception were not in Christ when He obeyed (Rom. 5:15-19).

The Bible presents three major imputations: (1) Adam's sin was imputed to the human race. (2) The sins of the elect were imputed to the Divine Substitute, Jesus Christ. (3) Christ's righteousness is imputed to the elect. An immature judgment will usually conclude that each of the major imputations is judicial in character, but this is not the case. Judicial imputation is reckoning to another that which is not antecedently his—our sins to Christ. Real imputation is reckoning to another that which is antecedently His—Christ's righteousness to the elect. Anyone who denies capital punishment denies the redemptive work of Christ. Jesus Christ paid the penalty of the elect's sin by a capital death.

Following God's deliverance of Noah by grace (Gen. 6:8), God revealed His decree of capital punishment (Gen. 9:1-7). The sovereignty of God is a doctrine that fills the elect with awe, but the nonelect with hatred. God is supreme, and humans are His creatures. He does with them as He pleases. The sacredness of life must not be carried to the extreme as some do, including religionists, who oppose killing animals and eating meat. As we eat meat of animals, we have a constant reminder of life by means of death. Here is the indication of the nature of blood that foreshadows the atonement.

The new world under Noah began with the revelation of capital punishment as a Divine decree. This was for civilization as a whole, and it touched every political view of human society. The verdict was righteous because the sovereign God of the universe issued it; therefore, executioners are not guilty for carrying out the sentence of capital punishment. What is the difference between the executioners of civil government carrying out the verdict of capital punishment and God using the Babylonians and others to punish the Israelites for their sins? What is the difference between killing in time of war in defense of one's country and executing a sentence issued by civil government? Murder is a crime, but killing a person in self-defense is not.

The laws of the chosen nation of Israel were divided into three parts: (1) The commandments were given to curb their moral life (Ex. 19-20). (2) The judgments were given to influence their social life (Ex. 21-24). (3) The ordinances were given to direct

their spiritual life (Ex. 25-40). While the moral law was for the non-Jews as well as the Jews, there were ordinances for Israel's spiritual life that had no authority over non-Jews. The same is true of the assembly Christ is building (Matt. 16:18). Many of her laws are not for the world. However, the moral law is for every person without exception until time shall be no more.

Although the moral law in the form of the ten commandments had not been given during the time of Noah and his near descendants, Adam's one act of sin manifested the following transgressions of the moral law recorded in Exodus 20:3-17—(1) idolatry, (2) made a god of his appetite, (3) failed to believe God, (4) broke the sinless rest, (5) dishonored his Father-God, (6) brought death to himself and his posterity, (7) committed spiritual adultery, (8) took what he had no right to have, (9) accepted Satan's false witness, and (10) coveted that which God had not given to him. The world of mankind has never been without a code of morals, and it never will be without a law demanding moral values.

God has two forms of government in the new world, beginning with the descendants of Noah to Christ's second advent. He instituted civil government as well as the moral governor of each nation outside the chosen nation of Israel. These nations have various forms of government. Some are better than others. However, any form is better than none. Civil government extends to all citizens without exception: "LET every person be in subjection to the governing authorities..." (Rom. 13:1 NASB). Christ Himself paid tribute to Caesar. Christians must obey governing authorities from a conscientious regard for God's authority. God instituted civil government for a peculiar function. That jurisdiction is separate and distinct from ecclesiastical (assembly) government. Civil government has been given authority to use the sword and exercise coercion to enforce its laws. Its purpose is the temporal welfare and prosperity of its citizens.

While the Scriptures clearly indicate that civil government is a Divine institution for the welfare and protection of its citizens, they also distinguish civil from ecclesiastical government. Ecclesiastical government is for the people of God. There are two domains and two authorities. Serving Caesar must not conflict with serving Christ (Acts 5:29). Christ did not present Himself as a political Messiah (Luke 12:13, 14). He had no desire to meddle with purely civil affairs. The realm of the civil magistrate is outside the sphere of the assemblies of Jesus Christ.

Moral reform cannot be accomplished by legislative acts. The prerogative of bringing all things under the "church," whether it is the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, etc., has been claimed by religious leaders and is becoming the practice of protestant denominations. This has led "churches" to look with favor on the legislation of civil rights, poverty programs, equality, habitats for humanity, disarmament, federal aid, etc. When criticized for meddling in civil affairs, these "churches" declare that they must do so in order to fulfill their prophetic function. Their reasoning follows that of the apostate church of Revelation 17-18.

Consider the following important questions and answers:

1. Does the Bible set boundaries between civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction? Yes!
2. Does God's sovereignty demand that the "church" (assembly) guide the political, economic, and social affairs of the nation? No!
3. Does the New Testament set forth as an ideal the union of "church" (assembly) and state as a theocracy of a sort? No!
4. Does Christ expect the "church" (assembly) to achieve her goals by means of legalism? No!
5. Do not "church" (assembly) and state differ radically in their origin, membership, goals, laws, and weapons? Yes!

Israel was God's choice (Deut. 7:1-11). Likewise, the assembly Christ is building is His choice (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:4). Both are of God, not of the world.

Capital Punishment—A Divine Decree Part 3

(Ex. 2:11-15)

W.E. Best

The sequel to man's failure described in Genesis is recorded in Exodus, which was given in the time of Moses. Exodus speaks of Israel's redemption. The construction of a building demands a drawn design and a blueprint. The blueprint of God's design for the salvation of some from among depraved mankind before the foundation of the world is given in the book of Exodus. This book historically typifies what God does by grace in the redemption of the elect. A study of Exodus is necessary for God's chosen ones to gain the elementary instruction for God's deliverance of His people and His purpose for redeeming them. Therefore, the book progresses from slavery (Ex. 1-2), to redemption (Ex. 3:1-15:21), to instruction (Ex. 15:22-18:27), to consecration (19:1-23:33), and to worship (24:1-40:38). It begins by telling how God came down in grace to deliver an enslaved people. It concludes by declaring how God came down in glory to dwell in the midst of a delivered people.

Israel flourished in Egypt until God raised up Pharaoh, who did not know Joseph (Ex. 1:8), in order to bring the Israelites to the end of themselves. Egypt became the smoking furnace of Abraham's vision (Gen. 15:12-18). The life of the elect begins in their ability to feel death. As at the beginning, light shined on chaos (Gen. 1:2, 3). Egypt (this world system) became the house of bondage to the chosen nation, and Pharaoh became its prince.

The time for Israel's deliverance had come, and the preparation in the hearts of the Israelites had arrived. Although the Israelites were fruitful, increased greatly, and became exceedingly mighty, they served under taskmasters and built the "storage cities" of Pithom and Raamses for Pharaoh. Their new world was adorned with costly buildings and imposing institutions. While laboring in such things, they were kept in complete bondage of soul. Who can argue that the world (Egypt) does not produce a harmful influence on the souls of those who sojourn there? With Israel, the patriarchal age of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had faded. However, some remained faithful in the midst of corruption. The midwives feared God and did not obey Pharaoh's command. God always has His faithful ones.

Moses viewed the Israelites' affliction under taskmasters and sought to act for them, but his effort failed (Ex. 2:11-24). However, in chapter 3, Moses saw God in relation to his brethren; therefore, he viewed things from God's perspective. God revealed Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham—the electing God, Isaac—the redeeming God, and Jacob—the empowering God (Ex. 3:6). This announcement blends into one marvelous statement, which includes the past—"I am the God of your father" (Ex. 3:6 NASB), present—"I have surely seen the affliction of My people" (Ex. 3:7 NASB), and future—"I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt" (Ex. 3:10 NASB).

Because of sin-failure of the Israelites under the conditional aspect of the Abrahamic covenant, they must suffer. However, they were assured by the unconditional covenant made with Abraham that they will never be consumed (Rom. 11; Rev. 7:4-9).

Moses “was lovely in the sight of God” (Acts 7:20 NASB). Every person who is lovely in the sight of God is hated by the world. Do we cherish those who are lovely in the sight of God and can never be accepted in the world? The life of Moses and God’s love for him are fully displayed in Jude 1—“Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to the ones who have been loved [perfect passive participle of agapao, to love] by God the Father, and who have been kept [perfect passive participle of tereo, to keep, guard, or preserve] for Jesus Christ, and effectually called [kleteois, plural pronominal adjective in the predicate position of the adjective kletos]” (translation). The elect fell in their representative head (often called the federal head)—Adam, but they did not fall out of their eternal covenant of grace Head—Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:20, 21). The sovereign God will keep all the elect, who have been permanently loved, until they are effectually called.

Consideration must first be given to the first forty years of Moses’ life. In God’s providence, after his birth and preservation from drowning in the Nile River, Moses became the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter. “But when he was approaching the age of forty it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel” (Acts 7:23 NASB). “...He went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand” (Ex. 2:11, 12 NASB).

Every Christian making a study of Exodus 2 should consider Stephen’s apology before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7. The Jews’ charge against Stephen was partially true and partially false. Therefore, there was a false accusation with a semblance of truth. A false accusation does not need to be altogether false. For a charge to be effective, a twisted accusation with a little truth is better for the accuser’s purpose and more difficult for the defendant to answer. The Christian is always at a disadvantage because he does not believe in distorting anything. Keep this in mind as you continue studying the subject of Capital Punishment.

Stephen’s historical statements in Acts 7 prove he was not opposed to Moses. He began with Abraham and showed there was a change in God’s economy from the time of Abraham to the time of Moses. He further proved there was a change from the time of Moses to the time of Christ. God does not change (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8), but He changes His economy.

The point of Stephen’s apology was the changes he was accused of advocating. He made his position clear: (1) He showed that the external condition of God’s people had undergone repeated changes. There was a change under Abraham (Acts 7:2-8), Joseph (Acts 7:9-16), Moses (Acts 7:17-44), and David (Acts 7:45, 46). (2) He explained that the state of God’s people during his time had no existence before

Solomon, and even that was temporary (Acts 7:47-50). Stephen applied his apology to his accusers (Acts 7:51-53). He employed the law of argumentative progress by beginning courteously, quoting from undisputed authority, and closing his speech as a judge of the nation, not as a prisoner at the bar.

Moses' killing the Egyptian has been a subject of debate for centuries. Some believe he was saved at the time he killed the Egyptian. Others believe he was lost. Hopefully, by the preponderance of Biblical evidence, we can come to an understanding of Moses' condition at the time he killed the Egyptian.

The record states that subsequent to forty years of growth, Moses went out to his brethren and viewed their hard labors. How did he know they were his brethren? What had he learned from his nurse (mother) during his formative years? His circumcision told him something about his ancestors, going back to Abraham where circumcision began (Gen. 17:10).

Those who believe in covenant salvation say, "Children, therefore, were included in the covenant of grace as revealed in the old dispensation, and consequently were members of the church as it was then constituted. In the sight of God parents and children are one. The former are the authorized representatives of the latter; they act for them; they contract obligations in their name. In all cases, therefore, where parents enter into covenant with God, they bring their children with them"—Systematic Theology, Hodge, Charles, p. 555. Some puritans and household salvation advocates use this argument to say Moses was saved when he killed the Egyptian.

Nothing can be more heretical than teaching that parents can act for their children in spiritual matters to the extent that they can secure the benefits of the covenant of grace, into which children vicariously enter. No doubt Moses' parents—Amram (name means the people exalted) and Jochebed (name means is glorious) instructed him in the traditions of the Jews. However, to think they could bring him into the benefits of grace is unthinkable.

If the teaching of "household salvation" were true, everyone would be saved because both Adam and Eve were saved. This would indicate that all Israel is Israel indeed. Where is any reference to babies in Lydia's household? There is a reference to the brethren in Acts 16:40. The house of the jailer included all who heard and believed. Only those who hear and believe are proper subjects for baptism. The "household of Stephanas" (I Cor. 1:16) included those who devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints (I Cor. 16:15). Babies do not minister. They, whether they have been born only of the flesh or have been born also of the Spirit, need someone to minister to them.

Before the case of Lydia can be established in favor of infant baptism, the following things must be proved: (1) Lydia was or had been married. (2) She had children, some of whom were infants. (3) She brought them to Philippi. (4) Her infants were actually baptized.

“Household baptism” is built on the assumption that children were in the houses, and that “household” meant every individual without exception in the household had been baptized. This argument would have to include the unsaved spouse of the believer: “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy” (I Cor. 7:14 NASB). Acts 18:8 refutes the idea of either infant or household baptism: “And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized” (NASB).

Some teach that baptism has taken the place of circumcision. However, there is no Scriptural proof for that teaching. If it were true, only males could be baptized. Circumcision was placed at the head of Paul’s list of things gained under the patriarchs to show that he had the right to be heard on the true significance of that religious rite. The meaning of the term “circumcision” changes in accordance with the context where it is used. The original application of the word was to chosen national Israel after the flesh (Gal. 2:6-21). However, the body of Christ, which is composed of believing Jews and believing Gentiles, is called “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). Anyone having confidence in works, ordinances, religious rites, or institutions manifests confidence in his flesh (Phil. 3:4). Paul clearly stated the truth concerning circumcision as a religious rite: “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15 NASB). “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God” (Rom. 2:28, 29 NASB).

Moses’ and Paul’s circumcision, which identified them as Israelites who were a separated people, meant nothing to them prior to their personal encounter with the Lord (Gen. 17:10; Rom. 9:1-6). As Saul of Tarsus, he was an active, open, determined, and cruel enemy of Jesus Christ. Saul was a strong man, but beware of strength that is not of grace. Graceless strength can be conquered only by grace. Five outstanding things about Saul are recorded in Acts 9:1-22—(1) Saul, a circumcised man, persecuted many Christians (vv. 1, 2). (2) He was apprehended by grace (vv. 3-9). (3) Saul was instructed (vv. 10-18). (4) Instructed Saul became an instructor (vv. 19-22). (5) The instruction by Saul who became Paul was given against great opposition (v. 16).

Like Saul of Tarsus (Phil. 3:1-12), Moses was a descendant of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Although great changes are brought about in time, we must not be led to think that God’s work of grace changes with the times. The Holy Spirit, the message, and the results are always the same. Therefore, no one can stretch toward the goal for the prize apart from grace that produced the ability to do so.

The next day after Moses killed the Egyptian, “...two Hebrews were fighting [quarreling] with each other; and he said to the offender [the guilty one], Why are you striking your companion? But he said, Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian? Then Moses was afraid, and said, Surely the

matter has become known. When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian [contention or strife]...” (Ex. 2:13-15 NASB).

Moses’ fear when he realized his sin was known issued from the fact that he was running unsent. He tried to accomplish by revolution what God will do through men who have been transformed by grace. All work independent of God worsens things. Moses had murder on his conscience, and some of his own people turned against him: “YOU DO NOT MEAN TO KILL ME AS YOU KILLED THE EGYPTIAN YESTERDAY, DO YOU?” (Acts 7:28 NASB). (See Ex. 2:14.) Moses’ fear increased when Pharaoh heard about the murdered Egyptian and tried to kill him (Ex. 2:15). However, God preserved Moses.

Moses’ birth, preservation, training, treasures in Egypt, murder of an Egyptian, rejection by a fellow Hebrew, fear of being killed by Pharaoh, and flight to Midian are all recorded in Exodus 2:1-15. All this took place in the first of three forty-year periods of Moses’ life. Pharaoh’s daughter, who rescued Moses from the Nile River, chose his mother (Jochebed) for his nurse who taught him while he was under her care. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that he was “...educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22 NASB). Surely no one can imagine that Moses spent most of the first forty years of his life at his parents’ knees. Think of the years Moses was exposed to the Egyptians’ ways and was tutored by teachers of the Egyptian system of education, especially as the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter. Prince Moses was exposed to the best education that Egypt (the world) offered.

In the second forty-year period of Moses’ life, he married Zipporah (name means a sparrow), the daughter of Reuel (name means friend of God or associate you with God), the priest of Midian (Ex. 2:16, 18, 21). Reuel is also called Jethro (name means excellency) in Exodus 3:1. The most satisfying answer to this seeming problem is that Reuel was his proper name, and Jethro was his official designation.

During this forty-year period Moses was also in the backside of the desert, the mountain of God. God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush and commissioned him. In contrast to his fear after killing the Egyptian, the only fear he had here was reverential. He was afraid to look at God (Ex. 3:6).

Moses spent his first forty years in Egypt learning he was somebody. Then he spent forty years in Midian learning that apart from grace he was nobody. He saw things in their true value at the backside of the desert. Therefore, Moses learned more in Midian than in Egypt. The elect of God learn more from the revelation of God in the Scriptures than they could ever learn in the world (Egypt).

In the third and last forty year period of Moses’ life on earth, he discovered what God can do with one considered by the world to be a nobody: “Now the man Moses was very meek [humble NASB], above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num.

12:3 KJV). How could a man of meekness write about himself that he was the meekest of men? Is this not a manifestation of vanity?

There are two kinds of egoism—false and true. If a person out of conceit refers to himself as a historian, he manifests vainglory. However, if he refers to himself in that manner when the Holy Spirit demands it with regard to revelation, his egoism is lawful and righteous. Men of unrenewed hearts in their unenlightened minds are expected to misunderstand and misrepresent such language.

Meekness is not the negative quality of repudiation of self-defense. It is positive, since those who are meek will subjugate and inherit the earth: “But the meek shall inherit [possess—Owens] the earth [land—Owens]...” (Ps. 37:11 KJV). The first positive quality of meekness (humility) is willingness to learn, and the second is self-renunciation.

Moses was anything but meek in the early days of his life. According to Exodus 2, he was hot tempered and hasty. One might say that the Egyptian slave driver got what he deserved. However, no one can justify death by murder. Moses was guilty of that capital sin. He had no right to murder the Egyptian. He committed that sin when he was unregenerate and before God revealed Himself to him in Exodus 3. Saul of Tarsus was an accomplice to murder when he was unregenerate. David, a child of God and king of Israel, committed murder by proxy when he had Uriah killed. Peter, a child of God and an apostle, committed murder in intention when he cut off Malchus’ ear with a sword.

Few understand the nature of sin. Sin does not start with the act. It proceeds from the heart. Man’s heart is the source of either virtue or vice. Therefore, the reason that sin has never been a popular subject is evident. Psychologists try to explain it away. Evolutionists deny God’s creation of man in an upright state. Between the two, the educational system has been corrupted. It is based on the theories of psychology, evolution, and a denial of depravity.

The human heart is the problem with society: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man” (Matt. 15:19, 20 NASB). This means that God-given instincts of human nature have been corrupted by sin. Therefore, a person must not minimize the subtlety of sin. For example, persons who have not committed acts of either murder or adultery are not free from either: “You have heard that it was said, YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:27, 28 NASB). “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15 NASB).

After being sheltered by blood, the Israelites had to learn the glorious power of Jehovah as the preserving and sustaining God. The wilderness was the place where the true character of the flesh came out into full view. In Numbers 20, the Israelites were at the

conclusion of their wilderness experience, and they found that their flesh remained unchanged. All of God's people, regardless of the age in which they live, are exposed to this lesson. History continues repeating itself because human nature is the same in every age of mankind on unrenewed planet earth.

A person would think that God's people would learn some things from history, but we learn most from bitter experience. This fact is exemplified in I Corinthians 10. Paul continued to rebuke the complacency of the Corinthians. He left his own example in I Corinthians 9 and turned to the history of God's people. The apostle appealed to the experiences of the fathers. In the first part of the chapter, he showed the Corinthians that the Israelites' indulgence in liberty impeded their spiritual progress. He showed in the latter part of the chapter that Israel's indulgence was a historical object lesson to warn God's people.

Christians should learn and then live, not live and learn. Revelation is given to save saints the bitter expense of some experiences. Do we overlook the truth that God's word is the Book that is filled with the wisdom of yesterday? As the Israelites were brought under the leadership of Moses, believers are brought under the leadership of Jesus Christ. Paul understood Christ to have been the source of all the blessings the Israelites received: "...all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ" (I Cor. 10:4 NASB).

The sin principle that remains in Christians is deceptive. It operates not only in our natural instincts, but also in our minds and hearts. Can we truly say we read various materials and watch television to keep up with social changes or to observe the degeneration of society? Could this be a subtle form of hypocrisy? The heart must be studied under three headings: (1) depraved, (2) new, and (3) whole. Our responsibility as Christians is to keep God's precepts with the whole heart: "...With all my heart I will observe Thy precepts" (Ps. 119:69 NASB).

The third and final forty-year period of Moses' life is described by Moses in Exodus 3 through Deuteronomy 34 and by Paul in Hebrews 11:24-29. In Hebrews, the hall of faith chapter, no reference is made to Moses' capital sins of murder and destroying a type of Christ by striking the rock twice when God told him to speak to the rock (Num. 20:8-12). The rock had already typically been struck in the offerings that typified Christ's death. The sufficiency of the priesthood results from the abiding efficacy of Christ's death (Heb. 7:25). Since Christ had once been offered in type, Moses committed a great sin by losing his cool and destroying the type by striking the rock twice. The sin was so great that it prevented Moses from bringing the assembly of Israel into the land that God gave them. It was a sin so serious that it could be classified as a sin unto physical death: "So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day" (Deut. 34:5-7 NASB). "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this" (I John 5:16 NASB).

How wonderful that neither Moses' sin of murder nor his sin of destroying the types of Christ's death and priesthood are mentioned in Hebrews 11. The reason is that both sins are under the blood of Christ by decree, sacrifice, and a true confession through lip and life—the fruits of regeneration. Following Paul's catalog of sins in I Corinthians 6:9-10, he said, "And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (v. 11 NASB).

Capital Punishment—A Divine Decree Part 4

(Ex. 19-24)

W.E. Best

We are entering the section of the book of Exodus called “the law.” This part discusses holiness, the commandments, and responsibility. The first eighteen chapters reveal what God was for Israel. Chapters 19-24 show what Israel is for God as the fruit of grace. The Abrahamic covenant revealed what God will do for Israel. The Sinaitic covenant observes that obedience to the law is not a means of establishing the law, but enjoying it and retaining its blessings. This covenant must not be interpreted apart from the covenant of grace typified by the Abrahamic covenant. (Study Ex. 2:24, 25; 3:1-10.)

The law as a covenant was never intended to be a covenant of works for salvation (deliverance from the guilt and bondage of sin). It was a covenant to intensify the awareness of sin by manifesting the weakness of the flesh (Rom. 7:1-13). The law was an objective standard, but it applied no power to measure up to its holy standard. Therefore, it gave no subjective power to change a person or his desire, but it can restrain his practice. “For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God” (Heb. 7:18, 19 NASB). How could the law be weak and useless when “...the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good...” (Rom. 7:12 NASB). God gave the law after His promise of grace to advance the promise: “Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made [perfect passive indicative of epaggellomai—has been promised]” (Gal. 3:19 NASB).

The Jews made the law faulty by turning that which was meant to be an aid to God’s people into a means of salvation. Anything resting on man’s faithfulness is sure to fail (Deut. 31:20). The cause of the failure lay in the Israelites’ character, not in the holy law. Religionists in any age of human civilization who say the sinner must do something in order to be born of God are in the same camp with those of the same mind who are exposed by Scripture.

Grace is a unilateral covenant between the three Persons in the Godhead (Heb. 13:20, 21). The Sinaitic covenant presupposes grace, because God was the Father of the Israelites (Rom. 9:5). Forgiveness was on the basis of the blood, not works (Ex. 12). The Sinaitic covenant was related to the Abrahamic covenant (Ex. 2:24; 3:17; Deut. 7:12). Anyone who interprets any passage in the New Testament in a way that excludes grace from the Old Testament is heretical. We learn three things from the law: (1) the knowledge of sin, (2) the perfection of Christ, and (3) the true character of man in the Spirit.

The law is the characteristic feature of Sinai. It is not the law as a means of salvation, but the law as a sequel to salvation. Therefore, the law was given to a redeemed people. The law concerning Israel consisted of moral, judicial, and ceremonial laws. The judicial law, which includes Exodus 19-23, should be considered in our present study. This, as well as the ceremonial law given to Moses, was given especially to the nation of Israel as God's theocratic nation. However, God's nation at the present is the "holy nation": "But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD'S OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:9 NASB). Every blessing comes with responsibility or obligation. (See John 15:16; Eph. 1:4.)

The ceremonial law has not been destroyed, but the substance fills the place of its shadows. Likewise, the judicial law, as far as it was peculiar to the Israelites, has not been destroyed. It has been fulfilled for "the holy nation." As it agrees with the requirements of civil justice, it serves to establish the precepts of the moral law. The moral law cannot dispense with the breach of those laws that in themselves are moral. God hates sin by nature and not by precept alone.

Capital punishment is enlarged under the judicial law of Moses (Ex. 19-24). At least twenty recorded sins were penalized by capital punishment: (1) touching the mountain (Ex. 19:12, 13), (2) committing murder (Ex. 21:12), (3) acting presumptuously toward a neighbor (Ex. 21:14), (4) striking father or mother (Ex. 21:15), (5) kidnapping (Ex. 21:16), (6) cursing father or mother (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 20:9), (7) causing the loss of a child by miscarriage (Ex. 21:22, 23), (8) owning an ox that killed someone (Ex. 21:28, 29), (9) practicing sorcery (Ex. 22:18), (10) lying with an animal (Ex. 22:19; Lev. 20:15, 16), (11) afflicting a widow or an orphan (Ex. 22:21-24), (12) blaspheming (Lev. 24:14), (13) breaking the Sabbath (Num. 15:32-36), (14) committing adultery (Lev. 20:10), (15) committing fornication (Deut. 22:23, 24), (16) committing rape (Deut. 22:25), (17) worshipping idols (Lev. 20:2), (18) committing homosexuality (Lev. 20:13), (19) practicing spiritism (Lev. 20:27), and (20) bearing false witness (Deut. 19:16-21).

Since this aspect of the subject is so vast, our comments will be limited to a sin not recognized by the majority as worthy of capital punishment. Abortion in any age is an act of murder, which is punishable by death. Pro-abortionists are developing their own code of morals. This is subjectivism, which is contrary to the objective truth of Scripture that abortion is murder.

The political discussion about the woman's right to choose whether or not to abort her pregnancy necessitates subjecting every person to what the inspired Scriptures say on the subject. Although many are not silenced by the written word of God in their lifetime, they will be silenced when they, including the United States Supreme Court, stand before the Judge of all judges. "He who rejects Me [Jesus Christ], and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day" (John 12:48 NASB). The word will be the same with one difference. What a difference! That judgment will be in the personal presence of Jesus Christ. Men may argue with the written word, but no one will argue with the One into whose hands all

judgment has been given: “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given [perfect active indicative of didomi, has permanently given] all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22 NASB).

A pregnant woman does not wait three, six, or nine months to know she is carrying a child. “And if men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child [not a fetus or embryo] so that she has a miscarriage, yet there is no further injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman’s husband may demand of him; and he shall pay as the judges decide. But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise” (Ex. 21:22-25 NASB). An interruption of a pregnancy is taking a human life. There is no Scriptural proof that the unborn “child” from the point of conception is anything less than a human being (Ps. 139:13-16).

David saw his own sinful nature as originating at the time of his conception: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5 NASB). David was referring to his immediate parent, not Eve. Furthermore, he was not a bastard. He came from a lawful wedlock (Deut. 23:2). The evil nature begins at conception (John 3:6); therefore, David was a sinner as soon as he began to exist in his mother’s womb. The seed of evil that is in the soil needs no cultivation. That is why the sins of nature proceed from the nature of sin.

There are passages of Scripture that establish continuity between prenatal and postnatal life. An unborn child has a special, independent significance. God’s personal concern for human life is revealed in His word to Jeremiah: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer. 1:5 NASB). There is no principle in Scripture, science, or philosophy authorizing or even allowing anyone to pinpoint a time between conception and birth when a human being emerges from something less.

A pregnant mother has a child in her womb, and that child who has direct dependence on her is also a new and separate human being. Therefore, she has no right to abort a child; it is a separate entity. A person who argues that a woman has the right to do anything she pleases with her own body in reference to aborting breathes a spirit of rebellion against God. Society is seeking to operate without any standard but its own. It advocates that morals change with changing society. That means the democratic majority determines morals. Therefore, subjective guilt changes with the changing moral codes of changing society. We often hear it said, “What is right for me may not be right for you.” In that case, what is the basis for right or wrong? It would have to be subjective instead of objective. If a person can convince himself that what he wants to do is for his own best interest and that of society in general, he has no subjective guilt. Unlike people of the world, Christians believe that God’s word is the true objective standard that produces guilt when it is ignored or disobeyed.

Although the prenatal child is a new and separate human being, it has direct dependence on the mother. After all, the postnatal child is also dependent on the

mother for survival. On one hand, if a mother neglects or harms her newborn child, law punishes her. On the other hand, if she chooses to abort her child, law protects her. The Supreme Court has made it possible for mothers to abort their unborn children without punishment. Do those who believe in abortion accept the view that the “fetus” is something less than human? If so, what do we think about people who mistakenly feel that members of other races are less than human? Did not Hitler think this about the Jews when he killed six million of them in World War II? Abortionists treat an unborn child as a non-person with no inherent right to life. If the unborn child has not begun to live, how could it be born? If life had not begun, there would be no life at all. (See Ps. 139:13-16; Rom. 9:11.)

Abortion is not only a miscarriage of justice, but also an interruption of pregnancy, which is taking a human life. If the woman of Exodus 21:22-23 had a miscarriage due to being struck by the man who was struggling with her husband in a quarrel, he had to pay with life for life. This is further proved in Exodus 21:12—“He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death” (NASB). Shedding innocent blood is listed among seven things that are abominable to God: “There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers” (Prov. 6:16-19 NASB).

The guilty ones involved in aborting a child must be revealed: (1) The pregnant woman who plans the abortion is guilty of premeditated murder. (2) Those who perform the act of abortion are guilty of murder. (3) Those who enacted the law that provides for abortion are guilty of murder. (4) Those who approve the law that permits abortion are by association guilty of murder.

Capital Punishment—A Divine Decree Part 5

(Gen. 9:6-13)

W.E. Best

God gave an everlasting decree of capital punishment when He spoke to Noah and his sons saying, "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man. And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it. Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth. And I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth" (Gen. 9:6-13 NASB). Here was the beginning of human government.

The sovereignty of God is a subject that should fill every human being with awe. God is supreme, and we are His creatures. With God's deliverance of Noah by grace, He required the life of man to be held in high esteem because He made man in His own image. God decreed a perpetrator's death when he sheds another person's blood, and He has given men wisdom and power to deter wickedness by executing His judicial judgment on earth. Therefore, God's justice and mercy are displayed for all successive generations in this covenant.

Because of God's covenant with Noah, all flesh has not been destroyed. God's eternal covenant of grace is the only reason all mankind has not been destroyed (Heb. 13:20, 21). Man has no more claim on God than a vessel has on the potter who formed it (Rom. 9:14-33). However, God has claim on the elect because of His eternal covenant of grace. Without the perfection of the Mediator, Jesus Christ the only Mediator between God and man, the justice and mercy of God would have been neither satisfied nor displayed. The eternal Son of God is the Mediator on behalf of those chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.

God introduced capital punishment for civilization as a whole. It is a feature of political society and is for the justice human governments execute. This punishment is righteous because God as sovereign Ruler over all issued it. Therefore, executioners who apply the sentence are not guilty of murder. God's decree of capital punishment by executioners of civil government is no different from His act of using the Assyrians and Babylonians to punish Israel.

The law of capital punishment given to Noah and his descendants applies to all people in the new world, beginning with Noah subsequent to the destruction of the old world of Adam (Gen. 1-8). In the Mosaic age, capital punishment was enlarged to cover at least

twenty different sins. The sin of murder continued to be punishable by the death penalty in all societies, even those that were not Jewish. This continued into the time of Christ and the apostles, and it continues during the age of the assembly that Christ is building. Civil government was instituted by God as the moral governor of the nations of the world. However, the many governments are human institutions that formulate laws without direct reference to the Scriptures.

God instituted civil government to be administered separate from the assembly. Civil government has been given the right to use the sword (capital punishment) and coercion to enforce its laws (Rom. 13:3, 4). Its standards of judgment are different from those of Christ's assemblies. Furthermore, its aim is the temporal welfare and prosperity of its subjects. On the other hand, the assembly is a Divine institution, and her interest is spiritual deliverance and instruction of God's chosen ones in view of their eternal destiny. Christ as Head of the assembly or assemblies has given a government and officers distinct from civil government and its rulers to perform a designated purpose. Nowhere in the New Testament do we read that officers of the assembly should engage themselves as political and economic advisors to civil governments. Their functions are restricted to the body of Christ. The two methods of government are so dissimilar that the end result advanced will be separation instead of union.

A good test case for the diversity of government by civil authority and government by the assembly is the current claim that homosexuality is another lifestyle. Homosexuals are saying that Boy Scout troops should have homosexual scoutmasters because they would provide good role models for young boys. Civil government may pass laws contrary to God's law giving homosexuals equal opportunity in many things and recognize homosexuality as just another lifestyle. What does the Bible, the text Book and guide for all laws, say about homosexuals and lesbians? "If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them" (Lev. 20:13 NASB). The same condemnation, but not the same penalty, is carried into the New Testament: "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper" (Rom. 1:26-28 NASB). There is no harmony between what human laws say and the Holy Scriptures declare.

Three times in Romans 1:24-28 Paul used the expression "God gave them over" (vv. 24, 26, 28). The Greek verb *paradidomi* is a compound verb made up of the preposition *para* and the verb *didomi*. It means to hand over or deliver up. Therefore, God gave them over to degrading passions (v. 26) and to a worthless (*adokimon*, accusative of *adokimos*, which means worthless, rejected, or failure to meet the test) mind (v. 28). These worthless and rejected people are said to be filled with all manner of sins, and they "bottom out" with the fact that they are worthy of death and give hearty approval to

all who practice such sins. Apart from God's intervention by grace, He "...will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false" (II Thess. 2:11 NASB).

Scripture states that God has intervened and may intervene in grace to save some homosexuals. If He does, the recipients of grace will not remain homosexual in their lifestyle: "Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (I Cor. 6:9-11 NASB). The God of grace teaches them what "is" is. Living a homosexual life is sin.

Since the body of every Christian is a temple of God (I Cor. 6:19), Paul's desire was that he and the people to whom he ministered put the body in its proper place (I Cor. 9:27). The body and soul are equally subjects of creation and redemption. When the soul of a chosen person is regenerated, the Christian should mortify the deeds of his body while he is on the earth. Christianity is not only real, but it is also visible. We should guard our health, watch our senses, and regulate our appetites because we are not our own. We have been bought with a price. Therefore, we must glorify God in our bodies. (Study I Cor. 6:12-20.)

Sex sins are considered worse than others. Scripture often refers to sex sins to illustrate the heinousness of sin. This is exemplified in Ezekiel 16. This chapter is unparalleled in its allegorical description of Israel's history. Jerusalem is represented under the figure of a woman. The allegory begins with an abandoned child. It goes through the child's development to womanhood, marriage, unfaithfulness as a wife, and restoration. Israel's restoration, like her deliverance from Egyptian bondage, is ascribed to the covenant made by God. A sad parallel to this chapter is the present course of Christendom in its departure from the principles of Scripture and a life of godliness. Ezekiel could not give understanding because he had no power to do so. Nevertheless, he was responsible to give them the message, which was sufficient to bring them to knowledge when the Spirit saw fit to apply it. There are four divisions in the chapter: (1) destitution (vv. 1-5), (2) deliverance (vv. 6-14), (3) desecration (vv. 15-59), and (4) restoration (vv. 60-63). (Study Ezek. 16.)

Subsequent to naming ten sins that would disqualify persons for heaven, Paul said, "And such were some of you..." (I Cor. 6:11). The verb "were" is an imperfect active indicative second person plural of *eimi*. The imperfect verb appears only in the indicative mood and always expresses linear action. It has been said that the aorist tells the story, and the imperfect draws the picture. A person is helped when he sees the course of the act. The course of homosexuals is the sin under discussion in this lesson. The adjective *tines*, pronominal adjective indefinite nominative masculine plural of *tis*, means "some." Some of the Corinthians had been homosexuals. However, they did not remain homosexuals because they "were washed" (aorist middle indicative second

person plural of *apolouo*, to cleanse oneself), they “were sanctified” (aorist passive indicative second person plural of *hagiadzo*, to set apart, make holy, or purify—positional), and they “were justified” (aorist passive indicative second person plural of *dikaioo*, to put in right relationship or to declare righteous).

All those included in I Corinthians 6:9-10 were saved from and not in their sins: “No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (I John 3:6-9 NASB).

There is one middle voice verb, “you were washed,” and two passive voice verbs, “you were sanctified” and “you were justified” in I Corinthians 6:11. The middle voice in the Greek represents the subject participating in the results of the action, having personal interest in as well as being intimately involved in the action. However, the passive voice represents the subject being acted upon by someone. Therefore, the use of the passive verbs denotes the subject receiving the action. The order of the middle and passive verbs brings up a question. How does one explain a person acting before he is acted upon? That sounds like Arminians who say, God cannot do anything until the sinner lets Him.

The statement “The outward expression is usually mentioned before the inward change which precedes it” is exemplified in Acts 22:16—“And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (NASB). Both verbs “be baptized” and “wash away your sins” are aorist middle imperative. Paul gave a record of his regeneration, which was not experiential, and a testimony of his conversion, which was experiential. Therefore, regenerated and converted Paul was told to be baptized at once and wash away his sins at once. Both verbs “baptized” and “wash away” are aorist imperative, which means they were point action. Paul’s baptism and washing away his sins were acts of obedience to God’s commands. Before he was told to be baptized and wash away his sins, Paul heard, saw, prayed, was called brother, and was told he would be a witness for God. Every true believer has two positions: (1) before God by grace and (2) before men by the works of grace. Cleansing by blood (passive voice) precedes baptism and washing away sins (middle voice). Baptism is neither the cause nor co-cause of regeneration. The same principle applies to I Corinthians 6:11.

The Greek word for homosexuals in I Corinthians 6:9 is *arsenokoites*, which means a sodomite, one who lies with a male, a male who practices homosexuality, a pederast who engages in pederasty, sexual relation between two males—especially when one is a minor (under legal age). The Greek word for sodomite is made up of two words—*arsen*, which means male or masculine, and *koite*, which means the conjugal bed, lewdness, or whoredom. The primary word for woman is *gune* (married or unmarried), and the primary word for man is *anthropos*. It is interesting to observe the different

words *thelus*, which means female, and *arsen*, which means male in Romans 1:26-28. The designations “you were washed,” “you were sanctified,” and “you were justified” signify they were no longer practicing homosexuality. Therefore, the words “And such were some of you...” spoke of their history, not what they were as members of the assembly in Corinth.

After viewing the Biblical description of homosexuals, what about people who talk about gay pride, another lifestyle, role models for boys, etc.? Adoption of a perverted lifestyle is bad enough, but to be proud of sodomy, lewdness, and enlistment of minors is proof that God has not only given them over to worthless minds, but He also sent upon them deluding influence for them to believe what is false (II Thess. 2:11).

Capital Punishment—A Divine Decree Part 6

(Luke 12:13-15)

W.E. Best

Christ's first advent to this world was for the purpose of redeeming the ones chosen by the Father, not to be a judge in settling civil disputes. As Jesus Christ had a higher mission, the assembly He is building also has a higher mission than the liberal-social concept of religion proclaimed today. For example, Christ refused to interfere in a matter dealing with an inheritance: "And someone in the crowd said to Him [Christ], Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me. But He said to him, Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbiter over you? And He said to them, Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions" (Luke 12:13-15 NASB).

Christ refused to arbitrate; therefore, He would not take from the oppressor and give to the oppressed. The immediate context must be considered in order to fully explain and understand Christ's refusal of this request, which appeared to men to be valid. The cloak of hypocrisy must be exposed (Luke 12:1-3). The disciples should not fear opposition (v. 4). The greater fear of God will banish the lesser fear of man (v. 5). God will not forget His own because we are of greater value than many sparrows (vv. 6, 7). The Son of Man will confess before the angels of God everyone who confesses Him before men (vv. 8, 9). The verb "confess" comes from the compound verb *homologeō* made up *homos*, which means one and the same, and *logos*, which means word, saying, or conversation. The compound verb means to say the same thing as or agree with. Therefore, a true confession is saying the same thing about God, Christ, the Godhead, sin, salvation, etc., that Christ says before the angels of God on behalf of His own (vv. 8, 9). Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is rejection of God's final witness to man. However, the Holy Spirit is the Teacher for Christians (vv. 10-12).

Christ forbids oppression. A person who demands his dues may be as selfish as the one withholding them. Covetousness often presents itself as prudence. Therefore, the corrective is to be rich toward God. Following verses 13-15, Christ gave a parable dealing with the subject of covetousness (Luke 12:16-34). A concise definition of covetousness is that it is an inordinate desire and love for the things of this world, but it is easy to determine when this desire and love are inordinate. It is necessary to understand two things at this point: (1) the things condemned by either Scripture or common reasoning, and (2) the dual caution given by the Lord Jesus that we must double our care—"...Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed..." (Luke 12:15 NASB). Covetousness is a sin that is very apt to slip upon us and slyly insinuate itself to us as coming under the pretence of God's providential care.

"Beware, and be on your guard" because covetousness is a decent sin, one that conforms to the recognized standard of propriety, good taste in speech or behavior. Other sins alarm because of their interference with attached passions. Lying interrupts confidence and weakens the bonds of society. Murder lays its hands on persons. Theft

deprives persons of property. Adultery invades the most sacred rights and breaks the dearest ties. Where is the disgrace of covetousness? A person may be sober, industrious, compassionate, and moral in many ways and yet be a slave to covetousness. No wonder Paul said, "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, YOU SHALL NOT COVET" (Rom. 7:7 NASB).

Although covetousness often presents itself as prudence, the only remedy is to be rich toward God. Christ's parable enlarges on this corrective. Provision for temporal need, as important as it is (I Tim. 5:8), does not mean it is the ruling principle of life (Luke 12:16-30). Wealth is not necessary to an ideal life: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (II Cor. 8:9 NASB).

We should ask ourselves three questions and consider the brief answer to each:

(1) What is covetousness?

It is an inordinate desire for material gain.

(2) Where is its root?

Its root is in its love for the creature more than for the sovereign Lord.

(3) How does it manifest itself?

It manifests itself in dissatisfaction with present possessions.

According to the overall context of Luke 12, reference is made to the kingdom. As Christ continued denouncing covetousness, He said, "But if God so arrays the grass in the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown in the furnace, how much more will He clothe you, O men of little faith! And do not seek what you shall eat, and what you shall drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:28-34 NASB).

At first consideration of Luke 12:14, Christ's refusal to interfere between two brothers who were having a problem seems astonishing. The problem was concerning an inheritance. Under the Mosaic Law, individual preferences and partialities should not set aside the rights of the firstborn. The firstborn should be given a double portion of the inheritance (Deut. 21:16, 17). There was a question of justice to be decided, and who was better qualified than Jesus Christ to decide it? Christ replied to the man, "...who appointed Me a judge [krites, one who passes judgment] or arbiter [meristes, one who settles property disputes—arbitrator] over you?" Christ did not come the first time to judge (John 3:17) or to establish the kingdom (Matt. 25:34; II Tim. 4:1). His first advent was to redeem. His second advent will be to judge and reign in His kingdom. The Son of

God is on the side of Divine truth and justice; therefore, He would not become involved in a civil matter that He ordained to be settled by civil authority (Rom. 13:1-7; I Pet. 2:13-20).

The Jewish chief priests and scribes wanted to lay hands on Christ because He spoke a parable against them, but they feared the people. Therefore, “they watched Him,” but not in order to learn anything. Their true motive was to entangle Him in His conversation that they might have reason for accusing Him: “And they questioned Him, saying, Teacher, we know that you speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? But He detected their trickery and said to them, Show Me a denarius [one day’s wage]. Whose likeness and inscription does it have? And they said, Caesar’s. And He said to them, Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and marveling at His answer, they became silent” (Luke 20:21-26 NASB).

People who think they can outsmart God are the ones God has given over to a depraved mind (Rom. 1:28). To the Jews, Israel is God’s chosen nation; therefore, to them payment of taxes to a Gentile power implied rejection of God’s order and His inability to keep His promises to Abraham. With their worthless minds, Christ’s enemies thought they had the Lord Jesus trapped. If Christ said the tax was lawful, they would indict Him before the high priest. If He said it was unlawful, they would accuse Him before Pilate. The Pharisees were too blind and deaf to see or hear what Christ said in Matthew 21:43—“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it” (Matt. 21:43 NASB). The Israel that rejected Christ by rejecting the prerequisites to get into Him could no longer represent Him on earth. The kingdom taken away is not the assembly of Christ, as many teach. Therefore, the nation to whom the kingdom of heaven has been given is closely related to the covenanted Israel of God. The one nation will be made up of redeemed Jews and Gentiles. The assembly of Christ is not now inheriting the kingdom because it is eschatological (II Tim. 4:1).

Christ’s enemies were silent because they were caught in the very trap they prepared for Christ. On one hand, if they paid taxes to Caesar, they would give evidence of national subordination to Rome. They were hypocritical to ask Christ, a Jew, if it was lawful for them to pay taxes to Caesar. On the other hand, if they denied the tax was legal, their nationalism would reveal their hypocrisy. Christ’s reply was to the point: “Show Me a denarius, Whose likeness and inscription does it have? And they said, Caesar’s. And He said to them, Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Luke 20:24, 25 NASB).

Christ’s answer simply carried out a principle given to Solomon: “My son, fear the LORD and the king; Do not associate with those who are given to change” (Prov. 24:21 NASB). Here is a double duty because Christians have a twofold citizenship: (1) Christians have a heavenly citizenship: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20 NASB). (2) All living

Christians are under civil authority appointed by God in each believer's country or nation where he resides (Rom. 13:1). Fear is a comprehensive idea containing all the duties that we principally owe to God and subordinately owe to the king (ruling authority under God). Fear is the foundation of spiritual wisdom, the security against all other fears, a good preparative for the peace and welfare of society, and the restrainer of our minds within the due limits of our respective subjections—first to our Lord and Savior, and second to our civil guardian. The fear of God is often used to signify the sum of the Christian life and its responsibilities. The command is to fear both “God and the king” (Prov. 24:21). The commendation “My son” stands first in the verse. This verse is true whether the government is a monarchy (supreme power actually or nominally lodged in a monarch), an aristocracy (rule by an elite or privileged class of best or most able men), or a democracy (government by the people).

The following are reasons for Christ's refusal to be an arbiter of a civil case concerning a family inheritance:

1. His mission was not to take from the oppressor and give to the oppressed, but to condemn oppression.
2. He would not allow a social appeal to degenerate into the task of deciding issues where the wronged person was as wrong as the person who wronged him.
3. His mission was to proclaim principles.
4. Covetousness often presents itself as prudence. Being rich toward God would be the corrective.
5. Civil rights cannot legislate righteousness. They can only deter and punish.

Capital Punishment—A Divine Decree Part 7

(Matt. 5:17)

W.E. Best

There is much confusion over the meaning of the word “law” in Matthew 5:17—“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill” (NASB). The three Greek verbs in this verse are (1) nomidzo, which means to think, assume, suppose, or presume, (2) kataluo, which means to annul, do away with, or nullify, and (3) pleroo, which means to make full, fulfill, bring to completion, or finish. Since the cause is immutably good, the operation and effect of the law must be the same. If the moral law could be altered, Deity would be altered. Therefore, those who believe the law can be altered have only a changeable god. That which came from God bears His title and stamp and can never be destroyed. Christ came the first time not to do away with the law, but to bring its fullest expression in His obedience to it. A greater than Moses has come. He who is the Author of the law was made under it: “But when the fulness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law” (Gal. 4:4 NASB). Christ’s relation to the law was to expound its spirituality, embody its principles, and honor it by suffering the penalty of its transgression for the elect.

The following reasons show that Christ is the fullest expression of the law: (1) The law manifests what man is in himself. Christ reveals what God is in Himself. (2) The law demands righteousness from man, whether saved or unsaved. Christ brings righteousness to the elect for salvation and in them for sanctification, positional and conditional. (3) The law sentences living men to death. Christ makes dead men live.

God’s moral law is for Jews and Gentiles. God as Creator (Elohim) and as the covenant God (Yahweh) spoke the moral law. (See Gen. 1:1; 2:4; Ex. 20:1, 2.) The moral law is designated spiritual (Rom. 7:14). It could not be designated otherwise, since it is the very impress of the character of God who gave it. The law allows no change, admits no deficiency, makes no allowances, and lends to no circumstances. Therefore, the moral law remains no less for the twentieth century subsequent to Christ than the fifteenth century before Christ.

Christ gave a summary of the moral law: “...YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. On these two commandments depend the whole Law [Moses—Luke 24:27] and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40 NASB). The first table of the law consists in a life of worship, and the second consists in a life of service. The first table forbids sin against God in thought. The second table proceeds in reverse order. It forbids sins against our neighbor in deed, word, and thought. Unlike every other code of ethics the world has ever known, the moral law begins and ends with the utter prohibition of evil thoughts. Every person is conscious of breaking God’s law because out of the heart proceed evil thoughts (Mark 7:21).

The moral law was not abolished from the time of Moses to Jesus Christ. Christ did not teach that we can keep our sin and our Savior. He showed the Pharisees and scribes that their concept of the law did not extend far enough. Murder includes a furious thought, and adultery entails a lascivious look. The law was preserved in the ark of the covenant when the tabernacle was erected. Jehovah did not take up His abode in Israel's midst until the law was placed in the ark, which had been covered with blood. Therefore, the moral law was the basis for God's government in dealing with Israel. This distinguishes the moral law from the law of Moses into which the moral law was incorporated.

The moral law, as the New Testament interprets it, stands today. Paul referred to the moral law in his writings (Rom. 13:8-10; I Tim. 1:8-11). Our relationship to the law continues because "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness" (I John 3:4 NASB). In its correct place, the law is correct and useful. Although no one can be saved or justified by it, the Christian delights in it (Rom. 7:22) and serves it (Rom. 7:25). Furthermore, the gospel of Christ has not lowered the standard of personal holiness: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him" (John 14:21 NASB). Obeying God because one loves to do so is not legalistic. The Biblical doctrine of sanctification does not teach relying and relaxing but trusting and obeying.

Having been an unregenerate Jew, Paul knew the Jews were too filled with prejudice to render justice. The regeneration and conversion of Saul of Tarsus is one of the high points in the Acts. Historical narratives of the Hebrews and the Gentiles are recorded in chapters 9, 22, and 26. An unpretentious man, Ananias, helped Saul of Tarsus, a strong man. Although Ananias was a private person, he was prepared and ready to serve. He was ready to assist in Saul's conversion, but he could not assist in his regeneration. The Spirit of regeneration on a passive sinner solely accomplished that. The servant was reminded that Saul was "a chosen vessel" to bear the Lord's name before Gentiles, kings, and Israel (Acts 9:1-16). Saul was an enemy of Jesus Christ and His followers before he was apprehended by grace. However, he was captured, conquered, captivated, and controlled by grace. Two things exist in every true conversion—the sinner gets the Savior, and God gets a willing servant (Phil. 2:13, 14).

Christians know they cannot get human justice from either civil governments or religious tribunals (seats of judgment). Any public servant knows that before he can be elected or reelected he must please the majority; therefore, popularity with any democratic society takes precedence over human justice. When Paul faced Festus, he said, "...I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried, I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know. If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of these things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar" (Acts 25:10, 11 NASB). Paul believed in capital punishment; therefore, he told Festus if he had committed anything worthy of death, he was willing to die.

In Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he acknowledged that every person should be in subjection to governing authorities. Furthermore, he affirmed God-given civil authority, but the authority of human government has no right to violate God's commandments and principles. When human authority approves practices that God condemns, Christians "must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29 NASB). Biblical examples of disobedience to human authority are recorded. Moses' parents and the midwives disobeyed the king of Egypt by refusing to drown Moses in the Nile river (Ex. 1:16-22; Heb. 11:23). The name of Rahab, the saved prostitute, appears among the heroes of faith because of her civil disobedience (Josh. 2:1-7; 6:17-25; Heb. 11:31). Obadiah's act of disobedience to civil rulers was during the time of Ahab and Jezebel, when he hid one hundred prophets in caves to protect them (I Kings 18:1-15). Three Hebrews refused to obey King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3:17, 18; Heb. 11:34). Daniel refused to comply with a royal decree issued by Darius (Dan. 6:1-9; Heb. 11:33).

Peter and the apostles gave a sermon of seven words that is of contemporary value: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29 NASB). (Study Acts 5:17-32.) This brief statement is the foundation of true liberty. Peter said all that was needful and then stopped. In this short statement he defended himself, confounded his adversaries, and commended Christ. To obey God is not simply acting according to His will, but because it is His will. Obedience, in order to be acceptable, must be internal as well as external.

Beginning with Noah, capital punishment is a fundamental part of civil government that God instituted as the moral governor of the new world. It is not derived from Jesus Christ as Mediator. The legislative acts are termed "human institution" (I Pet. 2:13 NASB). Civil rule extends to all citizens without exception: "LET every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Rom. 13:1 NASB). Christ Himself paid tribute to Caesar. Christians should obey from a conscientious regard to the authority of God. However, this does not indicate that they are to obey man's laws when they contradict God's laws. Christians make the better citizens in any form of human government because they are citizens of heaven.

God instituted civil authority for a particular function. That jurisdiction is separate and distinct from government by the assembly Christ is building. Civil government has been given the right to use the sword and exercise coercion to enforce laws that do not contradict God's laws: "Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake" (Rom. 13:2-5 NASB). This does not give civil authority the right to make laws that lower the standard below God's moral law. At His first advent, the Son of God did not abolish the moral law of God. Lowering the standard

of civil government is never a concept of helping humanity. There are perverted notions about morals, religions, and freedom today, as there have been and will always be until Christ's second advent.

Political and patriotic organizations use the passages of Scripture from Romans 13 and I Peter 2 as a means of stimulating support for their organizations. However, these chapters do not belong to the average citizen. They belong to Christian citizens, and good citizenship goes back to God. It is based on the moral law of God. Christ's sermon on the mountain in Matthew 5 did not contradict Moses. However, Christ was opposed to the legalistic system the scribes developed by failing to handle the Scriptures correctly, as so many are continuing to do. Christ revealed the Old Testament as possessing permanent validity. At the same time, He regarded His own teaching as equally binding (Matt. 5:17-19). What appeared to be an antithesis between Christ's pronouncements and Moses' previously spoken pronouncements was not in fact an antithesis. The conclusion from the Sermon on the Mount is the recognition that the Old Testament possesses Divine authority. Furthermore, Christ claimed authority to draw out principles that were latent within it and to disclaim false deductions that had been drawn from it. The Old Testament is the gospel in bud. The New Testament is the gospel in full flower.

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