**Capital Punishment**

**Biblical passages most often cited to oppose capital punishment**

Opponents of capital punishment see it as exactly the kind of revenge and human judgment that Jesus and His apostles so often warned against. They specifically cite Romans 12:19, “Do not take revenge…” They believe the principles set forth by Jesus and the apostles restrict punishment to only that which is necessary to protect society.

Opponents of capital punishment believe that the Mosaic Laws, which required the death penalty for a wide variety of offenses, are part of the old covenant, and since Jesus came to fulfill the law, we are now under a new covenant and no longer the old.

Opponents of capital punishment also point out that Jesus taught great principles for us to apply in our lives, rather than specific laws. Thus, his failure to specifically condemn slavery, capital punishment and many other evils should not be interpreted as approval of those things. They see the mercy He showed to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11) as His rejection of capital punishment.

Some opponents of capital punishment see a prohibition against capital punishment in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:13), "Thou shalt not kill.”

**Biblical passages most often cited to support capital punishment**

Proponents suggest that the citation in Romans 12:19 regarding not taking revenge is directed to the individual, while the passage in Romans 13:4 is directed to the government “…the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”

Proponents of capital punishment reference Genesis 9: 5-6, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image.” This law was given to Noah after the flood as an “everlasting covenant” in Genesis 9:16. The direction given to Noah applies to all human beings on the earth for all generations.

Proponents of capital punishment say that Jesus did speak about the death penalty in Matthew 26, when he acknowledged it and even used similar words to those in Genesis. In Matthew 26:52, Jesus references Peter’s sword. He didn’t have a problem with the sword because He says, “Put your sword back in its place.” The sword apparently had a place, but not for that situation. Then Jesus goes on to say, “…for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.” Clearly not an argument against capital punishment, more like support for Genesis 9: 5-6.

In this short discussion, Jesus even appears to recognize the difference between the sword being used as part of government and the sword being used in offense as an individual. The man Peter would use the sword against was not acting on his own, he was carrying out the direction of his superiors. The man was therefore not guilty and, if Peter had been called by his government to battle, he would not have been guilty in using his sword either. However, in this case, that was not Peter’s call and his violence against this man would have been equal to the shedding of innocent blood.

Proponents of capital punishment do not believe that the Ten Commandments can be used as an argument against it. Most experts believe that the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” is not a prohibition against capital punishment because the original Hebrew word, which is often translated as “kill” would be better translated as “murder,” which implies an innocent life, and in the very next chapter Exodus 21:12 requires the death penalty for murder.