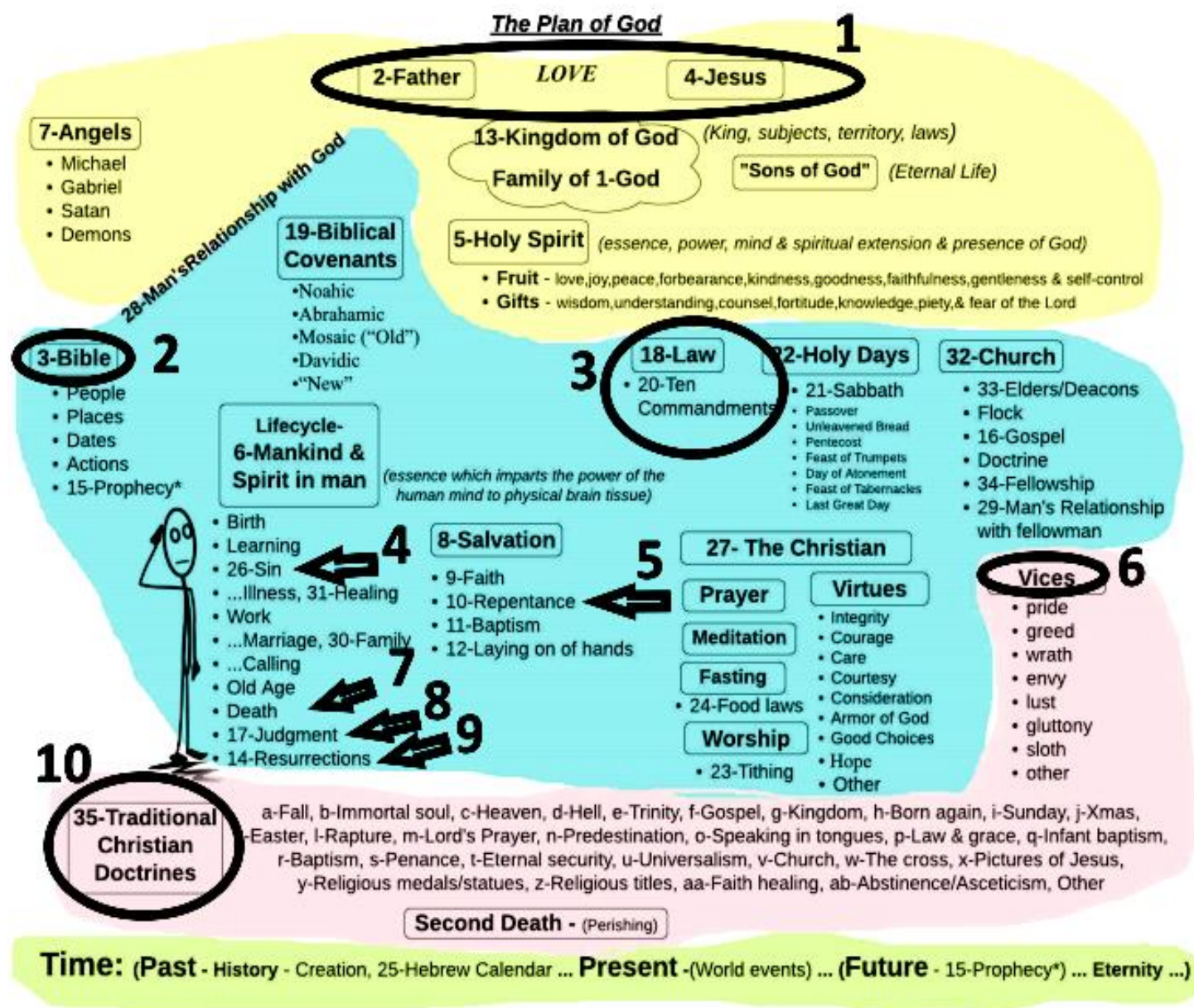


# Interesting Questions: The Christian View of ... Capital Punishment

Eric asked for a sermon on the topic of Capital Punishment ... And I agreed quickly, because it allows us to explore a *complex question* together ... to see if we can understand the *mind of God* on this subject ... that touches MANY of our doctrinal beliefs!

The tendency might be to grab one scripture, make a decision, & close the Bible ... but... with a complex question there are many points to consider... to arrive at a correct, & comprehensive understanding of the factors involved ... to arrive at a right conclusion.

**Isa 1:18** "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD...



## 1- Father & Jesus & Love

Pro- Gal\_6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

Con- Luk 9:56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them."

**2- Bible** - *(Direct statement of scripture are the best source of doctrinal proof)*

Pro- **Exo 21:12** He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.

Con- **Romans 12:17-21** Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

### **3- Law, 10 Commandments**

Pro- **Exo 20:13** You shall not murder. *(Breaking the Law has consequences)*

Con- **Exo 20:13** You shall not murder. *(Capital punishment is kills people)*

### **4- Sin**

Pro- **Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death ...

Con- **John 8:7** So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.'

### **5- Repentance**

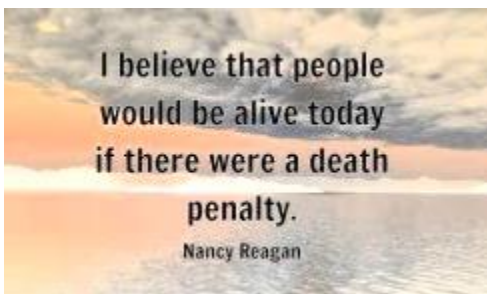
Pro- Deu 19:11-13 "But if anyone hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally, so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities, then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. **Your eye shall not pity him**, but you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you.

Con- **Ezekiel 33:11** Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways!'

### **6- Vices**

Pro- **Exo 22:18-20** You **shall not permit** (suffer - KJV) a sorceress to live. Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death. He who sacrifices to any god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed.

Con- **Rev 2:20-21** Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And **I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality**, and she did not repent.



### **7- Death**

Pro- **Gen 9:6** Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.

Con- **Ezekiel 18:32** For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord God. "Therefore turn and live!"



## 8- Judgment

Pro- **Deu\_17:6** Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.

Con- **Proverbs 17:15** He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, Both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord.

## 9- Resurrections




Pro- The second resurrection will give mankind a fair chance to know God

Con- The first resurrection is the Best - Life in prison might enable someone to respond to God's call

## 10- Traditional Christian Doctrines

Pro- If someone is "predestined" to be saved, they cannot lose their salvation so it is *okay* to execute *them!*

Con- Belief that "*this life*" is the ONLY day of salvation causes the incorrect view that a Christian might want a monster to stay alive in prison - in case they repent!

BRITANNICA PROCON.ORG		RELIABLE. NONPARTISAN. EMPOWERING.	
Death Penalty			
 Pro Death Penalty	 Con Death Penalty	 Not Clearly Pro or Con	
Islam	Catholic Church	Assemblies of God	
Southern Baptist Association	Conservative Judaism	Buddhism	
Church of God	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints	
	Episcopal Church	Hinduism	
	Orthodox Judaism		
	Presbyterian Church USA		
	Reconstructionist Judaism		
	Reform Judaism		
	Unitarian Universalist Association		
	United Church of Christ		
	United Methodist Church		

### **Southern Baptist - Pro**

“WHEREAS, The Bible teaches that **every human life has sacred value** (Genesis 1:27) and forbids the taking of innocent human life (Exodus 20:13); and

WHEREAS, God has vested in the **civil magistrate** the responsibility of protecting the innocent and punishing the guilty (Romans 13:1-3); and

WHEREAS, We recognize that fallen human nature has made **impossible a perfect judicial system**; and

WHEREAS, God authorized capital punishment for murder after the Noahic Flood, **validating its legitimacy** in human society (Genesis 9:6); and

WHEREAS, God **forbids personal revenge** (Romans 12:19) & has established capital punishment as a just & appropriate means by which the civil magistrate may punish those guilty of capital crimes (Romans 13:4); and

WHEREAS, **God requires proof of guilt** before any punishment is administered (Deuteronomy 19:15-19); &

WHEREAS, God’s instructions require a civil magistrate to **judge all people equally** under the law, regardless of class or status (Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:17); and

WHEREAS, All people, including those guilty of capital crimes, are created in the image of God and should be treated with dignity (Genesis 1:27).

Therefore, be it RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in Orlando, Florida, June 13-14, 2000, support the fair and equitable use of capital punishment by civil magistrates as a legitimate form of punishment for those guilty of murder or treasonous acts that result in death”

### **Catholic - Con**

“There are two extreme situations that may come to be seen as *solutions* in especially dramatic circumstances, without realizing that they are **false answers** that do not resolve the problems they are meant to solve and ultimately do no more than introduce new elements of destruction in the fabric of national and global society. These are *war* and the *death penalty*...

Saint John Paul II stated clearly and firmly that the death penalty is **inadequate** from a moral standpoint and **no longer necessary** from that of penal justice. There can be no stepping back from this position. Today we state clearly that ‘the death penalty is inadmissible’ and the Church is firmly committed to calling for its abolition worldwide.”

Source: Pope Francis, “Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti of the Holy Father Francis on Fraternity and Social Friendship,” vatican.va, Oct. 3, 2020

### **Lutheran - Con**

“The Death Penalty stands in the Lutheran tradition recognizing that God entrusts the state with the power to take human life **when failure to do so constitutes a clear danger to the common good**. Never-the-less, it expresses ELCA opposition to the use of the death penalty, one that grows out of ministry with and to people affected by violent crime.

The statement acknowledges the existence of different points of view within the church and society on this question and the need for continued deliberation, but it objects to the use of the death penalty **because it is not used fairly and has failed to make society safer**. The practice of using the death penalty in contemporary society undermines any possible alternate moral message since **the primary message conveyed by an execution is one of brutality and violence**. This social statement was adopted by the 1991 ELCA Assembly.”

Source: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “Death Penalty,” elca.org (accessed Aug. 26, 2021)

## **Mormon - No Policy**

“The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regards the question of whether and in what circumstances the state should impose capital punishment as a matter to be decided solely by the prescribed processes of civil law. We neither promote nor oppose capital punishment.”

Source: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, “Capital Punishment,” [newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org](https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org) (accessed Aug. 26, 2021)

The Old Testament Law prescribed the death penalty for an extensive list of crimes including:

- Murder (Exodus 21:12-14; Leviticus 24:17,21)
- Attacking or cursing a parent (Exodus 21:15,17)
- Disobedience to parents (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)
- Kidnapping (Exodus 21:16)
- Failure to confine a dangerous animal, resulting in death (Exodus 21:28-29)
- Witchcraft and sorcery (Exodus 22:18, Leviticus 20:27, Deuteronomy 13:5, 1 Samuel 28:9)
- Human sacrifice (Leviticus 20:2-5)
- Sex with an animal (Exodus 22:19, Leviticus 20:16)
- Doing work on the Sabbath (Exodus 31:14, 35:2, Numbers 15:32-36)
- Incest (Leviticus 18:6-18, 20:11-12,14,17,19-21)
- Adultery (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22)
- Homosexual acts (Leviticus 20:13)
- Prostitution by a priest's daughter (Leviticus 21:9)
- Blasphemy (Leviticus 24:14,16, 23)
- False prophecy (Deuteronomy 18:20)
- Perjury in capital cases (Deuteronomy 19:16-19)
- Refusing to obey a decision of a judge or priest (Deuteronomy 17:12)
- False claim of a woman's virginity at time of marriage (Deuteronomy 22:13-21)
- Sex between a woman pledged to be married and a man other than her betrothed (Deuteronomy 22:23-24)

## Interesting Points about Capital Punishment ...

- **54%** of Canadians support Capital Punishment for murder
- In pre-Confederation Canada, **hundreds** of criminal offences were punishable by death. By **1865**, only **murder, treason & rape** were still considered capital offenses
- **1976** Capital punishment for murder was eliminated in Canada & **1998** any Armed Forces crimes (desertion, spying, etc) were no longer eligible for capital punishment
- **64%** of Americans say the death penalty is morally justified for a crime like murder
  - **63%** say the death penalty does not deter serious crimes
  - **78%** say there is some risk that an innocent person will be executed
- **1984** - average wait for execution to occur was **6 years**
  - **2019** - average wait for execution was **22 years**
  - In California, more death row inmates have died from natural causes or suicide than from executions since 1978
- In US **2020** ... **31** people sentenced to death, **17** executions occurred
  - These numbers are “way down” from **late 1990s** (**330** sentenced & **98** executions)

## The Key points raised in considering Capital Punishment today

Argument	Pro	Con
<b>Deterrence</b>	Capital punishment deters potential criminals due to the severe consequences.	Empirical evidence on the deterrent effect of the death penalty is inconclusive.
<b>Retribution</b>	The death penalty provides a just response to heinous crimes by ensuring punishment fits the severity of the crime.	A life sentence provides "some" retribution
<b>Public Safety</b>	Executing dangerous criminals eliminates the risk of further crimes, ensuring the safety of society.	Life imprisonment without parole can achieve public safety goals without resorting to the death penalty.
<b>Irreversible Justice for Victims' Families</b>	Capital punishment provides closure and justice for the families of victims by holding the perpetrator accountable.	Once carried out, the death penalty is irreversible, and mistakes cannot be rectified.
<b>Moral and Religious Grounds</b>	Some religious and moral perspectives support the death penalty as a just response to certain crimes.	The death penalty raises ethical and moral questions, including the sanctity of life.
<b>Cost Savings (overcrowded prisons, limited resources)</b>	The death penalty may be more cost-effective than life imprisonment without parole.	The death penalty involves prolonged legal processes, leading to high costs and delayed justice.
<b>Closure for Society</b>	Executing individuals provides closure for society by removing a threat and sending a clear message about consequences. <b>Deu 21:21</b> Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall <b>put away the evil from among you</b> , and all Israel shall <b>hear &amp; fear</b> .	A life sentence provides "some" closure
<b>Preservation of Social Order</b>	Capital punishment reinforces societal norms and helps maintain social order. Deu 21:21 hear & fear	Countries abolishing the death penalty still have "social order"

## The Key points raised in considering Capital Punishment today (continued)

Argument	Pro	Con
<b>Proportional Punishment</b>	The death penalty is not "inhumane"- it ensures that the punishment is proportional to the severity of the crime - not reduced sentences. Some hold that long prison terms are "inhumane"	A life sentence provides "some" punishment.
<b>Expresses Public Outrage</b>	Capital punishment reflects the moral outrage of society in response to particularly heinous crimes.	A life sentence provides "some" closure
<b>Risk of Wrongful Executions</b>	Civil authorities (like in Ancient Israel - or the New Testament Roman Empire, or today) require evidence & witnesses. Scripture shows God considered the benefit from Capital punishment to be worthwhile even in an imperfect justice system. Jesus & Paul did not declare Rome had "no authority" to put people to death... Why do we today?	The legal system is fallible, and there's a risk of executing innocent individuals.
<b>Lack of Rehabilitation Opportunities</b>	Scripture (God) provides a list of capital offenses where immanent death was the just punishment	Capital punishment denies individuals the opportunity for rehabilitation and potential redemption.
<b>Global Abolition Trends</b>	"Some" global trends may be good, but many trends today point to the rise of injustice & evil in society	Many countries are moving away from the death penalty, reflecting evolving global perspectives & United Nations calls for complete abolition
<b>Racial &amp; Socio-Economic Inconsistancies</b>	Scripture calls for fair treatment & civil governments call for no favortism... This is a known problem with mankind - NOT a reason to eliminate courts & justice because every judge is not perfect	There are disparities in the application of the death penalty, raising concerns about fairness.

Some conclusions ... ??

- What the ***Church of God International Canada*** says about this subject means ... “little-to-nothing” to the Government of Canada or the Government of the United States
- There are some clear statements of Scripture to show God’s instituting & **support** for capital punishment (for all the reasons listed). It “surely” needs to be done!  
**Leviticus 24:17** Whoever kills any man shall **surely** be put to death.  
 Are you a “filthy sinner” if you support Capital Punishment for the scriptural reasons? **No!**
- Scripture is also about “freedom of choice”, “freedom of conscience”, “reasoning with God”... Some Christians are vegetarian. Some Christians choose to live by different rules in their carefulness to keep the Sabbath (eg no restaurants). Some Christians emphasize “other valid Bible scriptures & reasoning” to conclude civil society today can accomplish the goals of protecting society & punishing capital crimes via life in prison - which removes the need for the death penalty.  
 Are you a “filthy sinner” if you reject civil society using capital punishment? **No!**
- The umbrella of the church is big enough to accommodate those with both views... as long as we value each other’s right to choose a position... (**Some issues** are NOT optional!)

*Final thoughts ...* From Ron Dart's booklet: Capital Punishment the Christian Dilemma

Vengeance is a central value of justice ... But NOT personal vengeance. The exaction of personal vengeance will only lead to retaliation, counter-retaliation, and more vengeance.

God *promises* that He will avenge our wrong.

- **Rom 12:19** Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.

(NLT) **Rom 12:19-20** Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD. Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink..."

How exactly will God repay grievous wrongs?

**Rom 13:1-4** Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Rom 13:2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Rom 13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

Rom 13:4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not **bear the sword** in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.



The passage we read declares that "the higher powers," i.e., rulers, government, or the state, are the instruments that God authorizes to exact vengeance on behalf of the oppressed. Legitimate governmental authority, Paul tells us, is derived from God. We are further told that the government 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 (Romans 13:4, 5). Notice that Paul uses the word "sword." This is an explicit reference to the death penalty. **God commands His servants to avoid personal, private vengeance, but He expects the official vengeance to be executed by the state.** The passage in Romans 13 is troubling, because of the endemic corruption we encounter in government. But that only makes the case stronger. If we are entrusted with the responsibility of administering justice, we must administer justice. **Failure in this area will lead to the collapse of a society.** The Christian dilemma arises from confusing:

- our personal responsibility to forgive with
- the responsibility of the state to execute vengeance.

Personally, we must forgive. But the state is under no such requirement. In fact, the government is expressly forbidden to back down out of some misguided sense of pity. (ie Deu 25:11) Mercy and forgiveness is for individuals and churches. Justice is for the governments.