



Capital Punishment :- Right or Wrong

Introduction :- There has been a lot of discussion both in the public domain and also in parliament on whether we as a country should bring back the death penalty for certain crimes. Every time there is a high profile crime like a child murder or rape, cries are heard again to bring back the death penalty. Capital punishment is defined as :- “Execution under legal authority, as a punishment for a crime.”

145 countries in the world still practice capital punishment. These countries perform this act as follows:-

5 – by lethal injection, - 73 by firing squad, - 58 by hanging, - 6 by stoning, - 3 by beheading

Discuss –

Q. Do you think there are any grounds that capital punishment should be used?

Q. If not – How do you think we should punish serious crimes?

Q. What do you think the for's and against are of using capital punishment?

As with many subjects Christians hold different view points on this subject.

(discuss strengths and weakness of both arguments :- pointing on views in as well!)

Argument used by Christians – Who are FOR Capital Punishment:-

Point 1) It is God Himself who established the death penalty:-

Early on in our relationship with God:- we find that God establishes the sanctity of life by saying that if a man takes the life of another man, he should be put to death. (Genesis 9 v 4 – 7) He also establishes this idea of justice within the Jewish law. (Exodus 21 v 12 – 17, Exodus 22 v 18 – 20, Leviticus 20 v 7 – 16) Those who argue for Capital Punishment say, while the specific issues described here may not warrant death penalty anymore – the principle remains the same. God has given permission of serious sins to be punished by death and certainly in the case of murder. They say that God has established the sanctity of life and even before the Jewish law establishes that the punishment for murder is the death penalty. Therefore they see capital punishment tied up with the creation order, due to the sanctity of life rather than a specific Old Testament Law decree. As a result of this they say this is a universally binding principle that precedes the law.

Point 2) God Himself used the death penalty for transgressions.

Supporters of the death penalty say that not only did God establish the death penalty in Jewish law, but Himself also practised it. Examples :- flood in Noah's time (Gen. 6 – 8) Punishes by death all of humanity because of their wicked sins. Sodom and Gomorrah is another example in relation to sin. In many senses throughout the Old Testament, God used Capital punishment to punish Israel for its sins.

Point 3) Jesus never spoke against or rescinded the death penalty.

Arguers for the death penalty say that often the teaching of Jesus has been quoted out of context by those who argue against the death penalty. Often the Sermon on the Mount is quoted to establish that Jesus' line was to forgive and turn the other cheek to your enemies, therefore His line would be against capital punishment. However those for Capital Punishment, say what Jesus is dealing with here is the individual's desire for retribution and revenge. Jesus is not speaking against the power and authority of governments to decide to punish by death, rather He is saying that individual's must not take it upon themselves to administer vengeance. If they do they are replacing the power and rule of a legitimate government to make decisions on law and order.

Point 4) The New Testament gives authority of Law and Punishment to government.

In Romans 13 v 1 – 7 supporters of the death penalty say Paul here gives permission for governments to administer justice. In the context of the emblem of the Roman sword, they say this is a reference to capital punishment. Nowhere does the New Testament speak against capital punishment in a world that practised it widely.

Arguments used by Christians – who are AGAINST Capital Punishment