

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT
Numbers 35:16, Romans 13:4
By Raymond White

Is capital punishment right or wrong? A non-believer has the luxury of deciding one way or the other based on his or her own conscience. But a Christian tries to subject his or her own will to the Bible. So I've listed here those verses in the Bible that I think pertain to the subject and of course added my own comments.

[1] IN THE BEGINNING

To begin at the beginning, we need to look at the first murder,

***Genesis 4:8** And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.*

The word "slew" would be more properly translated "slit the throat." The idea being that this act of violence was more than just an act of rage, it was an act of spite. "Here God, you want a blood offering? I'll give you a blood offering. Here's Abel!"

This is interesting. Particularly God's response. Not just what God said but what God did.

***Genesis 4:12** When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. **:13** And Cain said unto the Lord, my punishment is more than I can bare. **:14** ...and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. **:15** And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slaith Cain vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.*

This story is really strange. Instead of executing Cain for murder, God merely curses him, marks him, and drives him out. Then Cain, instead of being grateful for having gotten off easy, complains, "This is too tough. People out there are going to kill me." — which, by the way, makes us wonder who else is "out there" who might kill him.

The point is that God not only didn't execute Cain, but acted decisively to protect him.

Why would God do that? I don't know. What precisely is the mark? I don't know. Why would God expect a mere mark to protect Cain from reprisal? I don't know. Or maybe it wasn't reprisal that Cain feared but simply being a stranger among strange people. I don't know.

This text is strange for many reasons, but one thing is clear: God was not interested in capital punishment. God did not want Cain dead, but instead seems to have just tolerated murder as a fact of life. Murder was soon even something to brag about.

***Genesis 4:23** And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. **:24** If Cain be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.*

Life was survival of the fittest and there was no law or government to make it otherwise. And that was the reality until one day when God said enough. You want violence? I'll give you violence, I'll kill all of you. Will that satisfy your lust for violence?

***Genesis 6:11** The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. :13 And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh has come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.*

Until that moment, God had tolerated human violence, so much so that he made people to live a very long time, presumably to give them more time to repent, which they never did. The oldest man who ever lived was Methuselah.

***Genesis 5:27** And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine: and he died.*

Methuselah's story is not an incidental side note. He lived so long that he survived his son Lamech and was around to watch his grandson Noah build his ark.

Why this is important is that the word Methuselah means something like "the dart" or a killing instrument. Some see in his name this meaning: "at his death, it will come." In other words, in the year that Methuselah dies, the flood will come. In other words, God, in his long suffering grace, not wanting to pull the trigger, postponed and postponed that final violent judgment by extending Methuselah's life way beyond the normal even for that day in order to give them every possible chance to repent.

But they didn't and so the flood came. God met violence with violence.

And when the flood was over and the human family began again, since God's hands off policy didn't work, it was time to try something new, something drastic.

[2] THE BEGINNING OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The result of social leniency was more and more violence, to the point where all of society was wrecked and God felt compelled to start the whole human experience all over again.

When the ark landed, God gave an instruction to Noah and his family. It was new, something that had never been done before, and it was shocking.

***Genesis 9:6** Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.*

And thus was born capital punishment, and with it, laws and government. Without laws and government, invoking capital punishment would simply be impossible. To execute a murderer required a common consent of a village, a city, or whatever, and a police power to arrest and execute. And so God was in effect authorizing government.

So, why capital punishment? Because man is in the image of God and must be avenged.

That of course is a very spiritual answer. A more practical answer is that capital punishment guarantees that a murderer will never murder again because he is dead. Another

answer is that capital punishment is a strong incentive to would-be murderers to not murder thus reducing the murder rate. And still another answer is, face it, we want revenge.

Most people would say justice, but frankly I've never found adequate definitions of those two words that made any clear distinction. In the cosmic scheme of things, we want to even the scale as best we can which is the goal of both revenge and justice. However if it's the legal system exacting it, we call it justice, and if it's just you, we call it revenge.

So, putting it all together, why do we need justice; that is, capital justice? For all those reasons just stated. The Bible says it this way:

***Ecclesiastes 8:11** Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

If we refuse to execute murderers, the murder rate goes up. Many studies have shown that. So it is no act of mercy to be lenient on murderers. Mercy on murderers actually sentences more innocent people to die. That is not an act of kindness. Also, if we seriously want to reduce the murder rate, we should scrap gun control laws and pass conceal carry laws. Gun control actually *increases* the murder rate. Studies have shown that too.

We need to execute capital justice because it works. To keep civilization civil, we need to execute laws that are vicious against criminals, and particularly vicious against vicious criminals.

[3] CAPITAL CRIMES

So then, what crimes are capital crimes? That's where Moses becomes important. When God freed Israel from bondage and made a nation of these ex-slaves, he gave that new nation a constitution, and that constitution we call the Mosaic Law, or the Torah.

In the Torah, God defines what is and is not a crime; and more specifically, what is a capital crime. Here is a short list (not a complete list) of capital crimes identified in the Torah.

[3.1] MURDER

First on the docket is murder. How is the law to respond to murder?

***Numbers 35:16** The murderer shall surely be put to death :**30** Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die. :**31** Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely be put to death. :**32** And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest. :**33** So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed there in, but by the blood of him that shed it.*

Some crimes the criminal can buy his way out. Today it's a fine or jail time. Back then it was a fine (recompense) or slave time. But not so for murder. "Take no satisfaction" means that a murderer cannot buy his way out, murderers "shall surely be put to death."

[3.2] KIDNAPPING

Deuteronomy 24:7 If a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandise of him, or selleth him; then that thief shall die; and thou shalt put evil away from among you.

You cannot just kidnap someone and make him or her your slave. Israel's notion of slavery was far different than Rome's.

[3.3] ADULTERY

Deuteronomy 22:20 But if this thing be true [that the bride was not a virgin] :22 Then ... the men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die.

This is a truth-in-marriage law. I'm sure every girl in Israel knew this law. This is not something to mess with. If a girl who is getting married is not a virgin and thinks "why should I bother to disclose my tainted past", well, this is why she should disclose it: her life was at stake.

Deuteronomy 22:22 If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die.

Adultery was a capital crime. Today, adultery has no penalties, except maybe alimony.

Deuteronomy 22:23 If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her :24 ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife.

Even if the girl is only engaged, sex with another man is still a capital crime. "She cried not" means she consented, this was not rape.

This was the situation between Joseph and Mary the mother of Jesus. They were engaged, Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant, therefore Joseph could have had her executed. But he would not. He acted only to annul the marriage and that privately. He was a gentlemen.

[3.4] RAPE

Deuteronomy 22:25 But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die.

Rape was a capital crime under the Mosaic Law.

[4] NOT CAPITAL CRIMES

It is as important and perhaps more important to know what is *not* a capital crime, and, for that matter, not a crime at all. You'd think this would be obvious, but unfortunately it is not.

In American law, people who are innocent of any wrong doing are so often sued that we feel the need to carry excessive liability insurance to protect ourselves from professional plaintiffs.

God is as concerned about legal injustice as much as he is about non-justice, and that is evidenced by the ninth commandment.

Exodus 20:16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

This commandment puts perjury at the top of legal prohibitions. So, with that objective in mind, protecting innocent people from the courts, here is my short list of not-capital-crimes..

[4.1] EXECUTIONERS

It is not a crime to execute a capital criminal. This may seem obvious, but there are people who are so opposed to capital punishment that they say foolish things like “executing a murderer makes you as bad as the murderer.” In their mind the executioner is a murderer. Well, he’s not, and the anti-capital-punishment people are wrong.

The expression “*thy blood be upon thy head,*” is a legal expression that describes this very thing. When a person is murdered, the law demanded that blood be shed for him; namely, the murderer’s blood. But when the murderer is executed, is there blood shed for him? Actually, yes. Not the executioner’s blood — the executioner does kill the murderer but he is not responsible for the murder’s death — but the murderer is responsible for his own blood. In other words, the murderer is responsible for two deaths, his victim’s and his own — his own blood was on his own head.

Here is an example. When King Saul died, David asked if any Israelite soldier was responsible for Saul’s death. One soldier foolishly announced that he had killed King Saul thinking that he would be rewarded for killing David’s enemy. He was wrong. Here’s what happened.

2 Samuel 1:15 And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died. :16 And David said unto him, Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the LORD’s anointed.

And of course whatever young executioner that killed Saul’s killer was himself not guilty of any crime. The self-declared killer of Saul was guilty of two deaths, Saul’s and his own.

[4.2] SELF DEFENSE

Exodus 22:2 If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. :3 If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

If there is a burglar in your house at night and you kill him, you are innocent of any wrong doing. Because how could you possibly know that he was not intending physical harm? Maybe he was planning to murder you and your family. Maybe he was planning to kidnap your

daughters for nefarious purposes. You don't know. And so you have a right to take any action necessary to stop his crime, including killing him.

But what about the next day? The burglar took what he wanted, he left, he harmed no one, and the crime is over, Now what? Do you have a right to find him and kill him? No. If you do that then *you* have committed murder and will be executed for it.

But assuming that the burglar is found and apprehended, then he must make full restitution, and if he can't, then he will be sold as a slave (in our law, put in prison).

Now that's good law. It all makes sense.

[4.3] CONSENSUAL SEX

Suppose a man and a woman, both unmarried and unengaged, have consensual sex. Is that a capital crime or not? We might think yes it is because there are many sexual behaviors that are capital crimes. But no, consensual sex between an unattached man and an unattached woman is not a capital crime. It is, however, in one sense a crime, in the sense that there is a penalty. Here is the penalty.

Deuteronomy 22:28 If a man find a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed ... and lie with her ...:29 she shall be his wife ... he may not put her away all his days.

The penalty for consensual unmarried sex between a man and a woman was (ta-da!) marriage! And marriage without the possibility of divorce.

Some men might think that penalty is worse than death, but there it is.

[4.4] RAPE VICTIMS

It was not a crime to be a rape victim. You'd think that would be obvious, but in some Islamic countries, a rape victim is thought to have committed a crime and must pay for that "crime" by being lashed. Such absurd "justice" is unheard of in the Bible.

Deuteronomy 22:25 But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die. :26 But unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death: for as when a man riseth against his neighbor, and slayeth him, even so is this matter. :27 For he found her in the field, and the betrothed damsel cried, and there was none to save her.

[4.5] CHILDREN OF CRIMINALS

This one is vitally important. It is not a crime to be the child of a criminal.

Deuteronomy 24:16 The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

This was not as obvious as it seems. The Code of Hammurabi (400 years before Moses) had a strange law (strange to us, somehow not strange to them) that if I kill your daughter, then you can kill my daughter. That's a little rough on the girls, but to them that was justice.

Lest we judge Hammurabi too harshly, it was also not so obvious to the Jews, or the Persians. The Bible gives us situations where the clear justice of **Deuteronomy 24:16** seems to have gotten mislaid. Here are three stories with very sad endings — for the children.

Esther 9:13 *Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shusan to do to morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows. :14 And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shusan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons.* Did the girls fare better?

Daniel 6:24 *And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions had mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.*

Joshua 7:24 *And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan ... and his sons, and his daughters, and ... :25 stoned them with stones.*

But to be somewhat encouraging, there is one Bible story anyway where the common sense justice of **Deuteronomy 24:16** finally did prevail. Here it is.

2 Kings 14:6 *But the children of the murderers he [Amaziah] slew not: according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin.*

It is disconcerting that the only reason Amaziah acted civilly was because of the law. If not for the law, the implication is that he would have killed the children. It's nice that the law protects children. It's not so nice that we need law to protect children. You'd think conscience would be sufficient.

So, what is my point? I suppose this: Law can be unjust and deadly, and law can be your only chance of survival. We call that a two edged sword.

[5] DUE PROCESS

In the Mosaic Law, what is required to get a capital conviction? Two witnesses are required.

Deuteronomy 17:6 *At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.*

And why is that? Because anyone can say anything, and there is the legitimate fear that a false accusation can make the court itself an instrument of injustice. Of the 10 commandments, the first eight define what courts are to do: convict the guilty. The 9th commandment defines what courts are *not* to do: convict the innocent.

Exodus 20:16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

In other words, courts — with their frighteningly lethal police powers that God has given them — had better get it right.

And that's why two witnesses are required. One witness can lie. And how would defense attorneys expose a lying witness? If there is only one witness, they can't. The lying witness stands by his story and that's that. But if there are two witnesses, they can be separated into separate rooms and interrogated separately. And if their two stories don't match, then they have been caught in a lie.

Just such a story is told in the apocryphal book "Susanna and the Elders." You should read it. You can find it in any Catholic bible. The story tells of two elders who lust after a pretty married woman who will not consent to their vices. And so they exact a terrible revenge. They falsely accuse her of infidelity which will result in her death.

Fortunately for Susanna, she has a good defense attorney, the prophet Daniel. Daniel separates her two accusers, interrogates them individually and finds inconsistencies in their stories, enough to prove that they are lying and Susanne is innocent. In the end, it is the two elders who are executed and Susanne is returned to her husband and they live happily ever after.

The point is, justice is indeed a two edged sword, and courts are required to get it right whichever way the sword swings.

Does "two witness" mean two human witnesses? Not necessarily.

John 5:37 And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me.

Jesus claimed to have two witnesses. First, himself. His own words declared who he is. And second, his father. The miracles he did were his second witness.

Putting that into today's context, witnesses are not required to be human. They may be human, but a witness might also be a surveillance camera, or a fingerprint, or DNA from a lingering hair follicle. The point of two witnesses is so that courts are not so hasty and act rashly. They are to seriously consider the evidence and to (as I've said) get it right.

Unfortunately, today's American courts have decided for whatever reasons that some things are more important than facts. For instance, a dead body in the trunk of a car has at times been excluded as evidence because of Maranda Rights. And so justice for the corpse is lost because of a vague body of law called "rules of the court." If I were in charge, the first thing I'd do is get rid of the legal notion of inadmissible evidence. Facts should never be inadmissible, however they were discovered.

[6] DID GOD GET MORE LENIENT?

But all that capital punishment stuff was in the Mosaic Law. Maybe as the centuries passed God softened up a bit, maybe Israel's judicial system got more lenient. Maybe the later

prophets thought maybe God's law was too harsh and it was time to be a little kinder to murderers and other criminals. That didn't happen.

Ecclesiastes 3:3 A time to kill ...

Ezekiel 18:4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

Ezekiel 33:13 ...for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it.

So, by the time we get to Ezekiel almost 800 years after Moses, God's thinking on capital punishment was still unchanged.

[7] NEW TESTAMENT FORGIVENESS

The Old Testament clearly demands capital punishment. But we are Christians, and Christians live under the grace and forgiveness of Christ's atonement. So, doesn't it follow that we should set aside the law and just forgive everyone and release all criminals however violent their crimes? Maybe we shouldn't even have a legal system. After all, Jesus taught forgiveness.

Well, we do need a legal system with full police powers. That was established when God killed the world with a flood. To eliminate laws would not be an act of kindness but an act of horrible violence unleashed on the whole of humanity. No author of the New Testament taught that. Jesus, for instance, specifically said —

Matthew 5:17 Think not that I have come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

In other words, the law has just as much claim on us as it ever did.

However Jesus, who lived the law perfectly, satisfied its demands, and died to atone for all the sins of all mankind could dispense grace to whoever he wished.

So now the question is: who did he wish to dispense grace to?

[7.1] FORGIVENESS AND SEX

The answer to that question — who does he dispense grace to — is the story of the woman taken in adultery and brought to Jesus. The gathered men wanted to stone her and they asked Jesus for his opinion. Here's how the story unfolds.

John 8:6 ... But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. :7 So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. :8 And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. :9 And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. :10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman,

where are thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? :11 She said, no man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

This we take as a blanket reversal of those commandments of the law that demand capital execution of sexual sinners. If Jesus forgave this adulterer and acquitted her of her capital wrong doing, why would he not forgive every adulterer, giving them all (who asked anyway) a second change, and certainly not to exact a capital penalty against them?

And so, taking its cue from this episode, Christianity soften the harsh requirements of the law that sexual infractions be met with death.

But the way — just what was Jesus writing on the ground? The text doesn't say. But I believe he was writing the sins of the men who had brought her. "Uri, you beat your wife this morning. Avi, you stole stationary from your boss again." And so it went until the whole crowd stood convicted. Then Jesus said, "If you are without sin, go ahead, throw a stone."

Who could? Well, Jesus could because he was sinless. But he didn't. Instead, the sinless one forgave, and that's the point. Jesus didn't undo the law, he confirmed it. Yes, she was worthy to die. But who will do it? Them? They were as guilty as she. That left Jesus and he chose to forgive her. And that was his right because he died for her and that is how we conduct law today.

Why did Jesus do it, forgive sexual sin? Well, for one thing, if those laws had been executed literally three decades earlier, his own mother Mary would have died as an adulterous (before Joseph met the angel) and Jesus himself with her. It was because of Joseph's leniency that Mary, and Jesus, survived the cloud of suspicion. To Joseph's knowledge (before he met the angel), Mary was guilty. But Joseph wouldn't pull the legal trigger. Instead, he arranged to put her away privately. So because Joseph was a civil man Jesus received mercy at the very beginning before he was born. And that wound its way to this story of Jesus and the adulterous woman which led to God dealing with sex sin in a whole different way.

[7.2] FORGIVENESS AND MURDER

But that was sex. What about murder? Does Jesus forgive murder in a similar way? Maybe, or maybe not. It all hinges on Jesus' relationship with a Christian killing zealot named Saul of Tarsus, and a victim of Saul's named Stephen.

Saul, later Paul, was involved with the murder of Stephen. Fortunately, for Paul and for all of Christendom, Stephen took to heart his Lord's example.

Acts 7:60 And he [Stephen] kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And he had said this, he fell asleep.

And God took him at his word. That is how Saul found forgiveness.

It's impossible to imagine what Christianity would have been like if it had not been for Stephen's dying prayer. If Stephen had instead said, "God, avenge me!" there never would have been a Paul.

Here is what we need to know about Paul.

Acts 22:4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. *26:11* And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme...

1 Corinthians 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, that I am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. *:10* But by the grace of God, I am what I am...

1 Timothy 1:13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. *:15* This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. *:16* Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

Understand this: Paul killed Christians (“unto the death”), he tortured Christians (“compelled them”), he enjoyed it sadistically (“injurious”), and all that, in his own words, made him the worst sinner on the planet (“I am chief”) and God does not disagree with that assessment.

Then why did God pick him for grace? First, because Stephen prayed for it. Second, because it was ignorant sin (“I did it ignorantly,” *Numbers 15:27-31*). And third, Jesus wanted him specifically to demonstrate to the world just how far reaching was grace (“*for a pattern*”). In other words, if Jesus could save Saul of Tarsus, Jesus could save pretty near anybody. So you ought not to think that you are beyond grace. He saved Paul.

Now I get really upset when people excuse Paul’s former life. Some people say, “Oh, he was just a good man misled.” No he was not a good man misled. He was a very bad man, a genocidal maniac. When you excuse Paul, you mitigate Christ and his grace. The whole point is to show how gracious Jesus is, and if Saul of Tarsus was just a good man misled, then Jesus didn’t have to reach very far to get him. The point is that Jesus had to reach *very* far to get him.

Paul was a bad man who changed into a good man. And because he became a very important good man, people want to make him a good man *before* he changed. But consider this: What if he hadn’t changed? What if there had been no vision on the road to Damascus, if all there was to his life was his Christian killing? Then you’d *have* to conclude that he was a bad man. We should therefore have to judge Saul of Tarsus the way he judges himself: by his deeds.

Saul of Tarsus killed and tortured Christians. That is no a good man misled. We would not say that of anyone else. Was Torquemada, head inquisitor of Spain, a good man misled? Was Hitler? Was Mohamed Atta? No. We don’t give those monsters a pass, we judge them fairly on their monstrous deeds. But people want to give Paul a pass because he switched sides. That’s wrong. He was a Christian torturing killer who lucked out and found grace because of a prayer, and because of his ignorance, and because Jesus wanted to make a point. And finally, because he was smart enough to join the winning team when the truth was thrown in his face.

Now, what does all that have to do with capital punishment? Because we face this question: Did Christ and his atonement end capital punishment for murders as Jesus did sex sin? We should let Paul, the Christian torturing killer, answer that question for us.

The idea that we should set free all murderers for the sake of Christ's forgiveness comes from a misreading of a single verse. And that is this —

Romans 12:19 *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*

This verse has caused more legal mischief than any other verse in the Bible. It seems to say that we should shut down the legal system and set all the murderers free to murder again.

That's not at all what it says, nothing like it. But to see what it does say, we have to read on, and to do that, you must understand that the chapter headings are not in the original Greek. In other words, you should read from the end of chapter **12** to the beginning of chapter **13** without pausing. Read the two chapters as though they were a single text, for that is what they are.

Romans 13:1 *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. [the law, the courts, and the police] for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. :2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. :3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. :4 For he is the minister of God to thee for God. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain. :5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.*

Now let's summarize this text. The higher powers that Paul is speaking of are not angels, they are cops, and judges, and the whole judicial system. God appointed them. Therefore, if you violate the civil law, you ought to be afraid because the cop has a gun (sword) and the hangman has a noose which God gave them. That is what the text is saying.

Now, back to —

Romans 12:19 *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*

Therefore, in the context, what this verse means is *not* set the murderers free, but let the courts punish them for you. In other words, don't be a vigilante. You don't need to be. That's why God created government and courts, to enforce laws and justice.

That is the point of the verse.

What about capital punishment? Back to —

Romans 13:4 *For he is the minister of God to thee for God. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain.*

In other words, the courts have the right to execute. God gave them that authority and God expects the courts to use that authority. Therefore, if you are a murderer you ought to be afraid. That's the purpose of the judicial system which God created.

To summarize, capital punishment is God's expressed will from the flood, through the age of Moses, and into the Christian era. And remember, this is from Paul, a former Christian killer, asserting the law's right to kill.

But if that is so, then why did God not execute Saul of Tarsus? Because there is an escape, a provision in the law called ignorance.

Numbers 15:27 And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. :28 And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly ...

And that would be Paul's defense if he needed a defense.

1 Timothy 1:13 ... I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

Now that does not make the pre-converted Paul a good man misled. He was a bad man misled. But because of ignorance, forgiveness was available.

So, back to the question: Can murder be forgiven? The answer is: it depends on how the court applies this detail of the law. Ignorance is the only escape. Not pretended ignorance, but actual ignorance.

Apply this idea today and we can see why courts would be hesitant to convict a child who commits a murder. We're just not sure at what age a child becomes aware of the heinousness of the act. But that's for the courts to decide and not me. I just pointing out that the bible agrees with such caution.

[8] FINAL THOUGHTS

Since God authorized capital punishment, the question then lingers, for which crimes? For murder certainly, because God ordered that specifically. Maybe treason because treason threatens to murder the entire nation. Other than those two, I'd say nothing else.

But what about rape? Or worse, child rape? I'd clink to no capital punishment in those cases, not to appease my conscience, but to protect the victims. If a rapist knows he will die for rape, he will be inclined to murder the girl to escape detection. I'm saying that if the felon knows he is better off to leave the victim alive, then he's less likely to commit the ultimate crime of murder. And isn't that better for the victim which is what the law is all about?

Now, how about mode of death? Israel stoned people to death. Murderers have died by hanging, by firing squad, by ... whatever you can think of, it's been done.

How should *we* execute murders?

You may find this extreme, but still I'll offer an opinion. If a murderer murders one person, then he gets a merciful lethal injection. But what if he murders 10 people, or 50? What if his victims are children? What if he tortured his victims? Should he instead be hung, or shot, or something else? What I'm asking is, should a court be allowed to make the mode of execution more fitting to the severity of the crime? I know, the constitution disallows cruel and unusual punishment. Too bad it doesn't disallow cruel and unusual crimes. There are some crimes that are just so egregious that they scream for, well, a little more thorough justice. After all, murderers were stoned to death in Israel and that couldn't have felt good.