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Even when he was falsely accused and in jeopardy of life, Paul did not oppose capital punishment; indeed, he affirmed its legitimacy in principle, saying, *“If I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them”* (Acts 25:11).

Several methods of execution are approved. In the New Testament, the Almighty does not specify any particular way to put an offender to death, only referring to the practice in general as *“bear[ing] the sword”*. However, in the Old Covenant, Jehovah named the ways by which criminals were to be dispatched. By far, the most common means of death in the Law of Moses was stoning (Exodus 19:13; Leviticus 20:2, 27; 24:14-16; Numbers 15:35-36; Deuteronomy 13:10; 17:5-7; 21:21; 22:21, 24). In at least one instance, shooting was presented as an alternative to stoning (Exodus 19:12-13). Burning was specified for certain sexual deviants (Leviticus 20:14; 21:9). Striking with the sword was also required at times (Exodus 32:27-28; Deuteronomy 13:15). Although it was never directly commanded by the Lord, He tacitly approved of hanging (Deuteronomy 21:23; Joshua 8:29; Ezra 6:11; Esther 7:10).

Methods of execution that doubled as methods of torture, such as lions’ dens (Daniel 6) or crucifixion (John 19), were never taught by God. Deliberately prolonging anguish is not how justice is carried out. That is human vengeance, not divine. Nevertheless, the incidental and unintentional infliction of pain is not a relevant concern. Execution is not required to be painless.

Innovations in capital punishment throughout western civilization in recent centuries have all been introduced for the purpose of minimizing suffering. The guillotine, electrocution, gas chamber, and lethal injection were all invented to spare the condemned from needless agony. Few of them have been found to be efficient in terms of cost, maintenance, certainty of death, or reducing pain. Lately, some States and the federal government have reverted to death by firing squad, a method that is affordable, effective, instant, and resembles one of the means God commanded in the Old Law.

The death penalty is an equal opportunity punishment. Jehovah clearly stated its use applied to men and women alike (Deuteronomy 17:2, 5). Despite this, since the legality of execution was reaffirmed in

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the 1973 Supreme Court case *Furman v. Georgia*, only 1.8% of those sentenced to die have been women while 98.2% have been men. Men commit murder about seven times as much as women do, but that still does not account for the disparity. The ratio of murders committed by men as opposed to women is 7:1 and the ratio of death sentences applied to men versus women is 49:1, a sevenfold difference. That is not justice.

Madness is an acknowledged mental condition throughout Scripture (Deuteronomy 28:28) which can be studied (Ecclesiastes 1:17), yet it is never cited to mitigate the guilt of sin, including bloodshed. Not one homicide or other capital offense recorded in God’s word was ever acquitted on the grounds mental defect. In fact, inspiration demonstrates that insanity can be easily pretended (1st Samuel 21:13).

Nor is youth a mitigating factor relative to a death sentence. No exemptions based on age are ever mentioned in God’s word. In fact, certain crimes explicitly committed by the young are specified as deserving of death (Exodus 21:15, 17; Leviticus 20:9; Deuteronomy 21:18-21). In ancient Israel, men below age twenty were disqualified from military service (Numbers 1:3), but, apparently, not from execution.

Capital punishment ought to be a community event. The last public execution in America was 90 years ago, but until then, hangings were carried out in the town square regularly, thereby enhancing its deterrent effect. Since then, however, executions have been moved behind closed doors where only the family of the victim, the family of the condemned, the Governor, and a few journalists without cameras are permitted to witness the sentence being carried out through a window. When the public never sees it happening, the public does not learn to fear it.

When God commanded the penalty of death under the former covenant, not only was the public meant to see the execution, but they were expected to participate. The Almighty repeatedly told the Israelites, *“Let all the congregation stone him”* (Leviticus 24:14), *“All the congregation shall certainly stone him”* (16), *“All the congregation shall stone him”* (Numbers 15:35), and *“All the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones”* (Deuteronomy 21:21). A return to publicly witnessed executions does not even come close to tangible public involvement.

Execution must not be delayed. There should be time for a judge to

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"WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?"

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

"THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER"

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

THURSDAY

Ladies' Studies @ 6:20 p.m.

75 Sherrod Boulevard
Belén, New Mexico

**Seekers Welcome.
Members Expected.**

"IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN ANY TRESPASS... RESTORE SUCH A ONE"

GALATIANS 6:1

CONFESS TRESPASSES

James 5:16; 1st John 1:9

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 8:22

PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS

Acts 8:22

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

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overturn a faulty verdict, for the defendant to pursue reasonable appeals, and for the Governor to consider commutation or pardon, but none of that should be a decades-long process. Prisoners now spend an average of 22-24 years on death row. They are, without hyperbole, more likely to die of natural causes than of their prescribed sentence. Interminable delays thwart justice, as Solomon wrote, *"Because the 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"* (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

"WHOLE COUNSEL"

ACTS 20:27

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 41

OCTOBER 11TH, 2026

THE DEATH PENALTY

Bryan Matthew Dockens

Capital punishment is back in the headlines. News was already swirling as Tennessee prepared to execute a woman for the first time since 1820. That the execution staff was entirely female was also gaining attention. And that the execution of Christa Pike was botched following two attempts at lethal injection, sending the condemned to the hospital instead of the cemetery, is most noteworthy. With all this focus on the death penalty, it is appropriate to remember what Scripture teaches on this subject.

God authorizes the death penalty. Paul the apostle taught, *"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. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 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. 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"* (Romans 13:1-4). Governing authorities exist by God's appointment, serving as His minister for good, wielding the sword purposefully to accomplish God's vengeance.

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