

Lawful and Unlawful

Yesterday, while out and about, I observed a bumper sticker on a car that stated the following:

"Why do we kill people who kill people to show that killing people is wrong"

Now, it should not surprise anyone that I saw this in Fayetteville, and immediately outside the confines of the University. Immediately I thought of the lack of understanding that accompanies this question as framed. I would expect this from a child with no background in history, or knowledge of society. Particularly, I would expect this of a child who had never read the Scripture.

In addressing this, first the rather simple logic of the deterrent effect of the death penalty, and the respect of the rights of others will be touched on. After that, we shall see what the LORD God has to say about the death penalty.

I did a Google search on this question as that would likely yield the best results. After all, if it's on a bumper sticker, its probably on the internet too. I was not surprised to find that it was indeed on the web. What I was surprised to find were sites that had this question, and the answers given in response to it. To say the least, the answers reveal a lack of depth in the thought processes of the respondents. Need I say this does not bode well for this society? Of all the centuries of collected wisdom ((There is wisdom in many of the writings of man. However, that wisdom will not save your soul, and it ultimately cannot address every situation. Nor can it create a stable society that will endure.)) about how society ought to conduct itself, the current generation of young people either have not, or do not wish to avail themselves of it.

However, let's look at the simple logic behind why we must put people to death for murder, and why the question

The difference between we, or us as a society putting someone to death, and that of an individual, or individuals who choose to put someone to death without proper legal sanction, is the difference between that which is lawful and that which is unlawful. Let us begin with the cause of, or why a society would choose to put someone to death: In this first instance someone takes a life without cause, based solely upon their whim, no matter how justified they may feel they are in so doing. This is unlawful as they deprived another individual of their right to life without proper cause, and without proper legal sanction. If they were to take their case before a jury of their peers and a judge, they would find themselves castigated for even considering such a thing. This is precisely why the vast majority (99.999%) of all murders are covered up and the perpetrator denies all responsibility.

Thus, the only way for society to demonstrate that this behavior is entirely unacceptable is to adjudicate the individual who took life unlawfully as guilty and deprive them of their life. This adjudication is the lawful taking of life as all the facts are ascertained, the standard of proof is beyond all shadow of doubt, and the jury must vote to condemn unanimously. Moreover, in many jurisdictions, this unanimous vote must occur twice – once for determination of guilt, and a second time for determination to impose the death penalty. In this way the murderer is actually afforded far more opportunity to have his/her own life preserved than the victim they deprived of life.

So it is in the process of adjudication that it is not a single individual who arbitrarily decides to put the murderer to death, but a jury of their peers (the community/society) and/or a judge who represents the law and the community. This is far more than the murderer afforded their victim. Moreover, to insure no mistake is made, the guilty are afforded an

appeals process. In this way, the taking of the life of a murderer, is entirely lawful and indeed beneficial to society and the community at large as it takes individuals who do not regard the rights of their fellow man, and permanently puts them out of society.

The deterrent effect of this is obvious, particularly if justice is carried out swiftly and without an endless appeals process. In the event of question concerning its deterrent effect, just ask yourself if you are ready to die right now. Be honest, are you ready and willing to die at this moment? I'll hazard you, like everyone else, are not quite prepared for that. Hence, it is self-evident that the death penalty deters murder.

Now, that covers the basic logic of the necessity of the death penalty as a means of controlling murderous impulses. However, we have yet to see what the LORD God states. This is necessary for several reasons, not the least of which is to provide an answer to those who, under the guise of religion, especially Christianity, would perpetrate and coddle evil in society.

In the Scripture, we are informed many times in the Old Testament that certain individuals were to be put to death for what they did. Much of the time the response to this by those opposing the death penalty is that the command applied only to Israel and the time of the Old Testament. Hence they engage in a sleight of hand concerning the Scripture and what it states as they ignore the LORD's earliest command and covenant that addressed this very issue. Please note this was long before the nation of Israel came into existence, and this covenant is a perpetual covenant:

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your

hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. (Genesis 9:1-6)

Since this is God's commandment to Noah, who is a father of us all; it is just as much a commandment to us as it was to Noah and his sons. Moreover, the logic we see expressed by the LORD God is similar to the logic expressed concerning respecting the rights of others. However, in this case the LORD God is addressing both agency and respect for God and His creation. Hence, to the LORD, an unlawful and unwarranted deprivation of the life of another is an implicit attack upon the LORD God Himself. For this, He demands the life of the murderer be taken.

Therefore, for two plain reasons we are not at liberty to cast off or deny this commandment of the LORD. Moreover, we also find support for the continued observance of this commandment in the New Testament. There are two specific instances in which the LORD could have set aside the death penalty, but did not do so. In fact, in both instances, the death penalty was affirmed as being in full force and effect. In the first instance, the Lord Jesus Christ, while hanging on the cross, spoke to a man who was also condemned to die. Even though that man repented, the Lord did not command, or in any way ameliorate the sentence of execution imposed upon the thief.

And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done

nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. (Luke 23:39-43)

It is also notable that the thief himself recognized that he deserved what he was receiving. What is also notable, is the attitude of the unrepentant thief – he sought to be freed from having to pay the price for what he had done, and challenged the very person and identity of the Lord in the process.

In the second case presented in the New Testament, it is the Apostle Paul before Festus, in which Paul states plainly:

For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. (Acts 25:11)

If we understand the language, clearly the use of the double negative here “I refuse not to die” means that Paul was certainly willing to die if he had actually done something worthy of death under Roman law. Since he had not, he was not worthy of death. Hence, here the apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, affirms what was stated by the LORD God several millennia earlier. In researching further in the New Testament, we find no other passages that deal with the death penalty being addressed in such a specific way. Although Romans, chapter 13 addresses governments bearing the sword, it is a non-specific reference that applies to the general powers of civil government, and is not specific like the two cited instances – even though it does in principle support the death penalty.

Unfortunately, we are, individually, wicked and evil, but most of us can be taught to respect the rights of others. However, there are those among us who will not adhere to any civility and refuse to have any respect for the rights of others. For

those individuals, only the threat of death dissuades them from depriving others of the right to life.

As I understand it, the question posed by the bumper sticker is hardly valid as framed, seeing it draws no distinction between lawful killing and unlawful killing.
