

Dear Andrea,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You asked how we are able to justify killing in wars and by capital punishment when we have been commanded not to kill. You further wondered how God's command to Moses to have his fellow Jews killed could be harmonized in light of God's own law to the contrary.

Ever since Adam fell into sin, human perfection was lost and the entire human race was plunged into the prison house of death awaiting a redeemer. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23) God began to implement his plan for redemption by developing the Jewish nation from which his Son would come. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." (Amos 3:2) In the context of the prison house of death, God gave the Jews rules with perfect standards to live by in order to purify them and bring them into a state of readiness for Messiah. But, being imperfect due to the curse of death, the nation could not keep the Law. They fell into sinful acts time and time again and God punished them accordingly. Two examples of this punishment were the slaying of 3000 for worshiping the golden calf (Exodus 32), and the killing of 250 and the 14,700 for rebellion against Moses (Numbers 16). In these slayings God was simply executing justice. Sin brings death. God's judgments are perfect and his executions of judgment are always righteous.

Life for the nation of Israel had its challenges. Her neighbors constantly made war against her. When Israel obeyed God, he helped her. If she disobeyed God, he let her enemies succeed. Had the Israelites maintained their faith in God to divinely intervene on their behalf, they would not have had to take up the sword to kill and be killed. Nonetheless, God intervened for them time after time, allowing them to fight to maintain their land. But God also made it clear to Israel through her prophets that evil, hate, and war were but a temporary situation, and soon a Redeemer would come who would reject the concepts of violence and warfare. Ultimately, the Israelites could not keep the "eye for and eye" justice of the perfect Law, and the Law itself became a curse unto them.

When our Lord Jesus walked the earth, he taught us by example and through the establishment of a commandment "to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," and to "love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matthew 22:37-39) This new attitude toward even our enemies rejects the use of force and killing. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." (Luke 6:27-28) To a Christian, the commandment, "Thou shalt not murder" takes on even greater meaning than just the literal. Each of us must be on guard not to figuratively murder a person by what we say. We must guard our tongues or we will be guilty of character assassination. Under the Old Testament, justice was reliant upon the Law. But under the New Testament, the Christian lives by the spirit of the law and that law is written in his heart.

As Christians we have our citizenship in heaven and are aliens or foreigners to any earthly government since we have already given our allegiance to the higher power-the Heavenly Lord. Although we are obedient to the laws of the land in which we live, we

are not compelled to fight against our King. We are told, "submit yourselves to every ordinance" (1 Peter 2:13), except when our conscience, and God's laws, would be violated. Our Heavenly Father is looking at how we are living up to the teachings that were revealed to us by his dear Son. "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5:20) Let us then, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14)

How do we as Christians feel about capital punishment? This is an issue that we leave to each individual Christian's conscience. At the present time, we are still subject to the prison house rules of sin and death and any attempt man makes to obtain justice falls far short. But we are encouraged knowing that this is only a temporary state of misery from which all will shortly be liberated.

The good news is that all who ever lived, whether they were good or evil, will have an opportunity for everlasting life in God's earthly Kingdom which will soon be established once the membership of Christ's Church is completed in heaven. Then "thou shalt not murder" will be written in everyone's heart and "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Micah 4:3) All the people of the earth will one day know everlasting peace, and have the opportunity to then live in harmony on a restored, perfect earth forever. Then God "will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:4)

We hope we have answered your questions.

Sincerely,
Christian Question Radio