

The Death Penalty

And the Absolute Sanctity of Human Life

^{ESV} Genesis 9:1 And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

² The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered.

³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.

⁴ But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

⁵ And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

⁶ "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

⁷ And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it."

Genesis 9:1-7

Politics or Morality?

Part of what we will talk about today involves the difficult discussion of the **death penalty**. Because of this, right here at the very beginning, I want to make something very clear. I'm a big believer that **politics needs to stay out of the**

pulpit. Much of the church today, both liberal (Jesse Jackson) and conservative (Moral Majority) bring politics into the church in order to make Jesus either a Democrat or a Republican. This must not be, for Jesus is on his own side and is the ruler of his own kingdom. He is not on the side of any particular American political party.

However, what needs to be understood at the same time is that the issue of the death penalty, like many other issues that are taken up in politics, is **not first and foremost a political issue**. It is a **moral issue**, and morals transcend politics and cultures. Therefore, as a moral issue, it needs to be talked about from the pulpit. And yet, there are ways to preach this issue that would be very political.

One of those would be if I were preaching a series on the platform of some political party. Believe me, there are pastors that have done things like this. But we are going through the book of Genesis. It just so happens that Genesis touches directly upon what people mistake as a political issue.

Because we are going through a book of the Bible with no political agenda at all, you must view today's sermon as you would any other from this pulpit. This is an **exegetical sermon** on a **biblical moral issue** that we come to as we **preach through books of the Bible**. It is a great mistake of our age to collapse morality into politics and thereby stifle preaching on

morality in the name of separation of church and state. Of necessity, politics will take up moral causes, either for or against the teachings of God, but that does not make them inherently political issues. It simply says that even politicians have to live in God’s world.

A New Creation after the Fall

Our passage today is **Genesis 9:1-7**. It comes at the end of the Flood story—the great baptism of the ancient world, after Noah, his family, and the animals leave the ark, after Noah offers a burnt offering sacrifice to the LORD, and just before God officially confirms a mighty covenant. In fact, these verses are actually part of the covenant that God is making with Noah. They include the preamble, stipulations, blessings, and curse of the covenant, but we see that more next time.

Covenantal Elements in Genesis 9:1-17		
9:1	Title/Preamble	“And God blessed ...”
9:1b (//7), 4	Stipulations	“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” not to eat flesh with its blood
9:1–3	Blessings	“And God <i>blessed</i> ”
9:5–6	Curse	man’s blood demanded from man and beast
9:9–11a	Oath	“I establish my covenant ...”
9:12–17	Sign	rainbow and explanation of its meaning

Taken from Jeffrey J. Niehaus, “Covenant and Narrative, God and Time,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 3 (2010): 541–542.

As we have seen for several weeks now, the flood story, like the baptism it typifies, is meant to be viewed as a kind of

new creation. First there is death under the waters, then there is life through those same waters. Moses shows us this with dozens of points of contact between the flood and the creation story. Several of the themes from Genesis 1 are repeated in our passage today, including “be fruitful and multiply,” “every living creature” being given to man, the giving of food for man, and the “image of God” language. But though both stories are kinds of creation stories and have these amazing similarities, there is a huge difference between them.

Genesis 9:1-7 and Genesis 1

9:1, 7	“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”	// 1:22, 28	“Be fruitful and multiply and fill...”
9:2	“The fear of you ... upon everything	//1:28”	“rule ... every living creature.”
9:3	“... yours to eat: as I gave you the green vegetation”	// 1:29	“I have given you ... for food”
9:5-6a	“your blood ... his brother’s life.”	// 4:8-24 b	man’s blood demanded from man and beast
9:6b	“in the image of God he made man”	// 1:27	“God created man in his image”

Modified from Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 192.

The creation of Genesis 1 was a creation where **human sin had not entered** into the world. The creation of Genesis 9 is **the opposite**. This new creation is prefaced by God’s looking upon the world and stating, “**the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth**” (**Gen 8:21**; cf. **6:5**). This makes the two stories in some ways as different as they can get. It is these differences against the backdrop of similarity that become the very important for us to understand, especially in a day of

moral relativism and the obliteration of the inherent dignity of human beings, for it is human dignity that stands at the very heart of our passage today. As we go through these verses, what we will see is this continuous shifting from similarity to difference, similarity to difference, verse by verse until we come to full circle.

Be Fruitful and Multiply (9:1, 7)

It all starts with similarity and repetition. The verse says that “**And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth’ (Gen 9:1).** Other than “**Noah and his sons,**” this is exactly what God said to man in **Genesis 1:28a**, “**And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’**” Let’s not move past this too quickly, but let us ponder the incredible grace of God.

In Chapter 1, there was no real grace shown by God in making this statement, because grace presupposes demerit and sin. But there was no sin. It was not grace there in Genesis 1, **but pure blessing.** This blessing was an infusion the God’s will and approval man’s ability to have children and give birth to new life. God was saying that I bless your marriage with your wife and approve of the children that you will bring forth from that holy union. Go now, and be fruitful.

But in chapter 9, it is more than that. Because man is now utterly fallen into sin, it can only be said that it is **by grace that God reinstates this blessing**. It is a reinstatement, because it is the same blessing he gave to Adam and Eve. But it is only by God's grace in the sight of our wickedness that he blesses the union and commands Noah and his children to be fruitful and repopulate the earth. This theme is so important for us to get that the passage begins and ends on this note. **Vs. 7** concludes, “**And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.**” It is what lies in between that is so interesting.

I give you Food (9:2-3)

It is in this context of grace in light of sin that **Gen 9:2** suddenly diverges from what we read in **1:28**. **1:28** continues by saying, “**... subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.**” “**Subdue**” and “**have dominion**” are **not repeated** in **9:2**. Rather, this verse begins to talk about what our dominion in light of the fall has done to the animals. “**The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea.**” This is a huge difference from Genesis 1.

Man's dominion now results in the fear of the animals towards mankind.

The backdrop of this is more than just our sin. Recall the beginning of the Noah story, how after the ark was completed, God made the animals approach Noah with no fear at all. They just came to him joyfully and marched into the ark. It is rather like **Timothy Treadwell** (1957 – 2003), a.k.a. “**Grizzly Man**.” This is the guy who lived for 13 summers with wild grizzly bears at **Katmai National Park** in Alaska. His relationship with those bears was documented in a movie of the same name. What a remarkable thing it is to see a man live with absolutely wild ferocious powerful animals like a member of their own. There is a man in Africa who is doing the same thing with a pack of lions and hyenas (though, he raised the lions from infancy, they are still quite wild). This is the picture we had of Noah and the animals before the Flood.

But the picture after the flood is quite different. But it is more than just fear, as if whenever they see a man they just run away like a scaredy-cat. No, this is actually military terminology. “**No one shall be able to stand against you. The LORD your God will lay the fear of you and the dread of you on all the land that you shall tread, as he promised you”** (**Deut 11:25**). Perhaps the story of Timothy Treadwell is not

finished being an example for us. After 13 alone with the bears, Mr. Treadwell brought his girlfriend to the park. She was as uncomfortable with the bears as he was comfortable with them. It was late in the fall, and most of the bears he knew had already gone into hibernation. Food was scarce that year and some new bears had moved into the area. Treadwell filmed a large unknown bear diving into the river time and again to eat dead salmon, and he said he did not feel entirely comfortable around this bear. Hours later, he and his girlfriend were brutally attacked and eaten alive.

That depicts the war from the side of the animals. The only thing you can call this man is foolish, well, maybe other things too, but foolish at least. But our verse actually describes man's side of the war. It finishes, "Into your hand they are delivered." Gen 9:3 continues the thought, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything." This is very fascinating.

Some may be tempted to say, "Look, God is saying he doesn't like vegetarians." Others will say, "No, he liked vegetarians, because they were all vegetarians before the fall. But now, God is adding to the Holy Diet that all people should follow." But this isn't really about God's Diet for Life or about the benefits or detriments of being vegetarian.

This again follows the pattern of returning to Genesis 1 but then adding to it in light of the fall. **Gen 9:3** says, “... as I gave you the green plants.” **Genesis 1:29** says, “And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.’” There is more grace in this repetition. God did not take away the green plants because of our sin. He lets man continue to eat them for food.

But because of sin, there is a difference now. “Into your hand [the animals] are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you ... I give you everything.” This is somewhat difficult to understand. If it is coming about because of the fall and our sin, does this mean that the eating of meat is therefore the result of sin, that it should be looked at as a bad thing, even as we might be tempted to look at the fear and dread of animals as a bad thing? Perhaps like the ground that would not cooperate for man when God cursed it because of his sin, so now the animals will not cooperate as being food for man as a result of sin.¹ But this does not take into account the entire situation. If God is reiterating things

¹ Along these lines, it is curious that in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, the wildman Enkidu was protector of animals until he met a woman, became “cultured” (in more ways than one), and so “fell” from his wild days. After this time, none of the animals would come to him again (*Gilgamesh Epic*, 1.126–133; 195–198). For a popular reading of this Epic on the level of a novel, see Brian Godawa’s *Gilgamesh Immortal* in the Nephilim Chronicles.

in Genesis 1, then this part seems also to come about because of grace. While it is perhaps right to see part of this as part of the curse, it is also possible to see them as an extension of God's grace.

If this is so, the giving of animals for food may find a parallel in the killing of an animal for the skins that covered Adam and Eve (**Gen 3:21**).² Others have speculated that the violence before the fall may have led to a shortage of food. This would help curb such a shortage caused by man's sinfulness, by making much more food available to humans. At the end of the day, I do not see this as only grace or only curse. I see it as God being gracious in the midst of our sinfulness that brings about bad consequences not only for us (food) for even to the creation (animals).

Sanctity of Life

To be honest, these two references to Genesis 1 (multiplying and food) are really only a prelude to the real meat (pardon the pun) of the section. They are setting up what really matters to God now, and it has been a problem in human society since Cain and Lamech and the fall of the Watchers and the violence that was on the earth prior to the flood. It is God's view of life.

² So John Walton, *NIVAC* Genesis, 341.

Have you ever heard someone argue against the sacredness of human life on the basis that it can't possibly be carried out consistently? I came across an article this week from a psychologist who argued that you can't possibly believe that abortion is wrong because the same people that do this do not care about poor starving children, they kill abortion doctors, and they bomb Middle Eastern countries. Therefore, if you can't be consistent, don't bother deceiving yourself. Life is not sacred.

This is a smoke screen. In reality, he doesn't believe that life is sacred because he does not want to be held accountable to a moral creator who says that it is. Like so many others, he tries to live in his head in a world of moral relativism, while he himself is not able to carry that view out consistently either. The short discussion we are coming to now is **Genesis 9:4-6**. This is where the death penalty comes up.

The *Evangelical Lutheran Church of America* takes an anti-capital punishment stand. It gives four reasons for doing this. 1. The church has a ministry of reconciliation, but executions often focus on a spirit of vengeance and retribution, not reconciliation. 2. Society should be assaulting the root causes of crime, not executing criminals as if their crime was only their individual failure rather than

all of societies. 3. Race plays a factor in who is executed, and it is not applied fairly, therefore we cannot be pro-capital punishment. 4. The death penalty cannot be shown to serve as a deterrent.³

I bring this up here simply to compare it with what I have just said about how the dignity of human life is often denied. If you can't do it fairly, don't do it at all. It is interesting that they do not appeal to Scripture that talks directly to this issue, nor is its own moral explanation for its position. Instead, situational ethics, human failings, hypocrisy, inconsistencies, and pragmatics are appealed to. This is frustrating in the extreme to me.

Let's turn now and look at these verses. What we will see is that God is entering into the situation, telling us what we may and may not do, and basing it all on a transcendent truth that was revealed way back in Genesis 1. There are three parts to this section. First, God deals with his view of animal life. Second, he deals with human life. Third, he roots those things in the image of God.

Animal Life (9:4)

Some people think that God only cares about human beings, that if we massacre and destroy animal life for fun or

³ James J. Westendorf, "Social Statements of the ELCA," ed. John F. Brug and Wilbert R. Gawrisch, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 89 (1992): 65.

for economics or politics or power or anything else, that this is our right, because we have **dominion**. Nothing could be farther away from the truth, but we have to think carefully about what we are reading.

Notice that the eating of “everything” has a condition put on it. This condition is found in **Gen 9:4**, “**But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.**” What is the point of this? It is the beginning of God’s assessment of the preciousness of life.

It will help to go back for a moment to point something out. The word in **9:3** for “**moving**” (“every moving thing;” *remes*) most likely refers not a locomotion (something that moves), but to a specific type of animal. There are three basic words for animals in Gen 1-9. They fall into two categories: hunters and hunted; predator and prey. There are domesticated animals and other naturally docile beasts like cattle and sheep (*behemah*; “cattle” in **9:10**). Then there are wild scavengers (*chayyah*; **2:17**; **9:2**). Then there are wild game that travel in herds (*remes*; **9:2**). This is the word that describes what God now gives to man, creatures like elk or gazelles or lions.

The idea proposed by some is that actually before the flood, man had domesticated animals and ate them. He wasn’t a vegetarian after all! There is a hint of this in **Abel’s sacrifice**,

since he offers the fat (**Gen 4:4**), and throughout the law, when fat is offered, this is God's portion, while the one making the sacrifice participates in a ceremonial meal and eats the meat, with this caveat: You shall not eat any fat or any blood (**Lev 3:17**). Domestication of animals was simply part of the expected dominion mandate. If so, then what is going on here may be that domesticated plants and animals were always considered legitimate sources of food, while permission was granted for gathering of wild growing food (**1:30**) and hunting animals for food (**9:3**).⁴

But this leads us to the point of the story. It seems to be that Moses is interested in **tracing the origins of such things** in his own law back to creation and the new creation after the flood. Moses was not novel, as if he just invented a bunch of laws willy-nilly. Rather, Christ gave the laws to Moses, even as he gave them to Adam and to Noah. And these laws are amazingly consistent. The main reason why this is true with today's story is because of the sanctity of life. People might say, **where is the sanctity of life in killing and eating an animal for food?** In fact, that is exactly what many people today say.

Notice, this is a stipulation against the eating of animals. **"There is something that you may not do when you eat an**

⁴ John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 343.

animal,” God says to Noah. You may not eat its blood. One only needs to think of today’s obsession with **vampires** and **zombies** to know what kind of creatures eat blood. Rather, they were to drain the blood from the animals they killed, and they were not to eat dead animals that they found on the road. There is no **Road-Kill Cafe** in the Bible. One commentary says, “Blood is identified with life (on “life,” see **2:7**): a beating heart and a strong pulse are the clearest evidence of life. Respect for life, and beyond that, respect for the giver of life, means abstaining from blood. Indeed, in the sacrificial law animal blood is given by God for the atonement of human sin (cf. **Lev 17:11**).”⁵

Perhaps the **American Indian** (at his best, though he was certainly as capable of not doing this as anyone else) remembered this in the way they treated the animals that they killed for food: as they prayed over it, mercifully took its life, and used the whole animal, unlike the white men that just went through and slaughtered Buffalo for their skins. The whole thing was a sacred religious business. This is a biblical value. Yes, God made the beasts for us, but he still cares about the cattle on a thousand hills (**Ps 50:10**). The fact that he puts restrictions on the killing of animals for food needs to have its

⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 193.

place in our own theology of the other life that God has put on this planet with us, even as our dominion over them should have a place as well.

Human Life and Capital Punishment (9:5-6a)

But if animal life is important to God, human life is a thousand times more so. This is the point of **Gen 9:5-6a**. Here we come to the heart of our text. When an animal's blood is spilled, depending on why and how, it can be OK. But “**for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning.**” This comes again after the flood which came about because the violence on earth was great. What is about to be said is God entering into the human situation again in grace, this time in the form of governmental regulation that transcends cultures and times.

The issue is **capital punishment**. This is an issue that for the life of them, many people, including many Christians, can't make jive with the sanctity of life. However, what needs to be understood as you wrestle with this topic is that it exists precisely because human life is so sacred. Many says, “How can you possibly believe in capital punishment and the sanctity of human life?” God says, “It is precisely because human life is so sacred that I'm instituting capital punishment.” Let the irony of this set in while we look at the text.

“From every beast I will require it.” If an animal kills a man (like we saw with young and foolish Mr. Treadwell), God will hold that beast accountable. This idea is fascinating all by itself. God will somehow judge animals for what they do. They too are bound by some kind of laws, and they are able to be judged by God. God took this so seriously that he even instituted the principle in Israel’s law code. For example, if an ox gored a human to death, it had to be stoned (Ex 21:28). Stoning is a brutal way to be killed, as it is painful and slow. Curiously, they were not to eat the meat of that animal. The ox was to be put to death because it forfeit its right to live. I think that men understand this instinctually, as we later learn that they killed all of the bears that had been found to have eaten our pitiful couple in Alaska.

Now notice what happens to a man who kills another man. “... and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. ‘Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed’” (Gen 9:5b-6a). This is the law of retribution, the *lex talionis*, and eye for an eye. It is exactly what the *ELCA* did not want to address. It is the epitome of justice, the very thing God did not give to Cain (who deserved it, but was allowed to live), and that

Lamech believed he was above and threatened anyone who would try.

You see, after Cain murdered Abel and God gave him grace, man begin to think of this grace as his right. Grace does not serve as a deterrent to *the wicked*; It does to the righteous. But the wicked abuse grace and take advantage of it. Lamech increased the violence seventy times seven. The flood increased it a million billion times more. So God institutes the death penalty here—and I want you to understand this—as a different kind of grace, a grace that deters violent people through the sword that God has given to the government (Romans 13:1ff).

Now, I realize that many people do not think that capital punishment is a deterrent at all. I would argue that when you only put to death 1 out of 100,000 criminals that have committed a capital offense, there are reasons why that is. I also realize that people can abuse capital punishment, as you find especially in Muslim nations governed by Sharia law, law that is built upon the fundamental indignity of women and non-Muslims, law that is also carried out hypocritically by sinful people.

But notice, and this is also important, the Bible is not saying that capital punishment is needed *because of some pragmatic argument* like “it works.” You will look in vain to

see anything here about it being instituted because it is a deterrent. Rather, God ties it to something infinitely more important and valuable that we will look at in a moment. Before getting to that, I want to spend a moment thinking about **some of the biblical arguments people give against capital punishment.**

The most common has to be the sixth commandment. “Doesn’t God say, ‘Thou shalt not kill’? How can you turn around and now say, ‘Thou must kill?’” Before moving on, I want you to understand that if this is correct, then the Bible contradicts itself. Many people are fine with that, in fact, that is what they are hoping for. My basic premise is that the Bible does not contradict itself and that if I think it does, the problem is with me. So where does the argument go wrong? That is my question.

The problem here is that **God makes a very huge distinction between killing and murder.** Murder is premeditated, vengeful taking of a life. Killing may or may not be. Murder is a type of killing, but there are other kinds of killing such wars or car crashes or “accidents” that are not murder. Also, if all killing was wrong, then how dumb would Moses have to be to say just 25 verses later, “**Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death**” (**Ex 21:12**). I know that many people want to think

the worst of Moses, but it is absurd to think that throughout the law, dozens of injunctions exist against killing and others command killing, if all killing is the same? Were he and all the copyists that came along after him really that stupid? I mean, they've had thousands of years to get rid of such obviously contradictions to save face, but they didn't. Those arguments are simply nonsense.

But what about Jesus? Didn't Jesus overthrow the law of Moses? Didn't he overthrow an eye for an eye saying, "You have heard that it was said an eye for an eye ... but I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (**Matt 5:38-39**)? Didn't he say that hate in your heart is the same as murder, so if you want to carry out the death penalty, you're going to have to kill anyone who hates? Didn't he say **love your enemies** and pray for them, not stone them to death? Didn't he prove this all by giving the woman caught in adultery a pass?

The short answer is, no, he didn't do any of these things. The entire Sermon on the Mount where most of these are found begins by saying that Jesus **did not come to abolish the law** (**Matt 5:17**). That couldn't be any clearer. Jesus is not saying that hate should be punished with capital punishment, because the law never applies to matters of the

heart. God never legislated feelings. Jesus is talking about individuals, not the state. Too many people make this mistake as well. Jesus isn't talking about the state, but to the people up on that hill listening to the sermon, people that live individual lives and interact on an individual basis. **Jesus didn't come to overthrow the sword given to the government**, and capital punishment is not the same thing as vigilante justice that you find in American cowboy movies. Jesus also did not say that the woman at the well should not be stoned. Rather, he knew that the law demanded that those guys who caught her had to throw the first stone, and he knew that if they did not that she could not be tried, but if they did, they would be in deep trouble with the Romans. He brilliantly upheld the Law of Moses even as he showed her grace.

I understand that people are confused about a lot of this. There is a lot of bad thinking and teaching out there. People who struggle with this issue should be allowed to struggle. But as they struggle, they need to also understand that God does not contradict himself, that there are passages that talk directly to this issue, and that if they care to find out, there are very satisfying answers to this kind of question. I invite you all to explore those honestly. But the

first thing we must do is let the Bible conform us to its image, rather than it to ours.

The Image of God (9:6b)

But one question remains, **how does capital punishment jive with the inherent dignity of human life?** Here we come to the last bit of the text today. Notice that capital punishment is justified this way, “**...for God made man in his own image**” (**Gen 9:6b**). This is the argument then. You must put to death someone who deliberately, maliciously, and unlawfully takes another human life *because* God made man in his own image. To put that another way, God views human life as so incredibly sacred, that to take it like that is to not only strike out against the image, but the Creator of that image.

What is Capital punishment? Is it personal vengeance? No, it is the state executing its God given task upon an individual. Capital punishment comes because one human being forfeits their own right to life by taking another person's life who had his or her own right to life. The idea here is that “**Man's nature is inherently evil and is naturally prone to violent and unrighteous acts. Therefore, man cannot be allowed to live by his instincts alone, but he must be directed and controlled by laws; laws are necessary for human existence. It was for this reason that God's first act after the**

flood was to give man laws.”⁶ If there is law, there must be a Lawgiver.

This is what really irks some people the most, I believe. They do not want to believe that there is a Lawgiver, especially not if it is a God that they have to be held accountable to. Is this not exactly why Peter says people deliberately forget about the flood in the first place? But this God gave this kind of law out of grace, to curb sin, not to increase it. It is for the sake of the victims, not perpetrators. Those who do not break the law have nothing to fear.

So because man is made in God’s image, life is precious. But if a man takes another man’s life, because life is precious to God, justice says that this man forfeits his own right to life. The state’s job is to carry out justice, and that is the very definition of justice. When it carries out justice, it upholds the dignity of human life, by showing that life is so sacred that anyone that destroys it unlawfully, maliciously will face justice.

So where does the incarnated Jesus come into all of this? It is not by overthrowing the state or eradicating government or getting rid of its sword. Rather, it is on the personal level, by extending forgiveness even to murderers. The forgiveness

⁶ **The Atrahasis Epic, the Genesis Flood and Capital Punishment**⁶ *Bible and Spade* (1979) 8, no. 1 (1979): 22.

he offers is not a temporary reprieve, but an eternal one such that even if the state carries out capital punishment, the murderer that trusts in Christ alone will not then spend eternity in hell.

Jesus also comes along and says to the individual that you must let the state do its job. You are not to carry out retribution yourself. Rather, if they slap you on one cheek, turn the other to him for another slap. Show them the compassion that only a person can show them, the person of Christ. Then they will listen to you if they have hate in their heart towards you for something you have done to them or some thing they have against God.

Salvific grace is God's blessing to any who will repent of their sins and turn to Christ for forgiveness. It does not overthrow the state, but rather comes along side of it, when it does its job, to show that God has compassion on the victims, the abused, the beaten, the downtrodden, but also offers forgiveness to the chief of sinners.