

Why Capital Punishment, but not Abortion?

Many feel that those who are anti-abortion and pro-capital punishment are grossly inconsistent. But is that true? An explanation is found in the matters of guilt or innocence and the "sword" of the government. First let us consider the matter of guilt or innocence. Does it make a difference whether a person is innocent or guilty, as to the justification of being put to death? The thief on the cross thought so (**Luke 23:39-41**). One of the seven things that are an abomination to God is the shedding of innocent blood (**Proverbs 6:17**). On the other hand, there is a use of the sword in execution that is not vain. As the thief indicated, they were getting what they deserved because of their crime. Even the apostle Paul said, that death for a proven crime was acceptable in **Acts 25:11. Romans 13:3-4** teaches that the civil government is executing wrath with a sword on evildoers as a minister of God. In other words, it is God's ordained place for them to punish, even capitally, the wrong-doer

By Whit Sasser

with a "sword" of vengeance. So, the slaughter of the innocents (abortion) is a thing God abhors, while the putting to death of criminals by the civil government, is not only permitted, it is one of their God-given purposes for existing. Capital punishment is not forbidden by God in the commandment not to kill. It is similar to the issue of corporal punishment of children. Some see the spanking of a child as abusive and a violation of the instruction of God against striking another person. But, not so! The same Bible that says one, says the other and there is no contradiction. And so it is with capital punishment...the Bible law against killing another is the condemnation of either, 1) putting to death the innocent, or 2) taking the law into your own hands and slaying even a guilty person. Both of these are murder, whereas the civil power's use of execution as a means of punishing a crime, is not.



North Charlottesville church of Christ
3445 Seminole Trail #132
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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (**Matthew 5:16**)

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Testing the Spirits

By David Posey

Why would a person who was once a faithful Christian suddenly begin to embrace false doctrine? Why would he risk his eternal well-being on some teaching that is far from what he had been taught in the past without subjecting his new found belief to careful scrutiny? Why do some people cling so tenaciously to certain teaching, while rejecting, out of hand, good arguments against the view?

"raggedly old tradition"). Not one of them has contacted me to try to change my view of these matters.

Exactly what leads men to make these kinds of radical changes will always escape us because we cannot read their hearts; we are limited to judging their fruits (**Mat. 7:16**). No doubt, some people embrace teaching for no better reason than that someone they like taught it to them. Some teaching is tenaciously held only because brother so and so taught it, "and that's good enough for me." We all need to check our doctrine against our motives and make certain we have better reasons than that for our faith. "Faith comes from hearing (the word of God)," not the word of bro. whomever. Steadfastness is no virtue when it is just parroting someone else's teaching.

Most of us have known brethren who sat under the same teaching we did, and who still attend a church of Christ, but have radically changed their views on a variety of subjects. For example, I know men who now embrace instrumental music, institutionalism, the building and maintenance of "fellowship halls" and social programs as part of the work of the church. Some have gone even further and are teaching that only the gospels count, that the letters of the apostles are not authoritative (one preacher, in a letter to me, called apostolic authority a

We are to be steadfast and immovable but not stubborn and obstinate, though the difference may not be always apparent. We should never totally shut down our

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Thought to Ponder

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" - 1 John 4:1

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Mark E. Larson
Evangelist & Editor

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minds on a portion of the doctrine of Christ. There are some non-negotiables, to be sure, but why would we be afraid to re-study any subject? Truth has nothing to fear.

But even worse (if possible), is the embracing of teaching simply because it validates a chosen lifestyle or moral decision. For example, a person may want to drink "socially" (*social schmocial*: "social drinking" is a stupid name for it; it's drinking alcoholic beverages, period), and therefore he's "decided" that the apostle Paul's instructions to Timothy to "take a little wine for the stomach's sake" applies to him. I find it sadly comical that some people could barely tell you what the work of the church is, but can quote verbatim 1 Tim. 5:23! Rarely has such a person done much study on the passage, but they like the sound of it and feel "confirmed" in their life-style choice. Is that honest?

There are many, though, who honestly and sincerely believe that the Bible teaches a doctrine just the way they see it. They may sincerely believe that one is saved by faith alone, or that having musical instruments in the assembly is scriptural, or that women should be able to preach, or that drinking wine is fine, or that a guilty party in a divorce can remarry, and so on . . .

Honesty and sincerity does not insulate us from judgment, though. One sure test of a man's sincerity is this: *is he willing to study the issue?* John said: "*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (1 John 4:1). The word is powerful (Heb. 4:12) and if a man will study any issue honestly, he will know the truth. What both-

ers me are brethren who are unwilling to speak up, content to discuss the issue only with those with whom they agree or with those whom they feel they can dominate. That is neither sincere nor honest. It is only cowardly, and Jesus puts cowards right up there with liars in the lake of fire (Rev. 21:8). Paul predicted that the time would come when people would not endure sound doctrine, but would heap up for themselves teachers who would "tickle their ears" (II Timothy 4:3). It is disingenuous in the extreme to avoid all discussion of an issue with those who you know disagree with you.

If an issue is important enough to a person that he is willing to advise others on it (like the marriage issue), or is causing them to change their view of worship or the church (like the instrumental music issue, institutionalism, and women's roles in the church), or causing serious life-style changes (like modesty questions or drinking issues), then upon what basis does that person refuse to discuss (or debate, if necessary) the issue with one who is at least as knowledgeable as he? What is he afraid of?

I can respect anyone who is willing to put his belief to the test. But I have a very difficult time respecting those who claim to "believe" but who then stand aloof and will not subject that cherished conviction to the scrutiny of others. It betrays an attitude either of doubt about the belief or of unconcern about others.

If we cannot discuss biblical issues as adults and Christians and come to a clearer understanding of the principles that God intends for us to learn, then isn't our confession a ruse? Let's always be willing to subject our precious opinions and doctrines to the most severe scrutiny possible so that, before we say "I believe" something, we are confident that we have fully "tested the spirits to see whether they are from God."



Comfort Zone Christians

By Jim Lee

It is said that "He who aims at nothing will hit it," and "He who has no goal in mind will get there fast." I wonder, in the realm of Christianity, how many of us go through our lives as Christians with no goals, no objectives, and no plans? "Comfort Zone Christians" is a term that is growing in popularity which describes this behavior, and I believe that many of us fit into this category.

"We'll never reach our potential, or even know what it is, because we won't leave our 'Comfort Zone.'"

the thrill of flight because we never leave the nest. We'll never reach our potential, or even know what it is, because we won't leave our "Comfort Zone."

Then Peter left the boat and walked to Jesus on the sea (Matthew 14:22-31), he had to leave his "Comfort Zone." How many of us would get out of the boat and go to Jesus if He

Why do I believe this? For the simple fact that it's easy to just do as you please if you have no objectives, goals, or plans in life. No plans means no failures! What an easy life! Thus with this attitude everything is nice and safe within our "Comfort Zone." But is that where Jesus wants us to be? Oh yes, He did say in Matthew 11:28, "*Come unto me...and I will give you rest.*" But I really don't think He meant for us to just "kick back and get comfortable" (cf. 2 Timothy 3:12). Rest assured my brethren, one is not going to suffer any form of persecution while in their "Comfort Zone." I believe that God expects us to reach out beyond our private domain.

Let me illustrate with the following example. When a baby eagle is left in its nest, it is in its "Comfort Zone." In order for it to learn to fly, it must leave its "Comfort Zone." Often, the mother eagle will begin to pull the feathers from the bottom of the nest, leaving the baby eagle sitting on the hard, sharp sticks that make up the nest. Get the picture? Many of us are like that baby eagle. We snuggle down into our padded pew, we get comfortable and don't want to go out into the real world. What would happen to that eagle if it never left its nest? It would live and die never knowing the thrill of flight, never reaching its potential (cf. Revelation 3:1). It's sad to say, but it's worth repeating, many of us are like that baby eagle. We'll never know

would bid us to come? Now, before you answer that too quickly, consider the fact that He commanded us to "*Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled*" (Luke 14:23). Jesus didn't ask us to walk on water, just to go out and invite them to come in. But when going out and ministering to people is suggested, some react with excuses as if you had asked them to walk on water!

Brethren, we need to realize that the boat we must come out of is our "Comfort Zone"; the water we must walk on is the unsure ground of a new experience. This may be a hard road for some to conquer, and some of you may be thinking, "I'll never be able to conquer that road." If this is your thinking, let me remind you of something. A long, long time ago, this same Jesus had to conquer the road that led to Golgotha, "*that is to say, a place of a skull*" (Matthew 27:33). In conquering that road, He has afforded you and me the hope of conquering the road that leads to heaven. But in order to conquer that road we must leave our "Comfort Zone." If this means "out of our seats and into the streets," then let's go! Remember, Heaven will surely be worth it all!

