

# YPS

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# YPS

**(Young Precious Seed)** is a supplement of *Precious Seed* designed for those young in faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live.

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## CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The term 'capital punishment' refers to the legal execution of a person by the government or state. Most western countries have abolished capital punishment on what they term as humanitarian grounds and have replaced it with sentences such as life imprisonment; Britain abolished the death penalty in 1969. The United States of America and other countries around the world still practise capital punishment for certain crimes such as first degree murder. The question we need to face is whether capital punishment is morally acceptable or not, and, as believers, we should base our decision on what the word of God says.



The commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill' should properly read, 'Thou shalt not murder'. There are certain instances where killing is permitted by God; murder, or unlawful killing, however, is never permitted by God. Does capital punishment fall under the heading of unlawful killing? Is it therefore legalized murder, as some say?

### The value of human life

At the outset we need to remind ourselves of the value of human life. Because of the special place that mankind has in terms of dignity as God's representatives on earth, 'made in the image of God', and because of the eternity of the human soul, which will never die, God has enshrined human life with sanctity. Killing animals is one thing; killing a human being is another!

### God's instruction to Noah

It was after the flood that '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

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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', Gen. 9. 1-6. Notice that the killing of animals for food is here permitted by God, but the killing of human beings is not. God also gives Noah (and others in authority) the right to execute a murderer when He says, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed'. In fact, God does more than give rulers the right to execute; He insists upon it. The unlawful killing of a human being requires justice at the hands of God, and that justice is 'capital'.

### God's instruction to Israel

That God gave this command to Noah before He gave the law to Moses indicates that the responsibility of the state or government to put a murderer to death legally applies to all mankind. It is not something that is binding upon God's earthly people, the Jews, alone. Yet God goes on to reinforce this command to His earthly

people, for He expects it of them as much as He does of the heathen nations around. 'He that smiteth a man that he die shall be surely put to death', is the command recorded in Exodus chapter 21 and verse 12. The Lord goes on in this passage to instruct that where manslaughter is deemed to have occurred (second degree murder in America, accidental or unintentional death in the UK) the killer may find a place of

refuge. God does, therefore, see a difference between murder and manslaughter and there is no capital punishment for manslaughter. Where, however, murder was intentional and devious, the murderer could even be taken from God's altar, traditionally a place of refuge, and executed, Exod. 21. 14.

This instruction was given to the people of God in their wilderness journeys. But it was so important it was repeated before they entered the promised land. God was, in this way, telling them that even in the land which was to be theirs for ever, murder could not go unpunished, and the punishment was capital. 'The murderer shall surely be put to death', He said in Numbers 35 and verses 16, 17, 18, and 21. For someone guilty of manslaughter there were cities of refuge to flee to; for someone guilty of murder there was nowhere. In fact, 'Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die. Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction (compensation) for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death. And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest. So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it. Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel', Num. 35. 30-34.

### No compensation for a life taken

This idea of compensation for a life is often used as an excuse to abolish the



**For someone guilty of manslaughter there were cities of refuge to flee to; for someone guilty of murder there was nowhere.**

BY IAN REES

death penalty. It is Old Testament law, we are told, that pleads 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. It does so, it is true, but that only reinforces what God is teaching here. The law of *lex talionis* allows for compensation to a certain value. If you injure a man's eye, you cannot be punished for more. A monetary valuation was put upon an eye, or an ear, and compensation was to that value alone. So, too, if a man killed an animal compensation had to be paid. But when it came to the murder of a human being no compensation was fixed. The value was, a life for a life. 'He that killeth any man shall surely be put to death. And he that killeth a beast shall make it good; beast for beast. And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again. And he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it: and he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death', Lev. 24. 17-21.

## New Testament endorsement

Once again, it has been argued, this is Old Testament law, but in the dispensation of grace, where forgiveness is demanded and expected, we should not be so harsh. Yet, the New Testament endorses capital punishment and the right and might of the state is upheld. The apostle Paul stresses, 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister

of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil', Rom. 13. 1-4. The state has the right to 'bear the sword' in the pursuit of justice, according to the apostle Paul. I may, as an individual, have the right to forgive those that harm me, or even kill my family, my friends, my neighbours. The state has no right to forgive. It has the duty to protect human life.

So heavy was this duty that God insisted that un-witnessed murders had to be thoroughly investigated. If the dead body of a man or woman was found in a field, the government or state (in this case the elders of the community) had to investigate the cause of death and do its utmost to bring the killer to justice. If they failed to do so, however, they could not just ignore the case. Shed blood had to be accounted for. God therefore insisted that the elders then had to sacrifice an animal to Him, and 'they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Be merciful, O Lord unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them', Deut. 21. 7-8. After all, it is not Abel's blood alone that cries out unto God.

## The problem of different values placed on human life

In Britain today the death penalty has been abolished. The government recognizes that its continued abolition or its re-introduction is a matter of conscience and in all debates about it, MPs are given a free vote to vote as

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their conscience demands. There has been a growing lobby that has argued for a modified re-introduction of the death penalty. It has been argued that it should be re-introduced where a policeman or policewoman has been killed. In other words, where a representative of the state is unlawfully killed, the state should execute the murderer. Whilst this may be biblical, it falls short of the ideal which is that all human life is sacred to God, not just that of a policeman. God sees mankind, made in His image, as of such great value that whoever unlawfully kills a man should be legally executed by the state, and all such executions are morally right in His eyes. Bob Warner has also argued, 'There may be one class of murderer who could reasonably and appropriately be subject to the death penalty and that is the mass murderer who is found guilty beyond all reasonable doubt of a whole series of unlawful killings. Many are unable to see any good reason to keep such a person alive and incarcerated for several decades', *The Ten Commandments and the Decline of the West*, published by Kingsway, 1997, p. 114. But have we the right to decide who is most

worthy of the death penalty, and whose life is more valuable than another's?

### What about other capital sins in the Old Testament that we no longer recognize?

There were many other sins which could lead to the death penalty in the Old Testament and that we no longer would consider today; abuse

of parents by children, kidnapping, witchcraft, various sex offences, blasphemy, false prophesying and criminal negligence, are some examples. Have we the right to insist on the death penalty for murder, but not for any of these other sins? Brian Edwards has argued that, whilst it cannot be wrong to abolish the death penalty in these instances as the law was often softened by mercy, even in our Lord's day, yet it is 'the value of life argument that leads many to conclude that, whilst capital punishment may be dropped for many crimes, it should be retained for murder', *The Ten Commandments for Today, Day One Publications*, 1996, p. 185.

### But what of miscarriages of justice?

There are some that may feel the force of the argument from the biblical point of view, yet still be hesitant to endorse capital punishment on practical grounds. 'What if the state executes an innocent person?' it is argued. 'Isn't that worse? We may not always be sure that every conviction is safe.' 'Any abuse or mistaken imposition of the death penalty is surely nothing more than yet another unlawful killing', writes Rob Warner, *ibid*, p. 112. He goes on to say, 'Faced with these dilemmas, many have come to the conclusion that, while in principle the death penalty is the ultimate sanction of the state in enforcing the rule of law, in practice the risks of a mistaken conviction, however small, mean that the actual use of the death penalty should be avoided', *ibid*, p. 114. That innocent people have been wrongly convicted cannot be denied. But that is surely an argument for higher levels of justice and investigation, not an argument for the abolition of the death penalty. If God insists upon it, are we not wrong to wriggle out of it?



# THE LORD'S PRAYER (2)

## A Family Prayer

'Our Father, which art in heaven', are the opening words of the prayer. It is this expression, 'Father', which reminds us that this is a family prayer; children are calling upon their father. In this first section of this familiar prayer we invoke, or 'call upon', the name of the Father. Dispensationally, it is true that the Jews are to call Him Father. But so are we believers today. The Holy Spirit Himself teaches us to call upon God using the gentle words, 'Abba, Father', Rom. 8. 15; Gal. 4. 6. This is a title even the Lord Jesus used of God when He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt', Mark 14. 36. All true believers show this family desire to call upon God as their father.

## The Father of the Family

We all have fathers, and some of us are fathers, so we know what fathers can be like. God, however, is like no other father in that He is a perfect Father.

## God is a holy Father

The Lord Jesus Himself called God 'Holy Father', John 17. 11. God, and God alone, can be called Holy Father. He says of Himself, 'I am holy', Lev. 11. 44; 1 Pet. 1. 16. He is called the 'Holy One of Israel', Ps. 78. 41. He is perfect, sinless, spotless and pure, unable to lie and unable to deny Himself, Tit. 1. 2.

## God is a righteous Father

Again it is the Lord who calls the Father 'righteous Father', John 17. 25. If God is holy in His nature, without sin, then He must be righteous in His behaviour: what He does is holy and right. So we read 'the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth', Dan. 9. 14. He is 'the Lord God almighty, true and righteous' in His



judgements, Rev. 16. 7. 'Gracious is the Lord, and righteous', Ps. 116. 5.

## God is a heavenly Father

Sometimes we think the title 'heavenly Father' means that God is in heaven and not on the earth. That He is there in heaven is quite true; heaven is God's throne, Acts 7. 49. But the title means more than just that, for though God is in heaven, in another sense He is everywhere, filling heaven and earth, Jer. 23. 24. The phrase 'heavenly Father' refers to His majesty, His power, His holiness, His transcendence (separation from the world). Someone has written, 'The words "who art in heaven" denote not the place of His abode so much as the authority and power at the command of the Creator and Ruler of all things. He combines fatherly love with heavenly power.'

## God is a benevolent Father

God is benevolent, or kind, in many ways to all mankind, not just to those who are His children. 'He sends the rain on the just and the unjust', Matt. 5. 45. Yet, He has a particular interest in His children. Your heavenly Father knows

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your needs, says the Lord Jesus, Matt. 6. 32, and He is able to meet them.

### The children of the Family

So much for the father of the family. But what about the children of the family? It is a popular thing to believe that all mankind are God's children. If by this we mean that we are His creatures, this is true; we come from Him. In a spiritual sense, however, we are not all God's children. The Bible in fact teaches the exact opposite.

### We are not all God's children

The Bible divides mankind into two groups and the basis of the division is spiritual. It makes no difference to God whether we are rich or poor, educated or uneducated, male or female, Jew or Gentile. God sees two groups only; those that have the Son and those that do not, those that have eternal life and those that do not, those that are His children and those that are not. 'In this the children of God are manifested and the children of the devil', writes John in 1 John 3. 10. 'Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God'. The Lord Jesus Himself spoke to religious, apparently God-fearing Jews of His day, and said to them, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do', John 8. 44. The Bible calls some people 'children of disobedience', Eph. 2. 2; 'children of this world', Luke 16. 8; and 'children of wrath', Eph. 2. 3; in contrast to this, believers are called

'children of light', Eph. 5. 8; 'children of the Highest', Luke 6. 35; 'children of God', Rom. 8. 16.

### We have to become God's children

If we are not all born God's spiritual children at birth, how do we become His children? We become God's children 'by faith in Jesus Christ', Gal. 3. 26. It is when we come to believe in God's Son, Jesus Christ, that we become children of God. 'As many as received him, to them gave he power (the right, or authority) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God', John 1. 12-13. We become God's children by new birth. We are 'born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God', 1 Pet. 1. 23. 'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth', Jas. 1. 18.

### There is a privilege in being God's children

Being the children of God means that we are born into God's family by spiritual birth. This gives us both privileges and responsibilities. The privileges lie in being God's sons. 'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God', 1 John 3. 1. We have used verses in our study so far that have interchanged the words 'children' and 'sons'. Sonship, (being sons of God) refers to our spiritual position and inheritance as God's children. 'For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our



spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ', Rom. 8.14-17. What a privilege it is to call the Creator of the world 'Father'; to be known as His children and His sons!

## There is a responsibility in being God's children

Yet, the responsibility of being children is that we are to be like our Father. That is why God frequently says, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy'. If God is holy, and we claim to be His children, we should be holy too; there should be that family likeness. We are to be 'blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world', Phil. 2.15.

Because God our Father does not love the world we are not to love it. 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father', 1 John 2. 15-16. The child of God, though he or she may sin, should not live a life that is characterized by sin. 'Whosoever is born of God doth not [habitually] commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him and he cannot [habitually] sin because he is born of God', 1 John 3. 9. This is our responsibility; to be like our heavenly Father.

## Conclusion

We know that there is a very real sense in which that is not going to be possible while we live in this world. We still have sinful natures, we are tempted by the world, the flesh and the devil every day, and we sin every day. Yet the tenor of the Christian life is



that we try hard to be holy, unlike non-Christians round about us who could not care less about being holy and probably try very hard not to be. The aim of the Christian life is to become more and more like God each day and to grieve over sin when we fail. So the Bible says, 'My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous', 1 John 2. 1-2.

The Lord Jesus reminds His disciples, and us through them, that when we invoke the name of God as Father, we call upon one who is holy, righteous, benevolent and good, and one whose power, as a heavenly Father, is far greater than ours. And should we ever call upon God as our Father, let us not forget the mercy which has made us His children, the grace which has made us His sons, and the privileges and responsibilities that are ours to be like Him in a world that hates Him. So the first request, for the world around us and for ourselves, is simply this, 'Hallowed be thy name'.

# Books & Parchments

## Building a good library



BY JOHN BENNETT

### BIBLE DICTIONARIES

#### What is a Bible Dictionary and why should I have one?

There is such a wide range of Bible dictionaries on the shelves of Christian bookshops that it is a daunting task to try and select one. How do you start to make a decision, especially when the potential outlay can be anything from £7 to over £30?

Like any book, the reason for having a Bible dictionary is a matter of personal opinion and method of study. However, there are some simple reasons that we might suggest:

- when you come across a person or place in the narrative of scripture and want to see where they may appear before, or later, than the passage in question;
- the spiritual significance of that place or person. This might start with an explanation of the meaning of the name in English and develop into an explanation of how different passages might add to that explanation;
- an outline of a book and the general thrust of its teaching.

While a concordance might supply a list of places where things occur it does not provide the alternatives listed above.

In such a short article, it is impossible to offer comprehensive guidance on such a broad range so we have had to be selective. At the cheaper end of the market is the Zondervan's *Compact Bible Dictionary*, first published in 1967 and re-issued in 1993. Although it is unclear who has contributed to its compilation, the content is valuable and not necessarily as brief as the title may suggest. Some entries are particularly well-balanced and helpful although the entry on the resurrection ends rather disappointingly. However, for a relatively moderate outlay this could be a worthwhile acquisition.

At the cheaper end of the hardback range there is the *World's Bible Dictionary*, compiled by Don Fleming. It was first published in 1990 by World Bible Publishers, Iowa, USA. Comparing the entries on creation indicates this dictionary as giving a more detailed and biblical account of this truth. However, Fleming's explanation of the role of women bows to the cultural and time-limited view and is less helpful as a consequence.

Two better known versions, which appear in both written as well as electronic format, are Fausset's and Smith's *Bible Dictionaries*. Originally written in the nineteenth century, Smith's has now been updated and is published by Thomas Nelson. Fausset's, contemporary with Smith's, is still available in the 1949 Zondervan Publishing hardback format. Although Smith's is a widely respected volume it is somewhat surprising in what it omits, both in terms of topics and explanation of terms. Similarly, it can be a rather lengthy and, at times, technical read. Other electronic versions which might be mentioned are the *Concise Bible Dictionary* and *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. All four are available in the On-line Bible and the latter is also available in e-sword. Fausset's and Easton's, being contemporary with Smith's, are similar in style to Smith's. They can all provide helpful background information although there are areas of weakness and they are a little dated.

In the last issue's article, which dealt with one-volume commentaries, mention was made of the *New Bible Commentary*. The companion volume, *The New Bible Dictionary*, is also published by IVP. In a similar way, it has contributions from a broad range of evangelical writers. This may be seen as a strength, giving breadth and scholarship, but it also has its weaknesses as evident in certain denominational traditions and views.

More modern dictionaries include the *New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* edited by Ronald Youngblood and published by Thomas Nelson. In its original edition (without the 'New!'), it was edited by Herbert Lockyer with F. F. Bruce and R. K. Harrison as consulting editors. Therefore, it does not lack scholarship or reliability. It is probably in the mid-price range of dictionaries and, as a hardback, would be a worthwhile investment.

#### RATINGS

<i>Zondervan Bible Dictionary</i>	★★★★★
<i>New Illustrated Bible Dictionary</i>	★★★★★
<i>New Bible Dictionary</i>	★★★★★
<i>Smith's Bible Dictionary</i>	★★★★★
<i>World's Bible Dictionary</i>	★★★★★
<i>Fausset's Bible Dictionary</i>	★★★★★
<i>Easton's Bible Dictionary</i>	★★★★★
<i>Concise Bible Dictionary</i>	★★★★★