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Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

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**"Genesis 9:6. Is it still a law today. If not, when was it disannulled?"**

Many questions I receive are very interesting but they are also quite difficult to answer. So many side issues are raised and have to be considered. This particular question is no exception because it raises the issues of the nature of man, murder, manslaughter, capital punishment, the possibility of 'just' wars, and the right of governments to embark on the killing of peoples of other nations. Let us first of all see what the particular scripture says; **"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man"**. The reader will be able to understand that some very important points are raised in this scripture. We shall look at these now.

**The Sanctity of Life**

There can be little doubt in the biblical student's mind that 'blood' occupies a very significant place in God's law. In the same chapter at verse 4 we read, **"But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat"**. Also in Lev. 17:11 we read, **"For the life of the flesh is in the blood"**; and in Deut. 12:23, **"Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh"**. Now obviously, these were food laws given by God to the Israelite nation, and these have their echoes in the N.T. in Acts 15:19,20, where the scripture says, **"Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood."** It is interesting to note that this particular portion of scripture has caused some concern to modern-day Christians in the eating of such foods as black puddings, and fowl from which the blood has not been let.

Applying the same principle to created man, it is quite clear that God considered the life of man to be sacrosanct. We can readily understand that in violent times the blood of the innocent will be shed along with the blood of the guilty (how many times have we seen this on T.V. when little children have died because of man's inhumanity to his fellow-men). The Bible is overly concerned with the shedding of 'innocent blood' (you will no doubt recall the words of Judas when he cast down the money given to him by the chief priests and elders, **"I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood"**). The elders knew the score because they realised they could not put the 'blood money' into the treasury). However, the shedding of 'innocent' blood, according to God's law, demands the shedding of the blood of the 'guilty', so the penalty for the murder of the innocent would demand capital punishment for the guilty. We shall say a little more about that later.

Before we leave this section we must say that human life is sacrosanct because man was made, as the scripture says, 'in the image of God'.

The twin sins of idolatry and the shedding of innocent blood were coupled by Jeremiah as foreshadowing the desolation of the Jews (See Jer. 19). It also seems quite clear that the mob who condemned Jesus before Pilate had been raised to a high pitch of frenzy, because when Pilate washed his hands and said, **"I am innocent of the blood of this just person"**, the rash and ill-considered response of all the people

was, **“His blood be on us, and on our children”** (Matt. 27:24,25). I have always had serious reservations about ‘open communion’, and indeed concerning Christians who perfunctorily attend the Lord’s Table out of a so-called sense of duty. We have a duty to protect people who have no right to be at the Table from themselves, and also to point out to Christians the seriousness of what they are doing. The shedding of the Lord’s blood was the shedding of ‘innocent’ blood, and Paul says, **“Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord”** (1 Cor. 11:26-29). God-worthiness is not a lifetime ‘blanket cover’ obtained when a person is immersed into Christ, but like respect, it has to be earned and maintained **throughout** the life of the Christian. I have to say at this point that, so far as I know, Genesis 9:6 has not been disannulled.

#### **Manslaughter**

Having given the law relating to the shedding of innocent blood, God now goes on to indicate a distinction between ‘intentional’ and ‘non-intentional’ killing; this distinction is embodied in our own criminal law today. God decreed that there should be ‘Cities of Refuge’ to which a manslayer could flee. There were six in number, three on the East side of the Jordan river; Bezer in the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth-Gilead in Gad, and Golan in the half tribe of Manasseh. On the West side; Hebron in Judah, Shechem in Ephraim, and Kedesh in Naphtali, It was to these cities that a slayer who had killed **unwittingly** might flee from ‘the avenger of blood’ (See Joshua 20: 1-6). He was assured of asylum until the death of the high priest of those days. However, the refuge availed him nothing if he was found guilty of wilful murder.

Why did God decree that there should be Cities of Refuge? Well obviously because it is never easy to determine the ‘intent’ which is behind a person’s actions. Government policy of any period in the formulation of Statute Law takes into account what is conceived to be ‘public opinion’; I suppose one might say that this is the basis of our Common Law. We understand, of course, that such public opinion has not evolved overnight; it has come down through the years, maybe even centuries. So, a person charged with murder today is judged according to the criminal law and before a panel of his or her own peers. Therefore, God in His Wisdom had to ensure that a person who slew another without intent to kill should at least be given a chance to explain his or her actions; you will notice that in Joshua 20:6 the scripture says, **“And he (the slayer) shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgement”**. Even though we may have misgivings about man’s interpretation of God’s laws, we can rest assured that what God decrees is right and just for all situations.

#### **What About Romans 13?**

The whole subject of ‘killing’ cannot be confined to a situation when one person murders another; the whole subject is a very complex one and has caused much heart-searching, particularly among Christians and peace campaigners. In Rom. 13:4 Paul says that the ruler **“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”**. There are many who argue that a ‘just’ war can be fought by ‘just’ means in order to obtain ‘just’ ends; they cite the last world war as an example of this when certain nations were designated as ‘evil’ because of unprovoked aggression and indiscriminate killing of innocent people, and other nations were seen as ‘good’ when they took retaliatory measures by force of arms to restrain the evil. The startling paradox is that some of the warring nations who opposed each other would be classed religiously as Christian, so we had the ludicrous position of opposing nations asking for God’s help to bring success to their cause.

There is also the vexed problem of participation. If a nation can take up arms against another nation in a so-called ‘just’ cause, does the **army** of that nation become

non-guilty of shedding innocent blood when the soldiers of that army kill soldiers of the opposing force? This question is compounded when one has to consider the relative status of combatant and non-combatant, and one has to ask oneself the further question, "if a 'just' war is permissible under God's law then have I any right to conscientiously object to it, because it is ostensibly fought for my benefit and on the behalf of the putting down of the forces of evil when they threaten the inalienable right of mankind to live in peace?" The issue is further complicated when, as we saw in the last war, members of the so-called 'good' forces **themselves** perpetrated 'evil' acts against innocent people and had to be tried as war criminals.

I do not presume to have all the answers to these complicated problems, but one thing I am sure of: Christians have a bounden duty to consider them seriously, and each autonomous community of Christians should be given guidance by their leaders on the biblical resolution of such problems. Everything which God's Word contains **must** be capable of correct interpretation and resolution, otherwise God would not have put it there; it is up to us to dig deep to find the answers and not to ignore issues because they are difficult.

I said I would comment further on the subject of capital punishment. As readers are aware, some countries practice it, others don't, in this country it was abolished some years ago. Even though Gen. 9:6 insists that the one who sheds innocent blood should pay with his life, it seems to me that even though that decree has not been disannulled, governments have a right, through their elected representatives, and in accordance with Rom. 13, to guard against innocent people being put to death along with the guilty. This is a personal opinion but I believe the principle underpinning God's law would allow this. Perhaps others will disagree.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden,

20 Costessy Way, Winstanley, Wigan, WN3 6ES.)