

From this we understand that therefore, and according to His example, we must not inflict pain, harm, or sorrow upon any one, but seek the highest welfare and salvation of all men, and even, if necessity require it, flee for the Lord's sake from one city or country into another, and suffer the spoiling of our goods; that we must not harm any one, and, when we are smitten, rather turn the other cheek also, than take revenge or retaliate. Matt. 5:39. And, moreover, that we must pray for our enemies, feed and refresh them whenever they are hungry or thirsty, and thus convince them by well-doing, and overcome all ignorance. Rom. 12:19, 20. Finally, that we do good and commend ourselves to every man's conscience; and, according to the law of Christ, do unto no one that which we would not have done to us. II Cor. 4:2; Matt. 7:12.

If we understand this as applying to personal obligations, there is no problem. But if we extend this to societal obligations, then we make it conflict with government's obligations to protect against and punish evildoers and to preserve human life.

11. Societal punishment of individuals who take away human life unlawfully may take various forms, ranging from fines, to imprisonment, to death, depending on the nature and degree of responsibility involved.

Romans 13:3-4 -- "For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong, Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer."

The sword represents the power of death wielded by the magistrate. Of course, if rulers have the power of death, then by application of the principle that the greater includes the lesser, rulers also have the power of inflicting lesser degrees of punishment.

Thus the punishment of death, inflicted by governments on those who take away life unlawfully, is not a violation of the obligation of societies to preserve human life, but an exception warranted by Scripture. In addition, the influence of such punishment may even save human life by means of its deterrent effect on those who might otherwise violate this obligation.