

Paying The Price

On February 3, 1998 Karla Faye Tucker became the first woman to be executed in the State of Texas since the Civil War. Karla Faye, along with an accomplice had brutally murdered two people. She admitted her crime and spent the last 14½ years of her life on Death Row.

Revenge or retribution? The on-going debate over the death penalty will never be solved to everyone's satisfaction. However, there is no debate when it comes to God's judgment, for retribution is required for every sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). and "God requireth that which is past" (Ecclesiastes 3:15). Whatever man's judgment might have been for Karla, God's righteous judgment demanded that her sin be dealt the eternal death penalty.

Then why, when interviewed on the Larry King Live television show just two weeks prior to her execution, could she say "I have no fear . . . I know He (God) walks with me . . . this is not my final step"? The answer is found in her own words, "I know what real love is. I know what forgiveness is, even when I did something so horrible. I know that, because God forgave me, and I accepted what Jesus did on the cross." Three months after she was imprisoned, she had heard the good news of God's salvation. For the first time in years, she cried as the overwhelming weight and reality of what she had done hit her, and as she wept, she accepted the forgiveness of God offered through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. "The blood of Jesus Christ His (God's) Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7), including the most heinous crimes.

Although Karla had experienced the forgiveness of God, she still had to face the punishment for her crime. In her request for a pardon and a sentence of life imprisonment rather than the death penalty from then Governor George Bush (who was later elected President of the United States), Karla is quoted as saying: "I am in no way attempting to minimize the brutality of my crime. It obviously was very, very horrible and I do take full responsibility for what happened . . . I also know that justice and law demand my life for the two innocent lives I brutally murdered that night. If my execution is the only thing, the final act that can fulfill the demand for restitution and justice, then I accept that . . . I will pay the price for what I did in any way our law demands it." {moscolumnbreak}

Governor Bush had the power to offer her a pardon, but he chose not to, and has been quoted as saying, "If the crime fits the penalty, the penalty is given." That is God's standard. He, too, says "the wages of sin is death" - so death there must be. While no one else could undergo the death penalty in Karla's place in the State of Texas, God in His great love provided a Substitute for her eternal punishment in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. "God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God in righteous judgment punished His Son for the sin of every individual, and those who repent of their sin and accept this gift are not only forgiven but are also pardoned.

When a person receives the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour they are born again and become "a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Holy Spirit indwells them, and gives power over sin. To quote from the same interview, Karla said: "I believe what Jesus Christ has done . . . the way He has transformed a life . . . He is real. If He did this in this life, in this person who did something like that, He can do that in anybody's life." "I am going to be face to face with Jesus now . . . I will see you all when you get there. I will wait for you." These were Karla Faye Tucker's last words to the Christians who were watching as she received her lethal injection.