

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Text: Exodus 20:13; Numbers 35:30-31

INTRO: One advantage the NKJ has over the KJV of 1611 is that much of the argument about capital punishment might never have come up if the KJV translators had better translated EX 20:13. "Thou shalt not kill," is more accurately translated, "You shall not murder." Murder was forbidden. There was such a thing as killing which not only did not violate the law, but actually enforced the law. Murder violated the law. The English word murder is defined as "the intentional and unlawful killing of one person by another."

Our subject today is one that is quite controversial in our society--and one that is often looked upon as basically a political issue. While we do not deny that it has serious political implications, we emphatically deny that it is only, or even primarily, a political issue. It is a Bible issue. What does the Bible teach about capital punishment, and what does the Bible indicate should be our attitude toward it?

I. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN THE PATRIARCHAL AGE.

A. Capital punishment was enjoined upon mankind in the first age of the earth & its basis clearly stated.

READ GENESIS 9:6.

B. This principle had been understood even before God specifically ordained capital punishment & evidently would have been carried out on Cain, the first murderer, if God had not, for whatever reason He saw fit, taken special precaution to prevent such, Gen. 4:14-15. Such vengeance would be completely exacted (7-fold) upon anyone who took the law into his own hands and killed Cain.

C. Another principle involved in this question was also understood before being incorporated into written law at the time of Moses, Gen. 4:23-24.

D. By the time of Noah, violence was so wide-spread that God Himself passed & carried out the death penalty on the whole human race with the exception of one godly family, Gen. 6:5, 11-14.

E. After the flood, God gave men the responsibility of carrying out the death penalty on murderers & told specifically who had the responsibility of doing so. NOTE that capital punishment was not an option, it was a requirement, Gen. 9:5-6.

II. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT UNDER THE LAW OF MOSES.

A. The Hebrew nation under the Law of Moses was a Theocracy, a civil government with God Himself as the King. As such, many moral & spiritual sins became capital offenses as well as murder.

1. Murder was retained as a capital crime. Kidnapping was also specified with it, Ex. 21:16.

a. Extenuating circumstances were sometimes recognized, EX 21:12-13; NUM 35:16-28.

b. A man accused of murder (or any other crime) had a right to be tried & could not be punished on the testimony of only one witness, Deut 17:6-7.

c. A false witness was punished with the punishment he attempted to bring upon the victim of his lies, Deut 19:18-19.

2. In addition to murder & kidnapping, certain moral sins, such as sexual immorality & disrespect for parents became punishable by death, EX 21:15-17; Lev 20:9-16.

3. Such spiritual sins as idolatry, sorcery, blasphemy, false prophesying & Sabbath violation were added to the list of capital offenses, EX 22:18-20; 35:2; Lev 24:16, 23.

Scholars & historians agree that under the Law of Moses, the avenger of blood in murder cases continued to be the next of kin of the victim. In other capital offenses, the whole congregation

was involved, with the witnesses beginning the process, Deut 17:7.

B. It should be noted that the details of the Mosaic Law applied only to the Hebrew nation. Other nations continued to operate under the system given during Patriarchal times. Sabbath breaking, idolatry, etc.

C. The whole nation was held responsible for seeing that the death penalty was carried out as God had specified.
READ NUMBERS 35:31-33.

D. The principle, when murder was involved, applied to other nations as well as Israel. Joel 3:19; Jer. 51:35-37, etc.

III. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES.

A. No nation today is governed as a Theocracy, therefore there is a clear distinction between the things of Caesar & the things of God, MT 22:21. Spiritual sins & moral infractions in general are not occasions for capital punishment.

B. Not much is said about capital punishment in the NT but we should remind ourselves of certain facts already established:

1. There had never been an age when capital punishment was not a requirement of God upon all societies.

2. There was not a country on earth where capital punishment was not practiced. It was universal. No one questioned it. It was taken for granted.

3. And what little is said in the NT shows that God still intends for the crime of murder to bring the death penalty.
Jesus said to [Simon Peter], "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish

by the sword" (MT 26:2).

For if I am an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar. (Acts 25:11).

[The robber on the cross]: We receive the due reward of our deeds. (Luke 23:41).

He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience & the faith of the saints. (Rev. 13:10).

4. Thus we see that from Genesis to Revelation, God's over-all intent & purpose with regard to capital punishment has not changed.

C. In the NT age, civil rulers have the duty to carry out the death penalty as it is needed. READ ROMANS 13:1-4.

1. The civil ruler "bears a sword"--a tool of death. And he does not bear it in vain. He bears it because he is God's minister to exact punishment on evil doers.

2. There are many individuals who could not conscientiously carry out the death penalty. No doubt, there are numerous other areas where they may effectively and adequately serve. Such individuals should stay out of those governmental positions that have to do with crime & punishment.

3. Some might even have qualms about serving on a jury in a capital case. All the juror has to do is weigh the evidence and determine whether the defendant has been proven guilty beyond reasonable doubt. The punishment if he has,

has already been determined by God. But if you cannot conscientiously serve, don't do it.

Rom. 14:23.

4. The same principle is involved in any punishment: "legal kidnapping," "legal stealing," etc.

D. Capital punishment is still a valid command of God today.

1. The basis for capital punishment is as valid as it ever was--man made in the image of God, Gen 9:6.

2. The purpose to be served by capital punishment is as needed today as it ever was. DEUT. 19:20-21

- a. To put the evil person away from among you
- b. Those who remain will hear & fear & learn not to commit such evil.

E. Gun control is not an adequate solution to our problems.

The gun used to murder Beatle J Lenon was registered. The gun used to shoot Pres. Reagan was registered. Hundreds of people are murdered in our world every year by knives, poisons, and various other devices. If governments want to bring violent crime under control they must take their cue from God's effective form of government in the OT. Willful, intentional, cold-blooded murder should carry an automatic death penalty. Give him time to repent, get things in order. Then carry out the penalty for his crime.

Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. (Eccl. 8:11)

F. Sociologists, liberal theologians & politicians insist that capital punishment does not deter criminals. God says it will, Deut. 19:19-20. I believe God.

G. A haphazard loosely applied set of standards will not deter criminals. A capital punishment law that is only applied one time in 100 or 200 or 1,000, will never deter murderers, but a capital punishment law that is

consistent & certain will do so. And it most assuredly will prevent repeat offenders.

H. But what about the sermon on the mount, turning the other cheek, etc.? In those passages, the Lord was telling folks how to conduct their lives as individuals. Individually, we have neither the right nor the obligation to take the law into our own hands & avenge ourselves. But Jesus was not telling those in authority how to run a government. Government agents have a God-given responsibility to use deadly weapons to protect law abiding citizens and punish criminals. They bear the sword & they must not do so in vain.

CONCLUSION: I wish that capital punishment were never needed. But it is. I wish that the use of physical force in self defense was never called for, but sometimes it is. I wish that carnal wars never occurred, but as long as there are terrorists and international criminals, some battles will be necessary.

In a recent newspaper column, someone wrote Marilyn Vos Savant and quoted Albert Einstein, "To my mind, to kill in war is not a whit better than to commit ordinary murder." The writer asked Ms Vos Savant, "What do you think of this?" She replied, "I think it's a darned good thing that Albert Einstein was not the Supreme Commander of the Allied... Force in World War II..." I think so, too.

If we respect God & His will, we should raise our voices to those who are in authority & insist that they do the job God gave them to do, or step down & get out of the way so someone who is willing to carry out the responsibilities of their office may do so.

La Porte, TX, April 5, 1981
College Park, Deer Park, TX, August 9, 1981
Exton, PA, October 16, 1988
Washington, NJ, April 9, 1992 (meeting)
Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, September 14, 1997
Bethlehem, PA, November 22, 1997 (lectureship)
Wonsley Drive, Austin, TX, April 6, 1998 (meeting)