

Capital Punishment: The Bible Position

Introduction

This short paper deals with capital punishment and the Biblical position on this topic. Capital punishment deals with the putting to death or execution of an individual who has committed one or several of a number of crimes. The Bible is clear in setting forth the fact that capital punishment is commanded by God in the case of certain crimes.

I Definition

Capital - Relating to the head. 1. Of or pertaining to the head or top. 2. Affecting, or involving loss of, the head or life.

So we can see from the definition that capital punishment involves the loss of the head or life. If one loses their head, they lose their life.

II God's Initial Commandment For Capital Punishment

- A. Right after the worldwide flood God gave Noah the law of capital punishment. Murder was to be punished by the execution of the murderer. Also, if an animal kills a human, that animal is to be put to death. **Genesis 9:5-6; Exodus 21:28.**
 - 1. The life of the flesh is in the blood. **Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:11, 14.**
 - 2. If a person's blood is shed, they have lost their life. They have been killed. **Genesis 9:5-6.**
 - 3. When innocent blood has been shed, the blood of the murderer is required by God as payment. This is why putting murderers in prison does not satisfy God's justice. They must be put to death. **Numbers 35:31, 33.**
- B. Before the worldwide flood in the days of Noah, God had not commanded capital punishment. Without this law, the earth was filled with violence and wickedness. **Genesis 6:5, 11.**

III Various Crimes Which Were To Be Punished By Death

- A. Over time, God added several more crimes which were to be punished by execution of the offender. This is just a partial list. There are several more which could be listed.
- B. Kidnapping. **Exodus 21:16.** See also **Deuteronomy 24:7.**
- C. Rape. **Deuteronomy 22:25-27.**
- D. The following two forms of sexual uncleanness, though there are several more which could be listed:
 - 1. Adultery. **Leviticus 20:10.** See also **Deuteronomy 22:22.**
 - 2. Sodomy (homosexuality). **Leviticus 20:13.**
 - 3. This demonstrates the importance which God attaches to marriage. **Hebrews 13:4.**
- E. Witchcraft. **Exodus 22:18.**
 - 1. Witchcraft encompasses more than just pointed hats, broomsticks, and old women.
 - 2. Other mystic arts are also included in this category such as; wizardry, necromancy, divination and familiar spirits. **Leviticus 20:27.** See also **Deuteronomy 18:10-12.**

IV The Distinction Between Old and New Testament as Regards Capital Punishment

- A. The responsibility of judgement and execution is not left up to the individual, but was to be channelled through the judicial system and proper authorities. This is the primary purpose for governmental authority. **1Peter 2:13-14.**
- B. The Old Testament dealt primarily with the religio-political system of national Israel, which

was charged with carrying out the punishment of capital crimes. Church and state were basically combined.

- C. In the New Testament, the religio-political system of national Israel is abandoned. Church and state are separated. The church is exempted from taking life for crimes worthy of capital punishment. However, the church should bar fellowship to such an offender. In other words, anyone who is guilty of committing a capital crime should not be allowed membership in an orderly New Testament church.
- D. The state, whose morals and judgement should be influenced by the degree of truth that is taught by the church, is given the responsibility to determine the offender's fate. **1Peter 2:13-14**.
- E. The apostle Paul acknowledged the justice of capital punishment. **Acts 25:11**.

V God is a God of Judgement and Mercy

- A. God is holy. **Holy** - In Christian use, Free from all contamination of sin and evil, morally and spiritually perfect and unsullied, possessing the infinite moral perfection which Christianity attributes to the Divine character. **Revelation 4:8**.
- B. God is righteous. **Righteous** - Of persons: Just, upright, virtuous; guiltless, sinless: conforming to the standard of the divine or the moral law; acting rightly or justly. **Psalm 119:137; Psalm 145:17**.
- C. God is just. He is a God of justice. **Just** - That does what is morally right, righteous. **Zephaniah 3:5**.
- D. God loves righteousness and hates wickedness. **Psalm 11:7; Psalm 45:7; Psalm 5:4**.
- E. Given the above facts, it is no surprise that God is a God of judgement. His judgements are holy, right, and just.
 - 1. God is the king. He gives the law. He judges when His law is broken. **Isaiah 33:22**.
 - 2. God's judgements are according to truth. **Psalm 96:13**.
 - 3. God incarnate, Jesus Christ, will return to this earth someday to execute His judgement; which is done in righteousness. **Romans 2:16; Revelation 19:11**.
- F. The best course of action for a person once their sin is brought to their attention is to repent of it and start doing what it right.
 - 1. Repentance from sin is commanded by God. **Acts 17:30-31; Isaiah 1:16-17**.
 - 2. The fear of God is to depart from evil. They who depart from evil receive mercy from God. **Proverbs 3:7; Psalm 147:11; Psalm 103:8, 13**.