

Theological Equipping Class

Capital Punishment

November 1, 2020

Introduction

Questions to consider regarding capital punishment:

1. What is it?
2. What does the Bible say about it?
3. What have Christians thought about it?
4. Is it sinful or not today?
5. Which crimes qualify?
6. What methods are acceptable?

What is capital punishment?

Definition: *Capital punishment is the execution by the state of a criminal convicted of a serious (i.e. capital) offense.*

Distinction from "death penalty"

Why is it called that?

Elements:

1. Competent authority
2. Due process and justice
3. Standards for assessing serious offenses

Capital Punishment in America

Colonies: types of offenses

Public executions

Restriction of offenses

Cultural changes

Growing opposition

1972: Furman v. Georgia

Reinstatement

Capital punishment today

The Church, Scripture, and Capital Punishment

Primary question: is capital punishment today sinful or not sinful?

Early Church to Augustine

Augustine to modernity

Why has the Church generally held that it is not sinful?

The meaning of justice.
The role of government.
The commands of Scripture.

1. The meaning of justice

To do biblical deeds, we must have biblical definitions.

Social justice isn't justice.

What is justice? Justice is rendering impartially and proportionally to everyone his due in accord with the righteous standards of the moral law of God.

What is the purpose of punishment?

- Rehabilitation
- Restitution
- Deterrence
- Retribution

What is proportionate punishment in capital cases?

- *You have profaned me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, putting to death souls who should not die and keeping alive souls who should not live... (Ezekiel 13:19)*
- *Moreover, you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death, but he shall be put to death. (Numbers 35:31)*

What about grace?

Role of individual and state

2. The role of government

...render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. (Matthew 22:20–21)

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:1–4)

1. God is ultimately sovereign over all authority.
 2. To resist authority is to resist God.
 3. Government is supposed to be scary.
 4. Part of the way that government works for your good is by punishing the bad.
 5. Punishing the bad includes even capital punishment.
- *Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. (1 Peter 2:13–14)*

punish those who do evil

3. God commands it.

Righteous vs. unrighteous violence/killing

Before the law

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. (Genesis 9:6)

Predictive or prescriptive?

For what purpose? ...for God made man in his own image...

for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it & from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. (Genesis 9:5)

So is this still binding?

In the Mosaic Law

- *Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. (Exodus 21:12)*
- *Whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 24:17)*
- *Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, and whoever kills a person shall be put to death. (Leviticus 24:21)*
- *If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses. But no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness. Moreover, you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death, but he shall be put to death. (Numbers 35:30–31)*
- *But if anyone hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and attacks him and strikes him fatally so that he dies, and he flees into one of these cities, then the elders of his city shall send and take him from there, and hand him over to the avenger of blood, so that he may die. Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, so that it may be well with you. (Deut 19:11–13)*

Applying the Law today?

In the New Testament

for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:4)

Don't try to be more holy than God!

Why pacifism isn't holy

When should it be applied?

What should be categorized as capital crimes?

2008: Kennedy v. Louisiana

Standards to consider:

Proportionality – Ex 21:23-25

Certainty of guilt – Dt. 17:6; Num 35:30

Intent – Numbers 35:22-24

Due process – Num 35; Dt 17

How should it be applied?

In the Bible

Today?

Methods?

Objections

1. The Bible says, "Thou shall not kill."

But if he struck him down with an iron object, so that he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. (Numbers 35:16)

2. What about turning the other cheek?

3. What about a whole life or consistent ethic?

4. What about loving your neighbor?

5. *Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. (Matthew 26:52)*

6. What would Jesus do?

7. What about abuses?

8. It doesn't work.