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5 Hot Topics, Part 4

Capital Punishment

Text: Exodus 21:12-27

On one level the question of whether or not capital punishment is acceptable or legitimate or valid, is easily answered:

God believed it, so should we.

God himself terminated the lives of those who disobeyed Him. Cf. Genesis 6:5-7; 7:17-23

On one level we could simply say, “Capital punishment was acceptable to God and it is acceptable to us.”

Let’s take a closer look.

In the OT law, there are sixteen actions, punishable by death.

1. Premeditated murder (Exodus 21:12-14, 22-23)
2. Kidnapping (Exodus 21:16)
3. Hitting or cursing your parents (Exodus 21:15,17)
4. Being presumptuous or rebellious (Deuteronomy 17:12; 21:18-21)
5. Sacrifices to any god except the Lord (Exodus 22:20)
6. Working on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36; Exodus 35:2)
7. Blaspheming or cursing God (Leviticus 24:10-16)
8. False prophecies and leading others into idolatry (Deuteronomy 13:1-11, especially verses 5,8-10)
9. Human sacrifice (Leviticus 20:2)
10. Witchcraft or divination (Leviticus 20:27; Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 18:9-14).

**Illus.**

Did you hear about the medium who was a dwarf and was running from the police? He was a small medium at large. **:-)**

11**.** Adultery (Leviticus 20:10-13)

12. Bestiality (Leviticus 20:15-16)

13. Incest (Leviticus 20:11-12)

14. Homosexuality (Leviticus 20:13)

15. Premarital sex (Deuteronomy 22:13-21; Leviticus 21:9)

16. Rape (Deuteronomy 22:25-27)

It is clear that in the mind of God, there was behavior that was not acceptable in a society that was to be holy, set apart, sanctified. These behavioral restrictions were even applied to non-Israelites. God seems to be saying there is a standard of behavior for a well-ordered culture. According to OT law, God believes in capital punishment.

The simple definition of capital punishment is the killing of someone for a crime that person has committed. In short, it is the death penalty. You took someone’s life and now your life will be taken.

See video:

The History of Capital Punishment in the United States

Running time: 4:44

https://youtu.be/D9DtjJFQnmY

The death penalty, capital punishment, is articulated clearly in Leviticus 24:17-20

**17**‘Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death. **18**Whoever kills an animal shall make it good, animal for animal.

**19**‘If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him— **20**fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.

To repeat my opening sentence, on one level the question of whether or not capital punishment is acceptable or legitimate or valid, is easily answered:

God believed in it, so should we.

See video:

Death Penalty in America

Running time 1:24

https://youtu.be/W\_mb7tuNJS0

It seems to me that the ethic of love towards one’s enemies, towards the social misfit, towards the mentally ill forces a reexamination of the issue of capital punishment. There are those who read the book Leviticus and say, “Vengeance should be left to God as should the taking of any life and I will not, in the name of justice, kill another.”

Addressing the eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth verse in Leviticus 21, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said,

*If we do an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, we will be a blind and toothless nation.*

It is argued that capital punishment is not only an appropriate response to violent and deviant behavior but that it is a deterrent. People who are inclined to misbehave will witness the deaths by the state and will not commit the planned crime.

See video:

Parkland Shooter Nikolas Cruz SPARED The Death Penalty, Sparks Debate Over FUTURE Of The Punishment

Running time: 7:57

https://youtu.be/RSg9O21w7Jc

My concern on this hot topic is threefold.

1. Putting a person to death is irreversible and final. What if later DNA evidence proves we killed the wrong person? Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart in Furman v. Georgia (1972): “The penalty of death differs from all other forms of criminal punishment, not in degree, but in kind. It is unique in its total irrevocability,”

2. If we kill a person, we can never present the gospel to that person. I favor life in prison without the possibility of parole. In that case, we can rehabilitate, possibly, the deviant person. I know it is costly to take care of a person until their natural death. However, I’d rather pay for their life sentence and minister to them than kill them.

 Equaljustice.org

*The death penalty process is more complicated because a life is on the line. Capital cases involve more lawyers, more witnesses, more experts, a longer jury selection process, more pre-trial motions, an entirely separate trial for sentencing, and countless other expenses – racking up exorbitant costs before a single appeal is even filed.*

An analysis in one state found that the average cost of capital trial cost almost 50 percent more than both trials with life without parole and life with the possibility of parole.

3. There is no humane way of executing a person available to us today. Those in favor of capital punishment would say that the criminals acted inhumanely toward their victims, and they do not deserve humane or merciful end of life considerations.

Closing

Every person on death row and every criminal who is in the prison general population, is a person for whom Christ died on Calvary. I long for these women and men to come to know the savior. He who died for humanity’s deviance, disobedience, and rebellion, stands ready to save, to deliver! I want those incarcerated people to live long enough to meet Jesus.

Amen