

Biblical Studies Program Spring 2012

Politics and the Bible

Lesson Five

Capital Punishment, Marriage, and the Family

I. Capital Punishment

A. *Should the government take the life of a person who has been convicted of certain crimes?*

B. Relevant Biblical Teaching

1. Genesis 9:5-6

a. This command from God says that when someone murders another person, the murderer himself should be put to death - *"...by man shall his blood be shed"* (Gen 9:6)

b. This is not human vengeance, but carrying out God's own requirement of justice

(1) God decrees that the murderer will pay the ultimate price - *"I will require a reckoning for the life of man"* (Gen 9:5)

(2) God establishes that He will delegate to human beings the authority to carry out punishment on wrongdoers - *"by man shall his blood be shed"* (Gen 9:6)

c. The authority to punish wrongdoing is given by God to human governments

d. Such authority also implies that human governments will have to:

(1) Decide what wrongdoing is worthy of punishment

(2) What punishment is appropriate for each wrongdoing

(3) And whether or not an individual is guilty of that wrongdoing

e. This command comes long before the establishment of the nation of Israel or the giving of the Mosaic Law

f. It is intended to apply to all people, for all time

g. The death penalty is to be carried out for murder because *"God made man His own image"* - this is why the crime of murder is so serious

h. We can conclude from this passage:

(1) That God gave to human governments the authority to carry out capital punishment

(2) And that this is the foundational authority of all governments of the earth

2. Romans 13:1-7

a. The agent of government is *"the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer"* (Rom 13:4)

- b. Civil government *"does not bear the sword in vain"* (Rom 13:4)
 - c. When Paul says that civil government is authorized *"to bear the sword,"* he means that it has been given authority from God to put people to death
 - 3. 1 Peter 2:13-14 – this passage teaches the government has a responsibility not only to deter crime, but also to bring God’s punishment to *"those who do evil"*
- C. Is it right to desire that government punish a criminal?
 - 1. Romans 12:19 – *"...never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"*
 - 2. Romans 13:4 – *"For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath..."*
 - 3. Revelation 6:9-10 – (verse 10) *"O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood...?"*
- D. The justice of God
 - 1. The action of committing judgment into the hands of God allows us to give up the desire to seek vengeance for ourselves and gives us freedom to continue to show acts of mercy to them in this life
 - 2. Matt 5:44-45 – *"But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (45) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."*
- E. What crimes are worthy of capital punishment (the death penalty)?
 - 1. Such decisions should be made by each state, as the will of the people find expression through the laws enacted by their elected representatives
 - 2. Those who embrace *"Christian Reconstructionism"* are misguided to look to the Mosaic covenant to determine the kinds of crimes subject to the death penalty – there is no suggestion in the rest of the Bible that those particular uses of the death penalty should ever be applied by civil governments today
 - 3. Crimes worthy of death
 - a. First-degree, premeditated murder
 - b. Certain other crimes that were intended to or actually did lead to the death of other people, such as...
 - (1) Perjury
 - (2) Espionage
 - (3) Treason
 - (4) Plotting to use weapons of mass destruction
 - c. In addition, *"...a crime such as kidnaping along with the brutal rape and beating of another person that did not result in death but resulted in permanent disability to the victim could also fall into*

this category of a crime worthy of capital punishment.”¹

- F. Scripture teaches that God gives to civil government the right and the responsibility to carry out capital punishment for certain crimes, at least for the crime of murder
 - 1. Capital punishment does deter violent crime
 - 2. Capital punishment can be fairly administered and adequate safeguards can be taken to prevent innocent people from being executed
- G. The human sense of justice acknowledges that the crime of premeditated murder can only be adequately punished through the taking of the life of the murderer...God has put in the hearts of all people a sense of right and wrong (Rom 2:15)
- H. Objections from the Bible
 - 1. Exodus 20:13
 - a. This text should not be used as an argument against capital punishment
 - b. The word “murder” is different than the word “kill”
 - c. The commandment does not prohibit all killing – that is not the sense in which the original readers would have understood the command
 - 2. Matthew 5:38-39
 - a. Jesus is speaking to individual persons and talking about how they should be relating to other individuals
 - b. Jesus is not talking about the responsibility of government or telling governments how they should act with regard to the punishment of crime
- I. A “whole life ethic”
 - 1. These are those who oppose all intentional taking of human life, including abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, and war
 - 2. We are to decide the biblical position by taking the specific biblical teaching about each topic
 - 3. Ezekiel 13:19 – *“You have profaned me among my people...putting to death souls who should not die and keeping alive souls who should not live”*
 - 4. The true “biblical ethic” is not *“protect all human life in every case,”* but rather *“protect the innocent and also punish the guilty in proportion to the crime they have committed”*
- J. When we support capital punishment, we show that we place the highest possible value on human life
 - 1. For when life is wrongfully taken...

¹Wayne Grudem’s *Politics According to the Bible*, page 192.

2. Society requires the greatest punishment – forfeiting the life of the murderer
- K. Recommendations about laws and policies:
1. Governments should institute the death penalty for cases of premeditated murder
 2. Societies and governments should use the normal decision-making processes established by their governments to decide whether any crimes other than murder are so similarly horrible but they are worthy of capital punishment
- L. The importance of this issue:
1. God, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, teaches the government should carry out this punishment at least for the crime of murder
 2. It satisfies a deep human sense that just punishment is required when a murder has been committed
 3. It satisfies God’s requirement for the just punishment that He expects societies to carry out in such cases
 4. It acts as an important deterrent to the horrible crime of murder, especially in cases where the execution is carried out fairly and swiftly and with adequate safeguards against punishing innocent people

II. Marriage and Family

- A. Marriage (see the material posted on **The City** related to the MPA)
- B. Family
1. Are parents or the government primarily responsible for training children?
 2. Government should encourage married couples to bear and raise children
 - a. The Bible has a very positive view of bearing and raising children
 - b. The very first recorded command to human beings was the command to bear children (Gen 1:27-28)
 - c. Other Scriptures:
 - (1) Psalm 127:3
 - (2) Malachi 2:15
 - d. Unless each generation of a society bears and raises at least as many children as themselves, the entire population will dwindle and eventually the society itself will weaken (and perhaps go out of existence)
 - e. As people grow old and become too weak to do productive work and support themselves, a new generation is able to care for them

- f. A new generation of younger workers keeps the society from becoming “top-heavy” with elderly people
 - (1) Fewer children born results (over time) in fewer and fewer young people supporting more and more older, retired people
 - (2) Declining population leads to a society’s economy spiraling downward
- g. Every society needs children to pass on its cultural values and its moral and behavioral standards to succeeding generations
- h. Concerns about “overpopulation” are a myth
- 3. Parents, not the government, should have primary responsibility for training their children
 - a. The Bible places the responsibility for training children on their parents, not on “society” as a whole and not on a civil government (Deut 6:4-7)
 - b. In Scripture, there is a complete absence of any indication that government has the responsibility for training children or for deciding what children should be taught
 - c. The consistent pattern is that parents, not the government, should have the freedom to decide how to best educate their children
 - d. Schools can support parents in this task; however, parents should never begin to think that the public school system is replacing the parents as the party primarily responsible for training children
- 4. The discipline of children (Eph 6:4; Heb 12:9,11)
 - a. Effective discipline of children will (at times) include the infliction of some kind of physical pain
 - (1) Not to bring actual physical damage to the child's body
 - (2) But to emphasize the *significantly* wrong or dangerous character of the behavior that led to the discipline
 - b. The calls in our society for the banishment of all corporal punishment is possibly strengthened by a deeper, evil spiritual influence that seeks to undermine God’s plan for the family and for the restraint of evil in children’s lives