



# Capital Punishment

A BIBLICAL VIEW

# Survey Questions from Last Week...

10.	One function of government is to manage our natural resources.	1	2	3	4	5	6
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*Definition:* Government exists to manage creation and to provide order by restraining sin.

- Score – **3.91.**
- Government is right to manage natural resources.

# Survey Questions from Last Week...

8.	There are times when government should be large.	1	2	3	4	5	6
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*Definition:* Government exists to manage creation and to provide order by restraining sin.

- Lowest score of all questions – **2.68**.
- Needs to be large enough to accomplish these purposes.
- It's possible a government isn't large enough to restrain.

# Introduction

- Who determines what is just?
- What punishment is appropriate for murder?
- If it's the death penalty, how swift should this punishment follow?
- When has the jury heard sufficient evidence to decide in favor of death?



# Introduction

Capital Punishment: The legally authorized taking of a person's life for a crime.

# Use and Abuse of Capital Punishment

- Ancient Babylonians and Assyrians – family decided the method of execution.
- Romans – beheading or crucifixion.
- Visigoths, Vikings, medieval warlords – variety of methods.
- England, King Henry VIII – Death penalty for 72,000 in his 36-year reign.
- British Empire expanded capital offenses to 160 crimes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

# Use and Abuse of Capital Punishment

- Innocent people frequently died
- Punishment often didn't fit the crime  
Shoplifting → Death?
- Executions normally inhumane and shame-based  
Ex: Roman crucifixion, French guillotine  
Public, highly visible  
Employed methods of torture

# Use and Abuse of Capital Punishment

## American History...

- At present, 41 Federal Capital Offenses
  - 1<sup>st</sup> degree murder, genocide, murder for hire, assassination, etc.
  - Nearly all are variations of murder (except espionage, treason)
- Gradual move towards abolition of the death penalty started growing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.



# Use and Abuse of Capital Punishment

How many executions have been performed in the history of the United States?

6,000

# Use and Abuse of Capital Punishment

“It is better 100 guilty persons should escape, than that one innocent person should suffer”

– Benjamin Franklin.

# Biblical Principles for Capital Punishment

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”

— Genesis 1:26-27.

# Biblical Principles for Capital Punishment

Two key words: “image” and “likeness”

- “Image” = A statue, a painting, a representation.
  - Ancient kings erected statues throughout their dominion. To see the “image” of that king was a sign that his authority applied where you stood.
  - People are God’s image on earth—“so that they may have dominion/govern” the land, sea, and animals in ways pleasing to God.
- “Likeness” = A similarity. Reduces our status.  
We are not gods on earth; we are only “like” God.

Man uniquely created to be God’s ambassador on earth,  
created to represent His authority over all things.

# Biblical Principles for Capital Punishment

“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image”

— Genesis 9:3-6.

# Biblical Principles for Capital Punishment

Prohibitions regarding violence...

→ “But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.”

→ “And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning...”

- Parallel structure in the Hebrew text.
- Given to Noah and all his descendants, not specific to Israel. Universal prohibitions.

# Biblical Principles for Capital Punishment

- First prohibition: Man is not to eat a live animal.
  - Don't tear the animal to shreds while it's still moving.
  - This is a command against blood-lust, animal cruelty.
  - Violence had characterized the world.

“Even when man slaughters and kills, he is to know that he is touching something, which because it is life, is in a special manner God's property”

– Gerhard von Rad.

# Biblical Principles for Capital Punishment

- Second prohibition: Man is not to murder others.
  - Life for a life: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.”
  - Justice is Godward: “I will require”
  - Reason: “God made man in his own image”

“When violence in the form of murder is done to a man, it is in effect an outrage against God”

– John Davis.



# Biblical Principles for Capital Punishment

- 1) The authorities (not vigilantes) are implied in Genesis 9.
- 2) The authorities have a duty to execute murderers.  
“I will *require* a reckoning...”
- 3) The process should be a deterrent to murderers.  
Given to prevent violence from engulfing the world again.
- 4) The execution should be humane (man is God’s image).
- 5) The reason for execution is Godward.  
God is supremely offended by murder. CP is not given to provide vengeance or to provide closure.

# Main Objections to Capital Punishment

- 1) Innocent people will die.
- 2) A “cruel and unusual punishment” in all circumstances.  
Violates the Eighth Amendment of the US Constitution.
- 3) Life in prison is a worse punishment than the death penalty.

# Main Objections to Capital Punishment

Illinois abolished the death penalty in 2011.

“Since our experience has shown that there is no way to design a perfect death penalty system, free from the numerous flaws that can lead to wrongful convictions or discriminatory treatment, I have concluded that the proper course of action is to abolish it”

— Governor Pat Quinn.

# Main Objections to Capital Punishment

Viewpoint of Illinois Lawmakers in 2011.

- Republicans largely favored the death penalty both in principle and in practice.
  - Democrats spoke in favor of the death penalty in principle. They did not support it in practice.
- In the 1980's and 90's, 14 capital offenses were overturned. Proof came from DNA evidence, but also from the Burge scandal (forced confessions through torture, judicial bribery).

# The Verdict on Capital Punishment

- In Principle: God “requires” government execute murderers.
  - See also: Romans 13:1-7
  - No judicial system is perfect.
  - Innocent men will die at times.
- In Practice:
  - What is a humane means of ending a life?
  - Can we reduce wrongful convictions?
  - When is a government is too corrupt to justly execute murderers?