

# Christianity and Capital Punishment

## Introduction

- An accusation is often made against Christians, especially that are pro-life, that supporting capital punishment (death penalty) is inconsistent with our beliefs.

## Sin's Penalty

- The foundation for the death penalty is found in sin's penalty – Romans 6:23
- The first mention of anything resembling the death penalty is the curse pronounced on eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – Genesis 2:16-17
- When Adam and Eve sinned, they did not immediately die a physical death – Genesis 3:7
  - They would now face death in the future – Genesis 3:19
  - This highlights the difference between practical punishment (physical death) and the spiritual punishment (spiritual death).
- That fate is passed down through the descendants of Adam (us) – Ezekiel 18:4,20; Romans 5:12
- Through Christ we can escape this penalty and have eternal life – John 3:16, I John 3:14
- Those without Christ face eternal, conscious death – Revelation 20:14
- Important takeaways:
  - In God's economy, sin brings death.
  - He grants us space to repent through His mercy before judgment falls – II Peter 3:9

## Capital Punishment in Scripture

- After the Flood, God makes man responsible to enforce capital punishment on those that commit murder – Genesis 9:6
  - This is important. God has an expectation that we execute justice and the most serious crime here is murder.
- The Law given to Moses for the nation of Israel is based on retaliation (Exodus 21:24-25) and has many crimes where capital punishment is prescribed, including:
  - Murder – Exodus 20:13
  - Adultery – Leviticus 20:10
  - Idolatry – Exodus 22:20
  - Witchcraft – Exodus 22:18
  - False Prophecy – Deuteronomy 13:1-5

- We are not under this Law today. It was only for the nation of Israel. We can learn from its priorities, but we are not commanded to enforce its brand of justice – Colossians 2:14
- There were times when mercy was granted and capital punishment was withheld, such as the adultery of David and Bathsheba.
- Christ did show mercy to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), but this was largely an indictment against her accusers and not the death penalty itself.
- Paul told Festus that if he had been guilty of death, he would not have fought the death penalty – Acts 25:11
- Paul does address the idea of capital punishment in Romans 13:4, saying that human government was invested with God’s authority to use the “sword” (lethality) in judgement.

## **Conclusion**

- It is clear that God has endowed human government with the authority to, and the expectation that they will, use capital punishment – Genesis 9:6, Romans 13:1-7
  - The primary crime this applies to is murder.
- Expectation from God regarding human justice:
  - It should be corporate and not personal – Romans 12:19-21
  - The punishments should fit the crime’s severity – Exodus 21:23-25
  - Exhaustive investigation and fair trials are required – Exodus 22:7-13, Numbers 35:30, Deuteronomy 17:6-7
  - Opportunity should be given for repentance – II Peter 3:9
    - While we pray the perpetrator repents and finds salvation, this does not mean they are no longer responsible for their actions.