

Moral Issues: Crime & Capital Punishment

(Romans 13:1-7)

- Introduction: 1. Ills. - At 7:14 a.m., Monday morning, June 11, 2001, a little more than six years after the senseless and tragic bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, Timothy McVeigh, convicted terrorist, was executed for taking the lives of 168 men, women, and children. Just prior to his execution in Terre Haute, Indiana, McVeigh gave the prison warden a handwritten copy of a poem entitled, "Invictus," which was written by the British poet William Ernest Henley in 1875. The last two lines of the poem said: "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." As I listened to that poem being read, those two lines jumped out at me. At first, my reaction was, "Yeah, that's what you think." But with further thought and reflection, those words were very much the truth. McVeigh, and others like him, are indeed masters of their fate and captains for their own soul. And look where it gets them! Long ago, the Lord stated that "...the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). And whenever man attempts to be his own "captain" and "master" to direct his own steps, it results in selfish, thoughtless, immoral living.
2. So on this date, our nation took the life of this individual.
3. Question:
- Were we wrong in doing so?
 - In so doing, did we stoop to the same level we were condemning in Timothy McVeigh?
 - Are we not inconsistent in supporting the death penalty while in the previous lessons arguing for the sanctity of life in regard to abortion, suicide, and euthanasia?
 - As God sits on his throne and watches over the affairs of men, do you suppose that he is just as disgusted with the actions of our government as he was the actions of McVeigh?
4. These are excellent questions and they deserve a Biblical answer.
5. As with all the moral issues we've addressed so far, I'm not so much concerned with what sociologists have to say or what criminologists have to say. My primary concern is what does God say about the moral dilemma of capital punishment?

I. The Present State Of Our Society

- I don't think I really need to provide statistics to tell you that the society in which we now live is not nearly as safe as the society in which you were raised as a child.
- Locked doors, alarm systems, mace & pepper spray on our key chains, and weapons in our night stands testify to the fact that we live in a violent society.

- C. How bad has crime become? Listen to the ticks of the “crime clock.” (1990 United States Justice Department Report).
 - 1. One murder every 22 minutes.
 - 2. One rape every 5 minutes.
 - 3. One robbery every 49 seconds.
 - 4. One burglary every 10 seconds.
 - 5. Crime costs Americans \$675 billion dollars every year.
- D. The sheer volume of crime we witness today has taken a toll on us. We are much more desensitized today than we were a generation ago.
 - 1. Ex. 1929, Seven gangsters were murdered on February 14. The event shocked the nation, and became a legend.
 - 2. Today, such gang killing is “normalized,” and would hardly grab a headline.

II. How Have We Gotten Where We Are?

- A. Parental breakdown.
 - 1. Failure to instill proper values in children.
 - 2. More concerned about pursuing the “American Dream” than in raising decent, responsible children.
 - 3. Absentee parents, broken homes, latch-key kids all contribute to lack of direction.
- B. Failure to respect authority.
 - 1. Authority is allowed to be challenged in the home, the school, athletics, the church, and the police.
- C. The likelihood and severity of punishment has drastically declined.
 - 1. We have adopted a “revolving door” justice system.
 - a. Our system puts back on the street 63% of all pre-trial violent felony defendants.
 - b. Our system fails to incarcerate 47% of those convicted of a violent crime.
 - c. Those it does convict are released before having served even half their time.
 - d. Did you know that on average violent criminals serve only 5½ years for murder, 3 years for rape, and 2¼ years for robbery.
 - 2. (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

III. Arguments Against The Death Penalty Examined

- A. Killing Is Wrong (Exodus 20:13).
 - 1. Not all killing is wrong. The context is speaking of murder, not justifiable killing.
 - 2. The very next chapter, God commands capital punishment on certain law breakers (Exodus 21:12, 15-17).
- B. It Doesn't Work; It's Not A Deterrent
 - 1. It certainly deters the one being put to death.
 - 2. There is a valid place for punishment as opposed to reform.

- C. We Should Be Forgiving.
 - 1. Forgiveness does not nullify consequences.
 - 2. Does forgiveness nullify divorce for a fornicating spouse (Mt. 19:9)?
 - 3. Does forgiveness nullify incarceration for an offender?
- D. Innocent People Have Been Killed.
 - 1. Correct, and such cases are tragic.
 - 2. However, would not such an position also argue against incarceration since some innocent people are locked up?

IV. What Does The Bible Say About Capital Punishment?

- A. It was practiced by God during the Patriarchal period.
 - 1. The flood of Noah (Genesis 6-8).
 - 2. Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19).
- B. It was practiced under the law of Moses.
 - 1. Murder (Exodus 21).
 - 2. Occult involvement (Exodus 22).
 - 3. Certain sexual sins (Leviticus 20:11-13).
- C. It is authorized in the New Testament under the law of Christ.
 - 1. (Romans 12:17-13:7).
 - 2. Jesus and Paul both acknowledged the right of government to take life through capital punishment (John 19:10-11; Acts 25:11).

- Conclusion:
- 1. Thus, according to the Scriptures, capital punishment is not inconsistent with a loving God, nor his people who are trying to conform their lives into his image.
 - 2. As for people like Timothy McVeigh, I am saddened. According to all reports, he went to meet his Lord refusing to express any repentance or remorse for what he had done.
 - 3. On the other hand, I feel of sense of justice was served. Not vengeance, but justice. Actions have their consequences.
 - 4. Rather than complaining about our government, maybe it's time we stop and thank God for the protection and service it provides us.