

The Death Penalty - Is It Still Applicable?

Written by K B Napier
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Exodus 20:13 clearly says “*Thou shalt not kill*” and the warning is repeated in Deuteronomy and Romans. In Romans 13:9 we read: “Thou shalt not kill...” Thus, the command at the beginning is the same as the command at the end.

As part of the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:13 uses the word *ratsach* for ‘kill’. It specifically means to commit premeditated murder, though it can also mean to accidentally kill someone in other texts. Assassination is another similar meaning. Therefore, the command is “You will not commit first degree murder”. That is, to kill someone after forethought and deliberation. It does not, then, refer to unintentional manslaughter.

So, we know that one of God’s principle commandments is that we should not think about, or commit, murder. Necessarily, then, there must be a penalty for those who ignore the command... and not restricted to post-earth. There are earthly punishments. Today, those punishments are erroneously linked to ‘rehabilitation’. It is erroneous because God’s commands do not include this lesser option – it only includes the death penalty.

Many protest against the death penalty, because a few are punished and put to death wrongly. But, this is not the fault of scripture! It is the fault of modern law-makers, who do not apply the same strict rules as God! Today, we must have sure proof before putting a killer to death, and examples are shown in scripture. If we put to death the wrong person, it can only be because we do not have strict rules of proof (evidences are not enough).

Just as the commandment not to murder is clear, so is the penalty. Exodus 21:12 states “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.” Now, if killing a man was wrong in itself, God would not have commanded the death penalty. Killing in war, in self-defence, or accidentally, is not treated like first-degree murder. The penalty above only applies in the case of premeditation.

The text indicated implies premeditation, as the following verse 13 suggests, with the words “lie not in wait”. If a killer does not lie in wait, then he can escape to a city of refuge, where he cannot be harmed unless he leaves the city within a specified time. Verse 14 highlights this difference. These verses are followed by other instances where a man could be put to death. Frankly, if many insolent young people were to be treated according to these texts, they would be put to death!

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The same penalty of death was commanded for men who follow perverse sexual desires. Exodus 22:19, for example warns against bestiality, man or woman. Jews who defiled the Sabbath were to be put to death, as were those who worked on the Sabbath. Those who gave their children for sacrifice to false gods were also to be put to death. Adulterers and incestuous people were to be put to death. Homosexuals were to die, too, because what they do is an 'abomination'. The same penalty applies to witches and all who practice the occult.

Most of the above examples are to do with defiling God's image, or His plans. Thus, the penalties, though severe, are reasonable. The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira were the result of lying to the Holy Spirit. Theirs was just as much a death penalty as for those who were put to death for murder.

It is pointless to claim that Old Testament laws no longer apply. In the New Testament we have lists of sins that are hated by God and which must be punished if repentance is not forthcoming. We are commanded to obey judges, or suffer the consequences, including death.

Every commandment in the Decalogue is for today. Jesus said He came not to get rid of these commandments and laws, but to fulfil them. That also goes for not committing murder, which is punishable by death. We are also told in the Old Testament that the nation that refuses to put its murderers to death is liable, and held to be guilty of the charge of murder.

If, then, every commandment in the Decalogue still applies to today – so does the one telling us not to murder. Every sin except the one that cannot be forgiven, is countered by repentance, including murder. However, even if God forgives a repentant murderer, he must still suffer the ultimate penalty of death, just as thieves, etc., must be imprisoned if a judge does not wish to show clemency. Premeditated murder is the killing of another who is made in God's image. That is why it cannot be let go – the killer MUST be put to death, regardless of sorrow or repentance.

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