

Does capital punishment violate God's command to not kill?

The issue of exercising capital punishment and God's command to “not kill” is one of those hotly debated questions in Christianity. Some see it as exercising a form of hypocrisy while others see it as being obedient to God's call.

1. What is meant by God's commandment to “not kill”?

Exodus **20:13**

Numbers **35:11-18**

1 Kings 21:19

Deuteronomy 5:17

Deuteronomy **22:25-27**

The idea behind the commandment to “not kill” is not that a life should never be taken by another person but that when the taking of that life was intentional, with malice and forethought against someone who is essentially innocent of a crime worthy of death, then that act is against the command of God. Although capital punishment is carried out with forethought, it is neither carried out because of malice nor is it carried out against an essentially innocent person.

2. Does God ever command capital punishment?

Genesis **9:5-6**

Numbers **35:30-31**

Deuteronomy **17:4-7**; 19:18-21; 21:18-23; 24:7

There are a number of crimes that God's law identifies the carrying out of capital punishment for. Amongst those crimes are crimes of murder and rape. Other crimes have been declared to be worthy of death, fornication, stealing, etc. but capital punishment is not actually associated with them today but in God's justice they are crimes worthy of death.

3. Does Christ's forgiveness and mercy change things?

John **8:3-7**

Romans **12:19-21**; **13:1-5**

On a personal level and on a societal level, there is room for mercy and grace. The reality is that every sin that a man commits is a sin worthy of death in God's court. So we are free to not carry out capital punishment out of a mind of mercy. It is possible that the murderer may come to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and be redeemed rather than spend eternity in the lake of fire. At the same time, there is nothing in the scriptures that commands us to cease carrying out capital punishment. We are not to carry out revenge for then we should justly receive an equivalent sentence since our sins are in reality no greater than the sins of another. On a cultural perspective, the government has been ordained by God to carry out such punishment for crime. The reason is to discourage revenge, discourage others from doing the same thing, and to “purge the evil from among you”.