

Our only safe source from which to get our values is God's Word. God values life, but in certain crimes He demands death as the punishment. If death is required, we will certainly find things that God values more than even life. This passage introduces two topics – the death penalty and four capital offenses – for consideration and from which we gain help in better understanding what God values.

I. *Help in seeing God's values from the death penalty*

1. Two arguments explain how the death penalty helps us see God's values:

- a. God's value for human life implies that there must be a still greater value involved.
- b. God's restrictions for the death penalty make it a very serious matter and thus points to a yet greater value than human life itself: at least 2 or 3 witnesses (*Deuteronomy 17:6*); false witnesses would suffer the death penalty (*Deuteronomy 19:16-18*); sometimes the witnesses or the offended must take part in or initiate the execution.

2. Four reasons suggesting that the death penalty values God's honor as Sovereign Lord who has the power and the sole rightful authority to take or give life, directly or through His agents.

- a. The very command for the death penalty implies this.
- b. The exception given to manslaughter (v 13) is founded on the truth of God's sovereignty. "God put it to his hand", that is, God caused it to happen. Cf. Job 1:12-19.
- c. The very person of God as Creator and giver of life leads to this conclusion. Cf. Job 1:21.
- d. This truth heads the concluding paragraph of the song of Moses in which God says, "I put to death and I bring to life" (*Deuteronomy 32:39*).

II. *Help in seeing God's values from four capital offenses*

1. The nature of these offenses

- a. Murder (vv 12-14): intentional or unintentional, both were punished but the former was a capital offense. Intentional murder was premeditated or characterized by malice. Cf. Numbers 35.
- b. Striking or hitting one's parents (v 15): i.e., "physical violence" against one's mother or father.
- c. Kidnaping, i.e., taking a person captive against their will (v 16): The intent to sell shows that enslaving is included.
- d. Cursing one's parents (verse 17): more than a brief angry word, it was making light of one's parents and despising their God-given authority. Cf. Leviticus 20:9. Its placement in lists implies both a relation to God (His authority) and a relation to society (its well-being). Contempt for parents is among those things leading to the final fall of Jerusalem (*Ezekiel 22:7*).

2. The implied values of God

- a. God values His lease of life to men and women, as in the Ten Commandments, "You shall not murder."
- b. God values His delegated authority to parents, also in the Ten Commandments, "Honor your father and your mother." It is so valued that disobedience required the death penalty. Teach respect by example and through correction. We do not do children any favor by allowing them to learn disrespect, since God will ultimately discipline them. Cf. Proverbs 30:17.
- c. God values the liberty which He has given each person to live their lives. Even in the New Testament slaves were encouraged to be free, if they could gain their freedom (1 Corinthians 7:21-23). The value of liberty is based upon God having redeemed them.
- d. God values accountability for one's actions. A murderer was not excused on the basis of circumstances, background or unexpected results of maliciousness. Disrespect of parents is also inexcusable. We need self-control which is possible for the child of God as fruit of the indwelling Spirit.

The world will try to conform our thinking, as the Apostle Paul warned (*Romans 12:1-2*). To resist we need to consider carefully and deeply the Word of God and be renewed in our thinking.

The big issues in capital offenses are such things as God's honor as Sovereign Lord and His position as Creator and Giver of life. This is why King David after two capital offenses, adultery and murder, would express to God in Psalm 51, "against you, you only, have I sinned." The world would focus on Bathsheba and Uriah, but King David correctly understood that his sins were against God.

If we try to answer the world on their grounds, we'll miss the point as well as the good news. Understanding the divine values in the laws, values rooted in God's person, gives eternal significance to them. There is not only damnation for failure, but the possibility for mercy and forgiveness from a God of unfailing love and great compassion.

The penalty for our capital offenses as been paid on our behalf by Jesus Christ. Though in Israel there was no ransom for a murderer, the blood of Jesus Christ is a sufficient ransom and able to cleanse. A person needs only to come to God and trust that what Jesus has done is fully sufficient as a payment for our offenses against God.

As our understanding of our offenses against God grows, so does our love for Him, since we understand how much we are forgiven.

Capital offenses were not merely laws for a functioning society. They expressed deeper divine values, against which we have all sinned. But thanks be to God that He has provided in Christ forgiveness for all our sin.