

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations.

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 69. What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment forbiddeth the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbor unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto.

Scripture References: Acts 16:28. Gen. 9:6. Matt. 5:22. I John 3:15. Gal. 5:15. Prov. 24:11, 12. Exod. 21:18-32.

Questions:

1. Is it possible for a person to commit suicide and be truly saved?
Actually, this is a question that only God can answer. Let us say that it would be rare indeed for a saved person to take his own life. He could be so mixed up and unbalanced by the temptation of Satan or so disturbed by mental or emotional disorder, that in a moment of frenzy he might take his own life. However, this is something best left in the hands of God. The commandment is stated and must be believed.
2. Is it lawful in any case to kill others?
A Christian would be within the bounds of the Word to execute, under and within public law, another person—for example, a murderer (Num. 35:30). He could kill in war that is lawful (in defense of civil or religious liberties) after all other means had been tried (Ex. 22:2. Judges 11:12-34). He could kill when it is a matter of self defense (Ex. 22:2).
3. Besides acts of violence, are there other ways that this commandment can be broken?
Yes, the commandment may be broken in ways such as our committing any act that is detrimental to, or tends to shorten our own lives or lives of others.
4. In what way could this be done?
This commandment may be broken by the withholding of lawful and necessary means for the preservation of life, such as food, drink, medicine, recreation; by going to extremes in things that will harm our bodies and minds (Luke 21:34); by malicious words or actions which indicate the presence of murderous attitudes in our hearts towards other people.
5. Does this commandment teach that capital punishment is wrong?
No, it does not teach that capital punishment is wrong. A comparison of Gen. 9:6 and Rom. 13:4 will confirm that capital punishment should not be abolished.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

In this day and age it needs to be shouted from the housetops to all who are believers in Christ: Capital Punishment was commanded of God in the Old Testament and was confirmed in the New Testament. When we are talking about capital punishment, we are not talking about a human prerogative but a divine command. It was not something set up, invented, by a man that man is free to change. It was set up by God and His rules do not and will not change.

What has happened to us that we are seeing capital punishment fleeing rapidly from the laws of our land? It is again the same old story, the same thing that has happened time and time again in other countries and now is happening here. Those who would do away with capital punishment always start at the same place: the weakening and then desertion of the belief that the Bible is the verbally inspired, infallible Word of God. This is always the beginning. The battle ground is always first the Word of God. If the critics can get the ministers and then the people to believe that it is not really the Word of God, then such things as capital punishment are sure to fall.

But the Bible is the Word of God, and as believers, we are called upon to believe every word of it. It may well be that for some people, capital punishment is distasteful, but God set the rule up and only God can nullify it. He did not do so in the New Testament. In the whole Bible the matter of murder is an insult to God because it destroys the image of God in man. Therefore right in the beginning, He set up the rule that the death penalty for murder be used and this rule has never been repealed.

A believer once said to me, "But it is so hard to explain this to the unbeliever. He can't understand how a God of love can possibly require such a thing and I feel it is a stumbling block to my dealing with him." The answer has to be two fold: (1) The Bible has the rule in it, God made it. We are not responsible for the rules God made. We are only responsible to keep them. Gen. 9:6, Rom. 13:4 are still in the Bible. (2) God never promised us that He would make it easy for us by setting His rules up so that all men would have no trouble accepting them. This is a divine command and must be kept whether people can understand or appreciate it.

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