

**Intro:**

I have given our message this afternoon a very arresting title:

*The Death Penalty*

The death penalty is very controversial and is no longer the law of Canada. There are many reasons for and against in the political world, but this message isn't about any of them. This message is not a political message.

Instead, what we are concerned about is looking at a passage of Scripture that invokes the death penalty in Israel.

Several different crimes had the specific penalty of death in the OT. We will see several of them today in our passage, Leviticus 20.

We are in the monthly communion series, working our way chapter by chapter through the book of Leviticus.

You might wonder at my title and my topic as you consider preparing your heart for communion.

But the death penalty is front and center in Lev 20 and I think that it is very tightly connected with the gospel of salvation from sin by faith alone in Jesus Christ. I think that you will find in our passage a profound statement concerning your relationship to Jesus Christ and your communion with Him if you are a believer.

Let's read our chapter, then get into the message:

Read Lev 20

**Proposition:** The ultimate earthly penalty for sin underscores our desperate need of *some other solution*.

## **I. The death penalty proclaimed**

### A. The dominant theme of Leviticus 20

1. Front and center: Molech worship – child sacrifice (3)
2. Repeated again and again
  - a. Cursing father or mother (9)
  - b. Adultery (10)
  - c. Incest (11, 12, 14)
  - d. Homosexuality (13)
  - e. Bestiality (15-16)
  - f. Witchcraft (27)

3. The central themes of capital crimes in Israel: idolatry and immorality – sins against faith and family

“Infidelity to Yahweh, who had entered into a covenant with Israel, is often compared to sexual license.”<sup>1</sup> [Lev 20.5]

In some ways these sins can be considered the worst sins against the image of God – they are sins of extreme lust and perversion.

B. The significant difference between God’s demands and human laws

1. The cursing of father mother illustrates a difference between Israel and her neighbours
  - a. Cursing father and mother is more than just losing one’s temper or ‘lipping off’
  - b. Regardless, this sin doesn’t really enter the radar screen of other nations as a crime

“The sanctity of parental authority implied by this law [Lev 20.9ff.] is striking. Whereas in certain respects OT penal law was much more lenient than that of neighbouring contemporary cultures, it was more strict with regard to offenses against religion and family life.”<sup>2</sup>

2. The reality is that God’s laws are thought to be archaic today – the great ‘Judeo-Christian’ ethic that frames our legal system is steadily eroding away
  - a. No fault divorce makes adultery a minor inconvenience
  - b. Abortion on demand – is Molech worship any different?
  - c. Public ‘tolerance’ [tacit approval] of homosexuality discounts God’s views

The mind of God hasn’t changed about sin – though the OT law is not the law of our land (nor could it be), the mind of God remains the same.

But there is a far more severe penalty in this chapter than merely the death penalty

<sup>1</sup> Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 279.

## II. A penalty worse than the death penalty

### A. The Lord's sentence

1. Death penalty is the civic responsibility of men
2. Notice the Lord's sentence: "I will set my face against that man, and will cut him off from among his people" (3)

### B. The Lord's sentence is on all sin, not just capital crimes

1. On child sacrifice, whether men execute their responsibilities or not (4-5)
2. On witchcraft (6)
3. On certain sins of immorality (17-21)
  - a. They shall be cut off
  - b. They shall bear their sin
  - c. They shall die childless

Especially this notion of being 'cut off' is in view here – regardless of human retribution, God promises to cut off people forever.

Jesus said:

<sup>KJV</sup> **Mt 10.28** And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Can there be any more fearsome penalty than the 'cutting off'?

### C. The Lord's sentence on all sin is the same (Rm 1-2)

1. Worthy of death (Rm 1.32)
2. 'Moral men' do the same things (Rm 2.1)

God's mind has not changed – his views of human indiscretions remain the same, though men are quite willing to overthrow them.

### III. The call to a standard of holiness

In the midst of our fearsome chapter in Leviticus, we have two ringing calls for holiness.

#### A. A call to consecration (7-8)

1. “Sanctify” (7)
  - a. Mt Sinai in the wilderness was ‘sanctified’ by setting boundaries over which man or beast could not cross (Ex 19.23)
  - b. God’s people were to sanctify themselves
    - 1) Keep distinct [keep boundaries] from other nations
    - 2) Keep distinct [keep boundaries] from sin
2. Keep statutes – do God’s laws – for I the Lord sanctify you (8)
  - a. The Lord himself sets his people apart

#### B. The call expanded (Lev 20.22-26)

1. Keep my laws to stay in the Land (22)
2. Maintain a holy distinction from the nations (23)
3. Remember the blessing I have given you by separating you from the nations (24)
4. Maintain the laws of cleanness and uncleanness (25)
5. For I have set you apart from the nations to be Mine (26)

### Conclusion:

The Holiness Code of Israel, found in Leviticus, puts God’s mark on His people.

It is a mark of distinction that tends to become meaningless over time, because men are always infected by the sin around them.

- The record of Israel
- The record of the Church

God’s viewpoint remains: we have seen over and over again that the ‘wages of sin is death’.

The consequence of sin is not merely physical death, as we have seen from Lev 20, but eternal death – cutting off from God forever.

What can men do?

Men can turn to God's Son who became death for us ... even for those who have committed the grievous sins mentioned here in Lev 20.

Read 1 Cor 6.9-11 — note especially the sins of v. 9... the sins of Lev 20.

But you are washed! But you are sanctified! But you are justified!

In Jesus Christ.

Are you in Jesus Christ?