

## QUESTION 30B: ENDING A LIFE (EUTHANASIA, SUICIDE): WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

(Job 12:7-10)

2.23.20

### INTRODUCTION

A few weeks ago, we began sort of a series within a series as our “Big Questions” brought us to some hot-button topics — gay marriage, gender controversies, divorce, cohabitation and remarriage and, last week, moving into the overall topic of what the Bible has to say about ending a life, we began with the issue of abortion. Now our perspective on all our questions continues to be what God has told us in His word. And, in that process, God has directed us to one nonnegotiable conclusion of how we are to live: reflecting the image of God. That’s the goal of the life in Christ, as Paul wrote, that we should be continuously *being transformed into [the Lord’s] image* — *Paul, II Corinthians 3:18b*, so that, in what we say, what we think, how we respond, what we promote, all our relationships, ALL those efforts reflect the image of God.

So, as we mentioned last week, because of that perspective, our conclusions will always differ from how our culture sees things; the apostle Paul in fact warned us about this with some of the words we heard earlier: *The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit* — *Paul, I Corinthians 2:14*. That was the basis for God warning Israel: *“Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong”* — *God speaking, Exodus 23:2a*. Bottom line? No way were God and the crowd going the same direction. The “crowd” — culture, traditions, fads, opinions — came from a basis of wanting nothing to do with God or His ways. Christianity, on the other hand, is founded on God and HIS ways; as David celebrated: *As for God, His way is perfect: The Lord’s word is flawless* — *David, Psalms 18:30a*. So today we will continue to use God’s “flawless” word as we look at the final two issues that have to do with ending a life: euthanasia and suicide. Now, you may hear some things repeated from last week, but it’s probably worth it if for no other reason than to be reminded of the foundation from where our perspective comes. And, as we did last week, we’ll begin with some verses from the book of Job:

### TEXT

*“But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind”* — *Job 12:7-10*.

### ANALYSIS

As with last week’s topic of “abortion,” the most fundamental issue is how we define the “sanctity” of life. So, as a means of review, we defined “sanctity” as: “the state or quality of being holy or sacred.” Understanding sanctity of life is everything. As we mentioned last week, there can be no discussion of “sanctity of life” from the side of evolution, which says that there is no Creator. We discussed the incredibly slippery slope that comes from subscribing to evolution: If there is no Creator, then all life is merely by chance. If all life is merely by chance, then nobody’s life has purpose. If nobody’s life has purpose, then nobody’s

life matters and, in the end, if nobody's life matters, then living itself is only a matter of "survival of the fittest." The ethical and moral philosophy of Nazi Germany was constructed from this view of life.

But, for the Christian, there is a basis for sanctity of life — and Job spells it out: ***"In [the Lord's] hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind."*** There is not one single human being who has come to life, who takes a single breath on this planet, who's coming has not occurred solely due to the ***hand of the Lord***. God rightly defines life because He created it; life itself has come from Him. That by itself sanctifies life; that by itself makes life sacred, and therefore is the foundation by which every human life should be viewed. The Bible clearly proclaims God as the solitary basis of all life — a proclamation that reverberates from Genesis to Revelation:

- 1) ***Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being — Genesis 2:7.***
- 2) ***"If it were [God's] intention and He withdrew His spirit and breath, all humanity would perish together and mankind would return to the dust" - Elihu, Job 34:14-15.***
- 3) ***"[God] Himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else" — Paul, speaking on Mars Hill in Athens, Acts 17:25b.***
- 4) ***"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being" — the 24 elders' words of worship, Revelation 4:11.***

Four scriptures, all with one clear, specific message: The sanctity of life is based on the sanctity of the One who created life — God, our Heavenly Father. Life is sacred and holy because the One who created it is sacred and holy. So, with all this as background, let's take these issues on one at a time, to learn how to represent our King when these issues come to us.

**Euthanasia.** Coming from a Greek word literally meaning "good death," and sometimes called "assisted suicide," euthanasia is widely defined as "the intentional killing by act or omission of a person whose life is considered not to be worth living" (sometimes also referred to as "mercy killing"). The advertised intention is to end a life to relieve pain and suffering, and as a basic human right to determine a preferred end to one's life. It comes in different forms:

- 1) Voluntary euthanasia, where the death occurs as a result of the specific and conscious expression of a patient. When a physician is either on hand to aid the patient in ending their life, or has prescribed a fatal dose of medication that the patient will self-administer, this is called "assisted suicide." Active voluntary euthanasia is legal in Belgium, Columbia, Canada, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Assisted suicide is legal in Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, and in nine US states: California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine (as of January 1, 2020), New Jersey, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, and Washington, D.C. Switzerland is the only nation that offers assisted suicide to foreign nationals. Two variations on voluntary euthanasia:
  - a) Passive euthanasia involves withholding treatment necessary for the continuance of life (sometimes referred to as "pulling the plug").
  - b) Active euthanasia involves the active, direct use of lethal substances or forces (such as administering a lethal injection).

- 2) Nonvoluntary euthanasia (patient's consent unavailable) is illegal in all countries.
- 3) Involuntary euthanasia (without asking consent or against the patient's will) where the death occurs as a result of someone else's actions and the patient was incapable of giving their own consent. Involuntary euthanasia is illegal in all countries and is usually considered murder.

While actual numbers for those who have chosen euthanasia to end their lives remain small (i.e., less than .4% of all recorded deaths in Washington and Oregon, as reported by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 2015), there are other numbers out there that are perhaps more disturbing. According to Gallup polling in May 2018, 72% of Americans polled believed "doctors should be able to help terminally ill patients die." A majority — 54% — believed that doctor-assisted suicide is "morally acceptable." And, interestingly, that same report mentioned that "pain is not the main motivation for PAS (physician-assisted suicide). . . . The dominant motives are loss of autonomy and dignity and being less able to enjoy life's activities."

However, since we have established God as the author of all life, what is the Bible's response to euthanasia? The same as abortion — it's murder:

- 1) ***"Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind" — God speaking, Genesis 9:5-6.***
- 2) ***"You shall not murder" — God speaking (the sixth commandment), Exodus 20:13.***  
The taking of a human life is the primary concept behind this word.
- 3) ***[The Lord hates] . . . hands that shed innocent blood — Proverbs 6:17b.***
- 4) ***Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not He who guards your life know it? Will He not repay everyone according to what they have done? — Proverbs 24:11-12.***

The Christian viewpoint on euthanasia is the same as Christian opposition to abortion — that every human being has essential and fundamental value simply because we are creations of God Himself, created in His own image. And just because we may not understand God's intentions in bringing somebody, particularly a loved one, to a place where chronic pain and debilitation is a part of their daily life, and where the prognosis is likely very dim, our lack of understanding does not somehow counterbalance God's intentions and designs on any moment in somebody's life. It's called "faith" — trusting God has purpose in all circumstances, not just the ones we can grasp. Therefore, euthanasia, like abortion, must be condemned for what it is: intentional killing — murder. Euthanasia introduces death into a situation in which it did not previously exist.

Now, that being said, to withhold or withdraw useless treatment from a terminally ill patient is not euthanasia, nor is the administration of painkilling drugs which may incidentally accelerate death but are being given solely to relieve pain. In both cases, death is already eminently present. To try and intervene in either of these instances would in reality only prolong the process of dying. What needs to be understood is that there is a clear difference between causing somebody to die — euthanasia — and allowing them to die. When Welsh pastor and author Martyn Lloyd-Jones was dying in a London hospital in 1981, he complained

to the doctor who was so conscientiously taking care of him that he wanted no further treatment, telling him: “You are keeping me from glory!”

One inducement presented by those in favor of euthanasia is the fear that is found in one of three outcomes as a serious illness or medical situation progresses:

- 1) Fear of increasing, uncontrollable and unbearable pain
- 2) Fear of indignity (the fear of tubes exiting every possible opening in the body)
- 3) Fear of dependence (the desire to “write our own script” vs. having circumstances dictate).

Euthanasia is seen as the only possible rescue from these fears. But a Christian response should be the encouragement toward palliative care, that is, the specialized care that can be provided for somebody with a serious illness. This kind of care offers an opportunity to not only die with dignity when that appropriate time naturally comes, but also provides a longer time of pain-free living, where life, family and friends can continue to be enjoyed, even in the context of terminal illness.

Euthanasia is also seen as a human right, that is, an essential human freedom, that everybody should have the right to live, and thus to choose to die, when and how they determine. The fundamental problem with this viewpoint? Human freedom in this sense is an illusion. We find our freedom only by living as a reflection of the image of God, not in rebellion against it. Dependence is not a weakness, but instead is a means of relationship to God. We are to depend on God in all our circumstances. Claiming ownership of our lives, dependent on no one else, is the essence of sin. And, bottom line, this is not my life; it never has been. As the prophet Jeremiah said: **“Lord, I know that people’s lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps” — Jeremiah praying, Jeremiah 10:23.** Having received from God the gift of life, we become guardians of that life — and every other life that we see around us.

**Suicide.** Suicide is maybe the grayest area of all that we have looked at. On its face, this seems like a no-brainer. Suicide is self-murder, plain and simple; right? After all, suicide is defined as: the act of intentionally causing one’s own death. And certainly the sixth commandment of **“You shall not murder,”** because of its use of a Hebrew word that defines “murder” as the deliberate taking of a life, not murdering yourself would be included in this commandment.

The Bible does give us some examples of suicide: King Saul in the OT and the disciple Judas in the NT. Both had in common the fact that they had turned away from God and His purposes. In the OT death of Samson in Judges 16, however, this is a great example of somebody using their death as an act of self-sacrifice. His death was a huge defeat for the Philistines and a great encouragement for the nation of Israel. Centuries later Jesus would proclaim: **“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” — Jesus Christ, John 15:13.**

What needs to be remembered is that Satan’s goal in his war against God is to destroy people made in His image. The apostle Peter makes this clear: **Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour — I Peter 5:8b.** Do you get it? Satan is a predator who is always in “attack” mode. Satan doesn’t just want to hurt us bad. Satan wants to hurt us permanent. He will do everything in his power to entice people to end their lives.

Sometimes when we've heard of people saying that they heard "voices" telling them to kill themselves, that may be a result of Satan and his forces attacking that person.

What a contrast with God's ways. The indwelling Holy Spirit which is imparted to us by the grace of God through the redemptive blood of Jesus Christ encourages us not to destroy our bodies but rather to glorify God in and with our bodies; as Paul said to the church at Corinth: ***Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies — Paul, I Corinthians 6:19-20.***

And regarding temptation, struggle, discouragement and all the other negative things that can sometimes seem to overwhelm us, Paul reminds us, again as he reminded the Corinthians: ***No temptation (time of testing) has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it — Paul, I Corinthians 10:13.*** As American theologian and author John Frame put it: "God never forsakes His children. He never leads them to a situation where sinful self-destruction is the only option" — John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life: A Theology of Lordship*, p. 738. And that same wonderful God and Father promises us a way out of all that makes us anxious and worried: ***Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. . . . And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus — Paul, Philippians 4:6-7, 19.***

Now if a Christian does fall into a mental/emotional hole that leads to suicide, as painful as that outcome is, it is not the unforgivable sin. Two wonderful Scriptures promise that outcome:

- 1) ***"[T]his is the will of Him who sent Me, that I shall lose none of all those He has given Me, but raise them up at the last day. For My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day" — Jesus Christ, John 6:39-40.***
- 2) ***For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord — Paul, Romans 8:38-39.***

But that being said, as the body of Christ and as His representatives in the world, the church also needs to come to grips with the reality of mental illness. If physical illness is real, why should mental illness be treated any different? Realities like depression are the result of real, physiological, chemical changes in the brain. It's not made up; somebody struggling with clinical depression is not just somebody who can't "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps." What if their "bootstraps" are broken? That's what mental illness does — it breaks our "bootstraps," our abilities in how we view and respond to life's various challenges — and buying into those stereotypes only deepens the sense of isolation, which can result in a higher likelihood of endangering behaviors.

People with mental health issues may represent as many as half of the people who commit suicide — meaning people suffering with mood disorders such as depression or bipolar disorder, people dealing with schizophrenia, personality disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a particularly devastating condition for our current military veterans (as of July 2019 it is estimated that 17 veterans take their own lives every day). Borderline personal disorders and eating disorders are other categories where suicide is an unfortunate result. South Korea, currently with the 10<sup>th</sup> highest suicide rate in the world, has estimated that perhaps as high as 90% of their suicides were driven by diagnosable, treatable mental illness.

Living circumstances can also be a huge contributing factor: hopelessness, loss of pleasure in life, depression, anxiousness, agitation, rigid thinking, and poor coping skills. Guilt and regret, if left unaddressed, can grow into an insurmountable mental and emotional burden which begs for relief at any cost. In older adults, the loss of former abilities and the sense of being a burden to others can become triggers if left unacknowledged over time. Living with chronic, unrelenting pain or with the diagnosis of a terminal illness will certainly influence how somebody considers suicide. Life stresses — loss of a job, loss of a loved family member — can expose a person to risk. Social isolation can contribute, and certainly drug and alcohol abuse, with their impact on reason and impulse control, can have huge impacts on a person's ability to fight off the temptation to end one's life.

And suicide is no respecter of age. According to a recent interview involving a school teacher in the Twin Cities, suicide had been seen in every grade of public school — including first grade. In fact, suicide is now the second leading cause of death in the United States for people ages 10-24. And just for the record, in 2018, there were over 48,000 suicides in the United States — approximately the combined populations of Mankato and Redwood Falls. There are over twice as many suicides in the United States as there are homicides. There are just over five (5) suicides every hour in the US, meaning that, from when our morning service began to when it ends, six (6) people will have made the choice to end their lives. In Minnesota in 2017 (the last year numbers are available), 783 of our fellow citizens chose to commit suicide (a number just over the population of Gibbon, MN) — meaning approximately one person every 12 hours. From 1999 to 2017, the state suicide rate climbed 53%. The Minnesota toll from 2017 represented a 5% increase from the previous year. In Minnesota, suicide is the 8<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death; suicide ranks 10<sup>th</sup> nationally.

One reaction Christians simply cannot have in this area is in trivializing or judging somebody's struggles. There is so much that, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is completely unknown — about both mental and physical illness. Schizophrenia, for instance, is completely unknown as to cause or cure. Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an example of a physical illness that has no known reason for why it begins or how to stop it. A well-known native American motto is very much worth remembering at this point: "Do not judge a man until you have walked a mile in his moccasins." The Biblical version of that sentiment? Solomon's words from Proverbs, which clarify and command where our heads and hearts need to be as we deal with the broken world around us: ***Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart — Solomon, Proverbs 3:3.***

## APPLICATION

So how should the body of Christ respond when they come into contact with somebody struggling with the consideration or aftermath of euthanasia? How should the body of Christ intervene when finding out somebody is considering suicide? Some ideas:

- 1) Recognize God's vision — God's ideal and God's design:
  - a) *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" — God speaking, Jeremiah 29:11.*
  - b) *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do — Paul, Ephesians 2:10.*
- 2) Recognize man's brokenness — man's reality:
  - a) *My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. . . . My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen on me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest" — David, Psalm 38:4; 55:4-6.*
  - b) *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? — Paul, Romans 7:24.*
- 3) Report God's word — God's remedy:
  - a) *I will extol the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips. I will glory in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together. I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears. . . . This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; He saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them. . . . The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit — David, Psalm 34:1-4, 6-7, 17-18.*
  - b) *Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous be shaken — David, Psalm 55:22.*
  - c) *Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you — I Peter 5:7.*
- 4) Rally to God's call:
  - a) *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up — Paul, Romans 15:1-2.*
  - b) *[S]erve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." . . . Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. . . . Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ — Paul, Galatians 5:13b-14, 24-25; 6:2 (quoting Leviticus 19:18b).*
  - c) *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love — Paul, Ephesians 4:2.*

*d) And we urge you, brothers and sisters, . . . encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. . . . [A]lways strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else — Paul, I Thessalonians 5:14, 15b.*

## CONCLUSION

We live in a broken world. So did Jesus. We live in a time and place where people feel completely alone, with no one to come beside them. So did Jesus. We live in circumstances where many people see no hope, and no future. So did Jesus. Yet He came into the world — precisely because of how the world was. We must enter the world in the same way, for the same reason, and with the same response to the brokenness that He had: ***“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:28-30.*** So, what does that mean for us? Learn Jesus, study Jesus, seek Jesus — in order that we may bring Jesus to a world that so completely needs him: ***“You call Me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” — Jesus Christ, John 13:13-15.*** So, let’s seek out and minister to the brokenness in this world, just as Jesus sought out and ministered to the brokenness in His world. And, at the end of the day, Jesus Himself said it best: ***“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” — Jesus Christ, John 13:34.*** That’s the Master’s plan; those are our “marching orders.” Love, without limit, without exception, without end — ‘cause that’s how Jesus loves us. Let’s pray!