

End of Life Decisions 9-15-13

In our last lesson on this series, we saw how God looks at Human Life based on Genesis 9:5-6. There God made it clear that because man was in His image, the life of man was uniquely precious. God also said that every man is obligated to preserve the life of man. We saw that in the Law of Christ, the life of man is still precious and we are still “our brother’s keeper”.

How does this teaching affect other ideas on life today? Specifically, we are talking about what might be called “end of life” decisions; Suicide, Euthanasia, Prolonging life or Ending life

Suicide (taking our own life) is on the rise. *“Each year 300,000 suicides are attempted—30,000 of these succeed. Teen suicide has more than tripled since the 1950s.....Suicide is the second leading cause of death for those between the ages of 13 & 21.....Too, more of the elderly are electing to die by their own hands. Between 1981 and 1986, while the suicide rate was rising 5% nationally, in the over-65 group, it was (rising at) 25%.”*¹ Right now, our society looks at this as a tragedy. I predict that we are changing enough that soon we will not see it as such.

The question everyone wants to know is why. Perhaps it is because too many people believe that the meaning of life is about being happy. Since they are not happy, there is no meaning to the lives of many. We cannot ignore too the decline in the esteem of life; there is no value in life.

Is Life About Happiness? Not according to the Bible, which talks instead about having contentment instead of happiness (1 Timothy 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.). Ironically, people who pursue “happiness” are neither happy nor satisfied. Or more simply stated, if you are selfish, you will never “be happy”.

Suicide is an unrepentable sin (1 John 5:16). It is also an act of supreme selfishness, which contradicts the Scriptural image of living for others (2 Corinthians 5:15). Ultimately, suicide amounts to robbing God (Malachi 3:8a: Will a man rob God?) who has said that all souls are His (Ezekiel 18:4) and who gives life to all things (1 Tim. 6:13): God....gives life to all things

Our society is moving towards supporting suicide or other types of murder. The “Right to Die” (the idea that you life is your own to determine to end) is promoted widely; here in Oregon we have the Death with Dignity Act, which is sanctioned suicide. Now we move towards not only murder of the self, but assisted suicide in Euthanasia (Greek for “Good Death”; “a deliberate intervention undertaken with the express intention of ending a life, to relieve intractable suffering.”).

Is it wrong to end life to avoid suffering? We have at least one example from the Scriptures, when Saul asked for an “assisted suicide” in 2 Samuel 1:6-10. How was that viewed? When David heard about the man who killed Saul, he did not commend him; “Then David called one of the young men and said, “Go near, and execute him!” And he struck him so that he died” (2 Samuel 1:15).

The problem is that the world has a different view on the importance of the quality of life that we as Christians do. The Bible is clear that pain has a place in life. We see Job telling his wife this (Job 2:9-10). Jesus is called the suffering servant in Isaiah 53). Paul speaks to the importance of his suffering in 2

¹ Wayne Jackson, Biblical Ethics and Modern Science

Corinthians 1:6. Suffering has value to life; it brings Character & Hope – Romans 5:3-4; it brings Maturity & Patience – James 1:2-4; it brings Honor & Glory – I Peter 1:6-7. As Christians, we look to a quality of ETERNAL LIFE, and we achieve that by sacrifices in this life.

In the same vein sometimes we ask “Is there an obligation to prolong life”? If you undergo surgery, you are asked if you want a DNR (“Do not resuscitate”). Simply considering medications/treatments falls into this category. But too we can add eating healthy and exercise. Is refusing medical treatment suicide by inaction? Is eating at McDonalds suicide by health destruction? At some point we see that the argument could be made that it is a sin not to run to work when we drive. Obviously, it is not necessarily a sin to make choices that do not prolong our lives. When Paul was faced with death, he stoically observed “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). We all know we cannot avoid death (it is appointed for men to die, Hebrews 9:27), and permitting nature to run its course is not suicide.

That being said, it could be sinful if we are talking about Good Stewardship vs. Worldliness. The Bible says *...Each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor* (1 Thessalonians 4:4). We have obligations to family and others that ought to be considered in our choices in our lives, and we need to remember that our body is a temple, not an amusement park.

We need to as well walk with great caution in the area of Prolonging life vs. Preserving life. We may at some point be charged with the decision on prolonging someone else’s life. We cannot forget the word of God to Noah “From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man” (Genesis 9:5). A decision that leads to death could be a grievous error, particularly when it is made from the perspective of refusing to be a caregiver or refusing to accept a burden.

God Has Revealed that murder is a sin. We see now this includes murder of the self, murder by request, or murder of the helpless in our care. God has revealed that we will suffer in this life, but we will be rewarded in the next life. Prolonging life is not always right or wrong, but wasting life is evil, whether it is ours or another’s.

We must acknowledge life: will be difficult and painful; will require sacrifices and burdens; has a great reward in such service