

## Christians & Health: End of Life Decisions 07-30-17 PM

Often we are asked some difficult questions about the nature of faith. Perhaps it is “*why do people suffer*” or “*why do we die*”? There is a chief principle of God’s Word that answers this. Simply put, there are worse things than death (Luke 12:4-5). This means that when God brings life to an end, He is not doing something horrible; it is the eternal condition that matters most.

For Christians, death is important in our Way of life. We are told that the death of a Christian is precious to God (Psalm 116:15). The way we face death and what we look for is a testimony of faith (Hebrews 11:13). Ultimately, there is one main reward for being a Christian, and the reward process can only come by death (2 Timothy 4:6-8). But does that mean that Christians seek death? Paul stated in Philippians 1:19-24 that while death would bring him to his reward, he also saw that living was important in serving God. It is important to realize service matters. Therefore, the mind of the Christian is that living means offering a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).

Christians pursue life & health to serve God. This is the intent and purpose of seeking healthcare. The world sees healthcare as a means to enjoyment in life. Both the world and the Christian seeks to take care of our bodies, but for different reasons. Our purposes therefore are not the same, and since they are not, we must conclude that many decisions we make in regards to our healthcare and lives will be different.

Christians are not obligated to extend life at all cost, but we do consider that we owe our God a reasonable effort of health care as part of the principles of stewardship (consider Matthew 25:14-30). At the same time, we are not permitted to expedite death. This can include intentionally harming ourselves. Here is a place where we are at odds with the world. We know that the world thinks that a life with pain or burdens is not worth living, but our spiritual discernment tells us that suffering has value, and that bearing burdens is necessary in the law of Christ.

One extreme point of this view is the issue of suicide and assisted suicide. In our world, more and more support is given to the view that there must be a certain quality of life in order for life to continue. If not, then it is acceptable to end our own lives. Euthanasia is the term for the decision to end another’s life for these reasons. As servants of God we need to understand God’s will for us in this matter.

There are 6/7 accounts of suicide in the Scriptures<sup>1</sup>. Consider that almost all of these men are considered ungodly in their lives before they made this decision.

Abimelech – Judges 9:54

Samson – Judges 16:30

Saul & his armor bearer – 1 Samuel 31:4-5

Ahithophel – 2 Samuel 17:23

Zimri – 1 Kings 16:18

Judas Iscariot – Matthew 27:5

One of the more dramatic instances of this is the account of King Saul and his armor bearer. In 2 Samuel 1, Scriptures revisit the account from 1 Samuel 31 with an additional detail; an Amalekite aided Saul in dispatching his life. Note that the Amalekite believed to be doing Saul a service. He tells us that Saul was

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<sup>1</sup> Samson may be an exception, as the purpose and intent of his suicide was not to bring about the end of his own life, but to destroy the Philistines.

suffering greatly, and that he was about to die. Thus he sees his action as an act of Mercy. Yet when David hears this, he has the man put to death for murder. We see quite clearly that assisting someone in a suicide, even when it was with good intentions, is murder.

We can discern the Scriptural view of suicide, assisted suicide and euthanasia. First, God's rule is simple: Murder is a sin. We are first explained this in Genesis 9:5-6. There we are told that since man was created in the image of God, his life is special. It cannot be taken (by man or beast) without recompense (Genesis 4:10). Second, we know especially as Christians that "you are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). To take away from God His vessel is robbing God (Malachi 3:8). Third, we need to remember that tribulation and suffering has a purpose (James 1:2-4).

There is no question that the ability to extend our lives with knowledge and technology creates some difficult decisions. For example, should we have advanced directives in regards to end of life medical treatments? When is it right to end life support? These questions are not black and white, but by applying the principles of the sanctity of life, the importance of trials, and the fact that our reward awaits us at the end we are equipped to deal with these difficult questions.