

youthESource Apologia

Assisted Suicide

by Mark Cook

Introduction

Assisted suicide, euthanasia, death with dignity--all synonymous--weave in and out of the spotlight of the news, and we continue to struggle and debate with what is ethical, what is moral and what is right. A case in the national spotlight in late 2014 was of Brittany Maynard, a 29 year old woman with terminal brain cancer. She made a very public decision via social media to end her life and sought to raise support for organizations that support assisted suicide such as "Death with Dignity." No matter the face or individual in each situation, the question comes down to this: Are there cases when euthanasia is the right thing to do?

Application

A humanist perspective seeks to reduce suffering and pain, and in the case of Brittany Maynard, many fully supported her decision to end her life. To make it very simple: If a person (in this case Brittany) is going to die very soon from a terminal condition, why isn't it better for her to end her life "on Brittany's own terms" and avoid a lot of pain and suffering from her death that would come anyway? Or put another way, if she is going to die anyway very soon, why not do it before the pain and suffering instead of after?

A Christian looks at death, pain and suffering from a completely different perspective, though. In the above (humanist) perspective, pain and suffering are the problem, and the way to solve that problem--the goal--is death. The result is also death. A Christian will look at the same pain and suffering, but the solution, or goal, to end pain and suffering is never death. Death may still be a result, but it is never the goal for a Christian. In the instance of Brittany, a Christian's goal is to end our life on earth faithfully. That would include love and care through her final weeks and days--palliative care for physical pain and suffering, and spiritual care through prayer, communion and visits of family, friends and church workers. The result would inevitably still be death, but not the goal.

Our commands in the Bible about killing and death are very specific. It is never right for the goal in a situation to be death for the individual Christian. (Scripture Connect below: Matthew 5:21-22, Deuteronomy 30:19, Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5:17.) There are specific cases when governing bodies are given the authority to kill in the Bible, such as in cases of capital punishment, but not for the individual Christian in suicide, murder, abortion or euthanasia.

Another difference between the humanist and Christian perspective is that of pain and suffering. In Brittany's case, pain and suffering are the problem and are meant to be avoided at all costs, even death. Are pain and suffering actually bad though? Yes, on the surface no one enjoys suffering or painful experiences, but are they fruitless? (Scripture Connect below: Hebrews 12:10-11, Romans 5:1-5, 6-8.) God uses even painful times and times of suffering to produce endurance, character and hope, and He even strengthens us through His Holy Spirit during those times. When we take into light that this life is not the end, that pain and suffering are truly temporary (Revelation 21:3-4), the goal becomes not to put an end to suffering and pain, but as before, to live faithfully through it. Our job then as fellow Christians is to provide the best palliative care to ease unbearable pain, and to minister to those people in their time of need.

Lastly, our lives and bodies are not our own (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). They are a gift given to us by God. It is not for us to control when our lives begin nor when they end. This is contrary to the opinion of much of society. Our

culture promotes the idea that it is mankind that determines when life begins and should end, and that your body is your own and you can do whatever you want with your body. When we treat our lives and bodies as our own property, we sin against the first commandment by making ourselves out to be God. We are clearly told that we are not our own, and we have been bought at a price. But how comforting to know that! We are not merely our own—humans left to figure out meaning in life and derive purpose from ourselves. No, our bodies and lives are gifts from God, and twice over, because not only has He given us our lives, but He has bought them back through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and resurrection from the grave. It is God's purpose that directs our lives, and we have life worth living for, whether through good times or through pain and suffering.

Definitions: [1]

Euthanasia – “the act or practice of killing someone who is very sick or injured in order to prevent any more suffering” Merriam-Webster

Assisted Suicide – “suicide with help from another person (such as a doctor) to end suffering from severe physical illness” Merriam-Webster

Palliative (care) – “something that reduces the effects or symptoms of a medical condition without curing it” Merriam-Webster

Hospice - a place that provides care for people who are dying Merriam-Webster

Scripture Connect [2]

In regard to life, and the taking of life:

Matthew 5:21-22 – “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”

Deuteronomy 30:19 – “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live,”

Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17 – “You shall not murder.”

Supporting passages in: Exodus 21:12-14; Leviticus 24:17-21; Numbers 35:16-31; Deuteronomy 19:4-13

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

Death is not the end!

Genesis 3:19 “‘By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.’”

Revelation 20:15 “And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Revelation 21:3-4 “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’”

In regard to suffering:

Hebrews 12:10-11 "For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

Romans 5:1-5 "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

Romans 5:6-8 "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Book of Job

Doctrinal Quotations

Luther's Small Catechism: 5th Commandment ^[3]

52. What does God forbid in the 5th commandment? A. God forbids us to take the life of another person (murder, abortion, euthanasia) or our own life (suicide).

Euthanasia

The severely handicapped, infirm, helpless, and aged are persons in the sight of God with life given by Him and to be ended only by Him.

Prov. 6:16-17 There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood.

Prov. 31:8 Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.

Acts 17:25 He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

Luther's Large Catechism: 5th Commandment (182) ^[4]

"This commandment is easy enough to understand, and it has often been treated because we hear Matthew 5 every year in the Gospel lesson, where Christ himself explains and summarizes it: We must not kill, either by hand, heart, or word, by signs or gestures, or by aiding and abetting (help, nor counsel – alternate translation)

CTCR Document: Christian Care at Life's End ^[5]

<http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=361>

This is a very helpful document for an in-depth look at euthanasia. It provides many case studies and examples that explain how our beliefs apply in different scenarios.

1 All definitions from: *Merriam-Webster.com*. 2014. <http://www.merriam-webster.com> (1 Dec 2014).

2 The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®) Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

3 Martin Luther, *Small Catechism with Explanation*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991)

4 Large Catechism, 5th Commandment (182) in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

5 *Christian Care at Life's End*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod February 1993. <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=361>

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