

X. Euthanasia (literally, “good death,” popularly called “mercy killing”) – all three terms are misleading

A. It is wrong for us actively to take our own life or the life of someone else

Exodus 20:13 "You shall not murder.

2 Samuel 1:1 After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. 2 And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. And when he came to David, he fell to the ground and paid homage. 3 David said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." 4 And David said to him, "How did it go? Tell me." And he answered, "The people fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead." 5 Then David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?" 6 And the young man who told him said, "By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear, and behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him. 7 And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' 8 And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' 9 And he said to me 'Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers.' 10 So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord."

11 Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. 12 And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. 13 And David said to the young man who told him, "Where do you come from?" And he answered, "I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite." 14 David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?" 15 Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go, execute him." And he struck him down so that he died. 16 And David said to him, "Your blood be on your head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the LORD's anointed.'"

1. This story from the Amalekite messenger is not mentioned in 1 Sam. 31:3-6, and it may or may not be accurate (but at least he knew that Saul had fallen on his own sword, and he had the crown!)
 - a. Even if it is not true, David accepts it as true and passes judgment based on it
2. This situation is similar in several ways to cases where people say euthanasia is justified
 - a. The patient was terminally ill, with no reasonable human hope of recovery
 - b. The patient was in extreme pain, and faced the prospect of more suffering
 - c. The patient requested that someone actively put him to death (help him die)
 - d. This was also a command of the governing authority (Saul was the king!)
3. Yet King David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), holds the Amalekite messenger morally accountable for killing Saul (and imposes capital punishment on him for this deed)
4. This gives significant narrative confirmation of the rightness of applying “You shall not murder” to the question of euthanasia
5. Objection: This is a unique case, because Saul was king (“the Lord's anointed,” 2 Sam. 1:14)
 - a. The image of God is not less in other people who are not kings! Their lives are no less valuable to God, nor can we say common people's lives deserve less protection than the life of the king.
 - b. Therefore, if it is wrong to kill a terminally ill king who requests it, it is wrong to kill anyone else who requests it.
6. Objection: the sin of the Amalekite was not murder but rebellion against the king
 - a. David specified that he had killed someone, not that he had rebelled
 - b. David did not punish people for joining with him against King Saul
7. Conclusion both Exod. 20:13 and 2 Sam. 1 indicate that it is wrong to actively kill a terminally ill person

B. “Physician-assisted suicide” continues to be a threat in the U.S.

1. Michigan had great difficulty stopping Dr. Jack Kevorkian (4 trials, 1994-97, not convicted until '99)
2. In the Netherlands, the “right to die” has quickly slipped to the “obligation to die”
→ a number of elderly people are put to death against their will
3. This is a slippery slope that we should oppose

C. We must maintain a clear distinction between killing and letting die

1. Killing: actively doing something to a patient that hastens or causes death
2. Letting die: passively allowing someone to die, without interfering with that process

D. We should try to help and not allow someone to die when:

1. There is a reasonable human hope of recovery
2. We are able to help
3. Examples: heart attack, person drowning or in auto accident, person planning to jump off building
Matthew 22:39 You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
Matthew 7:12 "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

- E. It is right to allow someone to die when:
1. This is the patient's wish, and
 2. There is no reasonable human hope of recovery (a situation of "futility"),
 3. There also may be times when we are unable to help (example: person in burning car)
 - a. This may include times when we cannot afford extraordinary expense of some medical treatments
 4. When someone wants to die, and the end of life is near, it is OK for the person himself to pray that God would take his life: see Luke 23:46 (Jesus); Acts 7:59 (Stephen)

and it's OK for us to pray the same thing with the person, and for the person

Hebrews 2:14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.
 5. Allowing someone to die may include
 - a. Not starting a life support system (examples:)
 - b. Stopping a life support system
 - c. There is much difference of opinion over a third category:

→ Stopping or not starting a feeding tube ("nutrition and hydration")
- F. We should do what we can to alleviate the patient's pain (see Matt. 7:12; 22:39 above)
1. The first consideration is the patient's wishes (there may be a trade-off between alleviating pain and remaining conscious, rational, alert) – patient should decide this if possible
 2. What about the "double effect" - where alleviating pain also tends to hasten death?

→ depends on what the primary purpose is for giving the medication
- G. It will save our families a lot of stress and trouble if we give clear directions about our wishes ahead of time (Matt. 22:39)
1. We should all complete a "Medical Power of Attorney" designation
 2. We should also verbally communicate these wishes clearly to family and/or friends
 3. Love for neighbor also should lead us to be organ donors (Matt. 22:39)
- H. My own personal decisions
1. If I am no longer conscious, no longer able even to pray, and if there is no reasonable human hope of recovery would I want a large amount of effort and expense put forth to keep me out of heaven?
 2. Paul wants either life or death, but not to be somehow suspended between the two!

Philippians 1:20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.
 3. Sometimes in Scripture God's people set their affairs in order and calmly die

Genesis 49:33 When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.
 4. We do not need to have a fear of death

1 Corinthians 15:55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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