

“THE CHRISTIAN AND SUICIDE”

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(2 Sam. 17:23)

SUICIDE IN OUR SOCIETY

A terrible fact in our day and in all the days before us is that individuals choose to take their own lives, either by their own hand (suicide) or with the help of another (Euthanasia- Assisted suicide). Today (2005 A D) there are about 11 suicides for every 100,000 people. The rate is the same for teenagers and rises rapidly, however with age. Americans over 65 make up 13% of the population but produce 1/5, 20% of all suicides. For every senior who kills himself three others attempt suicide and fail. Among young adults there are 200 attempts for every successful suicide. The real tragedy is not found in the statistics but in the guilt and shame of loved ones left behind, who tend to blame themselves and in the Christian thinking that says all suicides damn themselves for all eternity.

SUICIDE IN THE SCRIPTURE

There are six recorded suicides in the Bible...

- 1) Ahithopel, when his advise was rejected (2 Sam. 17:23)
- 2) Zimri, to escape capture in war (1 Kn. 16:18)
- 3) Abimelech, to hasten death from a wound inflicted by a woman asked his armor bearer to kill him and he did (Jud. 9:54). (Assisted suicide.)
- 4) Samson pushed a building down, by God's strength, killing himself and his enemies (Jud. 16:23)
(**Note: This is probably heroic sacrifice and not suicide.**)
- 5) King Saul and his Armor Bearer, to escape capture (1 Sam. 31:4-5).
- 6) Judas, in remorse for betraying Jesus (Matt. 27:3-5)

The Absence of Condemnation: With the exception of Judas, these acts are recorded with no rebuke or condemnation of their actions. And in the case of Judas, Peter's condemnation was not of his suicide but of his betrayal of Jesus (Acts 1:17-18). This does NOT mean however that the Bible condones it and does not consider it wrong. Every major branch of Christianity sees suicide as sinful.

SUICIDE AND SIN

Christians throughout the ages have considered suicide a sin for four basic reasons. (1) It usurps the place of God as the Creator and Owner of all things including our bodies and our lives. (2) It is a violation of the Sixth Commandment, **“Thou shall not kill!” (Ex. 20)** (3) For the Christian it is a violation of the Lordship of Christ over our lives. As followers we give Jesus ourselves all the way to the grave. Suicide is going from “Thy will be done!” to “My will be done!” (4) Finally, it hurts others. Every person who takes their own life is overwhelmed by loneliness and sees life as not worthwhile. The person’s loved ones almost always feel guilty, wondering what they might have done to make the person feel so bad and what they could and should have done to help.

THE DEFINITION OF SUICIDE:

Calling suicide a sin we must carefully define we do NOT mean. And here there are differing opinions.

1) **Sacrifice For Others.** Heroic self sacrifice for others is giving one’s life, not taking it. Jesus Christ Himself said no man will take His life, He laid it down for us (**Jn. 10:18**). He even said, **“Greater love has no man than this; that he lays down his life for his friends.” (Jn. 15:13)** Soldiers are sent on “suicide missions” and we rightly honor them as heroes.

2) **Refusing Medical Help In The Name Of Faith.** Certain misguided Christians refuse medical help in the name of faith. Jehovah’s Witnesses for example will die rather than have a blood transfusion. This should probably not be classified as suicide.

3) **Refusing To Prolong Life Medically.** Close to this is the person who believes the medical profession is only prolonging his or her life and chooses to refuse further help. It is much harder here to distinguish between when this is wrong and when it is right. When the extended life involves great pain and is usually costing loved ones a great deal financially and emotionally many good and godly people choose to refuse any further medical help.

Is this a sin? Is it a form of self murder? Many Christians say yes, believing no matter how great the pain or how poor the quality of life, we have no right to give up our life. We should, under the Lordship of Christ, take whatever pain comes our way. Others however realize how the medical profession has made such advances, that what for centuries, were normal deaths, can now be postponed for months or even years. As I write this, the great Baseball player Ted Williams’ family is going to court over whether or not to freeze his body so he and some of them can reunite here on earth when and if science can cure aging and disease. Even the Bible says, **“There is... a time to die.” (Eccl. 3:1-2)**

Here, no hard and fast rules can be made, and we must allow people who make such decisions to be judged only by God. A famous, robust movie star several years ago learned he had incurable cancer and a few weeks later took his own life. About that same time, a man in my church, taking chemo, after it made his life miserable, stopped taking it because he knew it was not a cure. He had six good months with his family instead of eleven or twelve months of misery. Each case is different. There ARE what seem to be pitiful, agonizing legitimate cases where we ourselves feel we might make the same decision. But we must also remember that life is precious, that many great witnesses for Christ are made from sick-beds and that whatever we do, is done with prayer and in agreement with the Lord. The truth is most people will fight for life no matter how hard life gets. An aside to this is the “**Living Will**” where people decide ahead of time what they will not allow when death is near. Once again, this is between the individual and God. And once again, I have seen people with living wills, when they get in the hospital facing death, change their minds.

SUICIDE AND SALVATION

A troubling question for many is whether or not a person who takes their own life can go to heaven. The Roman Catholic Church in the past, and many conservative and Pentecostal groups in the American South, have taught that suicides cannot go to heaven. This view is probably wrong for the following reasons...

(1) **The Rational Mind Factor.** Most of us, in the face of someone’s suicide, say something like this, “*They were not in their right mind. A person in his right mind would not commit suicide.*” Usually, this is said very weakly. It is only a vague hope. But we are probably closer to the truth than we realize. **The vast majority of suicides suffer from depression.** My mother, when I was 18, put a shotgun to her heart and pulled the trigger. By God’s grace, she did not die. Her reason, stated in a letter, made no sense. She said she did it so as not to be a burden to me. My mother suffered from Manic Depression. Most suicides suffer from depression and half of all depression is genetic. It is an illness. My mother, having lost all rational thought was no more guilty of self murder than if she had died of cancer. She was out of control.

What about the other half, the 50% of depressed people who are that way because of bad choices in their lives. Well, no matter what the reason for depression, genetic or lifestyle, the end results are the same- the loss of rational thinking. Some Christians, overwhelmed by life’s blows, take their eyes off Christ, like Peter did while walking on the water, and sink into the hell of depression. **(Mt. 14:30)** Some Christians, like David **(2 Sam.11)** commit great sins; lose their joy and sink

into the same hell. Listen to David describe how he felt after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed. He said, **“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long...My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.”** (Ps. 32:3-4) This is a perfect description of severe depression. And here, the real sin is lack of faith in the trials of life or lack of obedience in the temptations of life. Depression is the symptom, the end result. If a Christian eats all the wrong foods, smokes several packs of cigarettes a day, is 100 pounds overweight, gets no exercise and dies young, he has slowly killed himself. The sin was not his death. That was the symptom and the natural punishment. The same could be said of suicide, because once a person gets low enough into depression, even though he or she caused it, they are out of control. They have lost their capacity of think rationally. And few of us believe God will hold a person accountable for what they cannot help.

(2) **The Salvation Factor.** The second consideration comes from Scripture and has to do with the nature of salvation and how it relates to sins, including the sin of suicide. It teaches first that (a.) True Christians Can And Do Commit Terrible Sins. **Peter** denies he knows Jesus with cursing (**Lk. 22:57**) and years later shows prejudice toward the Gentiles Christians by refusing to eat with them (**Gal. 2**). **David** commits adultery with another man’s wife and then has her husband killed. (**2 Sam. 11**) And the way he did it, putting him in the front lines of battle and then leaving him, no doubt caused many Israelite soldiers their lives. **Lot** after the death of his wife and the loss of his home and possessions gets drunk and has sex with his own daughters (**Gen. 19:33**). **Noah** got drunk and lay naked on the ground (**Gen. 9:20**).

(b) These Terrible Sins Did Not Forfeit Salvation. There is no indication that Peter lost his salvation when he denied Christ. What Jesus did was ask him if he still loved him enough to Pastor His people (Jn. 21). **David**, in the hell of depression (Ps. 32), did not ask God to restore his salvation, but to restore **“the joy”** of his salvation. **Lot** is called “righteous” by Peter, and said his sins and those of Sodom **“distressed”** and **“tormented his righteous soul every day.”** (**2 Pet. 2:7-8**). The true Christian can, in weakness and even in moments of wickedness, can commit any sin a non-Christian can, including the sin of suicide.

(c) The Absence Of A Prayer For Forgiveness Does Not Forfeit Salvation. Many agree with what I just said but point out that a suicide does not get a chance to ask the Lord for forgiveness. What we must remember is that there are **two kinds of forgiveness in the Bible**, related to salvation. There is **Judicial** forgiveness when we come to Christ. It makes us right with God. We are **“Holy ones”** (Saints)

which means we are acceptable to Him (**Phil. 1:1,etc.**) We are “**justified**”, which means innocent in His sight.(**Rom. 3:24, etc.**) This only happens when we come to him for salvation. No one in the Bible is justified or born again twice.

Once we are justified we become Children of God and part of the family of God (**1 Jn. 3:1**) This is where **Paternal** forgiveness comes in. As children of God we do wrong, and just like when our children do wrong, sweet fellowship is broken. We then ask God to forgive us, not to save us all over again, but to restore our close fellowship with Him. David gives the heart and soul of this when he asks God to restore the joy of his salvation (Ps.51). Peter gives the spirit of a sinful Christian wanting restored fellowship when he tells Jesus, “**Lord, you know that I love you!**” (**Jn. 21**) Sin can break our **fellowship** with God, but not our **relationship**. When our children do wrong they are still our children. It is the same with our heavenly Father. **The Lord’s Prayer (Mt. 6:9)**. It is of the greatest importance, that in the prayer our Lord teaches us to pray, “The Lord’s Prayer”; He tells us to say, “**Our Father**” before we say, “**forgive us our sins**”. When we sin as His children we are still His children. He is still our Father.

(d) The Presence Of Persistent Sin Can Indicate The Lack Of Salvation and Maybe Even No The Loss Of Salvation. We must be very careful here and not give people who take their lives false hope. The presence of sin in a person’s life, if present over a period of time, can indicate the **absence of salvation**. The Bible says, “**No one who is born of God will habitually practice sinning.**” (**1Jn. 3:10** See the Amplified Bible. The Greek here means sinning as a habit and way of life.)_The terrible truth is that a person engulfed in sin does not know for sure whether or not they are saved and shouldn’t. Our call from God is to repent and turn to Him and serve Him. I believe deeply in eternal security, once saved always saved, but I don’t believe in my salvation and eternal security enough to feel safe in sin. I think some Baptists have given many people the false hope of salvation as they base it on some past (conversion ?) experience instead of the fruit of their present lives. Jesus said we know true Christian **by their fruits (Mt. 7:16)** and James said, “**Faith without works is dead.**” (**James 2**).

What about this idea of **losing salvation**? Well, even though I believe in eternal security, I also know there are some passages in Scripture that warn Christians of a possible apostasy (turning away from Christ) that can lead to hell, and I know many devout Christians like John Wesley have taught it. **Hebrews 6** warns those who have tasted the heavenly gift and turn away, that they cannot be brought back to repentance. The Bible talks about such things as “**receiving God’s grace in vain**” (**2 Cor. 6:1**), “**believing in vain**”, being saved only if we “**hold fast**” to the

gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-2) and having our "names removed from the book of life" (Rev. 22:19). The NIV says losing our share in the tree of life, but the meaning is the same- we miss out on heaven.

I don't know about you, but verses like this scare me and help keep me faithful to God. We are not sent to hell for any "sin" including the sin of suicide. We go there because we commit **the unpardonable sin (Mt. 12:31)** of rejecting the Holy Spirit's witness about Christ and being converted by Him and receiving the born again life of repentance and faith. The Pharisees thought Jesus was in league with the devil. Unable to tell right from wrong because of their hard hearts, Jesus called this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. It is a state of heart that rejects Jesus.

Every Christian, says Paul, should "**examine himself to see if he really is in the faith**" (2 Cor. 13:5). Part of this examination will be to turn from any sins we find. Christians should serve primarily out of love for Christ, but we also need the holy fear that keeps us from committing any sin, including the sin of suicide, IF WE HAVE THE CHOICE. Most people who take their lives are so mentally and emotionally injured that they don't have a choice. If you read this or any work on suicide and DO have the choice, you commit suicide or any other terrible sin at great risk to your eternal destiny. This is not because of the particular sin of suicide, but in having a character and a will that is not under the controls of Christ.

Note: I have inherited my mother's predisposition for depression and have been on mild anti-depression and anti-anxiety medicine for years. This is God's provision for an illness, every bit as much as medicine for high blood pressure. Also I have many choices in my lifestyle, like forgiving others and myself, that keep me from depression. So I depend as much on Christian living, as I do medication. If you are depressed, it is nothing to be ashamed of. Your first step should be to see a good medical doctor and get a thorough physical. He will guide and help you take the medical steps . You should also commit to living the Christian Life, especially when it comes to anger management and loving others. You should busy yourself helping others. Hard physical labor and strenuous walking also help. Most of all you should pray for deliverance from your heavenly Father. If you are not a Christian, you should give Jesus your sins to forgive and your life to control.

For any further help on depression, or for information on other books, booklets and tapes, please write:

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