

Moral Issues: Euthanasia

(Hebrews 9:27)

- Introduction:
1. Ills. A Father once returned home from work one afternoon only to find his three year old daughter crying as if her heart would break. This little girl's turtle had died and she was devastated. The mother had attempted to console the little girl all afternoon, but with no success. So this father was left with the task of somehow explaining the mysteries of life and death to his three year old daughter. First, he attempted to console her by offering to get her a new turtle to replace the one that had died. However, even at three years old, this little girl was smart enough to know that there is a certain non-transferability about living things. A turtle is not a toy. There's no such thing as getting another one just like the one that died. This little girl's tears continued to stream down her face. In desperation, the father offered to have a funeral for the turtle, but his daughter didn't know what a funeral was. So he began to explain, "A funeral is a great festival in honor of the turtle." Well, she didn't know what a festival was either, so he tried to explain further. "You might say it's like a birthday party. We'll have cake, ice-cream, and balloons, and all the neighborhood children can come over to our house to play." Success at last! This little girl's tears began to dry, and she quickly returned to her happy, smiling self. Then an utterly unforeseen thing happened. They looked down on the floor and lo and behold, the turtle began to move. It wasn't dead after all. Dumbfounded, the father stood there speechless, but his little girl, with all the innocence of her tender years, appraised the situation, looked up at her father and said, "Daddy, LET'S KILL IT!"
 2. The ethics of death and dying have always been troubling.
 3. With the advancements of modern medicine, this subject becomes even more complex and difficult.
 4. There are a myriad of questions that are not simply hypothetical, but are faced on a daily basis.
 - a. Is it moral to withhold medical treatment from a terminally ill patient?
 - b. Is it ever right to "pull the plug" on a person?
 - c. When this is done, is it mercy or murder?
 - d. How much money and how much effort must be spent in order to prolong a person's life?
 5. Given the advances of modern medicine, it's possible to maintain biological life far beyond the point where death would have naturally occurred throughout human history.
 - a. This blessing sometimes seems a curse, both to those who are suffering and to their loved ones who must watch them suffer.
 6. So what are we to do? Let's see if we can't find some answers to this very difficult subject.

I. Definition Of Euthanasia

- A. "Euthanasia" comes from two Greek words which together mean, "good death," or "easy

death.”

- B. Euthanasia then is the active killing of a person by a doctor or care giver.
- C. To properly discuss the subject of euthanasia, one must understand and distinguish between four forms of it.
 - 1. ***Voluntary, passive euthanasia*** - medical personnel, at the patient’s request, will merely allow nature to take it’s course.
 - 2. ***Voluntary, active euthanasia*** - medical personnel, at the patient’s request, will take some active means to hasten death.
 - 3. ***Involuntary, passive euthanasia*** - medical personnel, without the patient’s instruction will merely allow nature to take it’s course.
 - 4. ***Involuntary, active euthanasia*** - medical personnel, without the patient’s request, will take some active means to hasten death.
- D. I believe there is a vast difference between passive euthanasia and active euthanasia.
 - 1. While active euthanasia is the taking of a life, passive euthanasia is permitting a death.
 - 2. Often, those who are arguing for the acceptance of “active euthanasia,” will blur the distinction and site examples of “passive euthanasia” in defense of their position.
- E. For the purpose of this lesson, we are discussing “active euthanasia,” i.e. the active efforts of one person to end the life of another.

II. Similarities Between Euthanasia & Abortion

- A. As has been stated in a previous lesson, the measure of the character of a society can be ascertained by noting how it treats its helpless (i.e. its young and its elderly).
- B. Note how similar the reasons offered for abortion also apply to euthanasia.
 - 1. Embarrassment.
 - 2. Financial hardship.
 - 3. Not wanted.
 - 4. Have a right to choose.
 - 5. Mental and physical hardship.
 - 6. No quality of life.
- C. Brethren, considering the culture of death in which we live, surely we can see that it’s not that great a leap from taking lives at one end of the spectrum to the other.

III. What Does The Bible Say About Euthanasia

- A. As has been stated, the Bible addresses all moral issues, either explicitly or through principle.
- B. First of all, the Bible condemns killing which would speak against the practice of active euthanasia (Matthew 5:20-22; Revelation 21:8; Romans 2:29-32).
 - 1. While the Bible speaks of circumstances of “justifiable killing” (e.g. war, capital punishment, self-defense) to affirm that euthanasia falls in the same category cannot be accepted without biblical prove, not merely baseless assertion.
- C. A Biblical Example of Euthanasia
 - 1. (1 Samuel 31).
 - 2. Being seriously wounded, Saul requests his armor bearer to end his life.
 - 3. The armor bearer refused to kill Saul.
 - 4. We’re not explicitly told how God viewed Saul’s request to be killed, however an

Amalekite claimed to have killed Saul in order to relieve him of his great agony (2 Samuel 1:9).

5. David's response was to exercise capital punishment on the Amalekite because if he really did what he claimed, he was guilty of murder.
6. While the Amalekite, governed by his own heathen ethical system thought he would be commended for this "mercy killing" discovered that King David's view was quite different.

D. Principles Addressing Euthanasia.

1. The value of human life.
 - a. Life, as defined by the Bible is the union of body and soul (Ecc. 12:5,7; James 2:26).
 - b. Euthanasia advocates are attempting to redefine what it means to be a person.
 - 1). Ethicist, Joseph Fletcher offered indicators of personhood: (IQ greater than 40, self-awareness, self-control, a sense of time, capability of concern for others; communication).
 - c. Consider God's value on the handicapped (Exodus 4:11; John 9:3; Luke 14:13-14).
2. Respect for elderly parents.
 - a. (Ephesians 6:1-3; Matthew 15:4).
3. Death.
 - a. There must be a distinction between causing death and allowing death.
 - b. Death is as much a part of our existence as living and we cannot cheat it (Hebrews 9:27).
 - c. To allow a person to undergo the natural process of death is not the same as taking another person's life.
4. Compassion & Mercy
 - a. An action may only be truly called "merciful" if it falls into the realm of what is permissible by God.
 - b. Often what is said to be done to spare another suffering is really done to spare oneself of suffering.
5. God's Sovereignty.
 - a. (Job 42:2-3; Isaiah 55:8-9)

- Conclusion:
1. C.S. Lewis coined the term, "verbicide" to denote the murder of a word. That is what euthanasia advocates have done with the language of "compassion" and "mercy." In order to advance their agenda with the public, euthanasia advocates are cloaking doctor's deliberate homicide of patients in rosy phrases such as: "quality of life, death with dignity, and the "right to die." But no matter what they call it, euthanasia is still murder.
 2. My personal conclusion as to the ethics of euthanasia can be summarized as follows:
 - a. Active euthanasia in all its forms is wrong because it usurps God's exclusive prerogative over human life and death.
 - b. Passive euthanasia - allowing death under certain circumstances - does not necessarily violate any biblical principles per se, except when it involves

withholding basic human care, food, water, warmth, etc.

3. We, as God's children need to do our best to affirm the value of life in a culture of death.
4. The choices that so many are making for others today can not be called "mercy killing," when it, in fact, thrusts an unprepared soul before the judgment seat of Christ.