

# ***Euthanasia***

***By Philip Venables***

“Assisted Suicide”, “Living Wills”, “Death with Dignity” and “Mercy Killing” are all terms with which are becoming increasingly familiar. Euthanasia is very much an issue which is on the public agenda. The showing on TV on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2008 of the death of Craig Ewert who arranged for his own pre-planned death to be recorded, brought this issue to the public's attention. More recently the debating of the Assisted Dying Bill in Parliament on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2014 again focussed attention on the issue. So how do we, as Christians, respond to this matter? Many of the arguments for euthanasia seem to be full of compassion. But our authority is not found in feelings, but in scripture.

We must though, be clear straight away what we are referring to. Medical progress would now make it possible for many people to have their lives prolonged after the onset of the processes of death. In such circumstances life, we might say, has become artificial. Where the processes of death are working it is the Christian's duty to alleviate any consequent suffering, but not to artificially prolong life. Allowing someone to die in such a situation is not euthanasia.

Rather, euthanasia is when the processes of death are brought into the life of someone unnaturally. Either the person themselves or someone else desires that their life be brought to an end. As a result means are arranged whereby someone can “die well”; which is what euthanasia means. What are we to make of this?

We can very soon “lose the plot” in seeking to evaluate this issue by focusing on the cases where terrible suffering is relieved by a life being taken. In such situations we can soon allow emotions, rather than scripture, to determine our viewpoint. What we must remember is that **God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them** (Gen:1:27). Life is given by God. The implication is that He has full rights over us. He gives life and He takes life. This is underlined by the sixth commandment which says **“You shall not murder** (Ex 20:13). It is wrong for humans to unlawfully take the life of other humans. This

prohibition includes self-murder. We have no right to take away our own lives. Suicide is wrong.

The hostility of God to the wrongful taking of human life is also seen in the statement of God to Noah in Genesis 9:5b-6: **from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.** God has stamped His image on mankind. And He is angry when life is wrongly taken.

Whereupon the argument is made that if someone is subject to immense suffering then they are effectively no longer human beings. This merges in with the whole debate about “quality-of-life”. Someone might say that my whole life is so afflicted by suffering that I no longer have any “quality-of-life”, therefore my life should be ended. But who is to be the decider of what is an acceptable “quality-of-life” and what is not. Moreover, someone’s mental condition comes into play here. Someone undergoing a bout of depression or severe mental affliction may well say that “enough is enough”. However, the passing of the period of melancholy may well leave them very well able to bear any physical affliction. Joni Eareckson Tada, the well-known Christian, exemplifies this. Paralysed as a teenager from her neck down, she would have initially been very happy to bring her life to an end. However, the passing of that period has led on to her living a triumphant life for the glory of God full of faith and good works.

Once the “quality-of-life” argument wins the day, in our attitude to the continuing of life, then we are on a very slippery slope. This is because children, with ulterior motives, can soon decide that “dear-old-Mum” has no longer got any quality-of-life as Alzheimer's starts to set in. *“Let's save ourselves a lot of money on care fees and end it all for her”* they decide. And then others say *“Dad's broken leg means he can no longer get around. Life's no good for him. Let's call it a day”*. And the potential examples go on and on.

The Christian response is completely different. James makes this statement: **Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.** (James 1:27). We care for those who can give nothing back to us. Christians give with no strings attached.

We do need to be aware though, of the real issue of suffering. We have a responsibility to make sure that people live well. Scripture urges us **as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers** (Gal.6:10). It is not good enough for us to stand on our spiritual high horse and condemn euthanasia whilst doing nothing to help the suffering. Rather, we must get off and help alleviate suffering through our own personal involvement, giving of resources and encouraging of others particularly those in respite care. Moreover, we should be careful to respect those who are more elderly. Our society tends to dismiss

older people. We, as Christians, should rather respect the wisdom of older ones. God says **“Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD”** (Lev.: 19:32).

Finally, it is sobering for us to consider where euthanasia emanates from and some of the consequences of this thinking. Two terms that come to mind when we are thinking of artificially shortening the lives of those in physical pain are “survival of the fittest” and “natural selection”. And where do those terms come from? They come from the anti-God evolutionary teaching that pervades our society. Hitler got hold of these teachings and started to eliminate the unwanted, such as Jews, Gypsies etc. Are we in a society which is also subtly getting hold of these teachings and eliminating our “unwanted” such as the elderly and infirm? We are possibly shocked by such a thought and very possibly we should be!

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