

ASSISTED SUICIDE, EUTHANASIA, TERMINAL SEDATION

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Brevity Of Our Human Existence, Examining Our Lives, Living For God's Glory, Palliative Sedation, Terminal Sedation And Slow Euthanasia, Doctor Jack Kevorkian a.k.a. Doctor Death, Mar Adentro - The Sea Inside, Quadriplegic Ramon Sampedro, Assisted Suicide, Ramona Maneiro, King Saul And Amalekite, Mercy Killing, Touch Not Mine Anointed, Was Mercy Killing A Common Custom In Ancient Wartime?, Murder Killing And Mercy, My Inexperience With Persons In Agony Near Death & Funerals, Making Decisions About Life Death And Prolonged Suffering, God Will Choose The Time And Place Of Our Temporal Demise, Earthly Sensual Devilish Destructive Knowledge, Deciding For Ourselves And Deciding For Others Is Quite Different, Sudden Death Sudden Glory, Promised Purchased Possession, Our Coming Resurrected Glorified Bodies, Closing Remarks, Reading List

Quite some time ago, I read a thought-provoking article in the New York Times entitled "Hard Choice for a Comfortable Death: Sedation". While the article didn't seek to provide any final answers regarding the issues of terminal sedation and euthanasia, it did motivate me to ponder my own thoughts concerning these issues. As we all know -- and as the Bible makes rather clear -- whether we are rich or poor, famous or unknown, free or not, good or bad, young or old, death is one event which we must all eventually face at God's appointed time. As we read in the Scriptures:

"The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

Psalms 90:10, KJV

"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

Isaiah 40:7-8, KJV

"But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

Luke 12:20, KJV

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:"

Hebrews 9:27, KJV

"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

James 4:14, KJV

Thus we see that not only is death an eventuality which we all must face, but there are absolutely no guarantees that we will even live another day, except by the Mercy, Grace and Goodness of our Heavenly Father. If we truly believed this, would we not each live our lives very differently? If we were to die this very moment, would we be able to stand before the Lord unashamed of how we are currently living our lives? Would He say to us "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."? Or will He say "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."? Consider these verses:

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

Matthew 7:21-27, KJV

For those of us who are advancing in age, obviously, these issues should be of utmost concern. It is imperative that we examine our lives, and determine whether or not we are truly living the remainder of our lives wisely, in a way which is pleasing to the Lord. As I asked some years ago in another article that touches on this same topic, are you redeeming the time? For me personally, these questions have motivated me to take my work for the Lord even more seriously. I am by no means a spiritual giant. I have my human weaknesses as well. Like many of you, I don't always use my time as diligently for the Lord as I ought to. However, I want to build upon the Rock, and not on the sand, using wood, hay or stubble. As the Apostle Paul was inspired to write:

"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

1 Corinthians 3:11-15, KJV

If I were to claim a new verse at this time in my own life, I suppose that it might be the following one, which is also found in Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthian brethren:

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

1 Corinthians 10:31, KJV

Turning to our main topic of discussion, do we humans have the right to control how and when we exit this earthly life? Even more agonizing, putting our own personal lives aside, if we have the means to do so, do we have the right to reduce the pain that a loved one is experiencing as their moment of death approaches, even if it means causing them to fall into an unconscious stupor, and possibly even shortening their life by a few days or weeks? As you undoubtedly know, these questions have resulted in a very heated moral debate in our modern times. Due to advanced medicine and new technologies, science has learned to do certain things which were not even imaginable a few decades ago. But with this new knowledge and

power, also comes greater responsibility for our actions.

When proper oversight is lacking, and things are not kept in check, we end up with situations like Doctor Jack Kevorkian, who became known as the infamous Doctor Death. This process of administering drugs in order to reduce pain, and calm a dying person's body, is referred to as "palliative sedation", or "terminal sedation", in the medical profession. There are some critics who also refer to it as "slow euthanasia", being as it's similar to what Jack Kevorkian was doing, except that it is a more gradual process.

Quite some time ago, I watched a Spanish movie entitled "Mar Adentro". Its English title was "The Sea Inside". Directed by Alejandro Amenabar, the movie starred Javier Bardem in the true-life role of a Spaniard from Galicia by the name of Ramon Sampedro. For almost thirty years, Sampedro supported euthanasia, and fought for the right to terminate his life with dignity, via assisted suicide. That is because he had become a quadriplegic at the age of twenty-five, as a result of a diving accident. Ultimately, Ramon Sampedro in fact took his life on January 12, 1998, just one week after his fifty-fifth birthday. He used potassium cyanide.

According to online sources, seven years after Mr. Sampedro's death, when the statute of limitations had expired, his close friend, Ramona Maneiro, admitted that she had provided him with a cyanide-laced drink, and a straw. She stated "I did it for love." Maneiro also confessed that she had turned on the video camera that recorded Ramon's last words before he drank the cup of poison, and that she remained in the room, behind the camera, the entire time.

In just thinking about this tragic story, I can't begin to imagine what it must have been like for this man. Being in a coma for thirty years would be so much easier; but this man was fully conscious, and was totally aware of the fact that he was completely helpless; paralyzed from neck to foot, and confined to a bed. He couldn't even take his life on his own.

What makes the issues of assisted suicide and euthanasia so difficult, is that unlike with some issues, we can't simply run to the Bible in order to find a clear answer. Obviously, they didn't possess all of the technologies that we possess today; although in all honesty, dangerous poisons have been in existence for millennia. I am reminded again of the story of the death of King Saul. As you may recall, due to Saul's

disobediences and hard-headedness, the Lord had the Prophet Samuel tell him that He was going to take the kingdom from Saul, and give it to David, as we see here:

"And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king. And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD. And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou."

1 Samuel 15:22-28, KJV

Years later, after Samuel the Prophet had died, Saul found himself in quite a fix with the Philistines. In an act of desperation, Saul made the grave mistake of seeking out the witch of Endor -- an act which was strictly forbidden by the Mosaic Law -- and requesting that she call up the spirit of Samuel, so that he could receive some counsel from him. To Saul's surprise, Samuel did not give him the wise counsel that he was hoping for. Rather, Samuel told Saul that the very next day he would join him in death; and that is what happened.

Saul was seriously wounded during a heated battle with his Philistine enemies, but he did not die immediately. So, out of pride, and not wanting his enemies to find him alive, he chose to fall upon his own sword, being as his armourbearer refused to kill him. His armourbearer then also proceeded to take his own life. We later find out that an Amalekite came upon Saul, who was still alive and in great agony. Upon King Saul's request, the Amalekite slew the king. Eventually, the Philistines arrived and cut off Saul's head, and carried it throughout the Philistine cities in order to brag of their deeds. Consider these verses:

"And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers. Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together. And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities, and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan."

1 Samuel 31:3-10, KJV

"It came even to pass on the third day, that, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head: and so it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth, and did obeisance. And David said unto him, From whence comest thou? And he said unto him, Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped. And David said unto him, How went the matter? I pray thee, tell me. And he answered, That the people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also. And David said unto the young man that told him, How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead? And the young man that told him said, As I happened by chance upon mount Gilboa, behold, Saul leaned upon his spear; and, lo, the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I. And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite. He said unto me again, Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me: for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me. So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen: and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord. Then David took hold on his

clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him: And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword. And David said unto the young man that told him, Whence art thou? And he answered, I am the son of a stranger, an Amalekite. And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed? And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died. And David said unto him, Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the LORD'S anointed. And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son:"

2 Samuel 1:2-17, KJV

In reading the previous verses, it is plain to see that in a technical sense the Amalekite didn't really murder King Saul, because Saul in fact asked him to kill him. Notice that the Amalekite says "So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen". He knew that Saul was as good as dead. So in obedience to Saul, who was still the king, and in order to not prolong Saul's agony, he conducted an act of mercy. However, even though the Amalekite had carried out what some people today would refer to as mercy killing -- or assisted suicide -- we're told that David had the Amalekite slain; because even though King Saul had turned against David, David still considered him to be the Lord's anointed leader.

From reading this story, I get the impression that the issue with David wasn't that the Amalekite had demonstrated mercy and conducted assisted suicide. Rather, David's problem was upon whom the Amalekite had done this. As David stated, the Amalekite had touched the Lord's anointed. Even though Saul was a rebellious king, as long as he was still alive, he was still the Lord's anointed. As David would later write in one of his Psalms:

"Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm."

Psalms 105:15, KJV

In other words, the impression I get is that if the Amalekite had done this to someone else, other than to King Saul, David would not have taken issue with him, or ordered his death. In fact, the Amalekite obviously felt that he was doing his duty

to Saul, which is why he then brought the king's crown and bracelet to David. If he thought that he was doing something evil, or at least the wrong thing, would the Amalekite have taken the crown and bracelet to David? I don't think so. He most certainly was not expecting David to immediately order his death.

Just reading this story makes me wonder if this may have been a common wartime custom in those days. In other words, if a soldier encountered a severely wounded comrade who had no chance of survival, was it considered a duty to end his life in order to spare him further suffering? I honestly do not know, but this story concerning Saul seems to leave that possibility open. What do you think?

So in my mind, the central issue for us Christians is this: Where do we draw the line between extending love, mercy and compassion to a dying loved one who is in severe pain, and interfering with God's Laws regarding taking the life of another person; or at the very least, taking measures which may possibly hasten their death? I am reminded of certain verses that are found in the Book of Genesis:

"And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."

Genesis 9:5-6, KJV

Of course, it is apparent that the commandment that we find in Exodus is just a continuation of the previous verses from the Book of Genesis. As you will recall, the Lord told Moses:

"Thou shalt not kill."

Exodus 20:13, KJV

Of course, we need to remember too, as I point out in the 1997 article "Killing, Murder and Military Duty", the Bible does seem to make a distinction between killing and murder. If a person is already near certain death, is experiencing a lot of pain which even strong medication does not help, and requests assistance in terminating their life, is it really murder, or is it mercy?

During my lifetime, I have never been faced with watching a loved one die, and I do thank the Lord for that. I have also

never had to watch a person lying in agony and great pain as death slowly approached them, either through old age, or due to disease, an accident, or due to some other cause. Neither have I ever attended a funeral during my adult life; although I may have attended a few of them when I was a small child. I honestly can't remember now. In short, extreme, unbearable pain, suffering and death are rather foreign in my personal life.

This is not to say that I don't know pain. In recent years, I have had all of my teeth extracted, which did result in very strong post-operative pain. I also suffered from DVT -- Deep Vein Thrombosis -- in which the pain was so great that I was unable to walk. Furthermore, I have also torn a few muscles due to overextending myself with my workouts. It took a few months to heal, and it was painful. However, I have never felt the pain that one feels just prior to death. So, at this point in time, I honestly cannot say how I would react if I were to find myself in such a situation where one of my loved ones was in great pain and was close to dying. I do not know what decisions I would make regarding the life of that person if I was called to do so. I truly hope that such a day never arrives.

However, I suspect that given my own weak nature, and my own cowardice, plus my low threshold when it comes to any kind of physical pain, while I am a Christian, I think that if I personally were in severe pain, as well as terminally ill, I probably would not hesitate to say "Doctor, please pump me up; even if it kills me!". While that may surprise some of my readers, at least I am honest enough to admit it. I lean towards being pragmatic and a realist, after all. Can you be equally as honest?

As is the case with all of us, the Lord will certainly choose how and when I am supposed to leave this Earth and this old tabernacle of the flesh. But if my death is a slow, painful one -- and I certainly hope that it isn't -- then, again, I would probably say "Doc, bring on the drugs!". If I have made a mistake with such a decision, I am sure that God will let me know about it when I face Him. But if God is the loving, merciful God that we believe Him to be, would He really find it inappropriate for us to take strong, stupefying drugs which might reduce our agony as our final hour approaches? It is a good question for which I can provide no conclusive answer. Sharing the story of King Saul and the Amalekite is the only Scriptural evidence that I can think of at this time.

Obviously, there will be those people who will argue that God gave us the medical wisdom to be able to do these things. I wonder though. After all, couldn't the same argument be used regarding creating the atomic bomb, or inventing the electric chair, or lethal injection? As I point out in my 1997 article "Science and Technology: The Forbidden Knowledge?", not all scientific knowledge is necessarily good. Some of it is quite devilish. I am reminded of this verse:

"This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish."

James 3:15, KJV

One thing we all need to recognize is that deciding how we personally want to be treated during such a difficult time in our lives is one thing; but how we wish for another loved one to be treated is quite another. Why? Because it involves making a moral decision regarding the life of another human being, and it isn't quite as easy as deciding for ourselves.

If there is one consolation in all of this, it is that if we have trusted in Christ, and if we have faithfully dedicated our lives to His service, then one of these days, it will be sudden death, sudden glory. For as the Apostle Paul wrote, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Personally, I can't wait to peel off this old, tired body of the flesh. I earnestly await for my Redemption, when I will at last receive the "purchased possession", as the Apostle Paul informs us in the following group of verses:

"Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

Ephesians 1:14, KJV

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle [meaning our physical body] were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality

might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

2 Corinthians 4:18-5:8, KJV

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again."

Philippians 1:21-26, KJV

Truly, it will be a wonderful day for each one of us. It will be the day of our graduation from this current life, when we will each receive our resurrected and glorified body, which will be very similar to the body of Christ himself. Please consider the following verses for your personal inspiration and edification:

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

Romans 8:29, KJV

"Who shall change our vile body, THAT IT MAY BE FASHIONED LIKE UNTO HIS GLORIOUS BODY, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

Philippians 3:21, KJV

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM; for we shall see him as he is."

1 John 3:2, KJV

"There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars:

for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

1 Corinthians 15:40-52, KJV

With those wonderfully inspiring verses, I will bring another article to a close. I trust that it has been an inspiration, and a blessing in your life. If you have enjoyed reading this article, please consider sharing its URL with your friends. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or with any other social network, I would likewise appreciate if you would take the time to click or tap on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thanks so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

For additional information, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which contain topics which are related to this article. All of these articles are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics web server:

A Treasure in Earthen Vessels

Are You a Burning Ember for the Lord?

Are You Redeeming the Time?

Death: Final Battle, Final Victory

Heaven's Gate, Suicide and Other Death Cults

Killing, Murder and Military Duty

Organ Transplants and Blood Transfusions

Parable of the Sower: Salvation and Service

Science and Technology: The Forbidden Knowledge?
Study, Work and Don't Be Ashamed
Why Doesn't God Heal Me?

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