

SUICIDE

- I. **Biblical references to "suicide"**
 - A. Word "suicide" not used in NASB or KJV
 - B. Biblical accounts of persons taking their own lives, or attempting to do so
 - Judges 9:50-57 - Abimilech severely injured; seeks assisted suicide motivated by gender pride, male ego, not wanting death to be caused by a woman.
 - Judges 16:21-31 - Samson causes own death in enemy camp, motivated by the avenging of their torture of him.
 - I Sam. 31:1-7 - Saul and armor bearer fall on their swords after Saul was injured in battle and did not want to be taken by the enemy and tortured.
 - II Sam. 17:23 - Ahithophel strangled himself after his military counsel was rejected by David
 - I Kings 16:15-20 - Zimri defeated in battle, sets his house afire and dies therein to avoid capture.
 - Jonah 1:11-15 - Jonah seems to have attempted suicide by jumping into the sea.
 - Matt. 27:3-5 - Judas hung himself in remorse for having betrayed Jesus.
 - C. Passages used to evaluate suicide
 1. Negatively
 - Exod. 20:13; Deut 5:17 - "You shall not murder"
 - Deut. 30:19 - "choose life in order that you may live..."
 - Job 1:21 - "the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away"
 - Acts 16:27,28 - "jailer was about to kill himself, but Paul said, 'Do yourself no harm...'"
 - I Cor. 6:19 - "your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you...you are not your own"
 - Eph. 5:29 - "no man ever hated his own flesh"
 - I Jn. 3:15 - "no murderer has eternal life abiding in him"
 2. Positively
 - Mk. 8:34,35 - "take up cross, and follow Me. ...Whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it"
 - John 13:37 - "I will lay down my life for You"
 - John 15:13 - "Greater love has no one than to lay down his life for his friends"
 - Rom. 5:7 - "one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die"
 - Rom. 14:7 - "not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself"
 - Phil. 1:21 - "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain"
 - I Jn. 3:16 - "He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren"
 - Rev. 2:13; 20:4 - martyrdom
 3. The Biblical accounts do not present a definitive evaluation of suicide in their context, and the other passages are not directly related to suicide contextually.
- II. **Brief history of interpretation in the Church**
 - A. Some early church writers in their encouragement of martyrdom seem to accept suicide (cf. Ignatius)
 - B. Other writers cautioned against suicide (cf. Chrysostom)

- C. Augustine used Exod. 20:13 to prove that suicide was sin of self-murder
 - 1. no possibility of repentance
 - 2. act of cowardice
- D. Thomas Aquinas added arguments against suicide
 - 1. against nature's law of self-preservation
 - 2. only God has right to give and take away life
- E. John Donne (English writer, 17th cent.) first to argue for positive perspective of suicide.

III. Attempting a definition of "suicide"

- A. English word "suicide" is etymologically derived from two Latin words: *sui* = oneself; *cidium* = to kill.
- B. Inclusive definition: "the taking of one's own life, or causing it to be taken by another, inclusive of any motive, circumstance, or method used."
 - 1. By this definition all of the Biblical accounts (cf. I.B.) would qualify as suicide or attempted suicide.
 - 2. Questions
 - a. Is it possible to so focus on a self-oriented perspective of self-preservation, that one diminishes an other-oriented perspective of God's love?
 - b. Is it possible to so posit an inordinate value of human life, that we diminish the ultimate value of life beyond this life?
 - c. Is it possible to be so involved in legalistic determinations of moral right and wrong, that we lose sight of God's eternal perspective and character?
- C. Exclusive definitions
 - 1. (Limited) - "the taking of one's own life, or causing it to be taken by another, exclusive of the willing death of martyrdom for God, deference for the lives of others in love, or the avoidance of undue torture and suffering."
 - 2. (Unlimited) - "the taking of one's own life, or causing it to be taken by another, exclusive of any evaluative explanation since every man has an autonomous 'right to die'."
 - 3. Which of the Biblical accounts (cf. I.B.) would qualify as suicide or attempted suicide by these definitions?
 - 4. Questions
 - a. Is it possible to so focus on the human-oriented determination of life and death, that we diminish the divine prerogative and determinations of life and death?
 - b. Is it possible to so emphasize the altruistic and other-oriented motivations for the taking of one's life, that we diminish the divine determinations of His purposes?
 - c. Is it possible that our human evaluations of the situation are so limited by finiteness and self-concern that we might fail to understand God's supernatural options?
- D. Factors to consider in defining "suicide"
 - 1. Factor of intent
 - a. Is subject a rational, competent decision maker?
 - b. Is there a desire and determination to die?
 - c. Does the subject intent to terminate his/her own life?
 - d. Not just power to avoid such, but willing intent and choice to do so.

2. Factor of freedom
 - a. Is the subject fully appraised and cognizant of the situation?
 - b. Has subject been made to feel guilty about living, breathing, taking up a bed, medicine, resources?
 - c. Must be free of any pressured or forced coercion.
 - d. Freely chosen determination to act in direct causation of that which would be a means to one's own end in death.
3. Factor of motivation
 - a. Is there a self-oriented motive for the self-destructive act?
 - b. Do other-oriented motives reduce culpability, changing suicide into sacrificial acts or martyrdom?
 - c. What qualifies as an other-oriented motive?
 - (1) welfare of animals?
 - (2) psychological welfare of others?
 - (3) economic considerations?
 - (4) convenience of others?
 - (5) ideological premises?

IV. Attempting a Christian evaluation of "suicide"

- A. Differing world-views contribute to one's perspective of "suicide"
 1. Naturalistic or humanistic world-view
 - a. God is not part of the equation
 - b. Man is autonomous and independent
 - (1) self-determining agent
 - (2) right to determine own destiny; right to die
 - c. Human life is a result of evolutionary process
 - (1) evaluated physically and psychologically
 - (2) strive for "quality of life"
 - (3) objective: to be as productive as possible in bettering the conditions of mankind
 - d. Utilitarian motivations in life and death
 - (1) "do what you think and feel you have to do"
 - (2) avoid inconvenience to others, that they might pursue their "quality of life"
 - (3) when you are no longer useful to yourself or others, get out of the way.
 2. Biblical or Christian world-view
 - a. God alone is autonomous and independent
 - (1) God gives and God takes away
 - (2) God is the owner/operator of His creation
 - b. Man is derivative and dependent
 - (1) man has freedom of choice in his derivation
 - (2) sin is a result of man's attempt to usurp God's prerogative, to "be like God," and to self-determine his own life and death
 - c. Human life is God's creation; a God-given gift - Neh. 9:6
 - (1) evaluated physically, psychologically & spiritually
 - (2) teleology of life is prime concern
 - (3) objective: to glorify God - Isa. 43:7
 - d. Ontological motivations in life and death
 - (1) to be and do what God wants to be and do in us
 - (2) receptive to express God's character in all situations
 - (3) trust God to determine duration and destiny

- B. Evaluating "suicide" in light of God's revelation
1. Selfishness
 - a. The action of taking one's own life when self-determined (with intent), self-caused (without coercion), and self-concerned (without concern for others) is a very selfish act.
 - b. It is a final and ultimate selfish act, without opportunity for repentance or recovery.
 - c. Selfish acts are sinful acts; self-interest is a basic factor in sinfulness.
 - d. Satan, the Destroyer, tempts man
 - (1) personal aspiration, gratification, reputation
 - (2) fight, fright, flight responses to life's situations
 2. Failure to take God into account.
 - a. Self-determined taking of one's life fails or refuses to recognize the possibilities of God's action
 - (1) by natural processes
 - (2) by supernatural or miraculous processes
 - b. Suicide preempts the opportunity for God to act in the situation.
 - c. Self-concern of suicide fails to recognize that there can be divine purposes in suffering.
 3. Failure to take others into account.
 - a. The sinfulness of self-concern is contrary to the Love of God in concern for others.
 - b. Suicide usually harms and damages others, contrary to love
 - (1) left "holding the bag," "picking up the pieces"
 - (2) often questioning or blaming themselves
 - (3) the living have to deal with the consequences
 - c. Suicidal persons fail to recognize community responsibility
 - (1) every person is part of community - family, social network, church, etc.
 - (2) "we are in it together," "no man is an island," "what one does affects us all"
 4. Suicide and ultimate destiny
 - a. Traditional, fundamentalist, literalist interpretation
 - (1) "You shall not murder" - Exod. 20:13
 - (2) Suicide is self-murder
 - (3) "no murderer has eternal life" - I Jn. 3:15
 - (4) No one who commits suicide will go to heaven
 - (5) Suicide is unforgivable sin.
 - b. Compassionate Christian perspective
 - (1) God's love reaches out to those who are self-absorbed and desperate.
 - (2) The love of God in Christians should reach out in love, compassion, sympathy and empathy to those who regard their pain and pressures as overwhelming.
 - (3) It is not our place to attempt to determine eternal destiny for another. (Samson regarded as one of the faithful - Heb. 11:24)

- V. Relationship of "suicide" to other behaviors and acts
- A. Self-destructive behaviors in general
1. Various levels
 - a. Mentally destructive - drugs, alcohol
 - b. Emotionally destructive - schizophrenia, fantasy, unreality
 - c. Spiritually destructive - witchcraft, occult
 - d. Morally destructive - immorality
 - e. Socially destructive - desertion, dereliction, crime
 - f. Physically destructive - masochism, suicide
 2. Are these to be evaluated in the same manner as "suicide" is evaluated?
- B. Euthanasia
1. "Euthanasia" etymologically derived from two Greek words:
eu = good; *thanatos* = death.
 2. Euthanasia was originally used to refer to keeping terminally ill patients free of pain during last days of life. Palliative care.
Cf. Prov. 31:6
 3. Such "passive euthanasia" might be called "mercy-dying"
 4. Contemporary usage predominantly refers to "active euthanasia" or "mercy-killing," an active involvement in bringing about death.
 5. "Active euthanasia" obviously relates to "suicide" or "assisted suicide"
 6. Arguments for such usually use same naturalistic/humanistic premises of an unlimited definition of suicide with its premises of a "right to die."