

9/22/19

What About Suicide?

In 2013, 840,000 people committed suicide. Suicide is now officially listed the 10th leading cause of death worldwide and with a rising each year.

1. In 2017, 47,173 Americans died by suicide.
2. In 2017, there were 1,400,000 suicide attempts.
3. In 2015, suicide and self-injury cost the U.S. \$69 Billion.
4. And now it is growing among Christians!

I want to speak to you on the topic of suicide from three perspectives from the history of man.

* This is the most difficult sermon I have ever taught!

- I. The pagan view on suicide.
- II. The Jewish view on suicide.
- III. The Biblical view on suicide.

I. The pagan view on suicide.

A. The ancient Greeks.

1. The 'Big Three' in Athenian philosophy, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle all *condemned* suicide for various reasons.
2. Socrates believed man was one of the 'gods' possessions' and so he has not the right nor should he have the right to take his own life.

* The irony is that Socrates was given a chance to escape halfway through his execution, and justified his drinking of

the poison by saying he had entered in a social contract, which he had to respect.

3. Plato was no different. He believed the state and the gods were closely aligned, he saw suicide as a crime against the state and a crime necessarily against the gods.

* But there is one slight difference between Pato and Socrates; he claims that it *may be justified* for 'good reason' (without actually saying what that would be).

4. Aristotle was no different to Socrates, even saying that to commit suicide is 'cowardly'.

B. The ancient China & Bushido, code of samurai.

1. From the writings of Confucius and Mencius we can derive the opinion that suicide does not *always* deserve serious condemnation.
2. Suicide is only justified when a person has failed to observe the fundamental values of society, since to Confucius this would be worse than death.
3. Confucius placed an emphasis upon self-sacrifice and loyalty, which is why you might actually be obliged to commit suicide if it were to help the group, like falling on a grenade to prevent others from dying.
4. This would be called *altruistic suicide*, where your own death might serve the community that you are in.
5. The Japanese's devotion to the Emperor and any sort of act of dishonor would compel a

citizen or soldier to commit *hara kiri* (ritual suicide) to regain their honour.

C. The ancient Rome.

1. There exists a huge contrast between Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome and the ways that they viewed suicide.
2. The Romans believed once one's honour was gone, there was no reason to live.
3. If one were to commit an act of dishonor, to wash away the debt to society, suicide was an act more noble than public execution.
4. This is supported by the fact that many Roman politicians committed suicide to escape the dishonour of public execution.

D. The Medieval Age/Scholasticism.

1. St. Thomas Aquinas was one of the most influential philosophers and the most renowned Catholic theologian 1225-74.
2. In his grandiose, *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas outlines three reasons why people should not murder and we can safely assume it applies to the murder of oneself.
 - a. The three reasons are; 1) it is contrary to natural law, 2) It harms the common good (communal mentality should not be endangered) 3) it is a sin against God.
 - b. The last reason seems to be most compelling. Under no circumstances will God allow suicide and the proof of this is

Deuteronomy's chilling verse: "I will kill and I will make to live." Deut. 32:39

3. Augustine (A.D. 354–430) was the strongest opponent of any form of self-murder (cf. City of God 1:4-26). He appealed to the sixth commandment and its prohibition against murder. And he agreed with Socrates that our lives belong to God so that we have no right to end them ourselves. Over time, many in the church would see self-murder as an unpardonable sin.
4. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, "*Human life is sacred* because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being."

E. The Enlightenment.

1. Reigning in values of autonomy and the right to author one's own life, the Enlightenment Age was extremely radical in terms of its views on suicide.
2. Scottish Philosopher David Hume in his essay "Of Suicide" stated, "I believe no man ever threw away his life while it was worth keeping."

3. Later on, Arthur Schopenhauer, quite a bit after the Enlightenment, suggested that no man had a more “unassailable and incontrovertible right” than the use of their own life.
 4. What marked the contrast in the Enlightenment Age was of course Immanuel Kant’s moral philosophy epitomised in the Categorical Imperative.
 - a. Particularly relevant is the first rule/maxim of the Categorical Imperative which states that every action should have a feature of “universalizability”, thus if everyone were to commit suicide, the human race would go extinct.
 - b. It is quite ironic that the *deontological* framework upon which Kant built his moral philosophy neglects why it is that people might want to commit suicide, especially since it is supposed to value the moral worth of an action on the reasoning behind the motive.
- F. The 19th and 20th Century.
1. The 19th Century possessed what they called a ‘Schopenhauerian’ feel; meaning that suicide should not be thought of as something cowardly, everyone is entitled to the option.
 2. In the 20th Century we had Albert Camus a French Philosopher, author and journalist

- that won the Nobel Peace Prize in literature at age 44 in 1957, the youngest in history at that time and he considered suicide to be the “truly serious philosophical problem” since the world we live in is fundamentally absurd, giving rise to the philosophy of “absurdism”. Life can be Sisyphean in nature, a mythological king of Corinth punished by Zeus in Hades to roll a stone up the hill only to have it roll back down for all eternity, viewing life as futile and absurd.
3. The 19th and 20th Century is filled with humanism the belief in man to solve everything, God is not needed.
 4. That is why Dr. Kaborkian assist people in suicide, mothers killed 61 million of their own babies since 1973 Roe versus Wae and euthenesia is now considered to die with dignity in the U.S.
 5. Suicide is being practiced and accepted!
 - a. More people die from suicide than from homicide in America.
 - b. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for those aged 15 to 24 and is most common among those aged 65 and older.
 - c. Suicide rates by the elderly are highest for those who are divorced or widowed.
 - d. In the last half-century, the suicide rate among adolescents and young adults has nearly tripled.

- e. Men are more prone to suicide, but women attempt it more.

This is the pagan view of suicide!

II. The Jewish view on suicide.

- A. Jewish views on suicide are mixed.
 1. In Orthodox Judaism, suicide is forbidden by Jewish law, and viewed as a sin.
 2. Non-Orthodox forms of Judaism may instead recognize the act as more to a death by a disease or disorder (except in cases of purposeful assisted suicide). Rabbinical scholars (certainly in the reformed movements) command compassion both for the deceased and the survivors. Wikipedia
 3. The Conservative response states: "... those who commit suicide and those who aid others in doing so act out of a plethora of motives. Some of these reasons are less than noble, involving, for example, children's desires to see Mom or Dad die with dispatch so as not to squander their inheritance on 'futile' health care, or the desire of insurance companies to spend as little money as possible on the terminally ill."
 - a. The proper response to severe pain is not suicide, but better pain control and more pain medication.

- b. Conservative Judaism considers not giving the needed pain medicine to avoid severe pain is "bizarre" and cruel, that with today's medications there is no reason for people to be in perpetual torture.

- B. Jewish basis and rational on suicides.
 1. The later rabbinic authorities derived a prohibition from Genesis. Gen. 9:5a
 - a. "And surely your blood of your lives, will I require." Gen. 1:26; 2:7
 - b. The reason being God is the author and giver of life, "The Spirit of **God** has made me, And the breath of the Almighty **gives** me life." Job 33:4
 2. Rashi, the most widely read Jewish commentator 1040-1105, who also wrote a running commentary to the Babylonian Talmud Rashi and other early rabbinic authorities understood the verse as a prohibition against taking one's own life.
 3. Contemporary rulings from all three major religious streams have upheld the view that suicide is fundamentally incompatible with Jewish law and values.
 4. Preserving human life is among the highest duties in Judaism, and suicide is seen as counter to this fundamental value. Human beings are barred even from harming themselves, let alone ending their own lives.

5. Moreover, in traditional Jewish thought, the body belongs to God, and as such ending one's life is not considered within the scope of a person's authority. Suicide is sometimes regarded as stealing from God and a rejection of God's sovereignty.
6. The only exception is in cases of martyrdom, where Jews are traditionally obliged to sacrifice their lives rather than violate the three cardinal sins of idolatry, murder and sexual immorality.
7. However, the Jewish legal standard for suicide requires a person be of sound mind.

This is the Jewish view on suicide!

III. The Biblical view on suicide.

- A. There are two cases in Scripture that at times are cited as suicide, but they are not.
 1. The act of suicide is defined as the taking of one's own life.
 - a. The term suicide is traced in the Oxford English Dictionary to 1651.
 - b. Its first occurrence is apparently in Sir Thomas Browne's *Religion Medici*, written in 1635 and published in 1642.
 - c. Before it became a common term, expressions such as "self-murder" and "self-killing" were used to describe the act of taking one's own life.

2. The first case that is confused to be suicide is of Abimelech who was mortally wounded by a woman who dropped a millstone on his head in battle and he cried to his armor-bearer to kill him so his death would not be credited to the woman. Judges 9:54
 - a. This does not define suicide, but assisted suicide by his armor-bearer.
 - b. Abimelech did not kill himself.
3. The second case is Samson as he brought down the temple of the Philistines killing himself also. Judges 16:28-30
 - a. This also does not define suicide.
 - b. Samson called on God to use him one last time to defeat the Philistines and he died as an instrument of God in battle.
 - c. The Sixth Commandment, "You shall not murder or kill", prohibits any person to take the life of another being. Ex. 20:13
 - 1) The word for murder "ratschach" is unique, it has no cognates to this root in any other Semitic language and means to slay or kill a person, it appears 47 times in the Old Testament to indicate intentional murder or premeditated. Complete Bibl. Lib:216
 - 2) The Sixth Commandment does not prohibit self-defense, capital punishment or going to war, for God sent his people to war, demanded capital punishment and allowed a

person to defend his life and still valid in the New Testament. Rom. 13:3-6;
1Pet. 2:13-16

- 3) Not until modern times with the rise of the age of reason and humanism has capital punishment been opposed!

B. There are only five cases of suicide is recorded in the Bible.

1. The first is Saul. 1Sam. 31:4
 - a. Saul fell on his sword, it is clear that the Amalekite was lying that he killed Saul hoping to be rewarded by David. 2Sam. 1
 - b. Saul's self-deception, "So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the LORD, because he did not keep the word of the LORD, and also because he consulted a medium guidance." He spared King Agag and some animals. 1Chron. 10:13; 1Sam. 15
 - c. Saul sought out the witch of En Dor and God confirmed through Samuel saying God did not speak to him and departed from him, Samuel confirmed this and said God had become Saul's enemy and prophesied that the next day he and his sons will be in Sheol. 1Sam. 28:13-19
 - d. Sheol was a two-fold compartment for those who died in faith, Jonathan and his brothers perhaps and those who died apart from faith, Saul, unless you are

willing to tell me that those who die seeking mediums are going to heaven!

2. The second is Saul's armor bearer. 1Sam. 31:5
 - a. The text says, "And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell on his sword and died with him."
 - b. The text says, the armor-bearer, "saw that Saul was dead" and that "he died with him "Saul".
 - c. Both Saul and his armor-bearer fulfill the definition of suicide!
3. The third is Ahithophel. 2Sam. 17:23
 - a. Ahithophel was David's friend and counselor, but he deflected the Absalom's side at the rebellion.
 - b. The text reads, "Now when **Ahithophel** saw that his advice was not followed, he saddled a donkey, and arose and went home to his house, to his city. Then he put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died; and he was buried in his father's tomb."
 - c. David's enemies were God's enemies!
4. The fourth is Zimri, an idolatrous king of Israel. 1Kings 16:9-10, 18
 - a. Zimri was the commander of King Elah, king of Israel who he conspired against and killed Elah reigning in his stead.
 - b. When Omri and all of Israel heard they came against Zimri and when he saw the

- city was taken he went into the citadel of the king's house set it on fire and killed himself by the fire.
5. The fifth and last is Judas Iscariot, the only one in the New Testament.
 - a. "Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself." Matt. 27:5
 - b. "Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails **gushed out**." Acts 1:18
 - c. The four of the five recorded suicides reveal they were not right with God at the time, with the exception of Saul's armor-bearer, we do not know anything.
 6. Many today read clinical depression into some of the biblical characters and interpret them as wanting to commit suicide.
 - a. Like Elijah, "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, **take my life**, for I am no better than **my** fathers!" 1Kings 19:4
 - b. They read into the text the current culture and world view of our day, he did not say "I am going to take my life", but asked God, "take my life", a huge difference!

- C. The act of suicide is in conflict with the new creation in Christ.
 1. Suicide is an act of hopeless despair for those who do not know Jesus as Savior, "that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having **no hope** and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Eph. 2:12-13
 - a. After we are saved we have the only and greatest hope.
 - b. A new heart and mind.
 - c. A new and certain hope.
 - d. A new world view, a Scriptural one.
 2. Suicide is not taught as a Christian doctrine nor practice in Scripture or history.
 - a. The Christians under persecution cast to the lions did not commit suicide prior.
 - b. The Christians that were tortured and burnt at the stake under the Catholic Church did not commit suicide, but prayed for those lighting the wood.
 3. Suicide is a pagan or atheistic practice.
 - * Paul prevented the suicide of the Philippian jailer and won him to Christ, "Do yourself no harm". Acts 16:28c
 4. Our body is not our own, we have been bought with a price, it is the temple of God. 1Cor. 6:19-20

* “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I **live on in the flesh**, this will mean **fruit from my labor**; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.” Phil. 1:21-22

5. The very first government God gave to Noah involved the taking of life and capital punishment, “Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.” Gen. 9:5-6

* The foundation and source with the Ten Commandments of all human government.

6. Suicide is not and should not be presented by Pastors or Christians as a “fast pass or backdoor to heaven”.
- a. It is not a celebration, but a lamentation!
 - b. We need to be compassionate and sympathetic to those thinking of suicide and the families left to deal with life.
 - b. There has been a paradigm shift in the church to the medical model that everything is a disease, not sin, Political Correctness and a victim mentality.
 - c. Paul said, “I die daily”. 1Cor. 15:31
7. God will hold every Pastor and Christian responsible for the blood of those who take

their lives because of their permissive and celebration of suicide as a guarantee to be in heaven, only God knows!

* The principle for this great accountability is given by God warning Ezekiel, the watchman, if he did not warn the wicked from repenting of their evil. Ezk. 33:18

8. The Scriptures prohibit the taking of a life, apart from self-defense and war, yet many in the church legitimize suicide by asking a “strawman question”, “What believer when they die does not have some unconfessed sins?”
- a. Does that mean we don’t have to confess sin after we come to Christ? Foolish!
 - b. There is a big difference with unconfessed sin at time of death and the willful act of killing oneself knowing the inability to repent after taking one’s life.
 - c. Where are the biblical texts? The defense for suicide is an emotional argument!
 - d. Many quote for suicide that nothing can separate a person from the love of Christ in Romans 8, yet the context is life in the Spirit, are they saying believers commit suicide being in the Spirit, Romans 7 is life in the flesh!
* This is Calvinism, eternal security!
 - e. So they call us uncompassionate, heartless, unsympathetic and legalistic!
9. God gives life and takes life, no one else!

* Listen to Job, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised” Job 1:21

10. How is it that we as Christians are against abortion, partial-birth abortion, euthenacia and assisted suicide and many Pastors and believers defend and justify Christian suicide, the taking of their own life?
- a. Job said, “Even though You slay me, yet will I trust in you.” He did not say, “Even though I slay myself”.
 - b. Paul said, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has **begun** a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Phil. 1:6

D. Suicide goes against the doctrine of perseverance through suffering and persecution that transforms us to the image of Jesus by the Holy Spirit that enables us.

1. Paul told the Corinthians how they almost died, “Yes, we had the sentence of **death** in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a **death**, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us.” 2Cor. 1:9-10
2. Paul was under great pressure and distress often, “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in **despair**; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck

down, but not destroyed-- always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” 2Cor. 4:8-11

3. Three times Paul asked God to take away his thorn in the flesh and God said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” And Paul said he rather boast in his infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon him. 2Cor. 12:8
4. Severe persecution had broken out, “Beloved, do not think it **strange** concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some **strange** thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.” 1Pet. 4:12-13

* There are times when believers will die as martyrs for Christ, but that is not suicide. Mk. 8:34-36; Jn. 13:37; Phil. 1:21-22
5. Paul was in prison at Rome before Nero.
 - a. “being **confident** of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Phil. 1:6
 - b. “according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed,

but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by **death**.” Phil. 1:20

- c. “I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me.” Phil. 4:13
- 6. Paul ended back in Rome to be executed by decapitation, but he did not commit suicide.
 - a. He told Timothy, “For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is **able to keep** what I have committed to Him until that Day.” 2Tim. 1:12
 - b. This is Paul’s last will and testament, “But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. For I am already being poured out as a **drink offering**, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” 2Tim. 4:5-8
- 7. Our post-modern culture and church believes that absolute objective truth does not exist by making the absolute objective

truth that it does not exist. A very ignorant and contradictory statement!

- a. A society that believes in relativism does not believe in the God or truth of the Bible, so it is difficult to argue for life and against suicide with them.
- b. The people of today believe each person is their own “higher power,” we can do with our lives what we want, even some that call themselves Christians.
- c. This type of narcissistic philosophy has permeated the church, Pastors and believers are redefining the nature of the church, a Christian, drinking and being worldly denying holiness and rejecting doctrine under the pretense of being compassionate and loving like Jesus.
- d. You cannot claim the love of Jesus and to be like Jesus, if you deny or reject the objective truths of the Bible!
- e. If God is the Lord of your life, then He retains ownership over your life all the days of your life.
- f. Jesus is the only one who can determine when our service is done or our intended purpose in life is fulfilled.
- g. The clear and consistent teaching of the Scriptures is that our lives belong to our Maker and that we are not to end them by our own will or purposes, but lived for His will and glory till He takes us home!

- h. I pray I am wrong, but if I am not, what heresy have I taught you by telling you to “abide in Christ”, I rather error on the safe side!

This is the Biblical view on suicide!

Illustration

An article entitles, “A Lesson From 29 Golden Gate Suicide Attempts”

1. The original account was first titled The Jumper, by Steve Taylor, Ph.D. The Jumpers opens by introducing us to a Ken Baldwin who had struggled with depression much of his life. The moment Ken Baldwin let go of the railing he immediately thought, “What am I doing? This was the worst thing I could do in my life.” He instantly thought of his wife and daughter and didn’t want to die.
2. All 29 people who survived their suicide attempts off San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge said they regretted their decision *as soon as they jumped*.

Conclusion

I pray God give us compassion, courage and wisdom as we have examined the topic of suicide from three perspectives of the history of man.

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