

HOW A CHRISTIAN DEALS WITH THE END OF LIFE

(By Gary Berdine; Supplemental study)

Intro - The advent of medical technology has brought about multiple techniques that may be used to prolong life when a person is in critical medical condition. Many of them are indeed wonderful. We at Tomlinson Run were blessed when Brother Carl Parsons at the age of 87 was able to have successful heart bypass surgery. We all know many examples of these type of life saving operations and procedures. However, we are also aware that there are times when medical science can not save our loved one. Cancer, in particular, is one disease that takes many, no matter how many treatments they have undergone. Some indeed are saved, but not all. Other problems, such as serious accidents, aneurysms, strokes, etc. can leave a person with bleak hope of recovery. Due to medical technology, modern medicine often can offer ways to keep a patient alive that were not available 50-100 years ago. Since these techniques exist, these questions are asked: "Must I use these techniques, or can I refused them? If a family member is in grave condition, may I direct the doctors to stop these extraordinary life-preserving techniques?" These questions are of particular significance to Christians. We can not just do whatever we feel like doing, but must make sure our decision is in harmony with the word of God. In this study, we will seek to examine these questions in light of the word of God. I am sure I will not answer every situation that may arise, but will try to be as comprehensive as possible.

I. Biblical Principles Concerning Life and Death

A. We are made in the image of God, and our lives have sacred value

Gen 1:26-27 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 27So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

1. This passage states that we have a value & place above all other forms of life on earth

Gen 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

2. That is why we must never treat human life like plant or animal life

3. God has sanctified human life by giving us a soul - refers to the sanctity of life

B. God is sovereign over human life

Rom 14:7-8 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. 8For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

Job 1:21 And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

1. Therefore, our decisions about human life must be in accordance with God's will - He possesses the ultimate authority over life & death

C. The Christian must not be enslaved by the fear of death

Heb 2:14-15 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; **15**And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

1. Christ has made it possible to not fear dying - we can now be saved from sin - have great promises - **John 14:1-3, I Cor. 15:50-58**

2. Being with Christ will be better

2 Cor 5:8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

Phil 1:23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

D. The Bible everywhere condemns unjust killing

1. It is God who declare capital punishment for those who unjustly kill another

Gen 9:5-6 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. **6**Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.

2. There is nothing in the scriptures permitting euthanasia or the intentional killing of another person because their condition appears terminal - they were allowed to die

E. Suicide is not condoned in the Scriptures

1. Saul

1 Chr 10:4 Then said Saul to his armor-bearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and abuse me. But his armor-bearer would not; for he was sore afraid. So Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.

2. Judas

Matt 27:3-5 Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was

condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. 5And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

3. All suicides were committed by sinful men & dishonorably ended their lives

II. The Conduct of a Christian at Life's End

A. Many today would not be as careful as we are trying to be.

1. Doctor-assisted suicide, euthanasia would be practiced by many - more than you might think

2. Groups like the Hemlock Society have advocated the right to take your own life at any time, for any reason

B. We must be careful that we never let "quality of life" or "worth of the person's life" shade our decisions - remember - God is sovereign over life

1. Down's syndrome, crippled, amputee, etc. not good enough reason to end life

C. Therefore, we must resist any form of suicide, self-inflicted or doctor-assisted

1. Even if pain is great

2. Example of Job - **Job 1:21-22**; longed to die - **Job 3:11, 20-23; 7:15-16; 42:10-12**

3. Christ

Heb 5:8-9 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; 9And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

Heb 2:10 For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

D. Foregoing Therapy - A Time to Die - Permissible Acquiescence

Ecl 3:1-2 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: 2A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

1. Since there was little effective medical therapy available in Bible times, we can offer no examples of foregoing life-prolonging therapy. But the Bible does contain instructive examples of righteous people acquiescing to death.

2. Israel - **Gen 49:29-33**

3. Joseph - **Gen 50:24-26**

4. Simeon - **Luke 2:25-32**

5. Jesus - refused wine mingled with myrrh - a narcotic used to deaden pain

Mark 15:23 And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received

it not.

6. He “gave up the ghost” - **Matt 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30** - all writers careful to point out Christ chose when to let go of life

III. The Christian in Today’s World - Practical Applications

- A. Why can’t a faithful person, who has walked with God in their life, faced with incurable illness or marginally effective treatment, just decide to “give up the ghost” and go to prepare for his reward, as these did?
1. I knew a Christian sister who was diagnosed with incurable cancer, who decided not to undergo chemotherapy, radiation, etc. - she decided to devote the rest of her days to prayer, and if the Lord would have decided to spare her, she would have accepted it. The Lord decided to take her. Who can fault that kind of thinking?
- B. Doctor’s, by training, often want to try everything they can to save a patient
1. Sometimes their suggestions help - Brother Parsons
 2. Sometimes they don’t - co-worker’s child died during a heart operation
 3. A ventilator can keep a person going till they get stronger - then they get off the ventilator
 4. Sometimes people are kept for very long times on ventilators, and never can come off
 5. IV therapy, feeding tubes, etc. all can help - but is a patient duty bound to use them when the prognosis is still terminal?
 6. Based on what we have studied, I have concluded that we must remember that God is sovereign when it comes to life, NOT DOCTORS - doctors are not God
 7. God has given us a brain, heart, lungs, a mouth, and stomach to sustain our lives - anytime a medical procedure replaces the use of normal body functions, it is our decision whether to painfully prolong our lives with the medical procedures available, or to “give up the ghost”
 8. Our family needs to be instructed as to our wishes. Perhaps a medical power of attorney would be a good idea to avoid arguments with doctors or other parties when we are unconscious or unable to communicate our wishes. And then, whatever each person decides should be respected. If a person wants to be hooked up to every machine available, that is their prerogative. If they don’t, their wishes should be respected by all.

Conc - Hope this helps. I am sure you will find people that agree and disagree. If you would like to read more on this issue, a web site entitled “Biblical Medical Ethics” was helpful to me. It has many articles by doctors who are believers in God, but not members of the church of Christ. The brethren have very little that I could find on this issue. (Presented by Gary Berdine at Lisbon, OH - 6-26-05)