

Christian Life Resources

Position Statement on Euthanasia

PREAMBLE

A Christian demonstrates thankfulness to a loving and forgiving God by doing what is good and avoiding what is evil. The Word of God, which is the 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament, proclaims God's will for what is to be done and what is to be avoided.

It is that same Word of God which compels Christians and Christian agencies to perform charitable work for the care of others. Christians and Christian agencies are also compelled to commend faithful living and point out error by proclaiming God's Word. It is the purpose of this statement to glorify God by proclaiming His truth, speaking against error, and advocating charitable work for the benefit of others.

ABSTRACT

Any practice of euthanasia, the intent of which is to shorten one's own life or the life of another person, is a practice condemned by the Word of God and therefore is wrong. All people are to protect life and carry the burdens of others. Apart from God's expressed permission, it is wrong to take human life, even when we do not like the quality of that life.

BACKGROUND

The growing interest in the legalization of assisted suicide and advocacy of so-called "death with dignity" prompts this statement and the need for Christian Life Resources to clearly reflect the teachings of God's Word on the matter.

The issues for Christians in the debate on euthanasia are:

- The witness of God's Word on the matter;
- The competing interests between individual freedom and submission to God's will;
- The application of Christian beliefs in the public arena;
- The contrast of Christian life-affirming compassion with the practice of euthanasia;
- The Christian concern for the body beginning with concern for the soul.

TERMINOLOGY

Assisted Suicide: The act of self-killing with the assistance of another person.

Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care: A medical directive in which a person designates medical

care wishes and appoints a health care agent.

Euthanasia: The active or passive ending of a life, usually with the intent to end suffering or terminate a life of perceived lesser quality. This term applies to the following specific acts:

Extraordinary Means: Those treatments, medicines and operations which are gravely burdensome to the patient, and which cannot be obtained or used without excessive expense, pain or other inconvenience or which, if used, would not offer a reasonable hope of benefit to the patient.

Genocide: The systematic and planned extermination of an entire class of people based on nationality, race, religion, disability, age, or political convictions.

Health Care Agent (Surrogate): One designated in a medical directive to make health care decisions for another.

Imminent: A term used to describe the expectation that death will occur within a few hours or days.

Living Will: A medical directive in which a person states medical treatment wishes.

Medical Directive: A legal document in which a person designates medical care wishes in the event he or she is declared legally incapacitated.

Palliative Sedation: The active administration of pain-relieving medication for comfort and care, not for the specific or intentional purpose of shortening life. (Sometimes this term is unfortunately used as a euphemism for terminal sedation [see above]).

Passive Euthanasia: The intentional refusal to receive or administer necessary sustentative or curative treatment for the specific purpose of shortening life.

Suicide: The act or an instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally.

Terminal: A term used to describe a health condition that is expected to cause death after an extended period of time (in contrast to the comparatively shorter period of time implied by the term "imminent").

Terminal Sedation: The act of administering pain-relieving medication for the specific and intentional purpose of shortening life.

UDDA: The Unified Determination of Death Act. Released in 1981 by the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research containing the following criteria for determining death: "An individual who has sustained either (1) irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions or (2) irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem. A determination of death must be made in accordance with accepted medical standards."

THE ISSUES

SECTION 1: THE PERTINENCE OF GOD'S WORD ON THIS MATTER

The term, "euthanasia," comes from the combination of two Greek words "eu" (which means "good") and "thanatos" (which means "death") which literally translated means "good death." The term could be understood to refer to a comfortable death without an intent to shorten life. It is, however, a term used to describe efforts to terminate life when deemed to have little functional value and/or is filled with pain. Concern has also been expressed that euthanasia would be or is practiced for the purposes of genocide and the furtherance of "valued" and "quality" lives.

Collateral to the topic of euthanasia is the issue of the definition or redefinition of death. While the UDDA definition addresses the matter from a strictly physical viewpoint, there is increasing interest in defining death to be inclusive of both the quality of life and its physical presence.

While the Bible does not mention "euthanasia," it does establish abiding principles and practical implications that shed light on God's will in this matter.

Human Beings Are Unique and Prized in All God's Creation

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26,27)

God distinguishes human beings by giving them authority over all other living things. God further distinguishes human beings by the unique way He created them in His own image.

Human Beings Consist of Body and Soul

...and the dust turns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

Human beings on earth are further distinguished by their unique constitution of both body and soul. The possession of a soul is exclusively assigned to human beings (Definition – Soul: The spiritual being which, when united with a body, makes a living human person).

Protecting the Life of Human Beings Is a Primary Concern

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. (Genesis 9:6)

You shall not murder. (Exodus 20:13)

Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. (1 John 3:15)

Murder is so serious that it jeopardizes the eternal welfare of the murderer. Even though human beings after the flood were permitted to take plant and animal life for food, they are not to take human life, because, unlike animal life, it was created in the image of God. God allows for the practice of capital punishment (see also Romans 13:4) as just retribution for an act of murder to demonstrate its seriousness.

Human Beings Face an Eternal Accounting for Sin

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. (Mark 9:43)

For the wages of sin is death... (Romans 6:23a)

...as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment... (Hebrews 9:27)

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (2 Thessalonians 1:6-8)

In contrast to animals and other forms of life, human beings are moral creatures who are responsible for their actions and face eternal consequences because of sin.

The End of Human Life Brings Judgment for Everyone

Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment. (Hebrews 9:27)

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. (Revelation 20:12)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Every person's earthly life ends at death. The finality of death is marked by the inability to undo or redo one's life. Upon death, every person faces judgment before God. There is no second chance.

The Just Judgment for Sin Is Eternal Condemnation

...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

For the wages of sin is death... (Romans 6:23)

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41)

At death comes the judgment for sin, prescribed in God's Word as eternal condemnation for all people because all people have sinned.

All Human Beings Are Declared Forgiven and Righteous in Christ (Objective Justification)

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:20-24)

Christ died for sins once for all. (1 Peter 3:18)

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men... (1 Timothy 2:5,6)

Jesus' work of salvation was for all people. The salvation He brought was for everyone. Objectively speaking, His sacrifice demonstrated the equal value of all human beings.

Forgiveness and Eternal Life Are Possessed by Faith (Subjective Justification)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8,9)

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him. (John 3:36)

The individual receives this free gift of forgiveness through Christ, not by works, but only by God's gracious gift of faith. Everyone who believes in Jesus as the eternal Savior from sin has faith, and it is that faith that saves a person eternally. A person's lifetime is referred to as God's time of grace for that person.

Christians Seek to Glorify God When Making Decisions about Human Life

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. (James 4:13-17)

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue. All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord. (Proverbs 16:1,2)

While living, it is the expression of faith that a person devotes all he or she does to the glory of God. Because God's will reigns supreme, decisions about caring for human life are always judged by the standard of God's Word.

Conclusion

Apart from God's permission or directive to take human life, human beings who take human life commit murder. Terminating that life cuts short both the victim's time of grace and the time of service to God in this life.

SECTION 2: THE POTENTIAL CONFLICT BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AND ACQUIESCENCE TO GOD'S WILL

Human beings enjoy a particular blessing from God in the exercise of personal freedom and autonomy. There are times, however, when the exercise of free will can run contrary to the will of God.

Christians Are Free From the Curse of Sin

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:34-36)

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4)

By fulfilling the law on our behalf, Jesus freed us from the eternal curse of sin.

Christian Freedom Finds Its Expression in Keeping the Will of God

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. (Galatians 5:13)

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. (1 Corinthians 8:9)

"Everything is permissible" — but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible" — but not everything is constructive. (1 Corinthians 10:23)

Freedom won by Christ is not the freedom to do wrong but is subject to the will of God. Freedom finds both its beginning and end in God's Word and His will that we should love our neighbor.

Conclusion

Christians express their freedom through the moral obligation of the law. Obedience to the will of God is an expression of love for God and for our fellow human beings. A Christian does not have the right to choose that which is contrary to God's will. Apart from God's expressed command, Christians cannot take human life but rather are obliged to protect it.

SECTION 3: THE APPLICATION OF CHRISTIAN BELIEFS IN THE PUBLIC ARENA

Opponents of euthanasia, suicide, or assisted suicide are often accused of trying to push their religious views onto the rest of society. In reality, those who favor euthanasia and its various aberrations do the same when they hope to push on all of society their personally-held conviction which allows for euthanasia. Aside from that illogic, God's Word guides us to recognize the distinction between privately-held convictions and the Christian's role in reflecting those convictions to the world.

God's Word Speaks Clearly Concerning the Taking of Human Life

See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand. (Deuteronomy 32:39)

You shall not murder. (Exodus 20:13)

God condemns murder as sin. Christians testify to that truth.

Man Has a Natural Knowledge of the Law That Can Be Sensitized

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. (Romans 2:14,15)

Even unbelieving people have knowledge of God's law written in their hearts, albeit limited and incomplete. Christians appeal to that knowledge when testifying that murder is wrong.

When Others Need Our Help We Do Not Remain Silent

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:3-5)

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. (Matthew 25:35,36)

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (2 Corinthians 5:14,15)

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. (Proverbs 31:8)

Motivated by their love for Christ, Christians put their faith into action.

Conclusion

Christians are faithful witnesses to God's truth in this world. Therefore, they publicly testify to the sanctity of human life and the sinfulness of euthanasia. In so doing, they protect human life and proclaim God's holy truths.

SECTION 4: THE CHARITABLE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE PRACTICE OF EUTHANASIA

The obligation to correct error is clearly taught in God's Word. Also clearly taught is the responsibility of Christians to ease suffering, help the needy, and care for others.

Life Is a Blessing from God and All Are Stewards of That Blessing

I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her. (Genesis 17:16)

Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3-5)

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. (Matthew 25:35,36)

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3,4)

Life is God's gift and therefore a blessing from Him. It is not a right or a presumption but a treasure entrusted for care and safe-keeping. For that reason we will do all we can to protect and care for our lives, as well as protect and care for the lives of others.

Christians Have a Responsibility for Themselves

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (Romans 6:13)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1)

After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church - for we are members of his body. (Ephesians 5:29,30)

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19,20)

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:16)

Christians view the human body as God's creation. They therefore care for it and protect it from danger as a blessing entrusted to them by God.

Christians Care for Family Members

Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:9-12)

But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God . . . If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:4,8)

For the Christian, love for others begins with the compassion and care shown to fellow family members.

Christians Care for Fellow Christians

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:10)

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

Christians treasure the common bond of faith and show sacrificial love and concern for the bodily welfare of their fellow Christians.

Christians Are Concerned for Others

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. (Proverbs 31:8)

Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone. (Psalm 71:9)

Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:34-40)

Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have." "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:30-37)

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:43-45)

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3,4)

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism . . . But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. (James 2:1,9)

It is God's will that Christians obey Him by protecting and caring for life regardless of its age or quality. That includes various acts of charity and sacrifice which respect the will of God and exhibit a corresponding love for others. As Jesus died for all people, our love is to imitate equal concern for all people.

SECTION 5: THE CHRISTIAN CONCERN FOR THE BODY BEGINS WITH CONCERN FOR THE SOUL

The Soul Is the Preeminent Concern of Christians

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? (Luke 9:25)

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. (Philippians 3:7)

Worldly gain of fame, fortune, or life pale in comparison with the greatest treasure, the soul, redeemed

by the blood of Christ. Concern for the life and health of others is important but is secondary to our concern for the souls of those who are ailing or dying and the souls of those who would act or advocate to terminate life.

Because Terminating Life Is Contrary To God's Word, Terminating It or Advocating Its Termination Endangers The Souls Of Those Who Do So

“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked man, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself. “Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took warning, and you will have saved yourself.” (Ezekiel 3:17-21)

The Christian's concern for souls includes concern for those who would advocate and assist in terminating lives. The Christian responsibility is to witness to the error of such actions.

SUMMARY STATEMENT ON EUTHANASIA

God's Word teaches that human life is to be protected throughout its stages of development, growth, and decline. Unless God has made an allowance for or commanded it to occur, human life is not to be ended actively or passively by anyone. Rather, the clear will of God is to love all people as we have been loved, as witnessed in the sacrificial life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, as our Savior from sin. Even when life loses its earthly quality, we care for it as a precious gift from God, created by Him and redeemed by Him through Jesus. Because of Christ's sacrifice we are compelled to show concern not just for lives but especially for the souls of all people, including those who would advocate or assist in terminating life. Since this is God's position, it is therefore the position of Christian Life Resources.

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CHRISTIAN LIFE RESOURCES

Christian Life Resources' ministry includes a 24-hour helpline, more than 15 pregnancy care centers across the U.S., a home for single mothers in Milwaukee, WI, online information and education at www.ChristianLifeResources.com, Christian medical directives, speakers on life and family issues, our official publication *Clearly Caring* magazine that addresses life and family issues, and much more!

"The mission of Christian Life Resources is to use life and family issues as bridges to convey the love of God and the message of salvation through Christ."

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