

Ethics at the End of Life

1. The believer entrusts the end of his life to God.

Genesis 3:19: [God said to Adam:] "For dust you are and to dust you will return."

Psalm 90:2,3,5: From everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men..." You sweep men away in the sleep of death.

1 Samuel 2:6: The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.

Psalm 31:15: My times are in your hands.

Psalm 139:16: All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Acts 17:26: From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.

God specifies the exact means (conception) by which he begins life. Thus he also indicates the exact time at which he begins human life. God says that the end of life is also within his control, but he does not specify the means or the time he will make it happen. Therefore, in addition to trusting that God ends life, the Christian must apply other ethical principles to end of life decisions.

2. Toward the end of life, we have grown to trust that suffering has a god-pleasing purpose.

Hebrews 12:5-7: My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

Romans 8:18: I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Romans 5:2-4: We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character, and character, hope.

John 16:33: [Jesus said,] "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

2 Corinthians 12:8-10: Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take away [my thorn in the

flesh] from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in [your] weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me...For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Maintaining life is a higher goal than avoiding suffering. **Shortening a patient's time of suffering also shortens his time of grace.** To ease or comfort suffering in order to extend life and serve our neighbor, of course, is commanded by God. BUT, to hasten or cause death (which God reserves for his control) in order to avoid suffering (which God allows for his good purposes) is doubly sinful. God uses our last bitter hours to draw us to himself and to the promises of his Word, so that we will not die in smug self-reliance. Since life is God's jurisdiction, humans may not cause death as a "painkiller."

3. We believe that the eternal welfare of the soul is more important than the short term good of the body.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18: For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Matthew 10:28: 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.

3 John 2: Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.

When we prepare for our hospital visit, we will give more attention to what we will share from the Word and how we will phrase our prayers with our loved one than anguishing about which medical procedure is more godly. Putting these principles into practice at critical times, we might say: **When death is imminent, we may withdraw any and all medications and treatments except those which relieve pain. Generally, we may conclude that death is imminent when two or more medical practitioners agree that our loved one, regardless of treatment, will not live for more than a day or two. God does not expect us to be fortune tellers. As good stewards, we can only use the knowledge and resources that are known and available to us when we make our decision. We may make wrong decisions. If we are in doubt, we should err on the side of preserving God's gift of life rather than hastening death.**

4. A spiritual person will recognize sinful motives in end of life decision making.

A. Greed: health care at all levels is expensive: inheritances can be spent in days

Luke 10:34,35: He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey. 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.

1 Timothy 6:9: People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

B. Selfishness: the desire to be relieved of the duty of serving the dying.

Galatians 6:9: Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the household of faith.

C. Unspirituality: Neglecting to witness to and pray for our loved ones.

1 Peter 3:15: Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

5. Trusting in these principles, we confidently make decisions at the end of life, trusting that our Christian ethic is the only ethic that offers forgiveness.

Matthew 6:12: Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **Daniel 9:9:** The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him.

Psalms 130:4: But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.

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