

Embrace Life

by Naomi Englebert

Technological and medical advancements increasingly place pressure on our culture to settle end of life issues. Led by trails of endless debates, people look everywhere for answers to their questions. Oftentimes, their search fails to examine the Word of God, not realising that it carries clear instructions for this present day. Our Creator and Saviour is truly specific concerning the end of life.

What is the value of life to God? In the book of Genesis we are told that man was created in God's image (Genesis 1:26). We are not puppets, dolls or home-made crafts made from scraps. We were also made fearfully and wonderfully (Psalms 139:17). Jesus Christ valued our lives unconditionally enough to die for us (John 3:16). Since our lives are valuable in His sight, should we not acknowledge His opinion on our death as well?

The Bible declares in Hebrew 9:27, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement:" Job 14:5 tells us "...our days are determined..." God informs us that He knows when we will die; that He is in control. What about those however, who plan their own death by

euthanasia or doctor assisted suicide? The elderly, handicapped or terminally ill usually request these procedures because it offers a painless death from “advanced terminal illness ... or grave physical handicap”.¹ The issue therefore, involves physical challenges. How does God value life at this point? Throughout the Gospels, Jesus had compassion on the sick, maimed, and blind, and healed them. Although Christ may not perform public miracles today, we are told that His compassions fail not (Lamentations 3:22), and that He does not approve of premature death to end pain. One quadriplegic has said of her position, “No matter what men think of those with physical or mental disabilities, God holds each life to be intrinsically valuable beyond measure.”² On the other hand, a young woman dealing with cerebral palsy has asked court permission to die by euthanasia saying that her situation “is going to keep me from doing the living I want to do.”³

¹ James D. Torr, *Euthanasia: opposing viewpoints*, Greenhaven Press, San Diego, CA 2000, p.19, reprinted from Derek Humphrey, “Why I believe in Voluntary Euthanasia,” 1995 Euthanasia Research & Guidance Organization, (ERGO!) website article at www.finalexit.org, by permission of author.

² Gary E. McCuen, Gary E. McCuen Publications, Inc., Hudson, WI, 1994, p.148, Debbie Lynne Simmons, “A Quadriplegic Looks at Euthanasia,” *The Plough*, March-April, 1985. Reprinted with permission.

³ *Ibid...*p.146

Derek Humphrey, author of several books on euthanasia has offered his advice, “What many people do not realise is that for many people just knowing how to kill themselves is in itself of great comfort. It gives them the assurance to fight harder and therefore often extends lives just a bit longer.”⁴ Humphrey has now alluded to the fact that euthanasia and assisted suicide are acts of killing. God forbids killing of persons in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5). In addition, if these victims know when and how they will die, then is their day of death appointed unto them or by them? In I Samuel 2:6 it read, “The LORD killeth, and maketh alive...” Euthanasia and assisted suicide are clearly wrong in God’s eyes.

Secondly, how does God value life for those who are in coma or mentally unable to function? ‘To pull the plug’ is an often debated topic. “All killing of patients is morally wrong, while allowing some patients to die is

⁴ James D. Torr, Euthanasia: opposing viewpoints, Greenhaven Press, San Diego, CA 2000, reprinted from Derek Humphrey, “Why I believe in Voluntary Euthanasia,” 1995 Euthanasia Research & Guidance Organization, (ERGO!) website article at www.finalexit.org, by permission of author.

not,”⁵ said David Sulmasy, professor of medicine at the Center for Clinical Bioethics at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. His argument, taken from an article in the St. Anthony Messenger, focuses on intentions. If one pulls life support off a relative with the intention of death, it is killing, but if life support is removed understanding that the patient may or may not need it is not killing.⁶ Can one’s heart be trusted to make decisions such as this? The Bible tells us in Jeremiah 17 that the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. This writer believes it must involve more than intentions, whether good or bad.

One must understand the difference between coma and brain death situations. Many people awake from coma, recover, and lead normal lives. Removing life support from one in a coma is premature death and Biblically wrong; for God makes it clear that He hates hands that shed innocent blood (Proverbs 6:18). Those who experience brain death, however, possess no brain activity such as thinking, judgement, or reasoning, but

⁵ James D. Torr, *Euthanasia: opposing viewpoints*, Greenhaven Press, San diego, CA 2000, p.24, reprinted from Daniel P. Sulmasy, “Death with Dignity: a Franciscan Doctor’s Perspective,” St. Anthony Messenger, January 1996, by permission of author.

⁶ Ibid...pp. 28-29

may continue to breathe and maintain normal heartbeat.⁷ While medical science is capable of keeping this individual alive, is it a Biblical command to do so?

We should respect all life, but also understand that artificial life is not allowing God to take His children home (Psalms 116:15). It may be that God's mention of a "time to die" in Ecclesiastes applies to this circumstance, but great precaution must still be ensured involving any termination of life.

One more subject concerning the end of life is the elderly. This age group is vulnerable to daily attack and abuse. Does the Bible comment on the value of the old? Absolutely! Leviticus 19:32 commands us to "rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God..." While in some cases the elderly consent to premature death, in other instances it is mainly the children's suggestions for convenient purposes. If we connive to end the lives of the elderly on the basis of selfish reasons, we have committed premeditated murder, which is

⁷ Patricia Anderson, *Affairs in Order*, Macmillan Publishing, New York, NY, 1991, p.12

forbidden in Matthew 5:21, and deserve only death as well (Deuteronomy 19:21)

Age, physical handicaps, or mental conditions provide no limits to God's love for man (I John 4:10) unless the phrase "some of the world" substitutes the word "world" in John 3:16. In Acts 17:24-25 we read, "God...giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." Ecclesiastes 8:8 tells us that "There is no man that hath power...in the day of death:" God is our giver of life, our executor of death; therefore, one should embrace the life God has given with the time He has provided.