

Suicide

*I am only dealing here with a mentally competent person committing suicide.

What Suicide Is Not

It is not an unforgivable sin. There is an unforgivable sin in the Bible, ... *he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him* (Luke 12:10). This statement was made by Christ after He was accused of casting out demons by the power of Satan. When Christ performed a miracle by the power of the Holy Spirit and the Pharisees attributed Christ's power to Satan—that sin was unforgivable. Clearly, this passage has nothing to do with suicide.

It is not a sentence to hell. Hell is for those who reject Christ as God and Savior, not for those who commit suicide. Certainly, there will be those who commit suicide who are in hell, but their condemnation has nothing to do with their act of suicide. *He who has believed...shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned* (Mark 16:16).

It is not the will of God. All of our days are numbered by God, and no one dies before it is God's time (Psalm 139:16) because God is in control of all deaths. *The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up* (1 Samuel 2:6). ... *He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else... For in Him we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:25, 28). *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). But just because God will not stop a suicide, and, in fact, His plan includes them, does not mean that God is pleased with that decision. You can never assume just because something is in the plan of God, it is the will of God.

It is not euthanasia. "Euthanasia" is a Greek word meaning "good death." The Columbia Encyclopedia defines it as "...either painlessly putting to death or failing to prevent death from natural causes in cases of terminal illness or irreversible coma." Whether euthanasia is right or not is not dealt with here. Euthanasia involves the death of someone who is dying, however that death occurs. Suicide involves the death of someone who is not dying.

It is not self-murder. I have always concluded that suicide is sinful because it is self-murder. The dictionary defines suicide as "the act of killing oneself intentionally." Murder is the unlawful, premeditated killing of one human being by another. Murder, by definition (biblical or otherwise), necessitates killing another person. Suicide, therefore, is not murder. The Bible condemns murder (Numbers 35:30). There is no verse in the Bible condemning suicide. The question remains, then, "Is suicide sin?"

What Suicide Is

To answer that question, I would like to refine the definition of suicide. I would like to suggest that the act of killing oneself intentionally, for the sake of saving others, is not suicide. For example, Jonah said, *Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you* (1:12). When Jonah told the men on the boat to throw him overboard, he may have been trying to kill himself, but this was not an attempted suicide because his motive was to save others.

If suicide is broadly defined as killing oneself, then you could argue that Jesus died by suicide—for He certainly went to the cross voluntarily. In fact, He pursued it. But we never see His death labeled that way. His death was not suicidal, it was sacrificial. I, therefore, want to argue that a better

definition of suicide is, “the non-sacrificial act of someone (who is not imminently dying) killing oneself intentionally.”

Biblical Examples of Suicide

Ahithophel was a royal counselor of King David. He had a position of leadership and power in the kingdom. But *when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and arose and went to his home, to his city, and set his house in order, and strangled himself...* (2 Samuel 17:23). It appears that Ahithophel killed himself because he feared he had become an enemy of the king.

King Saul also killed himself because of fear. *Then Saul said to his armor bearer, “Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, otherwise these uncircumcised will come and pierce me through and make sport of me. But his armor bearer would not. So Saul took his sword and fell on it. When his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died with him* (1 Samuel 31:4-5). While Saul did kill himself, his death may not be considered a suicide since it appears that he was in the process of dying. His armor bearer, however, certainly committed suicide as did Zimri who *burned the king’s house over him* (1 Kings 16:18).

Judas determined that he could not live with himself after he betrayed Jesus. *Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that he had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” But they said, “What is that to us? See to that yourself!” And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself* (Matthew 27:3-5).

What about Samson?

Samson was a judge in Israel. He was given incredible strength from God for the purpose of subduing the Philistines. Samson had great success until he gave away his secret to a woman named Delilah. After the Philistines cut his hair, God took his strength away. The Philistines had gouged out Samson’s eyes and were making him work in prison (Judges 16:25-30).

It appears as though Samson killed himself because he was mad about his eyes. Samson was never known for his maturity. He made many selfish decisions throughout his life, but God used him anyway. And Samson was willing to be used by God. He willingly kept the Nazirite vow. He willingly killed those oppressing Israel. And he willingly died doing what he had come into the world to do—destroy Philistines. Just prior to Samson’s death, *the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said, “Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands.” When the people saw him, they praised their god, for they said, “Our god has given our enemy into our hands”* (Judges 16:23-24). The Philistines gathered to mock God. Samson appealed to God for their destruction. God mercifully granted his request, allowing Samson to serve Him this one last time. Samson’s death, therefore, was indeed sacrificial, not suicidal.

Shouldn’t Christians Want to Die?

Paul said, *For me to live is Christ and to die is gain* (Philippians 1:21). There is something to be desired in death, since it is our access to heaven and Christ. But God has us here for His service, and He will use us as we make ourselves willing and able to be used. If we commit suicide, we eliminate any possibility of being used by God in this world. Paul knew that it would be good to die, but He also knew it would be better to stay and serve.

Besides Jesus, no biblical character suffered more than Job. After he lost everything he owned and after the death of all of his children, Job said, *Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?* (3:11). Not only did Job wish he was dead, his wife encouraged him to get himself killed. *Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!"* (2:9). Job's response to his wife is the reason someone should not commit suicide. *But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?"* (2:10).

What is consistent with those who commit suicide is their lack of faith and trust in God. Zimri feared the Israelites, Judas' remorse was so intense that he could not live with his decision, and Ahithophel couldn't cope with his rejection. Godly people see their circumstances as a work of God. Even when evil men were trying to kill David, even when Paul was hungry, beaten, and afraid, even when Job lost everything including his children, they all found a way to survive. And they not only survived, they all were able to learn, grow, and praise God for the pains and sorrows in their lives (Psalm 119:71; 1 Corinthians 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 1:5; 11:24-28).

Conclusion

1. Suicide is wrong because it destroys an image bearer. Man was made in the image of God. It is for this very reason that God forbids taking another person's life. *Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man* (Genesis 9:6). As image bearers, people have intrinsic value. It is true that this verse is specifically forbidding murder, and suicide is not murder, but the reason murder is sinful is because shedding the blood of an image bearer is wrong, and suicide sheds the blood of an image bearer. When the Philippian jailer was about to kill himself, *Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!"* (Acts 16:28). Paul didn't know anything about this person, but he knew he should live.
2. Suicide is wrong because it is a rejection of God's choice. Every person exists by the will of God. As a result, man has a responsibility to God since there is a purpose for each person's life. Suicide is disagreeing with God. *Who are you, O man, who answers back to God?* (Romans 9:20-21). Suicide eliminates our ability to serve God. Job wished he had never been born, but he did not reject God's choice that he live and his responsibility to God by killing himself. Unknown to him, he had more children to raise! Geisler and Moreland put it this way:
I should keep on living, not based on the satisfaction of my individual desire and the quality of my life, but because I have a duty to live owed to our Creator. Living is an obligation in that we are to go on living even when we are far from figuring out why things are happening to us. This obligation expresses the rational belief that God is there and gives purpose to life in our hardships" (*The Life and Death Debate: Moral Issues of Our Time*, 83-102).
Paul came to this conclusion when he told the Philippians that he would rather die, but it was necessary to stay and serve (Philippians 1:24).
3. Suicide is wrong because it is an act of selfishness. Acting according to your own selfish desire is sinful. *Do nothing from selfishness...but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves* (Philippians 2:3). The Bible says that we should love our neighbor and serve one another (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:13-14; James 2:8). Suicide is loving yourself above your neighbor, it's regarding yourself as more important than others. We are told to live for Christ, fixing our eyes on Jesus (Philippians 1:21; Hebrews 12:2). Is it possible to kill yourself if you are loving others and living for Christ?