

# Euthanasia

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades advances in medicine and medical technology have made it increasingly possible for life to be prolonged. It has been suggested, however, that doctors too often employ extraordinary methods in order to keep a patient alive — methods which may be unnecessary, given the patient's prognosis. A movement has arisen which purports to end prolonged dying. These people advocate what is known as euthanasia or mercy killing.

Many countries in the world are on the verge of making euthanasia a legal practice. Here in the United States, the California Bar Association has approved a resolution supporting doctor-assisted suicide, which would allow physicians to give terminally ill patients a prescription for a lethal dose of drugs. Most people are familiar with the name Dr. Kevorkian, better known as Dr. Death; a physician responsible for creating a machine which allowed the patient to self-induce drugs that would end their life if they were terminally ill. He has been in and out of jail and on starvation diets rather than give up the practice of assisting suicides. Much controversy has come about over the many deaths which he has enabled. The legal consequences, as well as the ethical ramifications have yet to be seen regarding this practice.

What exactly is euthanasia? Webster says the word comes from the Greek root that may be translated "good death," but more strictly translates "easy death" or "mercy killing." It is the practice of mercifully terminating life when a person is hopelessly ill or injured in order to hasten the relief of death. There are two forms of euthanasia which have been defined. Passive euthanasia is a refusal to use life-sustaining medical equipment to prolong life

when there is no prospect of recovery. Active euthanasia is when one deliberately takes action to end a person's life. This form is certainly subject to Biblical scrutiny.

### THE ROMAN CATHOLIC POSITION

Catholic theologians almost universally condemn active euthanasia as murder — therefore it is classified as a mortal sin. The reasoning for this teaching is that God has supreme dominion of His creation and there is a purpose for human suffering. In the New Testament there are at least five different places where there is a Biblical commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" (Matthew 5:21, 19:18, Mark 10:19, Luke 18:20, Romans 13:9). It is upon these verses that the Roman Catholic Church bases its argument against euthanasia.

### THE JEWISH POSITION

The Jewish faith has a very definite stand by which to judge the legality of euthanasia. Jewish rabbinic references do not condone it. Many Old Testament passages require the death penalty for anyone who would interrupt life or shorten it. The Jews believe that the decision of whether a machine is prolonging death is up to a doctor, but if the removal of the machine is interrupting life, then the decision no longer rests in the hands of the doctor, but in the hands of God.

### THE PROTESTANT POSITION

In the protestant religion there are a variety of views on euthanasia. Those who are opposed to the practice cite the teachings of Jesus against killing and suicide. They will also strongly argue that no man can "play God" and determine when human life should be limited.

Those in favor of legalized euthanasia often use Joseph Fletcher, well-known humanist, as their main advocate. Mr. Fletcher argues that euthanasia should be legalized because:

1. Suffering and pain are purposeless, demoralizing, and degrading.
2. Human personality and dignity are of

greater value than life itself.

3. Jesus statement in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the merciful," is just as important as "Thou shalt not kill."

### SECULAR ARGUMENTS AGAINST EUTHANASIA

1. If euthanasia was made legal it would be virtually impossible to determine whether the motive of the killer came entirely from compassion or whether it came from greed or other selfish reasons.
2. No law having to do with mercy killing would be able to account for every circumstance, and therefore would be either so complex as to make dying longer and less dignified, or it would have so few controls that abuses would occur. (Can you imagine each case being contested and being tried in our legal system?)
3. Supposed terminal illnesses can be misdiagnosed so that patients may feel inclined to make needless requests for a merciful death. Even conditions thought to be terminal may undergo unexpected remission. The medical books are full of cases where near-death patients experience remarkable recoveries.
4. Mistakes can be made with regard to supposed "incurable" diseases. The disease may be incorrectly diagnosed or may be able to be survived or cured.

### A BIBLICAL ARGUMENT AGAINST EUTHANASIA

In the case of King Saul (I Samuel 31:1-6), who was mortally wounded in the battle against the Philistines; he begged for his own armorbearer to kill him rather than to allow him to die slowly in torture or suffer humiliation from the enemy who would take him captive. Saul attempted suicide when his orderly refused.

Later (2 Samuel 1:1-10), an Amalekite from a neutral nation passed by and Saul begged

him to take his life. "Stand beside me and slay me for anguish has seized me and yet my life still lingers" (verse 9). His response was exactly that of the practitioner of euthanasia. "So I stood beside him and slew him because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen" (verse 10). What happened? God condemned it!

The Amalekite was killed for his act, but why? David described the act as "putting forth the hand to destroy" (2 Samuel 1:14). From his judgment we seemingly must conclude that it was completely unacceptable to God, regardless of the motive behind it. David equates the Amalekite's act with an act of assassination and we are left to assume that he reflected the Biblical stance of the sacredness of life and the importance of preserving it.

Also in the case of Job, we see where this would be a prime example for a case of euthanasia. If Job had taken the advice of his wife (Job 2:9), "then said his wife unto him, 'Doest thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God and die.'" For those who would practice euthanasia, this would be the answer, but let's hear what Job had to say by the inspiration of God (verse 10): "But he said unto her, 'Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' In all this did not Job sin with his lips." We see that God preserved Job's life and blessed him.

Remember, suffering enables a Christian to learn humility, and in so doing, we are better equipped to comfort others.

Performing active euthanasia causes the administrator of death to sin, and at the same time suicide for the one who requests such death. Taking one's own life, although it may be by the hand of another is still murder — self-murder.

Christians should know that euthanasia isn't an issue to be dismissed or ignored. It directly affects them because of the world in which

they must live. At the same time, mercy-killing lies in direct contradiction to Biblical teaching.

### CONCLUSION

We must continue to protest the horrible idea of euthanasia. Martin Niemoller, who when imprisoned for his stand against the Nazi regime The Third Reich said, "First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me."

The legalization of euthanasia represents a "Pandora's Box" of evils about to be thrust upon society. Christians must actively oppose this type of atrocity. John J. Davis explains, "Human life is sacred because God made man in His own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26,28). This canopy of sacredness extends throughout man's life and is not simply limited to those times and circumstances when man happens to be strong, independent, healthy, and fully conscience of his relationship to others."

Christians do not have an option as to whether they should care for those who cannot care for themselves. God's word contains specific commands regarding such action (James 1:27, Isaiah 1:11,23, Romans 15:1, Leviticus 19:32, Psalms 71:9). Ignoring these commands and remaining apathetic to the horror occurring around us invariably produces evil fruits. Let us stand against such evils as euthanasia. It is our Christian responsibility. ■

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