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EUTHANASIA

Euthanasia may be classified on the basis of several criteria. It may be passive or active. Passive euthanasia involves simply allowing the person to die through withholding or discontinuing treatment that supposed to prolong life. Active euthanasia involves some positive step to terminate life, such as administration of a toxic substance or injection of an air bubble into the bloodstream. Euthanasia may also be classified as voluntary or involuntary.

The word euthanasia is derived from two Greek words meaning "good" and "death". It refers to any attempt to prevent the process of death from being prolonged and/or painful in situations of inevitable and painful death. Often heavy medical expenditures are a factor. The heightening of the issue of euthanasia is in part a by-product of medical success.

Persons who formerly would have died at a relatively early age are now kept alive to the point of contracting diseases of older age or experiencing the general physical deterioration, which so often accompanies advanced years. With a rapidly increasing population of older persons in our society, euthanasia will become a larger issue.

Voluntary euthanasia is the case where the subject has indicated his desire for life to end. In involuntary euthanasia the decision is made for the subject by some third party, usually the closest relative. Thus there are four possible classes of euthanasia: voluntary passive, involuntary passive, voluntary active, and involuntary active.

Passive euthanasia is in fact quite widely practiced today. Typically the situation is one in which there is no medical prognosis of recovery or even of improvement. The patient is ordinarily in great discomfort or even acute pain.

Frequently great sympathetic distress is felt by the patient's loved ones as well, and in addition, crushing economic burdens may be imposed upon the family by prolonged costly medical care.

Some opponents of euthanasia advance what has been called the sanctity of life argument. On these terms life itself is a good, a gift from God. It should therefore be preserved by all means. However, while Scripture does accord a high value to life, it is questionable whether it is an absolute value, in disregard of other considerations. On the other side is the natural death argument. God is the giver and taker of life.

There is a time for death and when this time comes, the person is to die. We should not interfere with this occurrence. The difficulty with this argument is that it would preclude any medical assistance, even first aid, since that could be interpreted as (and might actually be) interference with the inevitability of death. This has caused some to distinguish between

more customary medical treatment and the more unusual (sometimes termed "heroic measures"), maintaining that we are obligated to take all normal steps to conserve life but need not take heroic measures. The difficulty with this approach is the relativity of the terms. What is extraordinary treatment now may be routine ten years from now.

Sooner or later, death is God's will (Hebrews 9:27). Mercy may call for permitting it, especially where the patient has declared that to be his wish. The use of a "living will" enables the next of kin to know the patient's wish when he may no longer be capable of expressing it.

Nonetheless, such a step is a sobering one, particularly where the patient is not a Christian, since it cuts off the last opportunity of accepting Christ. Christians will want to make certain that such persons have heard the gospel.

Active euthanasia presents somewhat different issues. Although it is currently illegal in most countries, appeals are being made for its legalization. Some simply reject this either as murder or as assisted suicide. It should be noted, however, that biblically not all cases of homicide were treated as murder.

There was condemnable killing (murder), excusable killing (accidental death), and even mandatory killing (warfare and capital punishment). Murder was intentional, premeditated, malicious taking of the life of someone not deserving of capital punishment and contrary to the wishes of the person. While involuntary active euthanasia contains too many of these features to be acceptable, voluntary active euthanasia is neither contrary to the wishes of the subject nor done for the purpose of inflicting harm.

Nor is the effort to treat this as suicide convincing. The Bible does not speak clearly regarding suicide, the cases, Judges 9:50-57; Saul, 1 Samuel 31, 11 Samuel 1:1-16; and Judas Iscariot, Matthew 27:5) being simply reported rather than given any moral evaluation.

The first two are most like euthanasia but more of suicide, and appear to have been motivated by desire to avoid disgrace rather than pain. However, not all cases of self-willed death are regarded as suicide. Euthanasia merely hastens the end of a life that is possibly already largely useless and alters the circumstances of the death.

Some, recognizing the lack of clear-cut biblical statements about euthanasia, have attempted to resolve the difficulty by appealing to biblical principles. Those who oppose euthanasia usually cite the sanctity of life and the sovereignty of God. Those favoring it appeal to the principles of mercy and love. While relevant, none of these considerations appear substantial no matter how compelling.

Great caution should be observed in dealing with this difficult issue. Both revealed Bible doctrine and non-Biblical principles suggest that active euthanasia is less than God's best:

Consider the following factors:

- a. The value of the human life
- b. The finality of physical death
- c. The possibility of diagnostic errors
- d. The possibility of medical abuse
- e. The possibility of physical abuse
- f. And the perspective of that suffering is not an unqualified evil but have an ultimate divine purpose.

. It is desirable, therefore, that the present laws prohibiting euthanasia be maintained while further thorough study is done. Other options, including the possibility of passive euthanasia, the use and development of painkillers, the sustaining power of God, and the encouragement of believers, should be explored and utilized.

Consider the following truth:

Man or medical science has no power to prolong the life of an individual – nothing can add a single minute to the divinely assigned duration of human life. The time of physical departure is in the hand of God - appointed by God as contained in the divine decree. Nothing can delay or advance it. Suffering has a definite divine purpose designed to wake up the carnal sinner or the last minute call for unbeliever to respond to the Gospel.

Although the departure of every individual is fixed and final in the divine decree, only God has the perfect knowledge of our schedule. And only God has the sovereign right to determine our physical death. Therefore, euthanasia is human viewpoint inspired by satanic doctrine –a diversion from the truth of the Scripture.