

Death

Why It Is Not A Solution For The Woes Of Living
by David E. Moss

It is a paradox of human wisdom that men seek to delay death as long as possible and at the same time offer death as a solution to the suffering members of their race. Mankind frantically seeks the solution to death so that it may escape the horrible end to existence. Yet by some strange twist of thought, it is able to translate death into a solution for the woes of living.

The Bible says that death is a penalty. It was not part of God's plan. In fact, it was contrary to the nature and innocence of the first man and woman; but because of their defiance of God's directive, the whole race lost the seal of life and was doomed to die.

In one of his foolish imaginations, man has reversed the stigma of death by claiming we have a "right" to die: as though death were a panacea instead of poison.

The flaw in human reasoning concerning death stems from man's inability to observe both sides of the experience -- the before side and the after side. All we really know about it is what we see on the before side. Concerning the after side, we are able to observe the lifelessness and decay of the body, but everything else remains a mystery.

The Quality of Life

At the heart of the issue is the controversy between the "quality of life" and the "sanctity of life." According to the Bible, life has sanctity. That is, it is a gift and not a happenstance. It is sacred and inviolable. It has purpose and value. Simply to possess life is to be rich. The alternative view, however, suggests that possessing life is not worth the effort if the life one possesses does not offer the desired amount of pleasure and satisfaction. In other words, the gift of life is not enough, it must also be of sufficient quality to be of any value.

Indeed, life has the potential of being immensely difficult. Disease and deformity, accidents and confrontations, war and calamities of nature cause pain and suffering that can catapult us beyond our capacity to cope. In these conditions we feel anything but wealthy; and we can be easily convinced that something other than living would be of more value.

The controversy surrounding the concept of the "quality of life" has given birth to the concept of the "right to die." If it is judged that one's quality of life has disintegrated, then dying is viewed as having more value than continuing to live without quality. People like Jack Kevorkian actively campaign to legitimize the "right to die." He has indubitably merged the acts of euthanasia and suicide into what is termed "assisted suicide." While euthanasia involves one person ending the life of another, suicide involves a person ending his own life. Assisted suicide combines these together as one person provides the means for another person to end his own life. Mr. Kevorkian and his sympathizers argue that euthanasia and assisted suicide ought to be a legal part of medical practice because ending a life that has lost its quality is a merciful and compassionate "medical" procedure.

But can anyone's life really deteriorate to such a low level that it loses its sanctity? Furthermore, if death ever becomes desirable over living, who has the right to decide when the moment of death should occur?

The Deficient Life of the Unregenerate

Those who are unsaved have an excuse for being so confused about life and death issues. Though living human beings, they are already dead in their trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Death is their state of being. Consequently, for people in this condition, physical death is only a natural phenomenon that terminates a purely visceral existence.

An unregenerate lifestyle is based upon pleasure, comfort, satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. When none of these can be derived from one's experience, life becomes worthless.

Death is viewed as an anesthesia that numbs the senses and obliterates consciousness. It is believed that a suffering, tortured human being can only find comfort by sealing himself in an immortalized comatose state called death -- the ultimate drug that offers a permanent escape.

The Error of Man's Imagination

There is a significant flaw in this thinking. That is, one who wishes to flee life and seeks to do so by dying, is only looking on one side of death. Death has two sides. On this side of death, we live in a conscious state in the environment called earth. On the other side of death...?

Here is the tricky part of the issue. Man imagines what it is like after he dies. He imagines that it is either a state of annihilation in which nothing matters anymore, or it is a state of tranquility in which everyone lives in a universal nirvana.

The truth must come from a genuine source of authority on the subject -- God. He says that saved people do indeed awaken in His presence when they pass through the door of death (II Corinthians 5:6-8). However, unsaved people are far from any resolution to their problems as they plunge irreversibly into the pit of Hell (Luke 16:22-23).

For the unregenerate, death is a most unfortunate experience. Their choice does not relieve them from suffering but adds to it. As the rich man who awoke in hell, they find themselves in torments, with a hot dry tongue, and their suffering grievously aggravated by flames all about them (Luke 16:23-24). Added to this is the mental torture they will endure for eternity while they realize that choosing to die actually cut off forever their opportunity to choose to live through Jesus Christ.

But What About the Christian?

This raises a serious question for Christians. If a Christian's salvation is secure, wouldn't death be a desirable option for believers who are suffering in this world?

The initial answer to this question is “yes”; but the answer must be qualified with an explanation and illustrated with Scriptural examples. The qualification is this: a Christian may justifiably desire death, which would place him in the presence of God; but a believer must acknowledge that the timing of death is a choice that belongs only to God.

1. Job as an example.

To say that Job suffered is an understatement. There was absolutely no pleasure or comfort in his experience. Nothing he did satisfied his terrible longing for relief. In all that was taken from him, he must have felt an overwhelming sense of loss and failure. There was no quality whatsoever to Job’s existence. In the midst of this he was encouraged by his wife to commit suicide (Job 2:9).

In fact, Job did desire to die (Job 3:11-21). Yet he acknowledged that the timing of his death was in the hands of God (Job 6:8-9) and consequently he had no right to choose death. He unequivocally rejected his wife’s suggestion. For Job, desire and choice were two totally distinct and incompatible concepts.

2. Paul as an example.

To the Philippians, Paul expressed a strong desire to be out of this life and into the presence of God (Philippians 1:21-23). Nevertheless, he recognized that there was a viable reason for remaining active on earth. As long as God had something for him to do here, he would willingly remain. Only by the choice and hand of God would he depart from this life (II Timothy 4:6-7).

The Ramifications of a Christian’s Death

When an unbeliever dies, the greatest grief comes to himself. He enters into eternal damnation from which he will never escape. Even though people remaining on earth miss the departed person, their grief is nothing compared to that of one who awakens in Hell.

When a Christian dies, by whatever means, the greatest grief comes to those who are left behind. If the means of death is by disease, old age, accident or some fatal wound inflicted by an external source, the remaining loved ones grieve the loss of fellowship for one they held dear. Yet they understand that the victim is much better in the presence of God than they ever could be on earth.

If a believer commits suicide, he causes a debilitating grief within people acquainted with the departed individual. A person who claims Christ as Savior has declared that the Lord Jesus has the power to overcome an eternal problem in his life -- sin. If that same person then commits suicide, he is declaring that Christ is not powerful enough to solve his temporal problems. These two things are contradictory. For any of the deceased’s acquaintances who may be considering Christ as a solution, the suicide of a Christian will be greatly discouraging. There is the potential that they will reason something like this: “If Christ could not help my friend solve the problems of his earthly life, how will he ever help me in eternity?” A Christian’s suicide could actually be the factor which discourages another person from trusting Christ for salvation.

A Christian who commits suicide is testifying that the Bible is not true. He is declaring that God's grace is not sufficient; God is not always a very present help in time of trouble; God may give me more than I can bear without a way to escape; I cannot do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Etc., etc. [In fact, the opposite is true. II Corinthians 12:9; I Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13]

A Christian who desires to commit suicide is declaring that he knows more than God. He knows there is no possible solution to his anxieties. He knows the best time to die. [In fact, the opposite is true. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).]

A Christian who chooses suicide over life on earth is rejecting the sovereignty of Almighty God. He believes that God cannot possibly be in control if things are so wrong. This comes from the false doctrine that God can give me joy only from good things. [In fact, the opposite is true. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Psalm 126:5). "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptation; knowing this, that the trying of you faith worketh patience" (James 1:2-3).]

There is irony in all of this. A Christian by committing suicide declares that God cannot help him. Yet in dying he wants to go to God. What does he expect God to do in heaven that he cannot do here?

Conclusion

Our original parents were warned by God that they would surely die in the day they ate of the forbidden fruit. They may not have known precisely what death was, but they should have known it was undesirable. Nevertheless, they chose to die. In a gracious gesture, God provided a solution. When they plunged into death through sin, God's grace made it a reversible condition.

The Bible teaches us that faith in Jesus Christ and his redemptive work provides a person with an escape from the condemnation of spiritual and physical death (I Corinthians 15). That escape, however, is only available as long as a person is living on the earth.

To Mr. Kevorkian and the members of our society who believe that living human beings have a right to die:

You believe that there is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body. As a result you sincerely believe that in assisting people to die "with dignity" you are actually improving their state of being. Yet it can as easily be claimed that there is no credible evidence that life does not survive the death of the body. But one thing is certain about death -- it is irreversible.

In living there is always hope. In dying, destiny is sealed. You may not believe in God, but no human being has the right to play God. Assisting a person to commit suicide is murder because it irreversibly seals the eternal

destiny of the dead person. Whether they awaken or sleep, Mr. Kevorkian, you may not know. But the dying person finds out -- too late to change his mind.

To the Christian who is contemplating this chilling choice to die:

God's word is true. Jesus suffered and died for all your pain and affliction. God's solution is available to you. It only requires a simple, childlike faith. The same Christ who calmed the storm for the disciples on the Sea of Galilee can calm the storm in your life. Remember that Job's suffering ended and the Apostle Paul finished his course. Before you choose to die, believe that God is able.