

**Dallas Baptist University**  
**Pew College Society Conference**

**A Moral and Scriptural Assessment of Euthanasia  
and the Sanctity of Life:  
Is Euthanasia Ever Justified?**

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**Presented on**

**April 5, 2003**

An eighteen-year-old friend of mine was a healthy, intelligent, and hard-working student attending a major southeastern university on scholarship when tragedy suddenly struck and left his life hanging by only a thread and left his friends and family only to wonder if he would survive. A condition called arteriovenricular malformation (AVM), shared by only .03% of Americans, resulted in a burst vein in his brain, and it left him in a painful comatose state. Having finally contained the AVM, my friend was left to recover from his comatose state, but only after a few weeks had passed, and another vein burst in the same region, leaving him semi-paralyzed from the waist down and in a deeper state of comatose. Once again, doctors were able to stabilize his condition, but they were sure of one thing: my friend's life would never be the same again, with most of his memory completely erased, possible paralyzation, and the uncertainty of whether or not he would ever return from his comatose state. Again, weeks passed, and certain questions began to be raised, such as: would it be better to relieve him of his pain and suffering, and to end his misery now? If he ever does regain consciousness, will he remain in a vegetative state, and how meaningful would his life then be? Is it worth it to keep his life supported when little hope exists for his healing, and resources could be better spent elsewhere?

These are among some of the questions we are compelled to examine as we look at the wide but pressing topic of euthanasia. Literally translated from the Greek, euthanasia means "a good death." It is the term for the process that brings about death to a suffering or terminally ill patient, and it is usually seen as a process done in what some would call the best interest of the patient. Euthanasia encompasses several different forms including passive euthanasia, which is the gradual withdrawal of medical treatment directly leading to a patient's death, and active euthanasia, a direct action that immediately imposes the death of the patient. Two types of euthanasia include voluntary euthanasia, where an informed, competent person asks another to end his or her life, and non-voluntary euthanasia, where death is brought about in a person who does not have the capacity to make his or her own decision<sup>1</sup>. Generally, the term euthanasia can be applied to any term involving the process of medical assistance to end a patient's life, and this

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<sup>1</sup> Committee on Medical Ethics. Episcopal Diocese of Washington, D.C. *Assisted Suicide and*

procedure is becoming more and more widespread in its acceptance and its practice throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> It has become a major topic of debate and discussion at the turn of the century, one that Pope John Paul II has tragically deemed as the “century of death.”<sup>3</sup> Over the past several years, the movement for the “right to die” has gained significant momentum, and it has become a leading ethical, medical, legal, and moral issue that more and more people are being forced to deal with daily. In the courts, family members, doctors, and hospital administrators are increasingly petitioning for permission to withhold food and water from unconscious patients. The state of Oregon has approved doctor-assisted suicide and active euthanasia.<sup>4</sup> Rising health care costs are causing many to call for limited care for the terminally ill AIDS patients that drain resources and money from the health-care system. Is euthanasia the right moral response? Through an examination of existing beliefs and reasonings and a closer look at how Scripture relates to this issue, it is hoped that a clearer understanding of the critical issue of euthanasia may be ascertained.

Recently, an increasing number of people have come to accept the practice of euthanasia, leading to its prevalence in other countries and its moral acceptance here in the States. The pressing issue of euthanasia has been brought to prominence through the trials of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, recent Supreme Court decisions, and media stories on mercy killings and treatment withdrawals. The growing drive to control death has been a large factor leading to the acceptance of euthanasia; since death is such a factor of uncertainty in that we are never sure when it will take place and where it will happen, euthanasia serves as a control handle for many people, giving them some control over when and where death would take place. The fear of dying in an institution such as a hospital or nursing home has led many to desire death, rather than to be placed in a public and sterile environment to spend their last days, where there is seldom ample care for each patient and where their increasing personal, physical, spiritual, and

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*Euthanasia: Christian Moral Perspectives* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1997), 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> John Keown, et al. *Euthanasia Examined: Ethical, Clinical, and Legal Perspectives*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae* (New York: Random House, 1995), 116.

<sup>4</sup> Billy Graham. *Death and the Life After* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1987), 93.

So far, Oregon is the only state to have legalized assisted suicide and active euthanasia.

emotional needs are met with decreasing personnel, ability, and resources.<sup>5</sup> Growing economic pressures have shifted people's views of living from blessing to burden, and that coupled with changing religious and moral sensibilities about suicide and euthanasia have led to a drastic increase of the population percentage who accept the practice of euthanasia. Euthanasia is an issue that has divided people over the quickly fading line of moral acceptance.

The first point of view is that of those who defend the practice of euthanasia. People who support euthanasia argue mainly from the basis of human autonomy: that is, we as human beings make choices all the time from infancy through adolescence through adulthood that define who we are as individuals, and the choice on how we want to die is only another choice that we should have the right and ability to make. This has led to a growing movement for patients' rights. It is reasoned that patients have the right to die and to choose for themselves whether or not to continue living. Additionally, it is reasoned that we have a duty to look out for the best interest of others, and since many do not consider suffering to be in a person's best interest, it is our duty to see that a person's suffering is relieved. In many cases, ending human life is the method chosen to relieve pain and it is seen as the only way that the patient would no longer have to undergo the unpleasant experience of suffering. Many who support euthanasia reason that death is natural and that pain and suffering serve no purpose.<sup>6</sup> Besides, the costs of maintaining the life of those patients who are suffering or are terminally ill are disproportionate to the benefits for the patient, and it is reasoned that society cannot bear the costs, and thus, euthanasia is the best available option. Advocates of euthanasia further stress that mercy and compassion for the patient dictates the need to relieve their pain and suffering through bringing about their death.

On the contrary view, opponents of euthanasia (mainly Christians) argue that its morality cannot be justified, based on the scriptural view that God is sovereign and is not only the ruler of life but of death as well. Life is a valuable gift from God, and this exceptional sanctity of life should not be disregarded. Also, supporters of this view maintain that there is a specific meaning and role that suffering takes on during the course of human life; thus, just because one suffers does

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<sup>5</sup> Committee, 7-8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 37.

not mean that one's life is no longer worth living.<sup>7</sup> Euthanasia involves a deliberate decision to take life, and it is argued that euthanasia is never moral under any circumstance because it is a deliberate act of disobedience to God, who alone has authority over life and death, and who has, under the Ten Commandments, forbade killing in any form. No one can kill an innocent human being, whether they are terminally ill, suffering from an incurable disease, or whether they are an elderly person who is close to death, because it is not of our authority to take life, no matter what the circumstance.<sup>8</sup> In his *Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II defines euthanasia as playing the role of God, and he marks it as a "grave violation" of God's law, and a deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of human beings.<sup>9</sup> He denotes mercy killing as "false mercy," and a complete perversion of what God intended mercy to mean. He also counters the claim that euthanasia is performed out of compassion for the other person, since genuine compassion involves the sharing of another's pain and bearing it alongside of them, instead of bringing about their death because of it.<sup>10</sup>

These main arguments for and against euthanasia define the essence for each opposing view. However, from these arguments are drawn even more pressing arguments that shall now be explored. From these claims, many have been left to wonder about the morality of euthanasia.

To begin with, the issue of human autonomy has divided many over the morality of euthanasia. According to advocates of euthanasia, one should have the right to make important decisions about one's own life. In the principle of human autonomy, one decides for one's self what to do with one's life.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, most would agree that an essential part of living as a human being is the ability to make choices and decisions. Parents stress the importance of responsibility of actions to their children, and kids are taught that the person they become is largely defined through the choices that they make. In accordance with the principle of human autonomy, it is reasoned that one should also have the right to decide how their lives should end, whether that would entail dying a natural death, or whether that would employ the practice of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>8</sup> Pope John Paul II, 102.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 116.

euthanasia.<sup>12</sup> In fact, to ignore the wishes of one suffering or dying to perform euthanasia would be to take on a “tyrannical” and “arrogant” attitude.<sup>13</sup> It is held that one exhibits cruelty in sustaining the life of those in extreme suffering or existing in a vegetative state by neglecting their wishes or frustrating their desires to die, especially for those who exist in a vegetative state but have basically “lost the essence of personhood.”<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, there are many Christians who support euthanasia in the deeper context of human free will. Because we were created as humans to serve God and were created with the ability to make our own choices, it follows that human beings should be able to choose death through euthanasia when our purpose of serving God can no longer be fulfilled because of terminal illness or extreme suffering.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, opponents of euthanasia maintain the view that just because human beings have autonomy and free choice does not necessarily mean that each choice we make is a right choice. Challengers of euthanasia see autonomy as a great endowment from God, to be used in accordance with the will of God; they argue that the choice to bring about death is contrary to Scripture and the purposes of God. Because we are given free choice, we should use our choices to glorify God and to live according to Christian virtues.<sup>16</sup> Those who reject euthanasia argue that we do have autonomy in our choices, but our decisions are only right, and thus acceptable, when we choose God’s purpose for our lives in accordance with Christian values, which emphasize the sanctity of life as a gift from God. Even if one is motivated by mercy or concerns for the best interests of someone, no one has the right to take on the role of God, the Author of life and death.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, under a growing patients’ rights movement, patients have the right to dictate an advance directive, which can order the doctor to take the patient’s life should the patient’s life come to a certain point of impasse. A patient can currently refuse life-saving treatment, resulting in death. Christians maintain that although medicine may always be withdrawn, especially for

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<sup>12</sup> Committee, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Keown, 20.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Committee, 38.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

reasons of financial incapability, the life-sustaining elements of food and water should never be withdrawn, as the patient would then die from starvation or thirst, instead of from the disease. Many patients issue advance directives with suicidal intent and out of fear, as they are sure of what exactly would occur or if they would exist in a state of pain. Currently, doctors are ordered to follow the advance directives of a patient in compliance with their wishes, should their lives come to such a critical point.<sup>18</sup> However, in the overall scheme, opponents of euthanasia still hold that complete or full human autonomy involves disregarding God and denying his authority as Creator and ruler over life and over death<sup>19</sup>, and they maintain that God is the ruler of life, and thus, man does not have complete freedom to do with it as he wills.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Christian morals act as boundaries on human autonomy, and the emphasis of human life through Christian morals counters any choice to bring about death, namely through euthanasia.

Even within this argument, two key issues are raised that are frequently addressed by those who debate the issue of euthanasia: the quality of one's life vs. the sanctity of one's life. Proponents of euthanasia assert that when the quality of one's life has decreased to the extent that it is no longer worth living, such as existing in a vegetative state or a state of tremendous, irreducible pain, then ending one's life is not only plausible, but called for. John Finnis says that, "Life in such a state demeans the patient's dignity, and maintaining it insults that dignity; proper respect for the patient and the patient's best interest requires that life be brought to an end."<sup>21</sup> It is difficult, supporters say, to find much quality of life in people who are paralyzed or respirator dependent, or in people who are very near to death and have difficulty breathing. Those with distressing and painful symptoms and those with dementia are also considered among those whose quality of life is very low and in whom there is not much purpose found in sustaining their lives beyond one more second.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, those that exist in persistent vegetative states should not be kept alive, according to the quality-of-life principle held by euthanasia's defenders. Consistent with their

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<sup>17</sup> Keown, 317.

<sup>18</sup> Keown, 304.

<sup>19</sup> Pope John Paul II, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>21</sup> Keown, 24.

view, those in a vegetative state are considered a burden to society, as they consume valuable resources that could yield better results if invested elsewhere. Besides, one in a persistent vegetative state can no longer benefit from the life they lead, and their lives should no longer be kept at the expense of others and of society.<sup>23</sup> The same is said for elderly people, whom many in society label as useless burdens.<sup>24</sup> Advocates of this view claim that there is no more apparent need to support their lives, since the elderly become increasingly inefficient and their costs of care become progressively more expensive. Hence, in light of these views, euthanasia is a feasible and practical option for those whose quality of life is diminishing, and whose burden on society is ever increasing.

In contrast, those who reject euthanasia tend to argue from the sanctity of life perspective, which professes that all human life is valuable as a gift from God. The sanctity of life position is biblically based from two principles: that human beings are created in the image of God, and the Sixth Commandment against murder. Advocates of this view say that human life is sacred and inviolable because it involves the creative action of God, who alone is the Master of life.<sup>25</sup> They claim that people who support euthanasia do so because they weigh life based on what has been invested in one's life, instead of the simple but sacred value of life itself.<sup>26</sup> They argue that, contrary to that view, life is to be revered at all times because it is a gift of God and because man is made in God's image; living involves taking part in God's own breath of life that he first breathed to create human beings.

Moreover, Pope John Paul II asserts that instead of viewing certain people as useless and inefficient, we are to have reverence for life and to demonstrate love for every human life in accordance with Scripture and God's will.<sup>27</sup> The sanctity and value of life is diminished heavily by those who see human life as burdensome, especially in elderly people or in people who exist in vegetative states. Instead of viewing them as inefficient and disregarding their value of life, those who oppose euthanasia insist that we should increase our care for them and make them feel

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>24</sup> Pope John Paul II, 116.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 94-97.

<sup>26</sup> Keown, 13.



more valued and appreciated.<sup>28</sup> Whether they live in a comatose state, in severe impairedness, or extreme suffering, they still have life, meaning that their life is still sacred and should not be taken by anyone.<sup>29</sup> Life is a basic and intrinsic good, and by upholding a person's life, proponents of this view see the decision for life as the utmost way to demonstrate respect for that person.

A further argument to support euthanasia asserts that the purposes of God and His sovereignty are maintained even through euthanasia. Since many justify wartime killing and capital punishment as exceptions of the Sixth Commandment, euthanasia should also be seen as an exception, since, as advocates of euthanasia propose, no wrongful killing takes place. Those who are critically ill and suffering should have their torment brought to an end through euthanasia in order to bring about the greater end goal of eternal life in heaven. When the life of a suffering person is ended in compassion and mercy, any evil perceived through the taking of that life is outweighed by the greater good of that person then being in heaven with God. Thus, God's purposes are still carried out and His sovereignty still exists and is not undermined by human efforts.<sup>30</sup>

On the opposing view, those who reject euthanasia claim that God's intentions are in fact hindered and His sovereignty is dishonored through euthanasia. Since, according to this claim, our entire lives belong to God, including the choice on how we die. When we choose to end our lives, we bring a brusque ending on our ability to follow God's complete purpose and plan for our lives. Furthermore, we undermine the sovereignty of God when we intentionally take our life and our death into our own hands.<sup>31</sup> Also, those who advocate the position that euthanasia brings about a greater good place too little emphasis on the fact that an evil is being committed through the taking of an innocent life. It is not morally justified that evil should be done for good to occur. Never is evil to be an appropriate response to any problem, and evil should never take place so that good may result.<sup>32</sup> Christians who oppose euthanasia claim that God is sovereign and has power over any disease, illness, or seemingly incurable malady, and therefore, God has the

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<sup>27</sup> Pope John Paul II, 56.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>29</sup> Committee, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 48.

power over death and controls death itself. It follows that God will take care of what He has control over.<sup>33</sup> So, the absolute Master of death is the Creator, and any human choice in the domain of death undermines not only the purposes of God for that person's life, but also the very sovereignty of God.

And lastly, some of the leading arguments in the case of euthanasia stem from the difficult issue of suffering. In our culture, some consider suffering to be the epitome of evil and something to be avoided at all costs.<sup>34</sup> Most people see suffering as objectionable, and they consider it a "rightful liberation" to be set free from it.<sup>35</sup> From the standpoint of those who support euthanasia, it is asserted that euthanasia is an appropriate moral response to pain and suffering. Christians who support euthanasia hold that since we are created in the image of God, we should not have to go through the unbearable period of pain and suffering that comes for most prior to death; instead, an appropriate response would be to mercifully spare one from enduring that suffering. When a terminally-ill patient is undergoing severe suffering and pain, it undermines the patient's dignity to keep him alive, advocates claim. Experiencing such suffering holds no moral or spiritual purpose, and the suffering can often be so taxing that it destroys one's whole spirit and outlook on life. Additionally, it does not follow that suffering would be the part of the will of a loving and just God, some supporters say. It is maintained that the purposes of God are to reduce suffering, not cause it, and living through such suffering is useless, as there is seemingly no benefit gained from a suffering patient for the kingdom of heaven. Unless one somehow ties his distressing sufferings with being faithful to following Christ, advocates of euthanasia assert that there is no purpose to suffering and that it falls within morality to terminate suffering. Besides, Jesus himself performed hundreds of healing acts, showing his distaste for suffering. It would follow that out of our love and compassion for those in suffering, we would take steps to alleviate that suffering, although those steps may lead to death.<sup>36</sup> Since God's purposes are not to force us

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<sup>32</sup> Keown, 29.

<sup>33</sup> Pope John Paul II, 68-69.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>36</sup> Committee, 40-41.

to endure unredemptive suffering, supporters claim, euthanasia provides a morally acceptable method and a compassionate means by which suffering may be ended.

In quite the reverse belief, people who oppose the practice and the moral acceptance of euthanasia contend that euthanasia is not the appropriate moral response to the unavoidable adversity of suffering. According to many Christians, the problem lies within the fact that our culture does not understand suffering and places no substantive meaning in it, leading some to choose euthanasia.<sup>37</sup> Although suffering is difficult to understand and to deal with, it by no means justifies the taking of innocent life. Those who oppose euthanasia also claim that suffering can be a positive force, allowing one's faith in God to grow and developing one's character and ability to persevere, in accordance with Scripture and with the example of Christ. Moreover, Christians who oppose euthanasia see suffering as a part of living for the Lord, in that suffering can be a source of good if experienced for love and identification with Christ. In fact, according to this view, one can even rejoice in their sufferings as they identify with the sufferings of Christ.<sup>38</sup> The appropriate response to suffering, as some Christians claim, is to view it as a period where one's faith in God can grow. In sickness and in suffering, those suffering are called to have an even deeper trust in God and to root their faith even deeper in the One who has the ability to heal them. Suffering should not drive a faith-centered person to despair or to seek death, but rather it should allow that person to rely on their hope and their faith in God.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, solutions to suffering in palliative medicine, the medical development of pain alleviation and suffering reduction, are being developed as medical knowledge and technology continue to be advanced. Those rejecting euthanasia maintain that these developments and the progress in the medical field provide a better solution than bringing about the death of the patient to eliminate suffering. Also, Christians counter that true compassion for the terminally ill and for those who undergo suffering does not involve taking the lives of those who are terminally ill or suffering, but rather the care and comfort of those who are undergoing affliction.<sup>40</sup> Even in the case of those who have inadequate finances, the least that should be provided for the patients is as much care and comfort as can be given,

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<sup>37</sup> Pope John Paul II, 27.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

along with the basic support of food and water. Hence, those in opposition to euthanasia assert that suffering can be something that sanctifies and transforms us, ultimately bringing us closer to God, and with the progress in medicine, physicians will be increasingly capable of relieving the suffering without having to resort to euthanasia.

At this point, after having examined the essence of the cases for and against euthanasia, I will assess euthanasia based on New Testament Scripture, explore the issue of suffering, and discuss the sanctity of life. Through these examinations, I will scripturally support the view that euthanasia assessed from the quality of life standpoint is not justified and is not the appropriate moral or Christian response to end suffering. First, the view from Scripture is difficult to decipher, as there is no direct passage to deal with the modern issues of euthanasia. Although the Greek and Roman societies did not have the same technology, medicine, or ability to sustain life that we have in modern culture, they exhibited a lack of respect for human life similar to the deficiency demonstrated in that area today. For instance, the government and high-ranking officials would mercilessly abuse the lower class, the poor, and the weak, and the killing of infants was commonplace.<sup>41</sup> In those days, they simply did not have the technology, the medical knowledge, or the machines available to them in their culture that are necessary to comprehend the moral dilemma our culture faces in the area of euthanasia. Going from Scriptural context to modern context is often difficult, as hardly ever is the same context encountered in both places at once. However, the heart of the Scriptures is what will be examined and will prove to be the best assessment.

Human understanding of the sanctity of life is being eroded away little by little with every passing day as an increasing number of people are finding ways of justifying euthanasia. However, those who justify euthanasia lack a valid criterion for their decisions, and this oversight leads eventually to the justified killing of anyone and a true fight for survival of the fittest, not the best of all conclusions.<sup>42</sup> The Biblical alternative holds the sacred authority of God and the sanctity of human life over the quality of life. Euthanasia is an action that brings about death,

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<sup>40</sup> Committee, 48-50.

<sup>41</sup> Richard A. Fowler and H. Wayne House. *Civilization in Crisis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 59.

which is clearly marked throughout Scripture as an enemy of God. Death was never part of God's original plan, but it entered the world along with pain and suffering as a result of sin, and now these facets of life are consequences with which we must all contend.<sup>43</sup> Ironically, euthanasia can be defined as a "good death," although there is nothing good about death since it is an enemy of God, albeit an inevitable one.<sup>44</sup>

In response to the argument for euthanasia from the vantage point of human autonomy, the Bible makes it abundantly clear that individuals have no right to prematurely end their own lives or the lives of anyone else. Hebrews 9:27 indicates that every man is "appointed to die once," implicating that God is not only the author of one's life but the ultimate scheduler of one's death. Since He has appointed the day, details, and time of every person's death, the decision of death does not belong to the individual. Human life is a gift from God, and only God has the right to terminate life. The view of human autonomy is based in secular humanism, as man is elevated to be the central deciding factor of life and death and God is consequently dethroned from His rightful place of authority.<sup>45</sup> In reply, Romans 14:7-9 counters this extent of human autonomy, especially in the matters of life and death.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, if Christians truly exist "in Christ," then they identify with the reality that their entire existence is under God's control. God is sovereign and in control of every aspect of our lives, including our death. If one is in Christ, then his value and worth is not to be judged from a societal standpoint; instead, one should find one's value from being set apart and being chosen in Christ, not from the value imposed on a person by society or the community, or by the characteristics of usefulness or efficiency to society. The sanctity of life is worth far more than any monetary worth, and it should be viewed as such. Because we are created in God's image, we are to honor that principle with every breath that we take, whether in sickness or in health, whether in a vegetative state or in a comatose state. To deprive someone of life is to deprive them of the gift that God has given him or her and of the

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<sup>42</sup> Graham, 95.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>44</sup> Fowler and House, 102.

<sup>45</sup> W. David Kent, "Pulling the Plug." *Pulling the Plug*, (Vol. 33, No. 5. Ed. by Harold S. Martin. October 1998); Online, Internet; accessed 16 April 2002; n. pag; available online: <http://www.brfwitness.org/Articles/1998v33n5.htm/>.

hope that always exists in life.<sup>47</sup> I Corinthians 6:19-20 complements the argument with the claim that we “are not our own; [we] have been bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” As a Christian, one should have full trust in God and realize that our lives and our bodies belong to God. God will always be faithful to take care of that which is His own, and there is power in His omnipotence over any disease or malady, despite how bad the appearance to man might be. Anytime the choice between death and life arises, the choice of the Christian is always to be for life because of its sanctity and because the Bible claims that the lives and bodies of Christians in reality belong to God.<sup>48</sup>

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that we are new creatures in Christ,<sup>49</sup> implying that we have been recreated by God and indwelt by his Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup> However, because we still exist in our mortal bodies, we must continue to bear the consequences of sin that include pain, suffering, and death. As individuals deal with the consequences of sin and undergo pain and suffering at times, most have the opportunity to enter into a much closer relationship with God as their dependency on Him grows stronger through the trials they face. Although pain, suffering, and terminal illnesses are not pleasant to deal with, we are fortunate for God's promise to us in Romans 8:32 which claims that since God gave up His Son for us, He will also give us everything else that we need to make it through life, including help for our every problem, need, and pain.<sup>51</sup> There is never anything too big for Christ to handle.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, many people turn to euthanasia because the issue of fear arises as death approaches, either for them or for a loved one.<sup>53</sup> Facing impending death can certainly be terrifying, as the realization sets in that unless God intervenes, one's natural life will be entirely over. However, the response of Christians should biblically be one of persistence, patience and

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<sup>46</sup> Romans 14:7-9 – “For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” (NIV)

<sup>47</sup> Kent., n. pag.

<sup>48</sup> Kent, n. pag.

<sup>49</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17 – “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (NIV)

<sup>50</sup> Fowler and House, 150.

<sup>51</sup> Romans 8:32 – “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (NIV)

<sup>52</sup> Fowler and House, 150-152.

<sup>53</sup> Graham, 9.

reliance on God.<sup>54</sup> In Philippians, Paul advocates that despite external circumstances, the Christian is to persevere through difficult times, even when it is hard to do so – mentally, physically, or spiritually. In fact, Paul was torn between his desire to die, his longing to be with Christ, and his desire to continue doing the work of Christ on earth.<sup>55</sup> Paul realized, though, that it was necessary to continue being in his mortal body so that God could continue to use him to accomplish His divine purposes in and through him.<sup>56</sup> Christians should also face impending death with patience because God has already defeated death through Christ's death on the Cross and subsequent Resurrection. Therefore, Christians can face death with victory, knowing that *nothing* separates the believer from the God's love.<sup>57</sup> Christ secured ultimate victory over death through Resurrection, and death has no ultimate power or hold over Christians.<sup>58</sup> Instead of reacting with fear, the emotion usually associated for euthanasia, the Christian can respond by finding peace and eternal assurance through Christ's victory and triumph over death.<sup>59</sup>

Next, to address the issue of suffering, too many times we blame God for our suffering. If the purpose of life is to prepare us for an eternity with God, it should be noted that spiritual preparedness can definitely come through experiences in suffering and in waiting.<sup>60</sup> We as human beings show disregard to God in suffering, reasoning that if God is all-powerful or if God really has love for an individual, He would take away the suffering. However, according to the writings of Paul found in Romans 8:18-28, our present sufferings fail to be a valid contrast to the glory that we will one day receive in heaven.<sup>61</sup> Paul was one that had been through everything: prison, persecution, sickness, pain, torture, and trials. He certainly had the experience of suffering, but his focus was always on the future glory. Paul found the answer to the sufferings of this life in the realm of eternity outside of this life. That was how he kept his faith in the midst of all that he experienced. With every pain and moment of suffering Paul endured, he was being made

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>55</sup> Philippians 1:23-24 – "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body." (NIV)

<sup>56</sup> Graham, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Romans 8:38-39.

<sup>58</sup> I Corinthians 15:55 – "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (NIV)

<sup>59</sup> Graham, 10.

<sup>60</sup> Kent, n. pag.

<sup>61</sup> Graham, 129.

more finely shaped spiritually. The same is true for any Christian undergoing extreme suffering; all of the pain and suffering endured serves to make an individual more like Christ through the development of a closer relationship and a stronger dependency on God. In going through suffering, the task of the Christian is to be still in God's hands and resist the eagerness to escape their present lives, as God has a purpose for all the suffering He allows His children to undergo. God knows the pain and suffering of each individual, but to end life prematurely would be to cut short the work of God and to stunt the growth of the believer.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, in verses 26 and 27, we see that God shares with us in our sufferings and our weaknesses. What a consolation to know that God is interceding on our behalf. The ultimate hope of future glory is that we will be resurrected with a body that is free of pain and suffering, and one that is incorruptible and immortal.<sup>63</sup> Most of the time, God chooses not to intervene in our sufferings, but He always does intercede for us in the midst of all of our confusion in pain and suffering. We can take from this that suffering is temporary, as we shall receive our new bodies without suffering in glory. Also, suffering does not indicate divine abandonment. In the midst of our worst circumstances and our deepest sufferings, God is there, even interceding and praying for you. As Billy Graham remarked of the notable presence of Christ in believers undergoing suffering:

"I have visited Christians in sick rooms where the presence of Christ was so real that, even in the midst of unbelievable suffering and facing death, the patient had serenity."<sup>64</sup>

What should the response of the Christian be to suffering? From the Romans passage, we continue to groan in our sufferings, but we should remain in prayer to the One who has the power over our sufferings and that of others. We are to continue to persevere, and continue to exhibit faith and trust in God through living our life, even if it involves living in a paralyzed state. And finally, we are to eagerly await the glory that is coming. In heaven, everything will be better, and our response is to eagerly wait for that glory. As Christians begin to look beyond this life for the answer to suffering, they will begin to identify more with Christ and to more eagerly await the glory that is to come.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 76.



As we hope and long for the future glory, the intermediate wait is often difficult, but what an incredible and glorious destination awaits those who travel every step of the way with Christ! As 2 Corinthians 5:7 affirms, Christians *live* by faith and not by *sight*. Christians do not live on the basis of their feelings and their pain, but instead, they live trusting in God, knowing that He has a plan and a purpose for every detail of their lives, and resting in His authority as the only authentic giver and taker of life.<sup>65</sup> I Corinthians 15:58 paints a beautiful challenge to the Christian undergoing suffering, as it urges the believer to “stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” Even during pain and suffering, we can remain fully committed to God’s work. During suffering, nothing will be able to move the one whose true foundation remains in Christ, as the labor and the pains only serve to bring one closer in relation and in spiritual image to Jesus Christ.<sup>66</sup>

So, is euthanasia ever justified? According to all that has been presented here, the only instance where the prolongation of life is not to be achieved is in the case where the sanctity of life no longer exists. If a person exists only on a machine, and the person cannot sustain life off of the machine, then the sanctity of life is no more. The sanctity of life ends when life can no longer sustain itself and machines are required to continue life. Life begins and ends when God ordains it to do so, and to either end it prematurely or to prolong it unnecessarily encroaches on the authority of God. If life can no longer be maintained without the presence of a machine, then life should end. However, if a person can still exhibit life outside of a machine, provided a maintained diet of food and water at a minimum, then that person should live, whether they are in a comatose state, in a persistent vegetative state, permanently paralyzed, or terminally ill. Just because someone exists in a comatose and unconscious state, it does not mean that God cannot work to bring the person back to fully restored health, as it has happened a numerous quantity of documented times. The quality of life can be tremendous during the time afterwards in which the person has to live. It would be wrong, not to deny someone their death, but to deny someone their due life. It is incredible how much impact an additional day, an extra week, an unexpected

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 168.

extra month, can have on the person and his/her family.<sup>67</sup> The fact is that they exhibit life and thus the sanctity of life exists. As medical knowledge and technology continue to progress, advances should be made in the area of health care and palliative medicine, for the purpose of reducing pain in the final days of a patient. As palliative care that seeks to minimize pain for the patient in his or her last days and quality care for patient improves, the need for euthanasia will decrease.

In conclusion, euthanasia works against the morality of Christianity and is not an acceptable or appropriate option for the final days of any human being. God is the originator of life, and His authority covers even death. Those who support euthanasia lack faith, and instead of seeing life as a gift, they view it as a product of chance; thus, the individual can shape his life as he wants it, in conformity to his own will, with total disregard for a higher will or creator. The real tragedy of euthanasia is that there are many whose needs and wishes could be met without euthanasia but are not, due to a deficiency in time, effort, care, skill, or resources. Hospice care and palliative medicine are great substitutes for euthanasia that allow the patient to die with both serenity and dignity.<sup>68</sup> Life should never be taken lightly, since life is a gift from God. When we are faced with the contradictions of life, our faith is challenged to respond. Instead of turning to euthanasia in time of difficulty, we should turn to God and rely on Him through faith. The presence of suffering only serves to challenge faith and to put it to the ultimate test. However, when our hope and our faith is focused beyond this world, we can take comfort in the fact that God is with us even in the midst of the worst of suffering, and that He is interceding alongside of us. When we rely on God for our strength, we have the ability to persevere and make it through even the worst of times, and our faith and trust is secure in Him as we eagerly await the coming glory. The choice of life is always better than the choice of death. My friend who was mentioned at the start recovered from his traumatic state and his prolonged state of comatose. He underwent a series of intense recovery and rehabilitation treatments, and has recently begun to

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>67</sup> David A. Shaywitz. "The Right to Live." *New York Times*, (19 September 2000, national ed.), B6.

continue his education. This dear friend of mine is a constant reminder to me that life is in God's hands, and even through the most unpredictable and most painful of circumstances, God is there, and His will is carried out through our obedience in living our lives for Him completely, despite the circumstances and the obstacles that may sometimes exist. Where there is life, there is always hope, and where there is hope, there is always the ability of our God to work and change lives.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
 When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
 Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,  
 It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Refrain:  
*It is well, with my soul,*  
*It is well, with my soul,*  
*It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

**Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
 Let this blest assurance control,  
 That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
 And hath shed His own blood for my soul.**

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
 My sin, not in part but the whole,  
 Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

**For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:  
 If Jordan above me shall roll,  
 No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life  
 Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.**

**But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,  
 The sky, not the grave, is our goal;  
 Oh trump of the angel! Oh voice of the Lord!  
 Blessèd hope, blessèd rest of my soul!**

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,  
 The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
**The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,  
 Even so, it is well with my soul.**

- *It is Well with My Soul*, Horatio G. Spafford, 1873.

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