

Must Christians Use Extraordinary Medical Means To Prolong Their Lives in this World?

Thursday (4/30/20) Indepth Bible Class
of the Trilacoochee church of Christ

(Material compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Provisos For This Study:

- Do not listen for only that which you want to hear
- My approach in this study, while striving for objectivity, may be influenced by my own perspective
- I am not judging those who choose otherwise
- Maturity of faith and deep spiritual mindedness will be our best assets in making these decisions
- This is a compilation of many articles and materials I have collected over the years

The “Technological Imperative”

- Often in medicine, therapeutic intervention is used just because it is available
- This does not take into account the moral issues in this matter
- Medical technology is not the only factor in this question

Fundamental Rules Governing Moral Choices In Life And Death

1. Euthanasia is contrary to God's Law.
2. Refusing medical treatment is not suicide
3. Choosing not to engage extraordinary medical measures for a terminal patient in end stage is not euthanasia
4. We must not redefine terms to justify our position

Fundamental Rules Governing Moral Choices In Life And Death

5. As Creator, God alone knows with certainty whether a disease or an injury is incurable.
6. We cannot abandon our duty to exercise our best moral judgment, and leave such decisions to medicine.
7. Administering pain-relieving medications is permissible
8. The doctor should request and receive a statement signed by the patient, if competent to consent, or by the nearest of kin, agreeing to the uselessness of further “heroic efforts” and consenting to termination of treatment

Fundamental Rules Governing Moral Choices In Life And Death

9. Each person, no matter how infirm and socially useless he or she may appear to be to himself or herself or to others, deserves to be accepted as a being created in the image of God.
10. While suffering is an intrusion into life, it provides opportunity for a Christian to teach and serve others, by example and word.

Fundamental Rules Governing Moral Choices In Life And Death

11. The time prior to death is so personal and individual that those not experiencing it cannot force the dying person to choose against his or her inner yearning.
12. Death is not merely a physical event but a crucial spiritual event for every person.
13. Any decisions made in this complex matter must be entrusted to the relationship between the sufferer and his or her Savior to Whom they will give account, and Who also knows their hearts and minds in those critical circumstances.

A Christian Trusts God

- A Christian entrusts the end of his life to God.
 - Gen 3:19 - “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.”
 - Psalm 90:2-3, 5-6 - “Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. 3 You turn man to destruction, And say, Return, O children of men. 5 You carry them away like a flood; They are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up: 6 In the morning it flourishes and grows up; In the evening it is cut down and withers”

A Christian Trusts God

- Psalm 139:16 - “Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them”
- Psalm 116:15 - “Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His saints”
- 1Sam. 2:6 - “The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up”
- Rev. 1:18 - “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death”

A Christian Trusts God

- Toward the end of life, Christians grow to trust that suffering has a God-pleasing purpose.
 - Rom. 8:18 - “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”
 - Rom. 5:2-4 - “...We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope”

A Christian Trusts God

- John 16:33 - “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”
- 2Cor. 12:8-10 - “Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong”

A Christian Trusts God

- A Christian's trust in God moves him to make the right choice
 - John 19:30 - "So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit."
 - Luke 23:46 - "And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last"
 - Jesus had the power to prolong His life; He chose not to exercise it because of a higher moral imperative

A Christian Trusts God

- Phil. 1:21-24 - “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. 24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.”
- 2Tim. 4:6-8 - “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

A Christian Trusts God

- We are not tempted beyond what we are able to bear
 - 1Cor. 10:13 - “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

A Christian Trusts God

- Find blessings in sorrowful situations
- Emphasize only what can be defended scripturally
- Realize that every individual case will be different and will need to be handled with the best judgment possible under the circumstances
- Remember that our personal experiences may illuminate our view, but they cannot become the standard for our belief and teaching.

A Christian Trusts God

- A Christian trusts the wisdom of the scriptures when making this choice
- There exists no command, example, or Divine implication that mandates the believer to use any means beyond the natural to prolong life in this world.
- The duration of life is not ultimately subject to human will, desire, and skill, but to the will and wisdom of God who gave and controls all life
 - Psalm 89:48 - “What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave?”

A Christian Trusts God

- A Christian trusts God who created his body and Who knows its limits; and therefore, he does not squander what God has given him.
- A Christian recognizes that God's will and purpose for life can still be accomplished up until the moment of death.
- A Christian's respect for the sanctity of human life does not mean that life must be prolonged by every technological means possible.

A Christian Trusts God

- A Christian should seek to be cured of a disease if a cure is available.
- However, in the case of an incurable condition where the course of the disease cannot be reversed, sometimes it is appropriate to discontinue extraordinary treatment.
- Reasonable, faithful Christians trust that they have fulfilled their purpose for living in this world.

A Christian Trusts God

- Jacob and Joseph, aware that their deaths were approaching, gave burial instructions to their families and died (Gen. 49:29, 33, 50:24-26).
- Simeon, the righteous and devout man to whom it had been revealed that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ, was actually joyful when the sign that his life was over appeared -- Jesus was born (Luke 2:25-32).

A Christian Uses Wisdom

- Four major factors to be taken into consideration in extraordinary cases:
 - When irreversibility is established by more than one physician
 - When the process of dying has reached the point where nothing remains for medical science to do except to offer palliative care
 - When further, low potential treatment involves grave burdens to oneself and loved ones
 - When there are no means left to relieve pain and no hope of recovery

A Christian Practices Love

- Care that should never be withheld:
 - The presence of caring humans and kind touch; this assures them that they have not been abandoned
 - Care that alleviates suffering: mouth care, hydration, pain medication, relief of body functions respecting personal dignity
 - Conversation that attempts to satisfy the spiritual, emotional, and social needs of the patient

A Christian Practices Love

- Although it is painful, take time to properly say goodbye.
- Although it is very uncomfortable, tell them it is okay to let go and depart.
- Although it is difficult, talk with them about their passing if they ask; don't pretend it isn't going to happen. To the patient, it is a very real part of their present reality.
 - Some crave reassurance
 - Some want to talk
 - Some are afraid and want empathy

A Christian Practices Love

- Understand that this is always going to be more of a moral decision than a medical one.
- Understand that this is an extremely difficult decision often made under great stress; be kind, understanding, and patient toward others who are responsible for these decisions.
- Understand that those who must make these decisions need our love and support, not our judgments, opinions, outrage, rebukes, criticisms, arguments, contempt, or any other self-righteous impulses we may feel.

Matters To Consider

- Living will
- Health care proxy
- A do-not-resuscitate order (DNR)
- Mechanical ventilation
- Intravenous hydration
- Artificial nutrition (tube feeding)
- Hemodialysis
- Hospice comfort and care

Must Christians Use Extraordinary Medical Means To Prolong Their Lives in this World?

- God's Word and the capacity for reason that He gave to humankind are sufficient to arm us with the answers we need to one of the most difficult questions we will face in life, that is, how will we end our lives in faith and honor before God? This is a difficult question and the answer will not be easy or pain-free. But we are equipped by our faith in the faith to come to a conclusion that pleases God.