

Note: Resources utilized varied- ranging from John Frame's Doctrine of the Christian Life, resources on Ethics by Wayne Grudem, a book entitled "Why the Church Needs Bioethics", also "Bioethics" by Scott B. Rae and Paul M. Cox and "Evangelical Ethics" by John Jefferson Davis

Over the next two weeks we will be addressing a subset of ethics known as bioethics. The goal of bioethics from a Christian standpoint is God-honoring thinking and God-honoring living as we encounter various ethical challenges surrounding human life, health, flourishing and reproduction, as well as human aging and death.

As you can imagine, the scope of this discipline is broad, and to address the relevant issues in a thorough-going manner in 2, maybe 3 classes is not possible. Bioethics could easily be stretched out over several classes. It would be interesting, thought provoking, and I think profitable. But because of time constraints, the issues we cover over the next two to three classes will be focused and limited.

My goal today is to talk about ethics at the beginning of life. We will seek to address issues surrounding abortion, the use of reproductive technologies, the ethics of surrogacy, and some of the ethical decisions surrounding birth control. In a later class we will confront some of the challenges surrounding ethics at the end of life, including death and dying, physician assisted suicide, and euthanasia.

These can be complex matters. I believe the church must give these matters serious attention. I believe the church has the necessary resources to engage such challenges well. However, we need God to guide us by His Word and Spirit. We need healthy doses of sound biblical reasoning. We need discernment and biblically shaped wisdom. We need humility. May God help us.

Let's pray to that end.

We need to jump right in. As we start, I think it is necessary to take a few moments in order to lay a foundation that will serve us well as we seek to do bioethics over the next weeks.

A fundamental question that lies at the heart of bioethics is this- "What does it mean to be human?"

The Bible answers this question. Its answer must be foundational to our worldview if we are to think accurately and righteously about bioethical issues.

The crucial text of Scripture in this discussion is Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV):

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Here we have the defining description, from God himself, concerning what it means to be human.

As the creation narrative unfolds, we reach the 6th and final day of creation, and God issues this climactic proclamation- "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness".

We see two relevant truths emerge from the text.

1. God's own heightened involvement in the creation of man and woman.
2. Humanity's privileged status.

Prior to this creative act, God simply states what is to be created, and speaks it into existence. God says, 'Let there be light, and there was light.

However, with the creation of humans, He draws attention to His own heightened involvement in the process. "God said, 'Let us make man in our image,' v. 26).

As far as humanity's status is concerned, clearly man is conferred with a position of tremendous privilege, for both man and woman were made in God's image and likeness. "Let us make *man in our image, after our likeness*".

What does it mean to be made in the image of God?

Theologians have spent considerable trying to nail down the precise meaning behind these words. What is it exactly that makes us image bearers?

There are those who think that the image of God resides in man's unique intellectual ability. Others emphasize man's power to make moral decisions- a sort of freedom of will, as it were. Some believe that the image of God refers to man's original moral purity or is bound up with mankind's creation as male and female. Some emphasize man's capacity to know God.

This expression actually carries with it a wealth of biblical truth- it is an idea that is rich and expansive. It is a reality that blossoms as we reach the New Covenant, as Paul takes up this idea and applies it to Christ.

Colossians 1:15 (ESV): 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Christ is the telos, the destination, the ultimate expression of the image of God. Jesus, the Son of God incarnate, as a man, we are told, is the image of God par excellence.

So, I think any attempts to reduce the idea to its bare minimum will cause us to run the risk of losing something of its marvelous meaning.

For our purposes it is helpful to appreciate two basic realities- man in the image of God means that-

1. Man is somehow like God and
2. Man somehow represents God.

I'll explain. When God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26), the meaning is that God plans to make a creature *somehow similar to Himself*. The Hebrew word for "image" (tselem) and the Hebrew word for "likeness" (demut) refer to something that is similar.

This doesn't mean identical, for God is invisible Spirit- infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, never to be confused with the created thing. He is the Creator. Nevertheless- when God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26), the meaning is that God plans to make a creature *somehow similar to Himself*.

In ancient near eastern culture, the idea of image was closely akin to what we think of as a *statue or monument*. Pagan religions employed such images as physical and visual representations of their false gods and deified kings. So, the pagans would hew out lifeless images of their gods.

But Genesis 1.26 is a picture of the true God making man in his own image. His image bearers are qualitatively different. They are living physical and visual representations, not lifeless. They are living images representing the invisible God to His world, so that others would somehow know God and revere God and worship God alone.

God made us to image him, display him, reveal him, point to him. *Images glorify the one they represent*. Their purpose is to bring to mind someone great- so that we might honor the one who stands behind the image.

In the ancient world an image was usually set up to signify the rule of a king over a region. This implies that humans, in God's image, are given this remarkable reign over the creation. God reigns over everything, including the man and woman, and the man and woman reign as God would have them, exercising dominion over the creation. They are to subdue, steward, and represent God in a benevolent manner, reflective of the God who made them and governs them.

There is more that could be said.

But as we step back and take it all in, the man and the woman emerge as the pinnacle, the culmination of God's creative work in the beginning, exercising dominion over all other created things. To be in the image of God is the highest status and privilege in all creation, and only human beings share in it.

King David knew mankind's dignified position. As he reflects on the Genesis account, carried along by the Spirit, he describes mankind this way- Psalm 8:5–8 (ESV):

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and *crowned him with glory and honor*. 6 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, 7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, 8 the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Therefore, to be made in the image of God implies inestimable dignity and tremendous worth. *Man in the image of God is why there is a sacredness and sanctity inherent to all human life.*

Now, if we are thoughtful, the question inevitably arises about man's status as image bearer after the fall. We have to be clear and careful about how we answer this question.

Folks in the Lutheran tradition have taught that the image of God has been lost as a result of the fall. I think this position is problematic. If we say that the image is entirely lost, there is a sense in which we are saying that the sanctity of human life is greatly diminished, perhaps lost as well. This is a theological Pandora's box. Bad theology makes for bad ethics. If we embrace this position, we leave ourselves open to justify- perhaps unwittingly- the poor treatment of fellow humans if we imagine that the image of God is lost.

Those in the Reformed tradition have affirmed that man retains and remains in God's image, even if the image has been tarnished by sin. I think we are on solid exegetical ground to embrace the traditional Reformed view, because the Bible explicitly references the continuing presence of God's image in men and women after the fall in Genesis 3 and after the cataclysmic flood in Genesis 6.

Perhaps the most decisive text that shows that the image is retained can be found in Genesis 9:5-6- *remember the context.*

The effects of sin and the fall have run its course like a wildfire. The world is *corrupt and violent*. The wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

God sends a cataclysmic flood, giving rise to a type of de-creation and recreation, and Noah and his family eventually emerge from the ark to resume God's project of filling the earth with His glory. But sin remains. The intention of man's heart is still evil from his youth. God, knowing man's heart, knowing the corruption and violence he is still capable of, issues this edict-

Genesis 9:5-6: And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

'Shedding blood' refers to the violent, unjustified taking of human life. It is murder. And if someone takes the life of another human being in this way, God sanctions just retribution. The severity of the punishment is proportional to the seriousness of the crime committed.

Note how God purposes to carry out just retribution- by using man himself. Man himself is the instrument. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed."

And here is the point we must see in this text. The immense value and dignity of mankind undergirds the whole arrangement.

Because man is in God's image, the murder of a man is met with the severest penalty imaginable.

And as God's representative image bearer, man is a fitting instrument in God's hand to exact this heavy toll. If we say the image is lost, the whole arrangement makes no sense.

The text teaches that even though men are sinful and fallen, that the image remains.

This leads me to another text that is immensely relevant.

James 3:8-10-

No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

Of note James has no problem invoking our status as image bearers to inform our conduct. When it comes to patterns of speech, he condemns our backbiting and slander based on the moral status of the ones we curse- *men and women in the likeness of God.*

The implication is that image bearers, and the God that stands behind them, are so tightly connected, inextricably bound up together, that James says it is inconsistent and unfitting, to bless one and at the same time curse the other. In this New Covenant passage, it is clear that the image is retained and is to be recognized despite the presence of sin and the realities of the fall.

This is not to say that the man in the image of God is a pristine image. Man is not as fully like God as he was before the fall. His moral, ethical purity has been damaged; his thoroughly sinful character does not represent God's absolute holiness. His intellect is corrupted. His speech no longer glorifies God. His relationships are often governed by selfishness rather than love. Though man is still in the image of God, certain aspects of that image have been distorted and marred.

Nevertheless, every single human being, not matter how much the image of God is marred by sin, infirmities, weakness, age, or disability, still has the *status* of being in God's image and therefore must be treated with the dignity and respect that is due to God's image bearer. This has profound implications for our conduct toward others. It means that elderly people, those who are seriously ill or dying, people with severe disabilities, and the unborn, deserve full protection and honor as human beings.

The image of God is not fundamentally a capacity that we possess or lose, but rather a part of our inherent essence as humans. *We are made in the image of God. This is a status conferred by God.* Image bearing denotes something that we fundamentally are, something that the Scripture consistently says that we are **made in**. It is inherent. This realization is profoundly important as we do ethics at the edge of life, either at the beginning or at the end, where our capacities are diminished or quickly fading.

This brings us to the issue of abortion.

Here are some questions to stimulate the grey matter responsible for ethical decision making-

Does the Bible view the unborn child as human life?

What does the Bible teach about the protection of the unborn child?

Is there scientific evidence that the unborn child is a distinct person?

How should we think about abortion in the case of rape or abortion to save the life of the mother?

These are important questions.

For our purposes, abortion may be defined as: *any action that intentionally causes the death and removal from the womb of an unborn child.*

The biblical worldview is that the unborn child, from the moment of conception, is a person, made in God's image, entitled to the protection and the love that Christ demands we render to our neighbor. This is by far the weightiest argument against abortion.

Several passages in the Bible indicate that an unborn child should be thought of and protected as a person from the moment of conception.

Among the passages of Scripture most clearly relevant to this question is Exodus 21:22–25:

When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

This passage describes two possible scenarios.

In Scenario A, a woman somehow gets involved in a brawl between men, and one strikes her so as to cause her to give birth prematurely. The Hebrew phrase translated "her children come out" most naturally describes a premature birth. Beyond the pain and difficulty of the premature birth itself, there is "no harm." The text does not specify who is not harmed. *Since it is indefinite, we should take it as meaning harm to the mother, the child, or both.*

Since there is no harm, the legal matters deal entirely with the premature birth itself, in addition to the pain and suffering associated with it. Perhaps the father and mother were away from home, and had to make costly arrangements in order to accommodate the unexpected birth. Whatever the case may be, the woman's husband determines the penalty, in cooperation with judges, who also help make a determination as to payment.

In scenario B there is harm. *Again, the harm is indefinite, so we should take it as applying to the mother, the child, or both.* Here the law guides the judges by a long statement of the law of talion: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, and so on. In the worst case, where there is a death, the striker must pay with his life. Note, then, that on this interpretation killing an unborn child is as serious a crime as killing a pregnant woman. Indeed, killing an unborn child is a capital offense. This speaks volumes regarding the moral status of the unborn child.

Note that the text does not say that the striker intended to do harm. If the blow killed the child, the child's death was to some extent accidental. Had the striker intended to kill the child, his crime would have been even more serious. Now abortion is the intentional killing of an unborn child. So abortion is even worse than the action said here to be a capital crime.

Meredith Kline's points out that *induced abortion was so abhorrent to the Israelite mind that it was not necessary to have a specific prohibition dealing with it in the Mosaic law. Even the Assyrians, who were cruel people, had laws that attest to an abhorrence for abortion. A woman guilty of abortion was condemned to be impaled on stakes. Even if she managed to lose her own life in producing the abortion, she was still to be impaled and hung up in shame as an expression of the community's repudiation of such an abomination.*

Psalms 139:13–16

In this passage, David describes God's dealings with him in the womb of his mother: *For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.*

The important thing here is that in this reflection David refers to his unborn life as fully personal. He designates the fetus with first person pronouns. It was he, David, whom God formed in the womb. Therefore, David was a person before his birth.

Psalms 139, is not an isolated text. It represents the general biblical usage which should be seen as significant. In fact, there are many texts that speak of unborn children as persons (see Job 31:15–18; Ps. 22:9; Hos. 12:3; cf. Gen. 25:23–26; 38:27–30). Perhaps even more significant is that there are no texts that speak of the unborn as anything other than persons. That pattern of language shows remarkable consistency across the Bible and fits perfectly with the evaluation of unborn life in Exodus 21 discussed above.

Psalm 51:5

In Psalm 51, David confesses sin to God. The heading identifies the sin as his adultery with Bathsheba. In verse 5, he says, *“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”*

Here he is tracing his sin back to its origin. He recognizes that he has always been a sinner before God. Some assert that the sin in verse 5 refers to that of David’s mother, but that is impossible in the context. The psalm is about David’s sin, and his alone.

This text, like others, employs personal pronouns to refer to David’s unborn life. But there is more: the unborn David was also a sinner. *Sin in Scripture is a personal quality, never an impersonal one.* It is never a property of things, only of persons. It is personal estrangement from God on account of disobedience.

The Christian church has found in this text one of the chief Old Testament witnesses to the doctrine of original sin: that each of us inherits the guilt of Adam’s sin and his sinful nature.

So in this passage (1) David refers to his unborn self as a person, using first person pronouns, (2) he refers to his unborn self as a sinner, and (3) he traces that sin back to his very conception. Clearly David regards himself as a person from conception.

Luke 1:26-56

In this passage the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and spoke these words- Luke 1.31:

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

In Luke 1.35 the angel Gabriel goes on to say “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”

After this pronouncement, Luke 1.39 tells us that *“In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.”*

We may conservatively estimate that the time it took for Mary to travel and reach Judah was approximately two weeks or perhaps less. Therefore, the incarnate Jesus is no more than 3 weeks gestational age upon arrival to Elizabeth’s home.

When Elizabeth greets Mary in these early days of Mary’s pregnancy, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, refers to Mary as “the mother of my Lord” (Luke 1:43). No more than three weeks gestational age. But by the Holy Spirit calls Mary “the mother” of the Lord. The means that Jesus, in his early prenatal form, was not a clump of cells, but was a son, and therefore a person.

These verses are significant because they mean that the incarnation of Christ did not begin months later when he was a newborn baby in a manger, or a small child, or a teenager, or an adult man when baptized by John. Rather, the divine nature of God the Son was joined to the human nature of Jesus from the moment of his conception in Mary’s womb. From that point on, Jesus Christ was a divine-human person, both God and man. This is significant for the discussion of abortion, because it means that Christ himself was a genuine human person long before his birth, even in the very earliest phases of gestational life.

John Jefferson Davis writes: In the New Testament, the incarnation of Jesus Christ is a profound testimony to God's affirmation of the sanctity of prenatal life... His human history, like ours, began at conception... The significant point is that God chose to begin the process of incarnation there, rather than at some other point, thus affirming the significance of that starting point for human life.

Scott Rae agrees: From the earliest points of life in the womb, Mary and Elizabeth realize that the incarnation has begun. This lends support to the notion that the incarnation began with Jesus's conception and that the Messiah took on human form in all of its stages, embryonic life included.

Hebrews 2.17 comes to mind- *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

This includes all aspects of humanity, including prenatal humanity. And all of this suggests that there is untold value and significance in the setting of embryonic and fetal life.

Scientific Evidence

The relevant scientific data confirms the Scriptural view of the unborn as persons. From the point of conception, unborn children have a full complement of chromosomes, half from the father and half from the mother. Therefore, the unborn child is not "part of his mother's body." His or her genetic makeup is different from hers. At conception, you get a new entity, a person distinct from its mother, with its own inherent mechanisms for maturation and development.

Therefore, we should not treat the unborn child as we treat hair or fingernails, or even as we treat organs like the gall bladder or liver. The unborn child is a separate and unique human being.

Some object, insisting that the unborn are not a person because the child is unable to survive without its mother (or survive outside mother's womb).

It is true that the unborn child is dependent on his mother for life support: oxygen, nutrition, and immunity. But this dependence is not essential to his or her existence or personhood.

Technology has been able to provide life support for very young fetuses, and it is certainly possible that future technology will be able to support the embryo/fetus through the whole gestation period.

Furthermore, even after birth children are dependent on adults for life support. Therefore, dependence should not be used as an argument against the independent personhood of the child. The same applies to the elderly and infirmed. Dependence doesn't take away personhood.

But thinking about this in exclusively scientific terms has its limitations. Science is forced to appeal to an arbitrary milestone, such as quickening and heartbeat and brain waves or discernable features as it seeks to define personhood. Personhood is first and foremost, a metaphysical, religious, theological, and ethical category, not a scientific one.

Can Abortion Ever Be Justified?

Much discussion of abortion centers on the hard situations: abortion in cases of rape, incest, or to save the life of the mother.

Some have argued that although abortion should generally be avoided, it is warranted in these situations, and even in other cases, such as compromised physical or psychological health of the mother, possible or actual deformity, population control, and economic need.

Certainly people often seek abortion in the midst of great difficulty, and Christians should sympathize with women who think they have no other alternative. But we cannot compromise the biblical principle that unborn children should be treated the same as those already born.

It would certainly be wrong to kill an infant or child because he is deformed, exhibiting some sort of birth defect, or as a means of population control.

Therefore, killing an unborn child for these reasons is also wrong.

Regarding children w/ birth defects: Bear in mind that a “possible” or “probable” diagnosis can be in error.

Some birth defects can be very small, and even when significant, the child can lead a happy life and bring much joy, blessing to family and to others (example: Down’s Syndrome children).

Texts to reflect on-

Exodus 4:11 11 Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?”

John 9:1-3 1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

What about instances of rape or incest?

We should sympathize with women who do not want to bear children that remind them of such tragic experiences. Such women need much love and counsel. But in the final analysis we must not kill someone because that person is born of rape or incest. We must not kill a child for the sins of his father. The father is guilty; the child is innocent.

This particular scenario is emotionally charged, and that is understandable. But as we think through it, we must ask the question- would it be right to kill the child conceived as a result of rape or incest after the child is born? The answer would be no. The reason, from a theological perspective is that the child is an image bearer, a human person. The same status applies to earliest embryonic life as well, and therefore embryonic and prenatal life should be protected even in cases of rape and incest.

These situations are rare thankfully. In such situations, it may be necessary to give a child up for adoption, though it may be best if such a child can be raised by his own mother. For her to undertake such a task, or even to give up the child to adoptive parents, is moral heroism. But to kill the child is to choose death, not life.

When it comes to rape and incest, we must not minimize genuine pain and the hardship involved. But must recognize that it is opportunity for God to work in remarkable ways.

There is one exception to be mindful of; the case where the continued existence of the child threatens the physical life of the mother. This is also rare, but it does occur. One occurrence that comes to mind is something known as ectopic pregnancy, where the fertilized egg implants itself in the fallopian tubes rather than in the womb. In these cases, the child will not be able to survive. The pregnancy is not viable. And the physician must remove the child (bringing about its demise) to preserve the woman’s life.

It seems to me that this type of abortion (in the strict technical sense of the word) would be ethically permissible, because there is no possibility of saving the child’s life, and not to intervene while the mother carries the pregnancy poses a substantial threat the life of its mother. The principle is this- when two lives would be lost with no action, and only one can be saved, doctors must save the life that can be.

A word of caution- abortion to save the mother’s life does not equate to abortion to save the mother’s “health” or abortion to optimize the mother’s health. Some justify abortion by construing pregnancy as a threat to the mother’s mental or emotional health. Some might portray treatable and manageable physiological effects of pregnancy as a threat to the health of the mother as well. Abortion supporters always want laws to have exceptions to protect the “life and health of the mother” – which usually represents a huge loophole that would allow for most abortions.

Of note: All pro-life proposals for legislation include exceptions in order to save life of mother in cases where her life is truly threatened.

Abortion in our current societal context

David Livingstone Smith in his 2012 book, *Less than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others* brings valuable insight into what the human condition is capable of if we do not incorporate the biblical view of humans as image bearers into our own worldviews.

The basic observation of Smith's book is that people will dehumanize their enemies before enslaving, torturing, or killing them. The Hutus of Rwanda regarded the Tutsi as "cockroaches" and clubbed them to death by the hundreds of thousands. White Americans called Native Americans "savages," and African Americans "property," in order to justify rape, man stealing, and killing. History testifies repeated to this dynamic, all the way back to ancient Chinese, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian literature.

"It's hard to kill or enslave your own kind", Livingston says. Easier to kill something subhuman, especially if it's systematic and legally sanctioned killing. A murderous regime doesn't only need power, it needs legitimizing, a moral argument, a sense of its ... rights.

This means that it is important how we think about the unborn inside a woman's womb. We call it a fetus, organic tissue, uterine contents, a clump of cells, and part of the woman's own body, like an appendix, that can be removed if it poses a problem.

These concepts are commandeered in order to, as it were, dehumanize the unborn child.

Add to this the perceived moral high ground embodied by sacred American values- ideas like "choice" or "freedom" or the "the woman's right to choose." When it comes to American and westernized morality, these are the most sacred values that trump all others. This is what we are up against in our society.

The proliferation of Marxist thought has played a role as well. Marxist thought, amid its ethical relativism, sees life as an interplay of oppressors and oppressed, and this dynamic constitutes true ethical evil in the Marxist worldview. Since the late 1980s the pro-abortion movement has linked itself tightly to the Marxist movement. The result is that restrictions on abortion is seen as an effort to oppress women by limiting their choices. Some extremists in the pro-choice movement will tolerate restrictions surrounding abortion at all. A teenage girl must have parental permission to miss class or go on a field trip, but the abortion advocate will tolerate no involvement of parents in a girl's decision to abort a child. There can be no requirement of parental consent or even notification. Any restriction on abortion is the oppression of women, a denial of their autonomy.

And that word "autonomy" gets us to the heart of the matter.

The Bible teaches that we are not autonomous, that we belong to another, that we are created by God, and owe him allegiance. Our hunger for moral autonomy is what got us expelled from Eden. We want to be like God in ways that are forbidden, we want to determine what is good and what is evil. We want autonomy.

James 4:2 also tells us that "You desire and do not have, so you murder."

Certainly, it could be said that we terminate the lives of unborn babies because they cut across our desires; they stand in the way of our unencumbered self-enhancement.

This applies to both men and women. These sins do not happen in a vacuum. Our entire culture bears culpability. We live in a culture where self-enhancement and self-advancement is our god. And if self-enhancement is our god, then the One who is at work in the womb shaping a person in his own image is not God. Therefore, the assault on God's work in the womb is no longer seen to be sacrilegious.

As Christians we must bring to our age a prophetic accusation- that our society has sought to de-god God. And widespread abortion is the consequence of that.

But we are also to bring a message of mercy. When we deal with women who are contemplating this awful choice, we must come to them as ministers of mercy. Jesus was harsh with the Pharisees, but not with the woman of Samaria—his gentle yet perceptive words convicted her of sin.

Never before have women been so subject to *ideological manipulation*. Many people do not want women with “problem pregnancies” to know all the relevant facts. They do not want these women to know that their fetus is a baby, that there are physiological and psychological dangers in abortion, or that there are alternatives to abortion.

In the face of such manipulation, the Christian offers grace. We insist that a person does not have to kill the unborn child. There are alternatives. There is help. There is the church and the family of God. And the church can be instrumental in making sure this help is available.

This issue can make a heavy demand on the church’s attention, time, passion, and energy. None of us alone can do the job that needs to be done, but we can do something.

Support your local pro-life crisis pregnancy center.

Volunteer as a counselor, if you are gifted for that.

Pastor Lopes has preached on this issue. Preachers need to preach and teachers need to teach.

Write to newspaper editors and government officials.

Support pro-life candidates for office. Withhold support for otherwise promising candidates who favor abortion.

Be principled and flexible at the same time.

But even more important is to be faithful to Christ and his gospel. In Christ, God loved us well and rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His Son. Let us therefore go forth as the church in obedience to the great commission, praying that God would transform many lives and subsequently transform our culture and nation.

Euthanasia

Note: Resources utilized varied- ranging from John Frame's Doctrine of the Christian Life, resources on Ethics by Wayne Grudem, a book entitled "Why the Church Needs Bioethics", also "Bioethics" by Scott B. Rae and Paul M. Cox and "Evangelical Ethics" by John Jefferson Davis

Intro:

Because humans are made in the image of God, we are somehow like God, and somehow represent God, and certain capacities and capabilities will usually flow from that. We have a capacity for relationship with God. We have capacities in the domain of morality. We have intellects, and the ability to create, beautify, transform. We have the capacity to love. We can exercise dominion, subdue the earth, serve God, bear fruit and multiply. These are astounding blessings and privileges. But after the fall, having these capacities and these capabilities is always a matter of degree. As we grow old, they often fade and diminish. The effects of the fall can be devastating; and sometimes these capacities are conspicuously absent. Sin, in various ways, has taken its toll on humanity.

Nevertheless, all humans are still made in God's image. *They retain their status as image bearers.* Genesis 9 demonstrates this in no uncertain terms. James 3.7 takes up this theological reality and applies it without reservation.

What this means is that the image of God does not fundamentally rest on our capacities or capabilities. Being made in the image of God is a part of our essence as humans. It is a status conferred by God. Made in God's image denotes something that we fundamentally are. No man can take that away. Disease and debility cannot rob us of it.

This realization is important as we do ethics at the edge of life, either at the beginning or at the end. Every single human being, no matter how much the image of God is eroded by consequences of sin- still has the status of being God's image bearer. All human life remains sacred. Therefore, every person must be treated with the dignity and respect that is due to God's image bearers. This has profound implications for how we treat others. It means that those advanced in years, people terminally ill and dying, people with the severest disabilities, and the unborn, deserve honor and full protection as human beings.

We talked about how this bears on life in the womb. The consistent testimony of the Scripture leads us to this conclusion- life begins at conception, and even the undeveloped embryo falls under the sacred umbrella of being made in God's image.

This morning we are going to shift gears. My hope is that the momentum from last week's lesson will serve us well as we talk about life at the other end of the spectrum.

Today I plan to address death and dying and end of life decision making. We will address euthanasia and physician assisted suicide. At the end of class, Lord permitting, we may circle back and address some specialized matters very much related to these larger issues- namely birth control, reproductive technologies, and surrogacy.

As we walk through some end-of-life issues, from the outset I offer a careful qualifier.

As Christians, we openly affirm the sanctity of life; and we work outward from that non-negotiable truth as we seek to discern a God-honoring approach to death and dying. In the public arena, we should not hesitate to speak of God and use theological categories such as sanctity of life. We should discourage and condemn the practices of euthanasia and physician assisted suicide based upon these principles. Our perspectives on end-of-life may fall on deaf ears within the culture at large, and people may be unconvinced. ***But we can still put it out there universally without reservations.***

Nevertheless, much of the Scriptural teaching on facing death, dying, and dying well, cannot be applied to all people without qualification. Many precious truths are tailored for the people of God, and only the people of God. Not everyone can welcome death as the doorstep to an eternity of glory in the presence of Jesus Christ. But believers can.

Many biblical truths teach us how to face death, *especially what lies beyond death*, and they profoundly shape our thinking about death. They bring comfort and stability. But these comforting and stabilizing truths remain elusive if someone is estranged from God and averse to the gospel. Therefore, we need discernment when giving scriptural bioethical advice to someone facing death, especially if faith in Christ and the gospel are absent. These are opportunities to give the gospel, not assume the gospel.

But once a person embraces Christ and the gospel, the entire narrative is nudged in a different direction, and ethics at the end of life take on a different hue. It is not that we are enabled to better lay down bioethical “laws” that prohibit euthanasia or assisted suicide.

Rather, in the light of the gospel, these things become unthinkable. And when the end draws near, ***dying well becomes a distinct possibility***, something the Christian can embrace in Christ's strength.

As we move forward this morning, ***I want to organize our time around this idea of “dying well”.***

The Puritans have made many rich contributions to Reformed Christianity, and this idea of “dying well” is certainly one of them. Christians were at one time recognized to be those who knew how to “die well.” Believers prayed that they might “die well,” by which they meant- not that they would escape all suffering, but that amid suffering, they would not say or do anything that would bring reproach on the name of Christ.

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1. In order to die well, we first need a Biblical understanding of death.

What are some of the basic things that the Bible teaches about death and dying?

The God of the Bible is the true and *living God* (Deut. 5:26; Heb. 10:31). He exists and is self-existent (Exod. 3:14) and alone has “*life in himself*” (John 5:26). Therefore, he is the *giver of all life*. God gives to all people “life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:25). All life, physical and spiritual, is a gift from God. Therefore, life is to be cherished, and we are to preserve and enhance this good gift for ourselves and for others.

Although God gives life, death is a reality that God has ordained. Not because it is natural. Death is a reality because of sin. If our first parents had not sinned, they would have been permitted to eat from the Tree of Life and would live forever. *But because they sinned, death entered in.*

Paul reflects on this connection between sin and death.

Romans 5:12: “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.”

The text shows us, among other things, that death is universal, none are exempt. Death represents God’s righteous universal judgment upon all humanity-“death came to all people”.

But there is another biblical perspective on death that we must incorporate into our thinking.

Death is also described as an enemy. Death is the “last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26). Death's is an intrusion into life, and a powerful enemy that makes death and the process of dying fraught with emotion, and a fearful prospect (Heb. 2:15). Death is “not the way it’s supposed to be”. Humans rightly hunger to continue existing, because God made us for himself and for eternity. There is a legitimate place for grief and even outrage. But never outrage toward God. Never bitterness toward God. It is sin and all that sin entails that is abhorrent.

Consider Christ’s powerful response at the tomb of Lazarus in John 11:33–36. It was there that Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, and he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly

troubled. And he wept. Christ, more than anyone, could clearly see that death is a foreign invader into God's good creation, one that only he could overcome through his own death and resurrection.

Sometimes we imagine that grief in the face of death reflects unbelief in the promises of eternal life. When death takes away a loved one- Christian maturity does not mean we should not grieve. Grief in the face of death should be normative. We weep with those who weep. Paul says we grieve, to be sure, *just not as those who have no hope* (1 Thess. 4:13). What we must carefully avoid, then, is grief that slips into hopelessness and despair and anger against God.

Death is an enemy. We should be appalled at suffering and death (it is not the way it's supposed to be).

And death represents righteous universal judgment. Therefore, we should not be blindsided- as if death is inexplicable.

Sin and death are brutal realities. But death does not have the last word. Christ has already defeated death.

This brings us to another observation.

2. Dying well involves resting in Jesus.

Through his own death, Jesus has broken "the power of him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil," thereby freeing his people from the enslaving fear of death (Heb. 2:14–15). Christ has taken away the sting of divine judgment from death (1 Cor. 15:54–56), for "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). As a result, not even death can separate those who belong to Christ from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:38–39).

Because of what Jesus has done, death is now subservient to God's redemptive purposes, bringing believers into the very presence of their Creator and Redeemer. When believers die, we are present with the Lord. There we await a final transformation, a resurrection existence, in the new heavens and new earth.

Resting in Jesus brings hope, calms our fears, and help us to look beyond the here and now. Therefore, our approach to death ought to be transparently different from that of unbelievers. And the one hand, we refuse to accept physical death as something that is only natural. On the other, we also refuse to view it as the ultimate disaster. These are precious things for the Christian.

And the gospel also shapes how we come alongside the deathbed of an unbeliever. *As long as it is called "today", we are to bring the good news of Christ's victory over death.* We as Christians need to be at the bedside of unbelievers, speaking to them about the rest that Jesus gives. And only heaven will reveal how many have closed with Christ in those moments- as God uses impending death to put life, Christ, and the gospel in their proper perspective.

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3. Dying Well Involves Acknowledging Death's Reality

In Psalm 90, Moses prays, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12).

In other words, wisdom demands that we recognize that our lives, in this world, do not go on forever. Only as we live in light of our limited time on earth, can we truly live lives of wisdom.

This heart of wisdom often comes into full bloom as a senior saint sees the mist rising from the river, sees the finish line in the distance.

Recognizing that we are going to die may give a person a whole new perspective on the days he has left. Different priorities surface. There is gratitude for areas of faithfulness, honesty concerning areas of sin. The goal of finishing

life well becomes paramount. Believers become conspicuously intentional about living the final phase of life wisely and well.

This brings us to another observation.

4. *Dying well comes after closure with family and loved ones.* *The winter of life is a time for nurturing bonds with family and friends. A time for leaving a godly legacy to those closest to us. It is time to reflect openly on the major events of life, thank God for the good times, and rejoice in his forgiveness for the wrongs done. It is an opportunity for quality family time together in order to talk about the most important things in life.*

The Psalms regularly speak of the importance of telling the next generation about God.

Psalms 71:18 the psalmist prays, “Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.”

And as you declare the power of God to others, these words should be constantly on our lips. Simple words. I love you. Thank you. Forgive me. I forgive you.

This is how it ought to be.

5. *Dying Well Involves Acknowledging the Reality of Suffering*

Three observations-

1. Many passages in the New Testament tell us that Christians should expect to suffer. Very often, though not always, the suffering in view is the suffering that comes to Christians because of their attachment to Jesus.

But there are Romans 8:18 sufferings as well. The sufferings of Romans 8:18 are all-encompassing. They include all types of hardships we may encounter in this life. This includes the suffering that picks up the pace toward the very end of life.

In Romans 8:18 Paul writes-

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” *None of us are exempt from the sufferings of this present time. We should expect them.*

2. We must not lose sight of the fact that God can commandeer suffering for a good purpose.

2 Corinthians 4:17- For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. *In this text Paul, in language designed to bring perspective, describes suffering as a light momentary affliction. But he also describes it as accomplishing a good purpose- namely preparing for us an eternal weight of glory. God commandeers our suffering for a good purpose.*

3. God can meet us with extraordinary help in our suffering.

2 Corinthians 12:9- “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

*We must never overlook the help that the triune God affords. In suffering God brings comfort, His evident presence, an abundance of **grace** and strength.*

Quite often that help comes in the form of other Christians coming alongside the one who suffers. This is the way it should be.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4- Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Dying Christians should not lack the support of loving brothers and sisters in Christ; they should not die alone and ignored; they should not die in deepest despair that no one will look after their children.

We must not think that the Christian's only resources in the crisis of dying and death are those provided directly by the new covenant community either. This is hugely important.

We in the Reformed tradition are right to speak of the "common grace" that God gives. We should gladly receive the gifts and graces of God mediated through modern medicine, hospice, and other services. I don't have time to talk about this, but excellent hospice and palliative care are a ministry, to fellow believers and to others.

And finally, we need perspective when acknowledging the reality of suffering- "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time *are not worth comparing* with the glory that is to be revealed to us." *Some key passages speak of the absence of pain, sorrow, death, and suffering in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:4), and paradise in the presence of Jesus.* This means that as Christians face final suffering, we must not think of it as suffering without end, as indefinite, with nothing beyond it. Rather think of it as one last hurdle that we face before we finish the race, and enter into glory.

Another observation.

6. Dying well means using medical technology appropriately.

Modern medicine is a gift from God. With it we cure disease, and oftentimes even delay death. It may restore full health; but if full health remains elusive, it can enable a quality of life that is still rich and fulfilling.

But there comes a time when medical treatment only adds more burdens to an unavoidable death. Then, it may be appropriate to forgo certain treatments, seek comfort care, and not prolong an already hard dying process.

How can we know when to stop medical treatment near the end of someone's life?

To answer this question, a clear distinction must be made between "killing" and "letting die."

Killing is actively doing something to a patient ***in order to hasten or cause his or her death.***

Letting die, on the other hand, is ***passively*** allowing someone to die from other causes, without interfering with that process.

In the first case, the cause of death is the action taken by another person.

In the second case, the cause of death is the disease, injury, or aging process that has already been occurring in the person who dies.

The Bible clearly prohibits actively killing others (thou shall not kill). But in the case of letting someone die, the moral decision is more complex.

Sometimes it is clearly wrong to let a person die. There are cases where letting someone die is the same as murder. In the classic movie, *The Little Foxes*, Horace goes to take his medicine, and accidentally knocks over his bottle, presumably nitroglycerin, and pleads for help. His wife Regina does not take action, but just watches. Effectively, she lets him die of a massive heart attack. Certainly, in this case, letting him die is morally indistinguishable from murder.

Sometimes it is wrong to let yourself die. If I, a 40-something father and husband were to present to the hospital in complete heart block, a potentially life-threatening heart rhythm, and I could easily be stabilized with a pacemaker, for me to refuse that definitive treatment, a cure as it were, is morally dubious at best, and justifiably construed as suicide. It is just plain wrong and dishonoring to God.

So what are some guiding principles here?

We should intervene and try to help a person recover, and not passively allow the person to die, when (1) there is a reasonable human hope of recovery and (2) we are able to help.

This is obeying Jesus's teaching "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39) and his command "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" (Matt. 7:12). In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus implicitly condemns the priest and the Levite who neglected to do what they could in order to help a "half-dead" man (see Luke 10:30–37).

On the other hand, there are cases where **(1)** there is no reasonable human hope of recovery (sometimes called a situation of "futility"), and **(2)** it is the patient's wish to be allowed to die, **and/or** **(3)** we are unable to help (such as when a person is trapped in a burning car). In circumstance like these, it may be justifiable to allow the person to die. This is morally distinct from actively murdering a person.

Modern medicine complicates the issue. In today's era of intensive care, dying often happens slowly. We use a ventilator to help a person breathe, dialysis to replace failed kidneys, transfusions to replace blood loss, heart and lung machines to oxygenate and pump blood. As a result, the timing of death can involve an element of choice. Whether a patient dies in minutes, hours, days, or weeks is often determined by choosing to start, continue, or stop one or more of these or other treatments.

Technology can often keep people alive indefinitely—people who in past ages would have quickly died from injury or illness.

It is critically important to recognize that when dying patients (or their legal representatives) decide to limit treatment because death is imminent, treatment is futile, and brings with it intolerable burdens- it is still the disease that is taking the patient's life. It is not the patient or the family or the physician who is "killing the patient." Families often struggle with decisions about stopping artificial life-support for a loved one who is in the process of dying, fearing that such a decision will be the cause of death.

We may not know for sure whether a particular treatment will restore a patient. Often we must accept the judgments of physicians. They know what is possible and what is probable. They have had far more experience with who is dying and who is not dying patients, and the best providers often have a kind of intuition as to whether a patient has fallen beyond the point of medical help. Their expertise gives them greater insight in weighing the burdens of treatment with the probable and potential benefits of a given treatment.

The potential options should be discussed honestly, and a shared-decision making approach between the patient/family and provider is important. In some cases, it is good to get more than one opinion. But it is also important to recognize our fallibility, even the fallibility of medical professionals, in making these determinations.

Difficult decisions do not always take place in the ICU, either.

A 40-year-old woman with stage 4 cancer and two teenage children may fight with every ounce of her being to remain alive for the sake of her children, knowing full well the damage frequently done to children in their teens when they lose parents.

Compare this with a woman who has survived stage 2 breast cancer plus one return round seven years later, who is now 80 years of age and whose physical reaction to chemotherapy is horrific and the prospect of its "success" bleak. That woman may well decide that chemotherapy is unreasonable medical treatment and opt for palliative or hospice care. Her children are grown and mature, and she is ready to be away from the body and present with the Lord.

Prudential wisdom must prevail. Gospel priorities are paramount. Much prayer is needed. Honest discussions with families are important. Prayer and discussion with trusted members of the body of Christ are important. And in both cases, in a matrix of a mature Christian faith on the part of both women, these two women justifiably make different decisions.

This brings us to another observation-

7. In order to die well, the gospel must be central in our decision making.

Believers should consider carefully what responses near the end of life are consistent with the gospel and which are inconsistent with it. It has been said that people generally die the way they live- how much more should that be the case for followers of Christ. There should be no discontinuity between the faith they live by and the faith they die by.

Consider Paul's mindset- Philippians 1:20–26 (ESV): [that] Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

Here Paul candidly acknowledges that a martyr's death at present would in many respects be happier and better for him than his struggles in this life, **but his concern for fellow believers whom he helps by his ministry leads him to the conclusion that it is better that he remain this side of glory.**

(Notice prioritization in Paul's thinking. When confronted with the prospect of dying as a martyr, his mind runs out to what would bring the most glory to Christ and serve His gospel. But what if Paul were unconscious, quickly deteriorating, treatment was futile. If his body was broken, his mind irreparably damaged. Would he want extensive life support in order to delay his homecoming? Something to think about.)

8. Do not hinder others from dying well.

Essentially, we should seek to honor the values of the person, provided those values are in step with the Word of God and the gospel.

As the end-of-life approaches, there are many values which distinguish individuals. Some people may value their cognitive abilities and choose to endure more pain to preserve them. Some may have a very strong preference to die at home; others may prefer a hospital. Some will prioritize quality of life over burdensome treatment that may or may not prolong life, while others will think that the sanctity of life requires the use of all possible treatments until death intervenes. Some take a "never give up" approach and argue that there is always hope for miraculous intervention. And we should pray for miracles. And we should seek to understand and honor such values.

But it is not unbelief to recognize that miracles are distinctly uncommon. It is not unbelief to take an honest look at a situation, accept the limitations of the human condition, and rejoice in the life God has already given us, looking forward to eternal life with him. Trusting oneself to God in this way should not be construed as giving up, or faithlessness, but as trusting in whatever God wishes to do. This is easy enough to say when one is healthy, and immeasurably more difficult when confronted with a real decision for oneself or a loved one.

Sometimes, things get complicated at the bedside of a dying patient. Medical professionals may initiate overly aggressive medical care. It may come at the request of well-meaning family members who are struggling with letting go. Sometimes, families adopt a doing everything, at all times, at all costs, approach.

At this point, we have to ask the question- whose well-being is truly in view? The patient or the family?

Again, simplistic answers do not come easy in these situations. But there is a solid Christian foundation as we seek to do all of life to the glory of God.

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Earlier I said that dying well involves acknowledging the reality of suffering. But there is more that should be said. That brings us to point number 9.

9. Dying well is not inconsistent with minimizing suffering when possible.

No one wants a painful death. Suffering was not a part of God's original good creation. Along with disease and death, suffering came as the result of the fall. These difficulties are not welcome. To be sure, God uses suffering to accomplish his greater purpose and suffering can have some beneficial results. Nevertheless, its alleviation affords an opportunity to glorify God by reversing one of the results of the fall.

Add to that the fact that pain and isolation are among some of the largest looming concerns surrounding end of life. Isolation is something that we ought to seek to remedy in the bonds of Christian love, and I have addressed that already.

But what about pain at the end of life?

Pain at the end of life can be controlled adequately without undue sedation almost all the time. However, in the rare cases where pain cannot be adequately controlled — there is another option called palliative sedation.

This is a modality of treatment reserved for a patient who is imminently dying and has intolerable physical symptoms, all other possible treatments have been tried, and they have proven to be unsuccessful.

The symptoms that most often lead to this intolerable situation are, obviously pain as well as shortness of breath. In such rare circumstances, it is ethically justifiable to give patients sufficient sedating medication to render them unconscious in order to relieve their suffering.

This sedation may need to be continued for several hours or a few days. The physician does not give enough medication to cause death, but gives enough to relieve suffering, even if this causes unconsciousness. The intention is to relieve suffering that is otherwise uncontrollable.

Now, such relief of bodily distress may occasionally hasten death by a few hours or even days. That is a possibility. However, that relief of distress sometimes allows the body to relax so that death may actually be postponed for a short period. It is impossible to predict whether palliative sedation will hasten, postpone, or have no effect on the timing of death.

Even if death is hastened, that is acceptable as an unintended side effect. The moral justification for this is “the rule of double effect.”

The rule of double effect is an ancient concept developed by St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century.

Aquinas asserts that it is morally acceptable to do an act that has both good and bad effects if:

- the act is inherently good, or at least morally neutral
- the person intends the good effect; the bad effect is not intended, even if it is a possibility;
- the good effect is not achieved by means of the bad effect;
- there is a morally grave reason to allow the bad effect.

The situation most often encountered in a hospice/palliative setting is the use of morphine, which if given in high enough doses may cause respiratory depression, which can lead to death. Using the rule of double effect, it is found to be justifiable to give increasing doses of morphine until pain relief is achieved, even if this causes respiratory depression and possible earlier death. **Now, we must bear in mind- pain is a powerful respiratory stimulant, and it is very rare indeed that the dose of morphine needed to relieve severe pain will cause sufficient respiratory depression to cause death (though it is not impossible).**

Some may take issue with palliative sedation, but it is widely heralded as good end-of-life care, professionally, ethically, and legally allowed, even praised.

However, there is a potential moral problem here as well. The use of palliative sedation requires intellectual honesty. Otherwise, a physician or nurse may rapidly increase the dose of morphine, not waiting for it to have its full effect, leading to premature respiratory depression and hastened death.

If palliative sedation is to be considered, it warrants a discussion and those involved should allow time for goodbyes if it is to be used.

Some Christians have been known to reject most or even all painkillers on their way into eternity because they wanted to keep relatively clear heads so as to experience the sustaining power of Christ in the midst of weakness (2 Cor. 12:7–10). There is something to be said for that. But that choice is a personal one, depending on factors such as the severity of the pain, the maturity of the believer, the boldness of the Christian's faith, and much more.

10. Dying well does not involve euthanasia or assisted suicide.

As western culture has gotten somewhat comfortable with this issue of choice and quasi-control over the dying process, termination of life support or refusal of treatment, many individuals have carried that thinking a step farther.

Their reasoning is that if it is permissible to make treatment decisions with the intention of stopping the prolongation of the dying process, why is it not permissible to make similar decisions that hasten death and actually ensure the timing of death?

Why not allow a dying person to take a lethal drug (assisted suicide) or even allow a physician to give a lethal injection (euthanasia)? If this were allowed, the reasoning continues, we would be able to avoid a prolonged dying process, prevent some of the patient's (and family's) end-of-life suffering, and at the same time eliminate the residual uncertainty about the anticipated time of death. This is often presented as the compassionate and practical thing to do.

The justification for this approach is as follows-

Some patients are suffering and the suffering cannot be relieved; patients have autonomy to act as they desire; if patients want to end their lives, it is permissible to allow them to do so, and we have an obligation to assist. The determining factor in this reasoning is patient autonomy. This freedom of choice leads many to want to exert near absolute control over the timing of death.

The problems with exalting human autonomy and neglecting divine sovereignty are legion.

But based on (a) the presence of God's image in each individual, (b) the scriptural command not to kill innocent persons (Exodus 20.13 "You shall not murder") which includes not murdering oneself, we must conclude that humans do not have a right to engage in medical killing- whether it be physician assisted suicide in the States, or an openness to euthanasia overseas.

Ironically, we so prize our autonomy in the U.S. that the preferred flavor of medical killing is physician assisted suicide, in which it is the patient that presses the button. Nevertheless, assisting in suicide brings with it the same moral culpability, in my mind, as murder.

Since debate about legalization of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia takes place primarily in the secular realm, proponents often ignore or criticize arguments that come from a theological perspective. But the believer who concludes that such practices are contrary to the will of God need not abandon the debate. There are many persuasive reasons to avoid such practices:

- the possibility of misdiagnosis,
- the inaccuracy of prognosis,
- the issue of depression impairing judgment when making a decision,

-the danger of expansion of criteria (to situations involving children or mental illness),

-the right to die slipping into the obligation to die (this could catch on like wildfire given the right circumstances)

We already have legitimate concerns over the increasing costs of healthcare, and the argument that certain persons are draining resources of every kind from society will be used to gain momentum. This argument is already used to encourage abortion. We should have the right to stay alive without having to justify one's existence. Many people with disabilities are understandably worried about the growing openness toward the option of assisted suicide. They fear that a right to die may subtly become a duty to die. One British study shows 65 percent of respondents maintaining that if assisted suicide were legalized, "vulnerable people could feel under pressure to opt for suicide."

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11. Dying well considers Christ's own example- It is instructive to appreciate how the death of Jesus Christ illustrates so many of these principles. Although they come to expression in the context of the moral perfection that attends his status as the Son of God, we in our own small ways, may seek to reflect him. For instance, there is the godly character and dignity he demonstrates even while enduring excruciating pain. Then there is the closure he brings with his family by entrusting the care of his mother to John. There is his willingness to forgive his persecutors. And amid all of it, He entrusts himself to God implicitly- "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.