

Suicide and Christians

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 14 December 2017 16:48

When working in mental hospitals I came across a large number of suicides and attempted suicides. On rare occasions I was able to stop a death with quick action. At one time there was a spate of suicides as patients literally copied the first one (there was, for example, a spate of walking into the sea), a spate I blamed directly on a certain psychiatric 'therapy'.

One of those copy-cat suicides was of a pastor's wife, who could no longer cope with constant moving around to different pastorates; her pastor husband concentrated only on his sermons and congregation, not on his wife, pretending all was well. Today, many Christian men do what they wish to do, with no regard for their wives' feelings or desires, who submit to what is, really, a form of emotional bullying.

I will not go into detail about these suicides or the many more attempted suicides, because we need to know what scripture, and therefore God, says about the subject, bearing in mind that He created us *not* to kill ourselves, but to live in obedience to Himself. For this reason I do not include it with other articles on psychiatry.

However, it should be generally noted that suicide is very often a deep anxiety about one's self and one's inability to change a bad situation... if there is no-one to turn to or apparently 'no way out', people might resort to suicide. Even so, it is not something for any Christian to contemplate, because we either believe God is always with us, or He is not. Suicide by a Christian, then, is a marked sign of unbelief (unless there is an underlying brain malfunction caused by physical trauma or illness).

Six Suicides in Scripture

Six people committed suicide in the Bible: Abimelech, Saul, his armour-bearer, Ahithophel, Zimri and Judas. We do not know the character of the armour-bearer, but all the others were wicked.

Abimelech

Suicide is 'self-killing'. In his case a woman threw part of a mill-stone from a high tower he was attempting to capture and he was badly injured. His pride prompted him to call his armour-bearer, who he commanded to kill him with a sword, so that people did not know he was killed by a woman! The armour-bearer obliged and so Abimelech died. (Judges 9:54). The

Suicide and Christians

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 14 December 2017 16:48

whole episode possibly took no longer than a few minutes. Even so, it was still suicide.

Saul

What of king Saul? He fell on his own sword rather than be captured by Philistines (1 Samuel 31:4). The reason was bound up in not wishing for the enemy to sport with him and show him off in a cage; another reason was far more important – God had rejected him so he had no hope. How many today would kill themselves if an enemy captured them, and the enemy was known for cruelty? Yet, suicide is suicide. Saul's armour-bearer also killed himself, once his master was dead. We are not given much more detail.

Zimri

King Zimri set fire to the palace, and stayed there until he was killed by it. It was a punishment from God (1 Kings 16:18, 19) for his treachery and for leading the people astray.

Ahithophel

This prophet hanged himself after betraying David (2 Samuel 17:23), and did so in a very orderly manner.

Judas

Judas is referred to as a 'traitor' (Luke 6:16), which he was. In remorse, he hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-10). Remorse can drive a person to repent, but this did not happen with Judas; he simply killed himself. As with murder, which demands the death penalty, so Judas' suicide was a just reward for his treachery.

What Can be Said About Suicide?

Many men have fallen on their swords (literally and figuratively), to avoid discovery in treachery, to avoid further pain and suffering, to evade being publicly dishonoured, etc. Some have killed themselves out of depression/anxiety. Some through a brain disorder that robs them of the ability to think properly. Some as an earthly punishment from God for their sins. There are many causal factors for suicide.

In later wars, secret agents have carried cyanide pills, which they swallowed to prevent severe interrogation by an enemy. Soldiers have shot themselves rather than be caught by a vicious

Suicide and Christians

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 14 December 2017 16:48

enemy. There are people who kill themselves because they feel unwanted, or unable to face stress. Others because they feel a deep guilt. The list goes on, so what can we say?

Behind all suicides is fear of some kind. For this reason I often said that it is an extreme and ultimate form of cowardice. That is, not having courage to face danger, opposition, law, one's failings, pain, and so on. Is lack of courage sin?

Having said that, we must delve deeper – as you can see, suicide is a complex matter. On many occasions I have to provide a hard definition for a sin. This is required by God, so that we can repent and move on. But, not even repentance can absolve us of certain things. For example, a murderer can be sorry, or might even come to genuine repentance, but he cannot escape the penalty for first-degree murder – death by judicial instruction. It is what *God* commands, so no judge has the right to countermand it and no Christian may stop the penalty because of sentiment. So, if suicide is self-killing, is it equal to deliberate first-degree murder?

Also, who, faced with a bloodthirsty enemy threatening all kinds of evil injury, would willingly be caught and made subject to despicable behaviour causing immense pain and anguish? Though I ask these questions, they are an human thought, and are not meant to be taken as godly counsel. They are just questions indicating complexity.

Some suicides are the result of disgracing ones' self, or being godless. Some are the just deserts of sinfully decrying God. But, what of suicides caused by brain malfunction (I do not mean neuroses or psychoses, which I do not accept to be genuine illnesses)? What of suicides brought about in addicts after taking strong drugs that skew one's thinking, or bring about severe hallucinations, etc., leading to making muddled or irrational decisions? Can you see how all this means a final answer is not easy?

Jewish Thoughts

Early rabbinical sources could not find a specific prohibition of suicide, but later rabbis saw such prohibition in Genesis 9:5. Today, all three main branches of Judaism feel that suicide is *"fundamentally incompatible with Jewish law and values"*

. This is because the highest duty in Judaism is to preserve human life. (Compare with Christian first-duty – to honour the Lord). Jews believe that the body belongs to God; this can be accepted by Christians also.

Suicide and Christians

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 14 December 2017 16:48

Some Jews go farther, and say that suicide is stealing from God and a rejection of His sovereign will. But, they have a problem here, because Saul's suicide was a punishment from God. Modern Jews say that certain malfunctions do not place blame on those who kill themselves e.g. because of, say, Bi-Polar; or severe depression. However, even this is complex.

For example, the major cause of Bi-Polar, to me, is a refusal to accept responsibility for a severe situation one cannot resolve, so the person hides behind often wild behaviour followed by depression. Severe depression can sometimes be caused by underlying brain injury or illness, such as dementia, and so on. Or, it is an indication of long-standing anxiety which becomes a way of life.

Thus, within the label of 'mental illness' there is no real science or reason to accept justification for actions, thoughts or suicide. On the other hand, some are the result of a person being unable to think properly, and whose thinking in more stable and rational times would never dream of killing ones' self. Thus, acceptance on the basis of a theoretical philosophical stance may, or may not, be consistent with scripture.

At one time Jews refused to bury suicide-dead in their cemeteries, nor did they mourn. The definition used in Jewish law is simple: a person may be mourned over if they did not commit suicide willingly, with sound mind. Those who killed themselves willingly (*lada'at*), with a sound mind, are considered guilty of suicide. Jews think that Saul is not guilty of suicide, because he did not want to be captured and tortured.

The historically celebrated actions of Jews at Masada, who committed mass suicide when they were besieged by Romans, are venerated for bravery, their suicide being regarded as 'self-sacrifice'. Yet, helping a terminally-ill patient to die is not counted to be legal or godly. I agree with that, seeing such 'help' as murder.

Christian Thoughts

It is a fixed belief in my mind that Christians cannot and may not accept as good or truthful, anything condemned by God or not approved by scripture. It is a fact that suicide is not condemned in scripture in any full or detailed way. This is why we must step carefully.

Suicide and Christians

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 14 December 2017 16:48

As a Christian I know that when the mind is altered by drugs, or injury, or some underlying brain malfunction, no blame can be placed on the one who kills him/her self. And, if a man dies for someone else, as in, say, a battle, this is self-sacrifice and not suicide... otherwise one would have a great problem in accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross... He tells us He laid down His own life to save many.

Many more attempts at suicide are made, than the number who actually die. But, I would dispute the acceptance of certain suicides, e.g. say, for financial reasons, or perceived loss of face, and so on. These suicides show a godless attitude towards life and towards God. It must be remembered that our body is not our own, and we should not destroy what is the Temple of God. Another reason is the damage it does to those left behind, especially children, who often go through life with heavy burdens, because they believe the suicide was 'their fault'.

Suicide not allied to extreme circumstances such as physical attacks by a wicked enemy who would inflict extreme pain and suffering, for example, really have no truth behind them. To kill your body in most circumstances is to become an unbeliever, whose action is saying that there is no answer to problems or circumstances. The same can be said for Christians who indulge in depression when afflicted (though many FEEL afflicted when they are not).

We must acknowledge that Satan can intrude into our minds and strongly suggest suicide as an 'answer' to problems. This is a lie. Some prophets asked God to kill them for being (in their own minds) ineffective. This is not the same as suicide, but a request for holy punishment. In the final days of earth, many will try suicide to avoid the horrors around them, but they will not be successful (Revelation 9:6). This may be what we now see around the world in a godless population.

One example I would not call suicide is that of Samson. He did not intend killing himself, but he *did* intend to bring the lives of his enemies to an end. In many ways, countless lives of soldiers are lost for the same reasons. However, most suicides (that are not the result of genuine brain disorder) are in people whose spiritual lives are not good, or are actively wrong. In all cases of sin, suicide is a fitting end to wickedness, a sign of God's anger.

Some think that suicide is the unpardonable sin. This is an error – the unpardonable sin is to refuse God's Gospel and not to repent unto salvation. Rather, suicide tries to take from God what belongs to Him alone – when to remove life; it is murder of self; it does not uphold sanctity

Suicide and Christians

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 14 December 2017 16:48

of life; it harms many others who later have to live miserably because of the action (which makes it selfish). To kill ones' self because of suffering is indeed selfish and does not take into account that many suffer for a godly reason. For example, to show others one's dedication to the Lord even when suffering, which can lead some to salvation, and others to repentance.

It is fact that some who serve God as pastors have committed suicide. Even fairly recently one pastor* killed himself because he was accused of sexual misdemeanour. By killing himself he certainly got out of mental turmoil, but it left others wondering if he did so as a sign of guilt! He might have genuinely been 'not guilty' but by taking a route out of the problem that was final, it left doubt as to his innocence. Now, his poor family have to deal with the aftermath. So in his case, suicide was definitely cowardice. On the other hand the guilt of Judas is well-established by what he did, so there appears to be no condemnation of his self-killing. (*Will that pastor enter Heaven? If he was elect and saved, yes).

Finally

Generally, suicide is not acceptable. But, there are many stories behind it. Yes, I see most suicides as selfish and as acts of cowardice. But, I cannot definitely condemn anyone for killing themselves. I leave that to God. It is those left behind that I feel sorry for. Pastors and others in the public eye are problematic, because they show the opposite view that God wishes them to portray.

In the case of pastors who kill themselves because of alleged sins they did not wish to be made openly known, they have no excuse. If they are guilty, then let them face the facts and face the ensuing results, whether legal or social. If they are not guilty but no-one believes them, well, they stand as those walking alongside Jesus, Who was also falsely accused.

I see no reason to kill ones' self, especially not because of finances or similar non-dangerous acts. But, I uphold the command of God when it comes to first-degree (deliberate) murder. The penalty of death must be applied regardless of repentance or salvation.

Whatever I think, I refuse to condemn those who commit suicide. I leave that up to God, because I see nothing definitive in His word, especially as killing the self can be the result of so many causes, including not being in one's right mind (by reason of brain damage, that is. I do not refer to so-called 'mental illnesses'). However, I still see most suicides as cowardice.

Suicide and Christians

Written by K B Napier

Thursday, 14 December 2017 16:48

I know that many Christians WANT definitive answers to everything in life. But, my personal thoughts are not the same as God's direct or even indirect will, and the above constitutes my thoughts on the matter at this moment. I have given an outline of material above. It is now up to you to come to a conclusion.

© September 2017

---oOo---

{loadposition btm_address}