

*An Overview of Scriptural Principles as They
Apply to Selected Life Issues*

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In the course of human history various issues rise to the surface of public consciousness. Oftentimes those are life threatening maladies that victimize a population, such as war, famine and pestilence. In recent times, however, citizens of the United States have become embroiled in social concerns of life and death in the issues of abortion, infanticide, suicide and euthanasia. These and related *life issues* touch not only public policy but reach deep into the thoughts, convictions and morals of every citizen.

We must acknowledge the morality shifts in our society that have invited the changes in attitudes toward life issues. The constitutional dictates on individual liberty have received greater attention in the past 25 years. The result has been a shift in the acceptance of what has formerly been thought to be abhorrent behavior. This is especially evident in the arena of life issues. Today the thought of ending one's own life or the life of others is more acceptable than ever before.

Nevertheless, in Ecclesiastes we read, "**What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.**" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). People were killing unborn babies in ancient times, and they kill them today. People were allowing some newborn children to die by exposure centuries ago, and it is allowed today. People have always resorted to self-murder because they have lost purpose and value. Historical records reveal an almost cyclical pattern of societies establishing subjective criteria for who can continue to live and who must die.

Throughout the ages Christians have made their voice known -- louder at some times, softer at others. I would be so bold as to suggest that the liberalization of legal killing laws in these United States has come, in part, because the Christian voice has been too soft on these important issues. Before a Christian can consider activism in any issue, however, he must clearly understand God's word and will in these matters. While God does not provide answers for every question we encounter in life he does give us clear principles so we might make knowledgeable and God-pleasing decisions.

I will examine what I see as the six major Biblical principles that apply to decision-making in life issues. From those principles I will suggest a few applications to specific life issues questions. The first point that must be clearly understood, however, is that . . .

Principles are Distinct from Applications

The two words that are used frequently in Christian ethics are *principles* and *applications*. Principles are fundamental doctrines or assumptions based upon an established authority. In our instance, all valid principles are derived from the authoritative Word of God.

Applications are built from one or more principles and adapted to a particular circumstance. While the principles are unchanging, a change in circumstances may call for the application of different principles. The important point here is that the principles are absolute in their nature. Changing circumstances will vary the pertinent principles.

Circumstances, however, do not determine the course of action. The principles determine the course of action.

While this appears to be a quibbling with semantics it is an important distinction to make when wrestling with life issues. The first Biblical principle which guides us in making life issues decisions makes this clear.

Principle # 1:

Truly right deeds and decisions can only be made by the Christian from a heart of faith, regardless of its perceived outcome.

Often the time to act in a life issues circumstance is a crisis. Something unexpected has happened and emotions are running high. The natural response will most likely not be the correct response.¹ The circumstance, and not religious conviction, appears often to be the determinant for the decision or action to be taken. In ignorance we may want to blot out all the confusing facts and simply say, "I'll let God take over from here." It sounds noble but such a philosophical approach (called consequentialism) is not always reliable and certainly not Biblical.²

Another typical response is legalism. "Our church says we shouldn't have abortions so it is always wrong." Or, "my pastor said you shouldn't withdraw nutrition and hydration, therefore we will not do it." While in most circumstances these might be the *correct* positions to take, if they are not rooted in faith, they are not God-pleasing. Formalistic solutions in which circumstances dictate actions only serve to encourage obedience without thought and ultimately civic righteousness without faith. Without faith there is no *truly right* decision.³

With the motive to be from faith we can now consider the specific principles that speak of life and death.

Principle # 2:

God alone has the right to initiate and terminate life.

When we sit down with a young couple planning to get married, more and more of them are walking into the office with a *plan* for their married life. In 2 years they will buy a house, in three years they will replace the car and in the fourth year they will have a child. Without burying ourselves in the subject of effective and ineffective birth control methods

¹"the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." (Romans 8:7) and "For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing." (Romans 7:19)

²Consider on the one hand where Gamaliel's consequentialism was correct, "*Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.*" (Acts 5:38-39). But on the other hand the consequentialism of those around the cross was incorrect, "*He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.*" (Matthew 27:42)

³"Without faith it is impossible to please God." (Hebrews 11:6)

almost without exception one of two things happen: 1) a baby comes way ahead of schedule, or 2) when the scheduled moment arrives for this addition to be made to the family, nothing happens.

While God extends to humans the intelligence (and possibly the self-discipline) to know when and how to have and not to have children, he nevertheless reserves for himself the right to initiate life.

Scripture abounds with references supporting this fact. We first see that Biblical writers pair the terms of conception and birth together.⁴ Secondly, David gives a powerful testimony that man is accountable for sin not only from birth but from conception.⁵ Some call the unborn child a blob of tissue or part of the mother's body. One cannot overlook the fact, however, that nowhere in Scripture does God hold a part of a mother's body accountable for sin, nor does he hold a blob of tissue accountable for sin. He only holds *people* accountable for sin. One should also note that the Hebrew word for *conceived* is related to the word for *burn* suggesting that the Hebrews recognized that conception was closely tied with the passionate act of intercourse.⁶

The New Testament also addresses the personhood of the unborn. Luke used terminology that clearly reflected a conviction that children inside and outside of the womb are persons. In Luke 18:15 he uses the Greek term, βρεφος (BREPHOS), to describe the babies, or little children, that were being brought to Jesus.⁷ Luke, in 1:41 and 1:44 reveals that Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, certainly recognized that she had a BREPHOS within her, as any other mother would bring her BREPHOS for the blessing of Jesus.⁸

God's prerogative to end life is clearly his as the Creator of life. His absolute authority over life and death is clearly portrayed in his words of Deuteronomy 32:39, "*See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.*" The Christian's submission to God in all things is rooted in the knowledge of God as the author of life and death.⁹

⁴"Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she *became pregnant and gave birth* to Cain." (Genesis 4:1) and "So in the course of time Hannah *conceived and gave birth* to a son. She named him Samuel." (1 Samuel 1:20)

⁵"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." (Psalms 51:5)

⁶The Hebrew word used here for *conceived* is the Piel perfect of קָנָה. It is derived from the word חֵטְא which means *hot*. The Hebrew understood conception to be related to the heat of passion in intercourse and not to some other later part of the pregnancy. See Genesis 30:41 and Genesis 31:10 for the infinitive absolute use of this word.

⁷People were also bringing *babies* to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. (Luke 18:15)

⁸"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the *baby* leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." (Luke 1:41) and "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the *baby* in my womb leaped for joy." (Luke 1:44)

⁹"My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me." (Psalm 31:15)

God's defense of his authority over life and death and the high value he places on human life can be seen in the words following the Flood. In Genesis 9:6 we read, "*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.*" God has just completed authorizing man to eat of plant and animal life. When it came to human life, however, that was a different story. While man can take plant and animal life he is not to take human life. In fact, so repulsive is it to take human life that the highest price, a human life, was to be paid for the crime.

Without delving into a lengthy study of capital punishment and war we should acknowledge that God does authorize the taking of human life in these two instances. But even in such circumstances such acts had to be done on the authority of God and not on one's own accord. I find it significant that God establishes an Old Testament civil code to correspond to the moral law which preserves human life. That civil code recognized there may be accidental loss of life. It established a procedure to assure that the loss of life was an accident and that another loss of life might not occur.¹⁰ I believe that civil law gives further evidence of God's high value placed on human life.

Today arrogance has led man to believe that he may circumvent God's authority over life and death. Mixing sperm and egg in a petri dish, the ability to alter the genetic make-up of life, and the ability to observe and somewhat control fetal development in the womb has given man a sense of power and control over his own destiny, and the destiny of others. Using God-given intellect man evaluates one life against another. Looking at physical and mental maladies that may exist he ignores the possibilities for Christian love and sacrifice and presumes for himself the right to play God and to determine who lives and who dies.

We see indications of this mentality in high places of the scientific community. Following the U.S. Supreme Court decision to legalize abortion Nobel laureate, Dr. James Watson¹¹ expressed the opinion that "*If a child were not declared alive until three days after birth, then all parents could be allowed the choice only a few are given under the present system. I believe this view is the only rational, compassionate attitude to have.*"¹² Because prenatal testing for fetal handicaps was an expensive and relatively rare procedure he wanted to give parents the legal opportunity to "dispose" of their child should he or she not have the "normal" physical or mental faculties.

¹⁰This is the rule concerning the man who kills another and flees there to save his life--one who kills his neighbor unintentionally, without malice aforethought. For instance, a man may go into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and as he swings his ax to fell a tree, the head may fly off and hit his neighbor and kill him. That man may flee to one of these cities and save his life. Otherwise, the avenger of blood might pursue him in a rage, overtake him if the distance is too great, and kill him even though he is not deserving of death, since he did it to his neighbor without malice aforethought. This is why I command you to set aside for yourselves three cities." (Deuteronomy 19:4-7)

¹¹Dr. Watson, together with Francis Crick, won the Nobel prize in 1957 for discovering the double helix in DNA. Today Dr. Watson is head of the Human Genome Project, a \$3 billion project funded by tax dollars through the National Institute of Health established to map out the complete genetic structure of the human species. It is hoped that this will enable the scientific community to identify potential genetic defects and lead to cures for such diseases as cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anemia, and others. The project is expected to take 10-12 years and has raised many ethical concerns over how this knowledge will be used.

¹²*Prism*, May 1973.

As shocking as Watson's statement appears, subsequent revelations show that others had bought into that reasoning. Two doctors at the Yale-New Haven Hospital reported that 43 children died from withheld or withdrawn treatment. They acknowledged that though some would have died eventually, if treated others would have lived.¹³

The much publicized case of Baby Doe in 1982 focussed attention on the practice of allowing children to die based upon quality of life standards.¹⁴ While the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services jumped in to put an end to such activity some medical professionals defended their actions and boldly reported of their activities. One published report covered in detail the selective killing program in an Oklahoma hospital of spina-bifida patients. The article notes that a quality of life formula was developed and applied to patients resulting in the death of half of those with spina-bifida.¹⁵

The killing of the incompetent and defenseless in our society not only reflects a growing loss of reverence for the Creator, but it also reflects a loss of purpose to life. That is why another important principle to keep in mind is the recognition that life has a purpose.

Principle # 3:

**The purpose of life is to glorify God by coming to and growing in faith
and to then share that faith with others by our words and examples.**

The all encompassing mission of life is to give God the glory.¹⁶ Intimately tied to giving glory to God is the first principle that I outlined, namely, *truly right deeds and decisions can only be made by the Christian from a heart of faith, regardless of its perceived outcome.* In other words, giving glory to God is first an act of faith, not of works. That must be stated because one otherwise would attach inordinately greater value to one's physical and mental abilities to "perform for the glory of God" when in fact, the purpose of life is rooted upon the invisible trait called "faith."

This in no way denies the truth that James wrote.¹⁷ Faith not only produces good works but the believer is compelled to do so.¹⁸ Scripture does not provide us with an "all-inclusive" list of good works. It does, however, testify that good works are rooted in faith and are consistent with the will of God. What may be good works for one person may be

¹³*New England Journal of Medicine*, October 25, 1973.

¹⁴*Baby Doe* was born on Good Friday in 1982 in a Bloomington, Indiana hospital. He had an opening between his feeding and breathing tube which was repairable. Baby Doe, however, also had Down's Syndrome. In consultation with their doctor and pastor the parents determined that their child would not lead a *quality* life because of his retardation and for that reason refused to have the corrective surgery on his throat. This meant that Baby Doe could not consume food or water. Despite numerous legal attempts Baby Doe died, legally, six days later of dehydration and starvation.

¹⁵*Pediatrics*, October 1983.

¹⁶"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

¹⁷"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (James 2:17)

¹⁸"For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20)

beyond the capabilities of others.¹⁹ The purpose God assigns to life is regardless of its enhanced or diminished quality.

Life is clearly a time to come to faith. It is a one time opportunity.²⁰ Ignorance in this point is a root cause in the decline of values that we face today. As people gather around themselves a great number of teachers to tell them what their itching ears want to hear they seek an eternity without hell and life that gives you second chances. There will always be a following for the concept of reincarnation. People will always be attracted to religions without a hell. And one or the other of these notions yield a mentality that encourages the taking of human life -- after all, what is there to lose?

Illustrative of this point was the backlash that resulted when the Catholic bishop warned New York Governor Mario Cuomo that he stood in danger of hell should he persist in his public position for abortion rights. Commenting on the incident Senator Patrick Moynihan brushed it off. He felt that Governor Cuomo didn't have to worry about going to hell. In his own words, "Not many people any longer believe in hell." Representative Charles Rangel went a step further by saying, "I think that Governor Cuomo will be able to hold his own here as well as with St. Peter on Judgment Day. He'll just need a couple of minutes to explain it."²¹

Recognizing the attacks made on the Christian and his faith the believer is not content to sit idly by until his faith has been diminished and destroyed. Instead, he will do all he can to nurture that faith.²² The Christian will avail himself of the means of grace and receive the continued assurance of his forgiveness.²³

Consistent with Christian love and the purpose of life to come to faith is the corresponding desire to bring others to faith. The clearest testimony to this point is the Great Commission. It is in light of that commission that all other commands regarding our relationships with others take on a specific mission. Christ told us to *"let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."* (Matthew

¹⁹God gives various physical, mental and spiritual abilities to equip a believer to help work in the church. *"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers."* (Ephesians 4:11) He gives others varying financial abilities to support the Lord's work. *"But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others."* (Mark 12:42-43) But whatever the financial, mental, or physical predicament may be all that we do is to be by faith to the glory of God. *"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."* (Romans 12:6-8)

²⁰Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." (Hebrews 9:27)

²¹Reported in a February 1990 issue of the *New York Post*.

²²"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." (Ephesians 4:15)

²³"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17)

5:16) Since only believers glorify God²⁴ there is the presumption that when "letting your light shine" the Christian does so to bring others to faith in God so they might, in faith, glorify him.²⁵

As one considers what is at stake with this purpose in life, he will not lightly dismiss every opportunity to accomplish this mission. Our vanity may tempt us to think we can accomplish this only through our persuasive speech, hard work, and special skills. In reality, however, God uses us as instruments to accomplish his task of bringing others to faith. And while we may have some attractive skills, the fact of the matter is that God uses us even when we can't use our skills. If we see ourselves as instruments and not causative agents in bringing about the faith of others it changes our attitude about how we look at misfortune and hardship that inflicts our lives and the lives of those we love. God can use us, regardless of our great abilities or lack of impressive abilities. Regardless of the quality of our life we can still serve God's purpose for life. This brings us to our next principle...

Principle # 4:

God demonstrates in his word that while there may be different qualities of life, he extends to all human life an absolute value, being the object of his love and plan for salvation.

God's first demonstration of value placed upon human life was seen in the creation of all things. Man, out of all creation, received that special distinction of being made "in the image of God."²⁶ God testified that in man was a value that far exceeded any other aspect of his creation. Though man lost that perfect image of God at the fall into sin he nevertheless remained the object of God's attention and special protection above all other created beings.²⁷

The consistency of this high value placed upon human life by God is clear from the plan of salvation. Our lives became worthless because of sin. Sin made us unable to please God and earned for us only a justly deserved condemnation in hell.²⁸ God, however, placed upon man an "absolute" value. In ethical circles we would call this the *quantitative* value of human life. Despite the depravity of man before the sinless God there was nevertheless an absolute value that sustained God's love and commitment to us. The price he paid to secure our lives eternally is the greatest testimony of God's absolute value he

²⁴"That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9) and "Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:3)

²⁵"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." (1 Peter 2:12)

²⁶"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'" (Genesis 1:26)

²⁷"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." (Genesis 9:6)

²⁸"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

places upon life.²⁹ God sacrificed his own Son so you and I might be the righteousness of God.³⁰

God so values human life that he did not pick the healthy, wealthy and wise as the objects of his salvation. Nor did he pick the poor and unfortunate. The sacrifice he made for sin was universal. Christ died for us all.³¹

Because of this display of highest value for the eternity of all human life it should not surprise us that he is concerned for the earthly life of all people. David was in awe over God's concern for man who seemed so insignificant in the scheme of all things.³² Peter realized that God does not have favorites in his love for people.³³ Christ was the visible proof of God's love for the unlovable.³⁴

As we see God's providence for all people³⁵ it stands as an example of the high value we should also have for human life. As God has shown love and respect for all human life so ought we. We also should not play favorites.³⁶ The diminished quality of one's life does not mean that person deserves less love, compassion and attention. In the eyes of God it certainly is of no lesser value.

Society today approaches life from a qualitative perspective. It compares lives and makes judgments over which life is of a higher quality and which is of a lower quality. I am not prepared to condemn that outright. Scripture readily acknowledges various degrees of quality in human life. From lame Mephibosheth to blind Bartimaeus, we find many examples where the qualitative value of human life is greatly diminished. Never once, however, is it grounds to end a life. Never once is that grounds for showing less love and concern. In fact, a diminished quality of life has been grounds for showing greater love and

²⁹"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Peter 1:18-19)

³⁰"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

³¹"For God so loved *the world* that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) and "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of *the whole world*." (1 John 2:2)

³²"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (Psalms 8:3-4)

³³"Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism'" (Acts 10:34)

³⁴"Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them." (Matthew 15:30)

³⁵"He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matthew 5:45)

³⁶"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism." (James 2:1)

concern.³⁷

The need to show equal concern for all life, recognizing that while its qualities may differ all life has an absolute value, brings us to the question of suffering.

Principle # 5:

While suffering is the result of living in a sinful world, the believer faces it knowing God can use it to display his power, strengthen the sufferer's faith and to provide an avenue for the faith of others to be put into action.

Suffering is an undeniable part of life in this world. It is clearly testified that suffering is a part of life as we seek to enter the kingdom of God.³⁸ The disciples rejoiced at suffering for Christ³⁹ and Paul suffered as an apostle of Christ.⁴⁰ Life in this world of sin means suffering for all of us.⁴¹

As we face suffering, however, we do so with our purpose for life in mind -- that is to give God the glory. God uses our suffering as a means to give him glory. As the disciples pondered the great sins that may have caused a man's blindness Christ used that man's malady to give glory to God, and left no doubt about it.⁴² The Apostle Paul used his suffering as cause to give God glory.⁴³

Suffering that comes to our life may be an opportunity God has given us to give him glory. We are all familiar with the passage that says, *"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,"* (1 Peter 3:15). Why is anyone going to ask you about the hope that you have? This admonition presumes there is something about the way we are living or coping that is going to prompt someone to ask us how we retain hope.

³⁷"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." (Proverbs 31:8-9)

³⁸"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22)

³⁹"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." (Acts 5:41)

⁴⁰"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained." (2 Timothy 2:8-9)

⁴¹"I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy." (John 16:20)

⁴²"Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.'" (John 9:3)

⁴³"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

When we face suffering our response to our predicament is observed by others. When we stand at the side of a suffering loved one or at the casket of a deceased loved one people watch how we react. Paul admonished, *"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope."* (1 Thessalonians 4:13). A hopeless response will not prompt people to ask you the source of your strength. God can use your suffering to help others.

Suffering, however, is also therapeutic for our own faith. Paul observed that suffering produces a spirit of perseverance.⁴⁴ Peter observed that suffering has a way of making us think about God.⁴⁵ How many times hasn't our suffering physically or emotionally driven us to our knees before God? When a loved one falls seriously ill we run to God's Word seeking an answer because we know he is the author of life and death. When suffering inflicts our lives we long to hear words of comfort from Scripture to assure us that all is well between us and our God, whom we may face soon.

We must acknowledge, however, that suffering may not be an obvious chance for a person to give glory to God. One's supposed state of incompetence may make suffering of little therapeutic value for one's faith. It still, however, may serve a purpose as an outlet for the faith and love of others. As Christ described the final scene of judgment he described events of misfortune used by believers to show their faith and love.⁴⁶ Paul admonishes us that the misfortune of others is to be our concern and something that we should respond to.⁴⁷

The account of the Good Samaritan has always been an easy battle cry to get involved in life issues. One aspect of the story that is seldom examined, however, is the suffering of the man in the ditch. Christ says very little about him. What possible value could there be in his misfortune? It provides the opportunity for the faith and love of others to shine through. The fact that it didn't on the part of the priest and rabbi was to their discredit. His suffering, however, did give an outlet to the compassion of the Samaritan whose example has been an inspiration for millions.

Sometimes the suffering newborn child or the incompetent adult lying in an irreversible coma hooked up to artificial nutrition and hydration is there to be an outlet for our love. Maybe we are holding on to the purse strings so tightly that all we see are dollars going down the drain. If so, the lesson here may be soul-saving by releasing our grip on that which we can't take with us. Perhaps the suffering is to bring a fractured family together. And yes, perhaps it is meant to polarize a family for the ultimate protection of a soul or

⁴⁴"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;" (Romans 5:3)

⁴⁵"For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God." (1 Peter 2:19)

⁴⁶"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" (Matthew 25:40)

⁴⁷"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3-4)

many souls.

God does not tell us the purpose for all things but he invites our trust.⁴⁸ Suffering is a great intrusion on the dream of all people to have a problem-free life. Sufferings are continual reminders for us to have a consistent and Scriptural view of death, confident of what it will bring and the liberation that will be ours.

Principle # 6:

A Christian will recognize that sin brought death into this world but Christ changed the nature of death. The Christian longs for death and the paradise it brings with Christ, but he will seek to retain life as a time of faithful service to God until it is clear God wants to take him out of this life.

In a sense death is an unnatural intrusion on life. Death was not part of the order of creation. Man and woman were created to live forever. The violation of God's command, however, has brought death into the world. Today we consider it a natural part of life (like taxes). Because of sin all face death.⁴⁹

God, however, through his son, Jesus Christ, changed the nature of death for the believer. No longer is it something to be feared in ignorance.⁵⁰ In fact, it is something we can actually long for.⁵¹

While Christ has won the victory over death and it is something we can look forward to, it is not, however, something for us to pursue. The principles regarding God as the author of life and death make that point clear. Even Paul, who longed for death, saw life as a time of service.⁵²

As Christians, we may emphasize service to God as a part of living. Confidence in God assures of victory in dying. The story of our victory over death through Christ is a doctrine of comfort. It is the assurance we have as we carry out our purpose in life to give God all glory. It is the confidence in knowing that when our work here is finished there is a reward earned by Christ waiting for us in heaven.

⁴⁸"Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him." (Psalm 37:7) and "Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalms 46:10)

⁴⁹"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned--" (Romans 5:12)

⁵⁰"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)

⁵¹"I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;" (Philippians 1:23)

⁵²"I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith." (Philippians 1:23-25)

As I mentioned in the opening, this generation dwells on individual liberty and self-determination. People will, in the name of a right to choose, end the life of an unborn child. In the name of autonomy people will legally declare that regardless of what others may gain from their suffering they don't want to go through it. In the name of self-determination people have endangered not only their own lives (and souls), but also the lives of others.⁵³ Exercising their autonomy people will remain silent about what is right.

God's Word also encourages the practice of autonomy. That practice, however, is always to be hemmed in by the dictates of God. We will make decisions, but not to suit our personal philosophies and goals, but always to reflect the will of God. This world will undoubtedly continue its hellbent path to judgment. As it does Christians need to speak loudly and clearly the truths of God's Word with their own lips and by their own actions. In closing the words of Paul to Timothy are a reminder of what we face and the response that is necessary:

"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."

(2 Timothy 4:1-5)

⁵³In a publication called Withhold Treatment from Defective Newborn Children the authors present an article entitled, *Giving the Hemlock: A Policy Proposal*. In it they point out that the right to self-determination is a fundamental "common law" right extended to all citizens. All citizens are also to be able to enjoy all rights. In the case of the incompetent they enjoy that right by proxy. As it specifically applies to children a parent is the proxy for the child. The authors observe that because all people, under the right of self-determination, can dictate their own medical treatment and even choose to kill themselves, then such rights should be enjoyed by the incompetent as well. They proceed to reason out that in the case of a *radically defective neonate* (i.e. severely handicapped newborn child) it would not be an unfair presumption that if the child were competent he would choose to refuse further medical treatment and suicide to end further suffering. the authors then argued for the parents' right, as proxies for the child, to choose suicide for the child.