

Does Suicide Seal One's Doom?

A sister in Ohio sent this question: "What passages would you use to either prove or disprove that Christians who commit suicide are able to still be saved?"

The subject of suicide, like that of abortion and other important issues, is not addressed in the scriptures, so a person's willful self-destruction must be judged by principles given to guide our conduct.

It is thought traditionally that a person seals his or her eternal doom by suicide. Few comforting words have been offered to relieve the shock of family and friends. With a resigned quietness we have left them in unrelieved grief. We would like to offer hope, but that desire must not cause us to create false hope. Is there any real hope?

When the subject is approached, it is said generally that the person who kills self dies in violation of "Thou shalt not kill," and has no chance to repent and ask for forgiveness, hence, is beyond redemption. But suicide is not necessarily a violation of "Thou shalt not kill." That commandment had to do with murder, not manslaughter. It is not the taking of life that is sin, but it is the motivation for killing. Murder comes from ill-will, hatred, jealousy, and such evil thoughts. John explains, "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer..." (1 John 3:15).

There are several instances of justified killing (manslaughter) in the Scriptures listed in the very law that contained the Ten Commandments (consider Exo. 21:12; 22:2; Lev. 24:16; 20:13; Exo. 21:15, 17; Num. 35; Deut.20 – instructions for battle where killing was commanded.) Manslaughter could be honorable and expedient when serving the cause of justice rather than being expressions of personal hatred, rage, jealousy, or vengeance. The higher motive outweighs the general restriction.

Jesus and other martyrs chose to die for good cause. Although they did not perform the acts of self-destruction, they willingly put themselves in the situation where it would happen. Samson willingly brought his own death for the cause of his people and he is listed as a hero of faith (Heb. 11:32f). Some hopelessly ill persons take their own lives to spare their loved ones the extended emotional and financial burden of caring for them. Whether they are justifiable or not, we must recognize such cases as acts of unselfishness.

While I cannot in good conscience offer these thoughts as a support for willful suicide, I mention them in order to offer the grieving family some comfort and hope for their loved one. In Oregon the voters now have legalized assisted suicide. I cannot approve of that, either for the assistant or the one being killed. Though it may be done as an act of mercy, it presumes too heavily on knowing the unrevealed will of God and claiming grace which he has not offered either by word or precedent.

Most of the suicides of which I have known more details have been the result of a psychotic suicidal compulsion caused by mental illness. I know, some would class emotional disorders as demon possession, but I think that is an ignorant, insensitive insult to the one who has a mental disorder. Sin is not a disease, nor is disease sin.

In his grace and mercy, God does not demand the impossible of us. He does not demand sanity of the mentally ill. Even under the rigid code of Law through Moses, Jesus emphasized that the showing of mercy was of greater importance than keeping laws that would prevent it. His numerous "Sabbath violations" made that clear (See Matt.

12:1f; 12:9f; Lk. 14:1f; 13:10f; etc.). Law offers no mercy or grace. “Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13). God alone is able to judge, and he will judge mercifully those who seek his mercy.

Back to the question. No, those Christians who commit suicide are not “able to still be saved.” No one is able. (The questioner probably understands that.) “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God...” (Eph. 2:8). None of us are *able* to be saved but we must depend on God’s gift. To any of us who might think we can keep a supposed code of law well enough to be saved, James would shout, “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (James 2:10)! That includes all of us.

The man who kills himself has no chance for repentance and asking forgiveness. Neither does the person who dies in a moment of anger, pride, or jealousy. Would his state be better than that of the suicide? If you die of compulsive speeding, overeating, or smoking, what is your hope? If you fail in “one point” while someone else fails in another, who has better standing before God?

(If you will forgive my sick sarcasm, I will offer the legalist an acceptable mode of suicide. Don’t blow your brains out. That is too fast. Instead, swallow a big dose of cyanide or sleeping pills and then ask God’s forgiveness before they take effect! ☹)

If we must be in a state of achieved righteousness the moment we die in order to enter into eternal life, no one will make it! None are “able” to achieve it – able to be saved. So accept the gift! Because of his atonement, we struggling sinners can be in fellowship with him who accepts our sins and accounts us as righteousness. His forgiveness is continuous as we stumble along.

“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1John 1:6-8).

Yes, there is hope for you and me both as we die in our own imperfection while being accounted perfect through his gift of righteousness. However, there is no assurance for one who dies in deliberate sin presuming upon the grace of God and using it as a license. []