Suicide in Christian Perspective
David W. Jones, Ph.D.

I. Introduction
A. Definition: Suicide is to purposefully take one’s own life out of misdirected self-love.
B. There is a moral difference between volitional suicide and suicide due to psychological or physiological factors such as a chemical imbalance, clinical depression, an altered mental state, etc.
C. A distinction should be made between suicide and willful self-sacrifice of one’s own life.
  1. Examples of self-sacrifice include: military service, dying in defense of a friend (cf. John 15:13), ministering to the infectious sick, dangerous missions work (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7–18; 11:16–23).
  2. In regard to his own self-sacrifice Jesus declared, “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:18).
D. There are roughly 29,000 successful suicides in the United States each year; compared to 19,000 murders and 13,000 AIDS related deaths.
E. Roughly 500,000 people will attempt suicide each year.
  1. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for people ages 15 to 25.
  2. 72% of successful suicides are white males.
  3. Females are more likely to attempt suicide; however, males are four times more likely to successfully commit suicide.
F. Major reasons for suicide include: depression, financial trouble, dissolution of a relationship, a form of protest, sexual gender confusion, religious ritual, escape from punishment, and escape from pain.

II. Church History
A. The Christian church has always viewed suicide as a grave sin.
1. The church has viewed suicide to be the prime example of self-idolatry.

2. The difference between suicide and other sins is that successful suicide allows no time for repentance.

B. Early church councils denied Christian burial to those guilty of suicide.

C. Southern Baptists have passed resolutions expressing concern about suicide in 1972, 83, 92, 96, and 2001; yet, all of these statements are tangentially related to suicide, focusing upon things such as euthanasia, alcohol and drug use, and assisted suicide.

III. Suicide in the Bible;

A. General Scripture references;
   3. Some of God’s ministers, especially his prophets, became so frustrated with their ministry that they asked God to kill them, including: Moses (cf. Num. 11:12–15), Elijah (cf. 1 Ki. 19:4), and Jonah (cf. Jonah 4:1–11).
   4. During the Great Tribulation many will attempt to commit suicide, but will be unable to find death (cf. Rev. 9:6).

B. Examples of suicide in the Bible:
   1. Saul (cf. 1 Sam. 31:1–6; 1 Chron. 10:4–5)
   2. Saul’s armor-bearer (cf. 1 Sam. 31:1–6; 1 Chron. 10:4–5)
   3. Ahithophel (cf. 2 Sam. 17:23)
   4. Zimri (cf. 1 Ki. 16:15–19)
   6. Disputed examples;
      a. Abimelech (Judg. 9:52–54)

B. Observations;
1. All of the biblical examples of successful suicide are men.
2. All of the biblical examples are dubious characters and none are personally praised for their actions.
3. All were spiritually bankrupt or went through a period of spiritual collapse before their suicide.

IV. Conclusions;
1. Suicide is not the unpardonable sin, however suicide is sinful (cf. Matt. 12:31–32; Mark 3:28–29).
2. Reasons why suicide is wrong;
a. Suicide is a sin against God as the creator and sustainer of life. It rejects God’s sovereignty and usurps his prerogative in regard to life and death (cf. Job 12:10).
b. Suicide is a violation of the sixth commandment (cf. Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17).
d. Suicide is poor stewardship of one’s body (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19–20).
e. Suicide demonstrates misdirected love and is injurious to others (cf. Matt. 22:36–39; Eph. 5:29).
f. Suicide overlooks the value of human suffering (cf. Rom. 5:3–5; 8:28; 2 Cor. 4:17–18; 12:10).
g. Suicide fails to recognize the unnatural nature of death (cf. Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:26; 1 Thess. 4:13–18).
3. Ministering to those contemplating suicide and/or those who have been affected by suicide;
a. Get professional assistance for those contemplating suicide.
   1. Christian Suicide Prevention: 1-888-667-5947
   2. National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-SUICIDE
   3. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK

b. Try to understand the sadness, confusion, suffering, pain, hopelessness, despair, depression, darkness, and defeat that lead to suicide.

c. Do not judge, but offer the hope of the gospel.
   1. The gospel itself is a response to the conditions that lead many people to consider or to attempt suicide.
   2. Christianity acknowledges the emptiness and brokenness of the world and offers hope, newness, and abundant life. Jesus shared in man’s pain and suffering and provides redemption and restoration.

Resources


