

CBC Teaching Series – Tough Topics

Sanctity of Life – End of Life

Sunday, 27 November 2016

I. Euthanasia/Physician Assisted Suicide

1. Relevant Biblical Texts

- a. Genesis 1:27-31 – As we have covered, we are image bearers of God, the capstone of His creation.
- b. Genesis 9:6 – Because we are made in God’s image, there is serious consequence for taking the life of an image-bearer, and all life has serious value.
- c. Exodus 20:13 (Romans 13:9) – You shall not murder. This is not an absolute prohibition against any taking of life. It is a prohibition against both premeditated murder and accidental causing of another person’s death.¹
 - i. In the Bible, killing is justified when administering capital punishment, waging just war, or defending one’s own or another’s life.
 - ii. These exceptions all derive from the sixth commandment itself. “The one crime that Scripture declares universally worthy of capital punishment is *murder*. Warfare is justly conducted only when it is pursued not in order to conquer but in order to defend against a hostile enemy who threatens innocent life... Killing in self-defense is legitimate only when it aims to protect a person’s *life*, not his property or reputation.”²
 - iii. Suicide, or assisted suicide, does not seem to fall under one of these exceptions, wherein ending a life is allowed to further uphold the mandate not to murder.
- d. 2 Samuel 1:1-16 – Here a man recounts how he killed King Saul, who was already dying from falling on his own sword. David kills the man for putting the final blow to Saul. This may indicate that all euthanasia is wrong. On the other hand, this is a unique situation in which a common man puts to death the king of Israel. The gravity of that act, and the unique circumstance, may indicate that the man’s penalty for his action is not normative. He may have been executed not because it was assisted suicide, but because he dared put to death “the Lord’s anointed.”
- e. Luke 10:30-37 – The Parable of the Good Samaritan asserts that it is Christian and right to save life wherever possible.

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, p. 179

² David VanDrunen, *Bioethics and the Christian Life*, p. 199

- f. 1 Corinthians 15:26,55-57 – Death is the great curse and enemy of humanity. Death is a tragedy, and not the way things should be. We are right to war against it. Yet we also recognize that ultimately, we will all die, and only Christ has won victory over death for us. He has conquered the grave, where we could not.
- g. Philippians 1:21-23 – Yet, Paul, as a Christian, does not see death as a terrible thing to be avoided. Were it not for Gospel ministry on this earth still left for him, he would welcome death, for in death he will finally be with the Lord.
- h. 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 – Still, Paul endures incredible hardships in life, and never ever hints or implies any form of suicide as an option. It is evident that he will be content to wait on the Lord to take him home, and not determine his own lifespan.
- i. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – Our bodies belong to God. This is especially true for Christians, who are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, whose bodies are temples.

2. Some General Conclusions

- a. It is reasonable to conclude from Scripture that, in just about all cases, we do not have the right to kill via euthanasia/assisted suicide.
- b. Letting someone die is a different, and more complex, story. The Bible nowhere obligates us to preserve all life at all costs. We simply are unable to stop death. We may have the freedom to let a person die where there lacks reasonable hope for recovery, there lacks reasonable ability to save or heal, and/or it is the person's wish to be allowed to die.

3. The Cause for Concern

- a. The great fear is that where euthanasia and assisted suicide are legalized, the weak among us will be victimized by “involuntary euthanasia.” That is, people who are seen as drains on society will be put to death against their will. This is of course contrary to all biblical ethics, which call us to care for the weak among us.
- b. There is also concern that cultures that easily welcome death will lead to many people ending their lives prematurely, surely a saddening possibility.
- c. The Netherlands provides a tragic case study, where 1 in 28 deaths in 2013 were from physician assisted suicide, and people chose to die because they were suffering from ailments such as Lou Gehrig's disease, depression, loneliness, or simply being tired of living.³ Recently, the first minor died by euthanasia.⁴
- d. “The direction a society takes on the question of euthanasia is a reflection of how highly it values human life and how highly it values God's commands not to murder. In societies where physician-assisted suicide becomes legal, this will set the stage for a further erosion of the protection of human life. Some people will be thought “too old” to deserve medical treatment. Compassion and care for the

³ <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/02/20/choosing-die-netherlands-euthanasia-debate-306223.html>

⁴ <http://www.inquisitr.com/3518422/belgian-teenager-dies-by-euthanasia-the-first-minor-to-be-granted-right-to-assisted-suicide/>

elderly will diminish, and they will be more and more thought of as burdens to care for, rather than valuable members of society.”⁵

II. Capital Punishment

1. Biblical Arguments in Support of Capital Punishment

- a. Genesis 9:5-6 – The text is pretty clear- whoever takes a life shall have their life taken. “Shedding blood” refers to violent and unjustifiable taking of life, or murder. This is part of the Noahic Covenant, a binding covenant between God and humanity.
 - i. This penalty for murder is commanded to Noah and his family, who are the new, post-Adam, foundation of humanity. Therefore, this stipulation applies to all human societies. The argument is that this law is foundational to all human government, not just Israel. Genesis 9:16 clearly states that the Noahic covenant is relevant for all people through all time.
 - ii. Some will argue that we are under the New Covenant, not the Old Covenant. However, when the New Testament speaks of the Old Covenant, which we are no longer under, it speaks of the covenant God established with Israel through Moses. We are no longer under the Mosaic Covenant, because the New Covenant put that to the end. But it seems that we are still under the Noahic Covenant, which establishes capital punishment as a foundational authority for human governments. Many maintain that the New Covenant does not abrogate the Noahic Covenant, which establishes capital punishment.
 - iii. The reason for this command is the immense value of human life. Because humans are made in the image of God, they are not to be wantonly destroyed, and there is the most serious penalty for taking life. To attack a human is to attack someone who is like God, and is an implicit attack against God.
- b. Romans 13:1-7 – Romans 13 clearly states that we are to submit to governing authorities, and that governing authorities are 1) established directly by God, and 2) “an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (v. 4). The phrase in verse 4 “bear the sword” indicates that this wrath on the wrongdoer is violent in nature. It is an instrument in putting people to death (see Acts 12:2, Acts 16:27, Hebrews 11:37, Revelation 13:10, Deuteronomy 13:15). The sword language here is not just symbolic of governmental authority, but clearly establishes a government’s God-given authority to put people to death.
- c. 1 Peter 2:13-14 – Governments have the authority to punish those who do evil.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, p. 185

- d. Romans 12:19 – We are called to never avenge ourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. So, we should certainly not seek personal vengeance for ourselves, and are required to forgive. Instead, we leave vengeance in God’s hands. Leaving things to the wrath of God includes the wrath of God exercised through governing authorities. We know Paul has this means of justice in mind, as Romans 13 follows immediately after Romans 12. While it is wrong to seek personal vengeance, it is not wrong to desire that God’s justice and vengeance be carried out in the ways He prescribes. It can be argued that a healthy desire to see God’s justice carried out on His terms is the very means by which we may release ourselves from desiring personal vengeance.
- e. Ezekiel 13:19 – God says His name has been profaned both by putting to death souls who should not die, and keeping alive souls who should not live. It seems the biblical ethic is not simply to protect all life in every case, but rather to protect the innocent and punish the guilty. (On the other hand, note that God here is offended by injustice in the way Israel has administered justice. Those opposed to capital punishment may look to this text and wonder if our own justice system might fall under the same condemnation, as we inconsistently carry out justice.)
- f. Revelation 6:9-10 – The sinless souls in heaven desire God’s justice be carried out on those on the earth. We can therefore establish that it is not morally wrong, or inconsistent with a desire for compassion and forgiveness, to desire God’s severe justice be carried out.
- g. Jesus Himself prayed for God’s forgiveness (Luke 23:34), while also being the one who will one day judge in wrath (Revelation 6:16, Revelation 19:11).
- h. Deuteronomy 17:6 – Scripture recognizes that it should not be easy to put someone to death, but only on the basis of multiple witnesses. Essentially, Scripture requires irrefutable evidence before administering capital punishment. Scripture is also very serious about bearing false witness (Exodus 20:16).

2. Biblical Arguments in Opposition to Capital Punishment

- a. Matthew 5:38-39 – Jesus calls us not to seek vengeance, but to turn the other cheek. How can we support capital punishment while also adhering to Jesus’ ethic of turning the other cheek?
- b. Matthew 22:39 – Jesus says we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. Again we must ask if the ethics of Jesus are consistent with capital punishment.
- c. Matthew 26:52 – When Peter attempts to defend Jesus with the sword, Jesus tells Peter that all who take the sword will die by the sword. It seems that Jesus is generally opposed to violence.
- d. John 8:2-11 – The Old Testament mandated the death penalty for adultery (Leviticus 20:10), but Jesus here advocates a law of forgiveness. We are nothing

if not a people commanded to forgive. See also Matthew 18:21-35, Luke 11:4, Matthew 6:15.

- e. In general, as we follow the teachings and ethics of Jesus, would anything about Jesus lead us to believe that He would advocate putting someone to death? Does it not seem that He would advocate a more forgiving, more redemptive, alternate response to criminals? Patterning our lives after Jesus, and keeping Him as our focus, should make it very difficult for us to put someone to death.
- f. God Himself doesn't put some people to death in response to their acts of murder. God does not put Cain to death after he murders Abel, and God does not put David to death after he has Uriah killed. God does not always exercise capital punishment.
- g. When we put someone to death, we deny them the opportunity for repentance, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. It is not just a death sentence in this life, but potentially an eternal death sentence.
- h. Though not biblical arguments, many argue that 1) capital punishment does not deter violent crime, 2) violence begets violence, 3) innocent people might be (and have been) put to death, and 4) the allowance of capital punishment has been used to oppress people, particularly those of minority or underpowered status. How do we think through these sociological arguments, and how does Scripture affect our thinking?

III. War

1. A Biblically Informed Just War Theory

- a. A general outline of just war theory:
 - i. A war is just as long as it meets the following criteria⁶:
 - Just Cause. The reason for going to war is morally right, such as the defense of a nation.
 - Competent Authority. The war has been declared by a competent and legitimate authority, not by a renegade band within a nation.
 - Comparative Justice. The actions of the enemy are clearly morally wrong, and the motives and actions of country going to war are comparatively just.
 - Right Intention. The purpose in going to war is to protect righteousness and justice, not pillage, conquer, or destroy.
 - Last Resort. All other reasonable means of conflict resolution have been exercised.

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, p. 389-390.

- Probability of Success. There is reasonable expectation the war can be won.
 - Proportionality of Projected Results. The good resulting from the war will be inevitably be greater than the harm and loss of the war itself.
 - Right Spirit. The war is not undertaken with bloodlust or delight, but with great reluctance and sorrow.
- ii. Some have proposed restrictions on how a just war should be fought:
- Proportionality in the Use of Force. No greater destruction should be caused than is needed.
 - Discrimination between Combatants and Noncombatants. Adequate care should be taken to ensure, so long as it is feasible, that harm is not done to noncombatants.
 - Avoidance of Evil Means. Captured and defeated enemies should be treated with justice and compassion.
 - Good Faith. There should be a genuine desire for restoration, peace, and eventual harmonious living with the opposing nation or force.
- iii. Governments are responsible to protect their people, punish and dissuade those who do evil, and defend those who cannot defend themselves.
- iv. It is not true, and is in fact misleading, to say that “violence always begets more violence.” In reality, righteous force can and does thwart criminal and evil violence.
- v. In the end, pacifism is wishful thinking, even dangerously naive. It does not adequately respond to the real violence and evil we see in the world.
- b. Biblical and theological support:
- i. Romans 13:1-7 – God gives governments the right to wield the sword. This surely includes the right to defend themselves, and take militaristic actions that war against evil and prevent further loss of life. When a government does this, it is even God’s servant for our good.
- ii. Luke 3:14 – Roman soldiers ask John the Baptist what they should do in light of the coming of God’s kingdom. John does not command them to leave military service, but simply to be content with their wages.
- iii. Acts 10:1, 44-48 – Cornelius is a Roman centurion and becomes a baptized believer, but is never commanded to leave his occupation, and is never told that there is anything immoral about his occupation.
- iv. 2 Samuel 18:1-33 – David loves his son Absalom, but still sends his armies out to defeat him, for the sake of the high priority of preserving the kingdom. Some may argue from this passage that loving others is not necessarily incompatible with violent force.

- v. 1 Peter 2:14 – Governments are responsible to punish those who do evil.
- vi. Deuteronomy 28:7, Judges 2:16-18, 1 Samuel 17, 2 Samuel 5:17-25 – God’s blessing of Israel coincides with military victory.
- vii. War (assuming it is just) is not necessarily inconsistent with the command; “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). The Hebrew word here for murder is used 49 times in the OT, and is never used in reference to killing in war.
- viii. Luke 22:36-38 – Jesus seems to authorize the use of a sword for self-defense and protection. (Note: Those of the peace position might argue that this kind of sword is more of a multi-purpose tool than a weapon of war. And, when Jesus says that two is enough, he is saying that two is enough for all of the disciples, thus indicating that they need not take many instruments for war, but two simple ‘swords’ for basic use in daily life and travel.)
- ix. Romans 3:9-12, 23 – All people are sinful, and some especially so. This means that some will inevitably oppress and abuse others who are weak, no matter how extensive our efforts at peacemaking. Some people will simply hurt others, no matter how nice and Christ-like we are. And, if we are to be truly righteous, we must prevent the oppression of the weak, using force if necessary.
- x. “Just war theory, out of love, insists that in this broken world, war, under restricted conditions, may be the loving option.”⁷

2. A Biblical Case for the Peace Position

- a. A general outline of the Peace Position:
 - i. As ambassadors for Christ, citizens of God’s Kingdom, and people who have been granted peace with God, we are called to be peacemakers. To be Christian is to be a proponent of peace.
 - ii. Thus, it is wrong for Christians to use violent, military force against others.
 - iii. Thus, some might say, it is wrong for Christians to participate in military combat, even to defend their own nation. Some would advocate, instead of combat service, various forms of alternate service.
 - iv. Resorting to violence, in opposition to violence, negates the real possibility of diplomatic and peaceful solutions.
- b. Biblical and theological support:
 - i. Matthew 5:9 – Blessed are peacemakers. The Sermon on the Mount does not call us to violence, but calls us to seek peace and reconciliation.
 - ii. 1 Peter 2:19-23 – The Gospel call is not to seek retribution, but to endure suffering righteously.

⁷ D. A. Carson, “Just War” – Lecture at Capitol Hill Baptist; <http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/just-war/>.

- iii. Matthew 5:39 – Jesus commands us not to violence, but to turning the other cheek. Jesus calls us to respond to violence and hatred with peace.
- iv. Matthew 22:39 – Jesus commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves, which is inconsistent with warfare.
- v. Matthew 5:21-26 – Jesus calls us not to acting out in our anger, but to peacemaking with our brother and sister.
- vi. Romans 12:14-21 – This whole passage calls us to peaceful living, seeking peace, blessing those who persecute, feeding our enemies, and overcoming evil with good. Can this be consistent with military combat?
- vii. 2 Corinthians 5:15-20 – Christians, as ambassadors for Christ, are called to be reconcilers.
- viii. As Christians, we belong not to the nations of this world, but to the kingdom of God. It is then incongruent to fight on behalf of an earthly nation, to which we do not ultimately belong. This is especially the case when we may be putting to death combatants on the other side who are also fellow citizens of God’s kingdom.
- ix. Jesus never taught any kind of just war theory, but Jesus did teach extensively about peace and reconciliation.
- x. War almost always involves significant civilian casualties. This horrific reality is surely opposed to a Christian ethic and the ways of Jesus.
- xi. Engaging in militaristic warfare seemingly fails to trust God’s sovereignty over the nations. Is it worth compromising the mandate of Christian peace for the sake of defending nations, over which God ultimately has control?
- xii. Some argue that if Christians had been better peacemakers and reconcilers throughout history, then things like oppression, war, and slavery would have been minimized. The best attack on violence and oppression is a rigorous ethic and lifestyle of Christian peacemaking.
- xiii. Micah 4:3 – The promise of the New Covenant is that people will beat their swords into plowshares. In other words, New Covenant people put away the weapons of war for tools of peace.
- xiv. Partially because of the force of the New Testament emphasis on peacemaking, the historic peace position is associated with a strong distinction between church and state. The state may legitimately be involved in militaristic endeavors, per Romans 13. But Christians who are part of a different nation cannot entangle themselves in such affairs. According to the historic peacemaking position, Christians must not become part of the state’s battles. More radical pacifists/peacemakers believe that even the state does not have the right to wage war. Therefore, we should, through various mechanisms afforded us, influence the state toward actions of peace.

USMB Confession of Faith:

Article 13: Love, Peacemaking and Reconciliation

God's Community of Peace

We believe that God in Christ reconciles people to Himself and to one another, making peace through the cross. The church is the fellowship of redeemed people living by love. The bond between followers of Jesus transcends all racial, social and national barriers.

Christian Peacemaking

We actively pursue peace and reconciliation in all relationships by following Christ's example and His command to love God, neighbors and even enemies. We strive to be peacemakers and agents of reconciliation in families, churches, communities, in our nation, and throughout the world.

As peacemakers we alleviate suffering, reduce strife, promote justice, and work to end violence and war, that others may see a demonstration of Christ's love. As in other Peace Churches many of us choose not to participate in the military, but rather in alternative forms of service.

Because Jesus is Lord, His example and teaching take priority over nationalism and the demands of human authorities.

Exodus 20:1-17; Jeremiah 29:7; Matthew 5:9, 17-26, 38-48; Romans 12:9-21; 13:8-10; 2 Corinthians 5:15-20; Ephesians 2:14-18; 1 Peter 2:19-23

<http://www.usmb.org/menus/Article-13.html>

From the “12 Principles of Anabaptism”

10. Belief that the gospel includes a commitment to the way of peace modelled by the Prince of Peace.

Here Anabaptists differ from many other Christians. Anabaptists believe that the peace position is not optional, not marginal, and not related mainly to the military. On the basis of Scripture, Anabaptists renounce violence in human relationships. We see peace and reconciliation - the way of love - as being at the heart of the Christian gospel. God gave his followers this ethic not as a point to ponder, but as a command to obey. It was costly for Jesus and it may also be costly for his followers. The way of peace is a way of life.

<http://www.usmb.org/menus/the-12-principles-of-anabaptism.html>