

# Suicide

## Biblical Guidance/Our Position

Suicide is not an easy issue to discuss. It needs to be addressed, however, especially when considering on average, one person in the United States kills himself or herself every sixteen minutes, over 30,000 per year.<sup>1</sup>

Suicide is a serious sin because it goes against the sixth commandment, “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13), and suicide *is* murder against oneself. The commandment not to murder is built upon the fact that as humans we are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26), and we are to reflect God’s character, and the God of the Scriptures is a life-giving God. Therefore, suicide is a serious sin. Like all other sins, suicide makes us legally guilty before God, and yet some sins are worse than others because of the degrees of devastation that they bring into our lives and into the lives of others. Also some sins cause God more displeasure than others. This would be especially true of suicide because it is a repudiation and rejection of God’s gift of life.

Suicide has always been radical disobedience to our Creator-God. Satan would love nothing more than to have God commit suicide (Matthew 4:5), yet he couldn’t get Him to do it so he does the next best thing and that is to get God’s image bearers, humans beings to commit suicide, and for that reason is it a particularly serious sin.

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<sup>1</sup> American Association of Suicidology: AAS Suicide Data Page (based on 2006 statistics), website (<http://suicidology.org>).

Dr. Wayne Grudem, Research Professor of Bible and Theology at Phoenix Seminary states, “The distinction between degrees of seriousness of sin does not imply an endorsement of the Roman Catholic teaching that sins can be put into two categories of “venial” and “mortal.” In Roman Catholic teaching, a venial sin can be forgiven, but often after punishments in this life or in Purgatory (after death, but before entrance into heaven). A mortal sin (they say suicide is a mortal sin) is a sin that causes spiritual death and cannot be forgiven; it excludes people from the Kingdom of God.”<sup>2</sup>

Within the pages of the Old Testament we find several occurrences of suicide recorded as historical fact.

- Abimelech (Judges 9:54)
- Samson (Judges 16:28-31)
- Saul (1 Samuel 31:1-6)
- Ahithophel ( 2 Samuel 17:23)
- Zimri ( 1 Kings 16:18)
- Saul’s armor-bearer ( 1 Chronicles 10:5)

What is interesting is in the Scriptures those who committed suicide weren’t judged simply upon their decision to end their life, but rather on whether they put their faith in God as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures.

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<sup>2</sup> Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology. Pg. 504, Zondervan, 1994

Unfortunately, many Church fathers, in an effort to protect human life, went too far and publicly condemned those who had committed suicide. In the year A.D. 452, the Council of Arles condemned suicide. The Council of Orleans in A.D. 533 asserted that offerings were not allowed for those who committed suicide.<sup>3</sup> Thirty years later, in 563, the Synod of Braga banned the singing of psalms at the funeral of a suicide and said that the body of a suicide could not be brought into the church building as part of the burial ceremony.<sup>4</sup> In 693 the Synod of Toledo barred individuals who had attempted suicide from receiving the Lord's Supper for two months, during which time they were expected to repent of their sin.<sup>5</sup>

Thankfully, we in the evangelical, protestant tradition have placed more of an emphasis on letting Scripture speak for itself, and have taken a more redemptive approach to suicide. Again, suicide is radical disobedience against God, however, our salvation has *never* been based upon our ability to obey, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

### ***What happens to someone who commits suicide?***

In the New Testament, we read the account of Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27:3-5 & Acts 1:18, 24-25), and this one account has thrown many into confusion. Judas, the one who betrayed Jesus, after he realized he betrayed an innocent man, went off and hanged himself. Later, in the Book of Acts, the physician Luke writes, “Judas left to go where he belongs” and the phrase, “where he belongs” is a euphemism for Hell. Many have taken this passage and deduced that Judas was in Hell *because* he committed suicide. Judas committed suicide, and he went to Hell, but *not*

<sup>3</sup> Carl Joseph Hefele, A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents, trans. William Clark (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1895), 3:171.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 4:187. -

<sup>5</sup> Carl Joseph Hefele, Concilien Geschichte (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder'sche Verlags-Handlung, 1873), 3:15.

because he committed suicide. Judas went to Hell, because when he died he did not believe in Jesus Christ (John 6:64 & 70). Judas trusted in himself all along and when he realized he had sinned by betraying Jesus, he punished himself for his sin by killing himself. He never let the Lord be the Lord at any point in their relationship.

If a person has placed their trust in the person and the work of Jesus Christ when they pass from this age into the next, *no matter* how they pass, they will be ushered into the presence of the Lord Jesus, because “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7).

#### **Bibliography:**

1. Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology. Pg. 504, Zondervan, 1994
2. Carl Joseph Hefele, A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents, trans. William Clark (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1895), 3:171.
3. Ibid., 4:187. –
4. Carl Joseph Hefele, Concilien Geschichte (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder"sche Verlags-Handlung, 1873), 3:15.