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THE BIBLE ON THE END OF LIFE ISSUE

In this session there has been much debate and passionate testimony related to HB 399 (SB 311), the End-of-Life Options Act. Advocates of this bill, as well as opponents, have voiced their views with reasoned, thoughtful purpose. Personally, this issue has caused me to pray even more for Maryland lawmakers due to the difficult nature of the bill. Both sides raise important points that need to be considered. Some delegates even asked for input on their Facebook pages and the constituent's responses interested me as a pastor and minister of the gospel. God is not silent on this subject and if anyone is wanting to read a resource with some pertinent Scriptures, my hope is that this study will be helpful.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

There is no question that end-of-life issues are heart-wrenching decisions. Our hearts go out to anyone who has to deal with this, mainly because we have had to go through it with a loved one and we know that our own death is coming someday.

But the Bible has much to say when the question is asked, "Who is really in control of life?" Here are just a few of the verses to consider as to God's role as the Author of life as well as the One who determines the length of our lives.

Deuteronomy 32:39 - See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

This strong statement is clear in God's sovereign reign over the lives of people. The creation of life as well as the ending of earthly life is completely within His control. His allowance of other difficulties and their resolutions are also covered here (wounding and healing). All of these things, and many more sum up our human experience and God's control is holding it all together.

Acts 17:24, 25, 28a - The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. For "In him we live and move and have our being"

If God is the One who gives life, breath and everything, death is surely included. We do not move and have our being without Him and His control is over all things, including the length of our lives. This is what He gives – because He alone is the One who possesses them. We do not possess the ultimate capacity to decide the day of our birth or the day of our death.

Hebrews 9:27 - ...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment

The Greek word translated "appointed" means "reserved or laid away". So the question is left "Who is the one laying away and doing the reserving?" That's one of the foundational questions in the physician-assisted suicide debate. When one believes they are the ultimate decider of their destiny, then they will naturally answer that question, "I am the one who reserves. I appoint my days since I want the legal control to end my life under circumstances my doctor and I choose."

But how much control are we in, really? We may have the medicinal control to end our lives due to the technology available, but when a person dies in a car wreck or in a street shooting or with a heart attack while jogging, who is really in control of the number of a person's days? Obviously, those aren't times appointed by the person dying. So then, would we have to say that God is only sovereign over some people's time of death, but not all? Do we split the ability to appoint times of death between God in some cases and terminally ill patients in others?

No. Clearly it is wrong to claim God numbers our days only to the extent we let Him. If He is God and He is sovereign, we don't let Him do anything. We live and move through His timing and His good pleasure according to His will and purpose. Here is an excellent prayer from the Psalms for us to remember:

*Psalm 90:12 – So **teach us to number our days** that we may get a heart of wisdom.*

Whatever the length of our lives will be (as God determines), we grow in wisdom if we use those days to realize the brevity of earthly life and gain the skill of right decision-making as God directs us.

THE RIGHT OF GOD

For proponents of the End-of-Life Options Act, a central argument is the claim to the individual's right to choose the path of suicide under certain conditions. Again, those conditions are agonizing and we all feel great compassion for anyone in such pain with a terminal illness.

But a view shaped by the Bible will acknowledge the right of God in these situations which supersedes our right to self-determination.

*Romans 14:7-9 - For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, **we are the Lord's**. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*

There is an ownership that the Creator has over His creation. Our lives began through His providence and our deaths will end the same way. We are His, not as powerless beings from whom God withholds choices, but as humans made in His image with dignity and purpose, even in our time of death. We were made in a special way, unlike anything else in creation.

*Genesis 1:26, 27 - Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, **in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.***

We do not have that right and we are fundamentally created in a way that bears the image of God, branded with His ownership. This is a loving act on His part – a gift to us that means our lives are valuable to Him and there is a sanctity to how we should view life and death.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

Because of God's sovereign will and divine right, we must also see His goodness to us, even in death. Job felt the crush of the deaths of his ten children all at once, but he could still say,

*Job 1:21, 22 - "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; **blessed be the name of the LORD.**" In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.*

Friend, this is without a doubt one of the hardest things to grasp as a human. But the way to look at suffering and pain, as hard as it is to endure and as hard as it is to watch our loved ones endure it, is to see hardship as God's good plan meant to draw us closer to Him. Consider the goodness in these verses that acknowledge how difficult life on earth can be, yet call us to see a much bigger picture than just the few decades we're here.

*Romans 8:20, 21 - For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, **in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.***

This is part of His goodness as well. The promise for those who trust in Him and follow Him is a freedom from death when He chooses to end the bondage to corruption we all face in this world, including death.

BIBLE STUDY

Legislators and Staff (During Session)
Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.
Room 153, House Office Building