

(Justin, *Second Apology* 4.1-3). In truth, this very hope of life after death is part of what must be understood to prohibit choosing suicide as an escape from the troubles of this life. Paul taught Christians that, **“the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”** (Rom. 8:18). Christians are to **“endure hardships”** as good soldiers of Christ (2 Tim. 2:3). We are to **“endure afflictions”** (2 Tim. 4:5) in the assurance that **“he who endures to the end will be saved”** (Matt. 10:22). Suicide allows the temporary hardships, sorrows, persecutions, or injustices of life to become more important than the hope which lies beyond this life. It ignores that we will answer for the stewardship with which we have been entrusted in this life, as a determination of our fate in the life that is to come.

4. Suicide is an act of extreme selfishness. In spite of the feelings of isolation and loneliness that can often

lead to suicide this is not an act that impacts only the one who commits suicide. Friends of suicide victims can be irrevocably affected by a friend's death. They ask, “Why didn't I see it coming?” or “Why didn't I act to help?” Family members may face emotional, financial, or even spiritual problems that come in the wake of a loved one's suicide. How will the bills be paid? How will the kids be raised? Family members ask themselves, “Was it my fault that mommy did this?” or “If I had loved him more, would he have chosen to stay?” In some cases, the spiritual dilemma of facing the fact that suicide compromised the soul of a loved one may lead surviving family members to question, “how can I keep serving Christ, if I must believe that my loved one is lost?” Paul taught, **“let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others”** (Phil. 2:4). Few acts in this life can demonstrate the blatant selfishness that suicide does.

Suicide is Not the Answer!

The burdens and pains of life that lead souls to look in the mirror and say to themselves, “I can't go on another day!” can feel overwhelming, but Suicide is not the answer! It has been accurately said that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. No matter how bad things get in this life, the Christian can trust that there is hope beyond this life. We must help souls around us to see this hope. We must strengthen our brothers and sisters who are struggling so that they might never imagine that suicide is the “way out.” If you find yourself beginning to feel overwhelmed by life, find a Christian brother or sister you can trust and share with them your struggles. Talk to the elders. Talk to a preacher or teacher. You don't have to face it alone. God loves you and wants you to spend eternity with Him, but the sad and desperate choice of suicide is not the path to peace, rest, or escape that it might appear to be.



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Faithful Sayings

November 2,
2014

Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM
10:20 AM
6:00 PM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM



Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn
Kyle Pope

Deacons:

Steve Dixon
Jack Langley
Neil Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott

Evangelists:

Kyle Pope
Andrew Dow

The Christian and Suicide

By Kyle Pope

The recent death of actor Robin Williams has brought into the public eye the sad reality of how emotional turmoil, substance abuse, and an aching sense of hopelessness far too often lead desperate souls to see suicide as the only way to end their despair. In the days following his death there was great concern that the attention the media gave to the details of his suicide might trigger others facing similar pain to follow his example and take their own lives. According to *USA Today* the day after Williams' death was announced the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, a telephone “hotline” offering counseling to those considering suicide, received the highest number of calls in its history. Christians are not immune to this problem. In spite of the fact that the God of heaven loved us enough to send His Son for our salvation, even Christians can become so overwhelmed by the trials of life that we long for any way that might allow us to end the pain.

What Does the Bible Teach About Suicide?

Biblical Examples of Suicide.

Although the Bible spans 4000 years of human history the Holy Spirit has recorded only seven instances of suicide in connection with those involved with God's people. These seven are...

1. Abimelech (Judg. 9:54). This man was a son of Gideon who presumed to set himself up as king, after having seventy of his brothers killed. In battle, after a woman dropped a millstone on his head, he commanded his armor bearer to kill him lest he die at the hands of a woman.

2. Samson (Judg. 16:21-31). Having been captured by the Philistines and blinded, Samson positioned himself between two supporting pillars in their

pagan temple as the people watched. After praying to God, he pushed the pillars apart and brought the building down on himself and the Philistines who were watching.

3-4. King Saul and his Armor Bearer (1 Sam. 31:3-6). After being wounded by archers in battle, Saul commanded his armor bearer to kill him. When he would not, Saul fell on his own sword. His armor bearer then followed his example.

5. Ahithophel (2 Sam. 17:23). Ahithophel was an adviser of David who conspired with Absalom to overthrow David. He is the one who advised Absalom to lie with David's concubines in the sight of all Israel. When Absalom rejected his later advice to pursue David immediately he went home and hanged himself.

6. Zimri (1 Kings 16:18). Zimri was a servant of Elah, the king of the wicked northern kingdom of Israel. He conspired and killed Elah, but when other Israelites rose up against him he burned his own house down upon himself.

7. Judas Iscariot (Matt. 27:5). Having betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, upon learning that Jesus was condemned Judas hanged himself.

Of these examples, Samson's death came as a consequence of an act of warfare against enemies of God. It was not because of rebellion to God or due to emotional desperation. Each of the other examples, however, involved those in rebellion to God. This says a great deal about the divine attitude toward suicide in the fact that it shows a dramatic contrast between the biblical view and that which was held by contemporary ancient cultures.

Attitudes Toward Suicide in the Ancient World.

In many ancient cultures the attitude toward suicide was much different. Not only was it commonly practiced, but it was actually encouraged in some cases in order to preserve one's honor or demonstrate appropriate grief. For example, in ancient China the philosopher and politician Confucius (551-479 BC) taught that in order to preserve what he called *ren*, a disposition of seriousness, generosity, sincerity, diligence and kindness, one might need to "sacrifice himself to consummate his *ren*" (*Analects* 15.9). In the Greek and Roman world ending one's own life was considered more honorable than facing shame or criminal punishment. The Greek philosopher Socrates, after being convicted of corrupting the youth of Athens, was ordered to drink hemlock in order to carry out his own execution (Plato, *Phaedo* 117c). The Egyptian queen Cleopatra rather than face the shame of defeat after Octavian defeated her and Mark Antony committed suicide (Plutarch, *Life of Antony* 85.2-3; Cassius Dio, 51.14.1). Centuries later, this concept of ritual suicide in order to preserve one's honor became formalized in the practice of the Japanese Samurai known as *seppuku* by which a man in grief over the death of his master or in order to avoid shame in battle, a Samurai literally disemboweled himself. The first recorded instance of this practice occurred in 1180 AD, and the last known example took place in 1970.

In some cases in the ancient world suicide was actually a course of action that was expected due to shame or grief. As early as 400 B.C. the custom developed in India that a widow was to voluntarily lay herself on her departed husband's funeral pyre (Diodorus Siculus 19.33-34.6; Strabo 15.1.30). This practice known as *suttee* was only outlawed in 1829. The first century Latin author Hyginus in his collection of Greek and Roman *Fables* attributes similar practices to many women in classical mythology (*Fabulae* 243). According to the University of Missouri Museum of Art and Archaeology, of the thirty-two ancient

Greek tragedies that have survived, there are thirteen examples of suicide (<http://maa.missouri.edu>). This demonstrates a dramatically different attitude towards suicide than what we see in Scripture.

Biblical Principles that Condemn Suicide.

In spite of the prominence of suicide in much of the ancient world not only does the Bible not record many examples of it, but it also does not record a specific condemnation of it. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit approves of it. On the contrary, various principles that run throughout Scripture make it clear that the Bible condemns its practice. We may note the following:

1. Suicide is an unlawful taking of life. From the earliest record of God's dealings with mankind taking human life has been condemned under the punishment of death. God commanded, "**Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man**" (Gen. 9:6, NKJV). This makes it clear that when a human being deliberately takes a human life, it is the responsibility of civil authority to punish this sin with capital punishment. Mosaic Law spelled out a distinction between murder (carried out with premeditation) and manslaughter (an accidental taking of life), but this same condemnation stood (Exod. 21:12-14). Under Christ, murder can prevent one from inheriting the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21), it is contrary to the sound doctrine of the Gospel (1 Tim. 1:9-11), and murderers will be condemned to hell (Rev. 21:8). Accountability for any sin assumes that one possesses the mental capacity to obey God's law (cf. Num. 14:29; Isa. 7:15-16). It is conceivable that an infant or one who has no mental capacity for moral accountability might take his own life without bearing sin. However, in general if a person of sound mind deliberately takes his own life, as the Bible teaches it he has committed an act of murder.

2. Suicide is a sin from which there is no opportunity for repentance. The Bible makes it clear that all sin on the part of those who have attained moral accountability results in spiritual separation from God. God declared to Ezekiel, "**the soul who sins shall die**" (Ezek. 18:20). Paul taught, "**the wages of sin is**

death" (Rom. 6:23). One who dies in sin cannot have eternal fellowship with God (John 8:21). It is only through obedience to the gospel that one may receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:30-32; 13:38-39; 26:17-18; Col. 1:13-14). A Christian who sins may receive forgiveness when he repents of that sin and confesses it to God through Christ (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). A Non-Christian, however, who commits suicide forfeits any opportunity to obey the gospel. Further, a Christian who commits suicide commits a sin from which he or she cannot repent and confess to God. It follows, therefore, that this puts him or her in a position in which they have died in unrepentant sin. The Bible teaches no means of forgiveness for such a condition—we will be judged for the things done while "**in the body**" not after our spirit departs from the flesh (2 Cor. 5:10).

3. Suicide focuses on this life not the afterlife. The fact that Christians look towards a hope that lies beyond this life led early critics of faith to urge Christians to hasten this hope by suicide (Tertullian, *Ad Scapulum* 5.2). As early as the second century Christian writers answered this taunt by declaring that suicide was against the will of God