



What the Bible says
about euthanasia
and assisted suicide

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Human beings are unique

The Bible teaches that human beings are unique in all Creation because they are made in the image of God:

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule" (Genesis 1:26)

It is on this basis, after the flood, that God introduces to all humankind the death penalty for murder:

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God has God made man." (Genesis 9:6,7)

This prohibition against killing legally innocent people is later formalised in the sixth commandment:

"You shall not murder." (Exodus 20:13)



Human life belongs to God



There is no provision in Scripture here for compassionate killing, even at the person's request, nor is there any recognition of a 'right to die' as all human life belongs to God:

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. (Psalms 24:1)

"The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up." (1 Samuel 2:6)

According to the Bible then, our lives are not actually our own. Euthanasia, suicide and therefore assisted suicide are wrong.

There are two instances of euthanasia in Scripture. In the first, Abimelech, believing himself to be fatally wounded asks his armour-bearer to kill him:

Abimelech went to the tower and stormed it. But as he approached the entrance to the tower to set it on fire, a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head and cracked his skull. Hurriedly he called to his armour-bearer, "Draw your sword and kill me, so that they can't say, 'A woman killed him.'" So his servant ran him through, and he died. (Judges 9:52-55)

Euthanasia in the Bible

In the second, an Amalekite despatches the mortally injured Saul, still alive after a failed attempt at suicide:

"I happened to be on Mount Gilboa," the young man said, "and there was Saul, leaning on his spear, with the chariots and riders almost upon him. When he turned round and saw me, he called out to me, and I said, 'What can I do?' ... Then he said to me 'Stand over me and kill me! I am in the throes of death, but I'm still alive.'" (2 Samuel 1:6-9)

These two cases demonstrate the two main arguments people make for euthanasia and assisted suicide: autonomy – 'death with dignity' and compassion – 'release from suffering'.

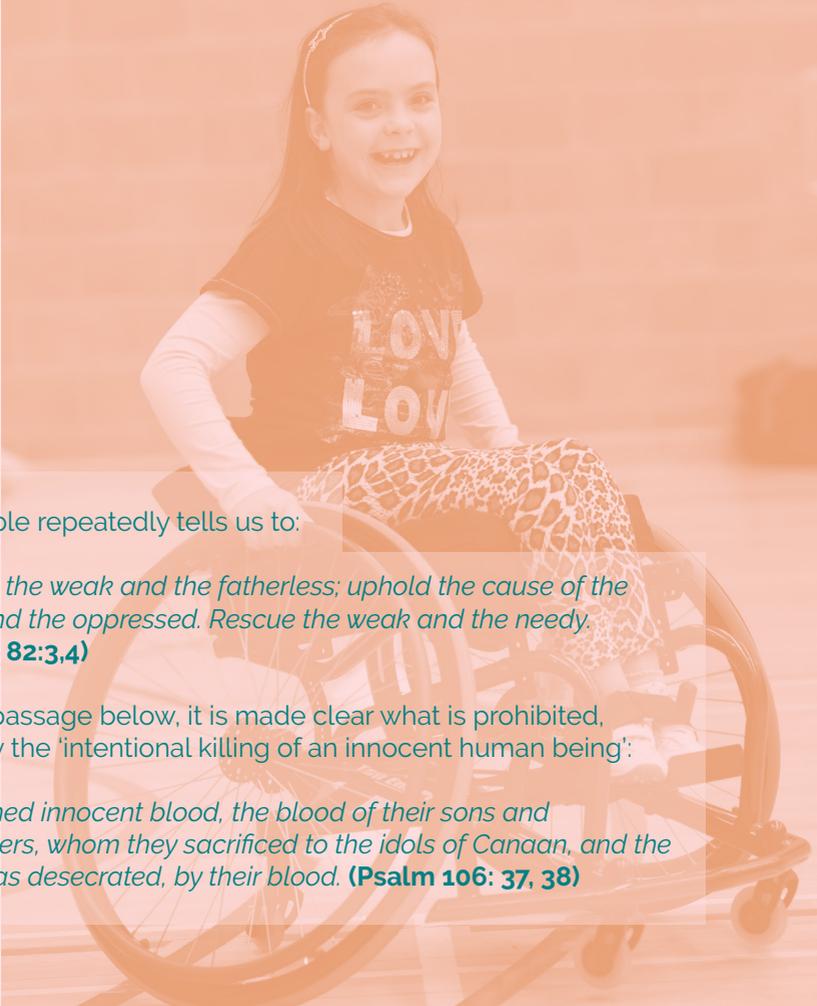
Protecting the vulnerable

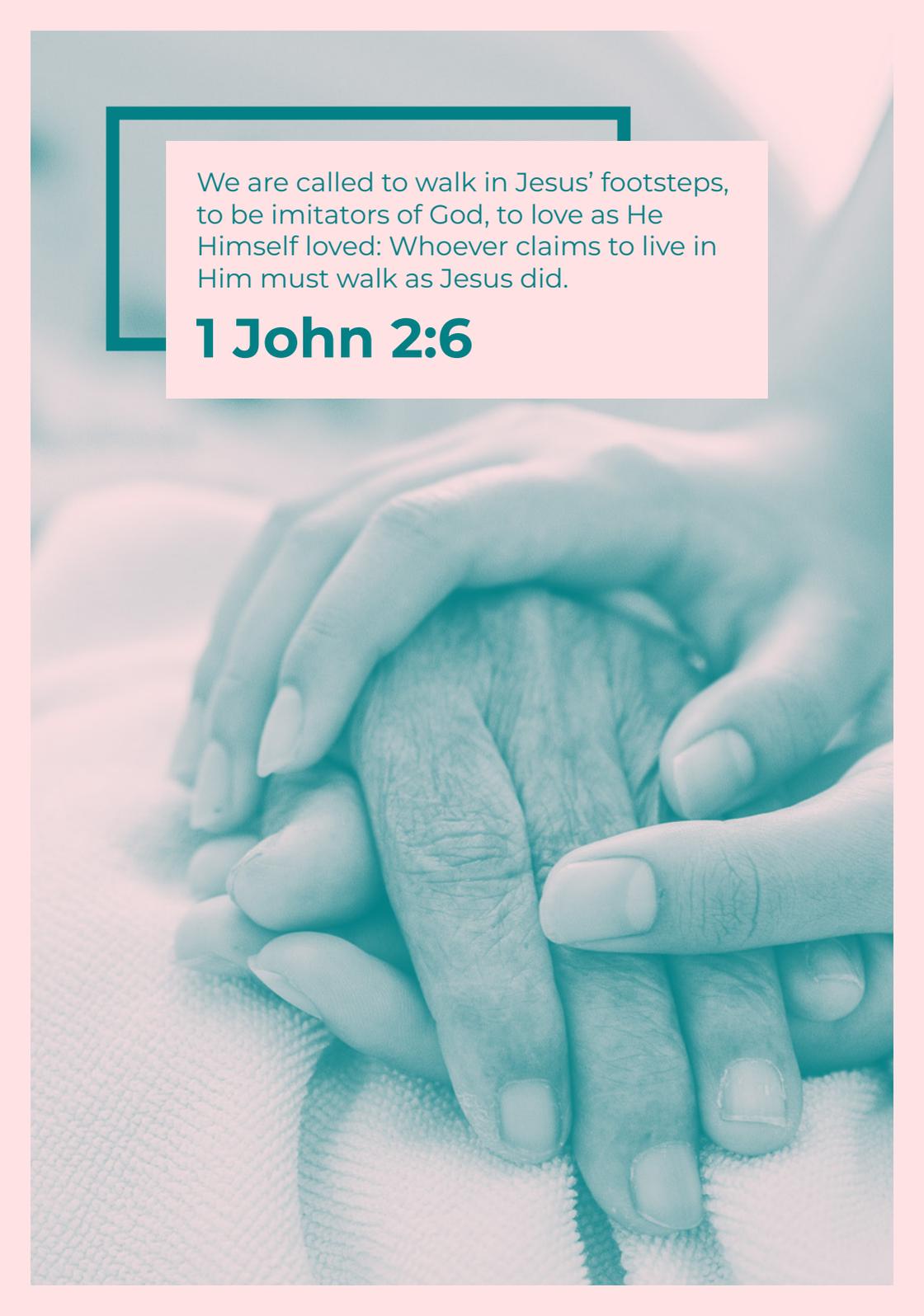
The Bible repeatedly tells us to:

Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy.
(Psalm 82:3,4)

In the passage below, it is made clear what is prohibited, namely the 'intentional killing of an innocent human being':

They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was desecrated, by their blood. **(Psalm 106: 37, 38)**





We are called to walk in Jesus' footsteps, to be imitators of God, to love as He Himself loved: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did.

1 John 2:6



Spirit of love

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us to go beyond the demands of the sixth commandment to fulfil the very spirit of love on which it is based:

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment..." (Matthew 5: 21)

Rather than lead people to an untimely death, as Christians we should do all we can to nurture life, love and hope. This will involve self-sacrifice and maybe heartache for the sake of others. This attitude marks us out as God's servants:

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children – and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:1, 2)

Powerful arguments

Some Christians may wonder whether occasionally there are situations in which helping someone to end their life is acceptable, especially when faced with emotive hard cases and false arguments. Even if we believe it is wrong, it may be difficult to express why when asked for our opinion.

We have powerful arguments to use against the legalising of any form of euthanasia including assisted suicide

- Any change in the law to allow assisted suicide would place pressure on vulnerable people. This includes those who are elderly, disabled, sick or depressed who could feel under an obligation to agree to end their lives for fear of being a financial, emotional or care burden upon others. These feelings would be greatly accentuated in a time of economic recession with families and health budgets under pressure.
- Members of the medical and health professions and disabled people's advocates are strongly opposed because they fear the dangers associated with such a change.



- Historically – and still today – British parliaments have consistently voted against any attempt to legalise assisted dying.
- The present law making assisted suicide and euthanasia illegal is clear and right. The penalties it holds in reserve act as a strong deterrent to exploitation and abuse whilst giving discretion to prosecutors and judges in hard cases.
- In a free democratic society there are limits to human freedom and the law must not be weakened to accommodate the wishes of a small number of desperate and determined people but put others at risk.
- A far better alternative is excellent hospice and palliative care provision that meets people's physical, social, psychological and spiritual needs.

Christian response

We must speak up for those vulnerable people who really have no voice:

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute ... defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31: 8, 9)

God calls us, as Christ's followers, to give our whole selves to the love and service of others by expending our time, money and energy in finding compassionate solutions to human suffering:

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2, 10)

This has indeed found practical shape historically in the hospice movement and in good palliative care – pioneered in large part by Christian doctors and nurses in the UK. We must work hard to make this compassionate, effective care more widely accessible.

Death is not the end

Perhaps the most powerful Christian argument against euthanasia and assisted suicide is that through Christ's death and resurrection for our sins we can look forward through the eyes of faith to a new world after death with God:

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Revelation 21:4)

But for those who do not know God, neither euthanasia nor assisted suicide are a 'merciful release'. It may rather be propelling them towards a judgement for which they are unprepared. It may be the worst thing we could ever do for them.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide are illegal for good reasons – and God says it is wrong. He points us instead to a better way, offering protection, hope, love and compassionate care.





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