

Ethical Issues and Politics.

This is the end of our series where we have looked at economics, ecology and migration. Today we are looking at Ethical issues.

Reading Gen 1.26-31

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹ Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Imago Dei

Verses 27 and 26 are the foundation of one of the most important notions in Christianity. We are made in the image of God. Each of us is made in the image of God. You, each of you, reflect something of the living God. And that makes you precious.

This idea of that we are made in the image of God is the foundation of many ethical considerations.

Our challenge ...

- Our challenge is to see the image of God in the suffering, the marginalized, the oppressed and the hurting.
- Our challenge is to see the image of God in those that the world devalues; the handicapped, the imprisoned, the stigmatised.
- Our challenge is to see the image of God in every human being, including those with whom we disagree.
- Our challenge is to see the image of God in those who oppose us, even in those that persecute and slander us.
- Our challenge is to see the image of God in friend and foe; acquaintance and stranger; strong and weak; oppressor and liberator.
- Our challenge is to see the image of God in ourselves and in each other.

We are about to vote but voting is the beginning not the end. We are going to look at one issue that is ongoing and that we need to grapple with. I also hope this exercise sets a model for how to grapple with ethical issues.

Assisted Dying

We need to clarify about what we are, and what we aren't talking about.

Assisted dying is the proactive intervention to deliberately cause the end of someone's life who has a terminal illness. For the upcoming bill it's about proactive intervention to deliberately end the life of someone with terminal illness who is asking for this and who may or may not be able to do it themselves. This is, of course, a bill that sits in the wider discussion about euthanasia as a whole, but we are looking at the confines of just this bill. The assisting someone with a terminal illness to take their own life.

NOT – about opposing aggressive treatment. People have the right to refuse treatment, and that's ok.

NOT – about treatment for problems that also happens to shorten life. Treating pain with high dose pain relief may shorten someone's life, but that is not the motivation for giving pain relief.

Why are we looking at this? It will come. It's difficult, emotional, personal. It will have profound effects on society if it happens.

Four guides for Christians in ethical decisions.

- Bible,
- Holy Spirit,
- The Church (tradition and authority),
- Reason

Biblical Considerations.

We are made in the image of God therefore we are precious. Human life has a value in and of itself. Ending it is a big step.

“Thou shalt not kill” is not correct. It's more “Thou shalt not man-slay.” i.e. kill inappropriately. So is it wrong to take the life of a terminally ill person.

The Bible gives values of love, grace, compassion, hospitality, service. Joy, peace, kindness, goodness, self-control

Holy Spirit: We look to his guidance as we work out the values and guidance above in our real life issues.

Church: Its always been against assisted suicide. In fact most traditions have been against it. Hypocratic oath – the doctor will not provide poison, even if the patient asks for it.

Assisted suicide is contrary to all historical codes of medical ethics including the Hippocratic Oath, the Declaration of Geneva, the International code of medical ethics and the [Statement of Marbella](#) – which was reaffirmed by the World Medical association (WMA) as recently as 2013. The latter reads, ‘Physician-assisted suicide, like euthanasia, is unethical and must be condemned by the medical profession. Where the assistance of the physician is intentionally and deliberately directed at enabling an individual to end his or her own life, the physician acts unethically.’

Assisted Suicide is opposed by the British Medical Association, the World Medical Association, the Association for Palliative Medicine, the British Geriatric Society and virtually every Royal Medical College including the RCGP and the RCP.

Reason

We are called to work through the issues.

4 guidelines in Medical Ethics.

- Autonomy – responsibility for self.
- Beneficence – do good.
- Non-Maleficence - do no harm.
- Equity / Justice – justice for all.

3D communication.

We are called to engage in a way that speaks in three directions at once. We speak as Christians to Christians, to a secular world that is vaguely hostile to religion and doesn’t like religion to “tell it what to do”, and to people of other faiths.

Autonomy

Choice – My body, my choice. Is choice biblical? Is choice for self presented as Godly? I would argue that it’s not, it’s to the fore but sometimes comes secondary.

Love our neighbour as yourself. Joy = God, others, you. This is wrong! Others and you are equal.

Sophie’s question. I might want that choice for myself, but do I really want my mother to have to face that when I’m with her and I don’t know the motives of the people around her?

Role of Dementia.

A lot of the problem is when people also have dementia and can't speak for themselves. How do we treat them.

Treatment for dementia may well be found. To halt it, if not reverse it. Who knows what the next 20 years will bring. If we open the door to Assisted Dying now it will not be closed again. So I'm cautious about opening the door to assisted dying because people have dementia, when that may not be such a problem in 20 years time.

The issue is that assisted dying is for those who don't have the autonomy to take their own life. Its *Assisted* suicide. So its asking for autonomous actions for those that don't have autonomy.

Beneficence / Doing Good:

Some would argue that compassion says to help end life is being good. "I wouldn't treat my dog like that."

Others would say that good hospice care means that we don't have to take that path. With good hospice care pain is, to a large extent controllable. Not perfect but usually bearable. And with bearable comes the intention to add life. "Not only can we help you die well, we can help you live before you die"

Non Maleficence –

Is assisted suicide doing harm?

- To the person?
- To the assistor?
- To relationships. E.g. Dr / Patient relationship.

Can we stop other people wanting to cause harm. No safeguard will stop the pressures of finance, selfishness. Etc. In my opinion: The current safeguards are pathetic. They are a chocolate fireguard.

The right to die can become the expectation to die.

Slippery slope argument. Will this open the door which will get wider and wider? Cf. abortion.

Equity.

There is a balance of equity and justice for all in society versus individual choice. Some of the issues affecting wider society would be

- Pressure on the elderly. "I don't want to be a bother"
- The right to die may well become the expectation to die.

- Disability and handicapped – “gosh you’d be better off dead.” Becomes a message given to the disabled.
- Affecting those doing the assisting.
- Disrupting the Doctor / Patient relationship.

Many people say “I wish I could end it”. That is not currently an option. So it’s a safe question. It’s a way of expressing grief, emotion, sadness, but it’s safe. If we open the door then it’s not safe. We have to face the question. And many people will find themselves raging against events and then staring into the abyss. It’s no longer a safe conversation.

4 Fears

Pain – People fear being left in agony. To a large extent pain is controllable. It may not be perfect but bearable. “Not only can we help you die well, we can help you live before you die” Very rarely is it the case that pain management leaves people in agony. And we must remember that hard cases make bad law.

Loss of dignity - We fear losing dignity. This is a matter of good care and treating people with dignity. Its others role to keep the dignity of others.

Fear of dependence – We fear being dependent. Again this is a matter of good care, helping people realise they still have control and can do things.

We can’t afford it. – That society can’t afford good end of life care. But that means this isn’t an ethical decision but a financial one. We can afford what we want to. If we think its important we can find the money. We can imagine that financial pressure will lead to ideas like

- “help the NHS help those who have a future.”
- “Its better that the family have use of the money rather than it all gets swallowed up in nursing home bills.”

We must stand against these sorts of idea.

Summary

I would say

- Yes to dying well
- No to actively taking life.

What can we do.

Inform yourself.

Advocate. But note there may be “1000 letters but what about the silent majority”. So we need to advocate through many different means. Email, twitter, and other social media. We need to go and see our MP and speak in an informed way.

3D communication

- Speaking to Christians
- Speaking to Secular world often vaguely hostile to religion telling it what to do/think
- Speaking to other faiths

Be ready for abuse. Don't respond with abuse.

Respond with grace.

Useful website <http://www.carenokilling.org.uk/>