

ISSUES: Euthanasia

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Terry Schiavo*

1. At shortly after 9 in the morning of March 31st, Terry Schiavo took her last breath, & departed this life.
2. Her death came nearly 2 weeks after the feeding tube that had provided her with nutrition for 13 years, was removed by court order.
3. The drama that surrounded Terry's last few weeks was played out in the popular press.
 - a. Each day, the decade old battle between her husband & her parents over Terry's fate was made national news.
 - b. *Michael*, her husband, had fought for years to have the feeding tube removed.
 - c. Terry's parents, the *Schindlers*, had been successful in maintaining the life of their daughter.
 - d. 2 times the courts had ruled in Michael's favor & Terry's life support was removed.
 - e. But last minute action by the Florida legislature had always prevailed to have the tube reinserted.
 - f. Finally, on March 18th, the court ruled that the Florida Law was unconstitutional & the tube was withdrawn. Nearly 2 weeks later, Terry died.
4. The debate over Terry Schiavo has brought the whole subject of euthanasia & the right to die to center stage of public discussion & debate.
 - a. Both the Pro-Life & Right-To-Die camps came out in full force around the hospice where Schiavo spent her last days.
 - b. Michael Schiavo asked several notable Right to Die advocates to be his spokespersons, while the Schindlers did the same from the Pro-Life camp.
5. From watching the coverage & listening to all the rhetoric that was bandied back & forth by *all* sides, it seemed there was not a little *use* of Terry Schiavo as a way to promote each group's position.
6. What's difficult for the common person, like you & I, who are removed by distance from Terry's case, is to know with certainty

the *specifics* of her condition.

- a. Despite the loud protests by each side, the fact is – we just don't *know* what Terry's actual state of awareness was.
- b. The court appointed doctors declared she was in a PVS (persistent vegetative state), with NO chance of recovery.
- c. While her parents & some of the nurses who attended Terry said that she often showed signs of awareness & occasionally made attempts to communicate.
- d. But brain scans indicated that this was highly unlikely.
- e. So, right up to the end, the *facts* of Terry's condition remain uncertain.

B. The Issue

1. The question before us tonight is this –

Does that matter?

Does it *matter* that Terry Schiavo was in a PVS with no chance of recovery?

Is *that* sufficient cause to remove her feeding tube?

2. And that brings up the bigger Issue we need to tackle:

Do people have a "Right to Die?"

3. What's a solidly Biblical position on Euthanasia?

II. The Sanctity of Life

A. Some Verses

1. Before we get into the details of dissecting the whole issue of the Right to Die, I want to begin by taking a look at some verses that give us an idea of the value God places on life.

2. Genesis 1:27

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

3. Psalm 139:13-16

¹³ For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all

were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet *there were none of them.*

4. Exodus 20:13

You shall not murder.

5. Proverbs 24:11-12

¹¹ Deliver *those who* are drawn toward death, And hold back *those* stumbling to the slaughter. ¹² If you say, “Surely we did not know this,” Does not He who weighs the hearts consider *it*? He who keeps your soul, does He *not* know *it*? And will He *not* render to *each* man according to his deeds?

6. Psalm 8:3-6

³When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, ⁴What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? ⁵For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,

B. The Basis of Civil Government

Genesis 9:5-7 • ⁵ Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a *reckoning*; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. ⁶ “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man. ⁷ And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth And multiply in it.”

1. This was God’s statement to Noah & his sons as they emerged from the ark & began civilization over again after the Flood.
2. God intended this to be the ***founding premise*** for the establishment of human society because it had been so badly violated prior to the Flood.
 - a. You’ll remember one of the reasons God said the Flood was necessary in the first place was because of the inordinate

- amount of violence that had broken out. [Gen. 6:13]
- b. Murder & mayhem had become the norm.
 3. So as they emerge from the ark to begin again, God lays down the ***first principle of human civil government*** – and it's based on the sanctity of human life.
 4. Life is so special, & carries such value, that if someone takes a human life, his/her ***own life*** is forfeit as the ultimate ***penalty*** to insure that the problem of murder does not spread.
 5. In other words, capital punishment is society's way of telling all its members that each & every human life is considered special & off limits.
 6. Genesis 9:6 is the foundational mandate for all civil government, and it's based on the ***sanctity of human life***.
 7. Paul affirms this truth in the NT. In Romans 13:4 he says that God gives to civil government "***the power of the sword***" to resist & punish evil.
 8. Contrary to what many people think, capital punishment, when it's applied in a just manner, isn't a ***denial*** of the sanctity of life.
 - a. When capital punishment is applied in a manner consistent with Biblical morality & ethics it's an ***affirmation*** of the sanctity of life.
 - b. It's society's way of saying, "This is something, or someone who ***imperils*** the lives of others – & to protect the sanctity of innocent lives, we must remove this person from society."
 9. Now, it's not our aim tonight to look at capital punishment; we can deal with that at a different time.
 - a. The point is that Gen. 9:6 gives us the ***mandate***, the ***basis*** for all human civil government,
 - b. And it's founded on the unchanging principle of the ***sanctity of human life***.
 10. That means it's the God-delegated ***duty*** of civil government to operate all its institutions & systems first & foremost ***from that premise***. – that life IS sacred, special, & not to be ended without right justification.
 - a. Laws, courts, & officers ought to use the sanctity of life as the pre-eminent principle when governing.
 - b. When government moves ***off*** this base, it's lost its legitimacy & abrogated its authority.

III. EUTHANASIA

A. Defining Terms

Let's begin by defining some terms – This is not what we mean by Euthanasia; This is Youth in Asia

1. The word 'euthanasia' means "good" or "easy death"
 - a. It combines the Greek prefix *eu* = good
 - b. And the word for death = *thanatos*.
2. As it's used today, it's come to refer to the intentional killing by act or omission of a dependent human being for his/her alleged benefit.
 - a. The key word here is '**intentional**'.
 - b. If death is not **intended**, it's not an act of euthanasia.
 - c. **Mercy-killing** is a synonym for euthanasia.
3. Euthanasia by Action: Intentionally causing a person's death by **performing an action** such as giving a lethal injection.
4. Euthanasia by Omission: Intentionally causing death by **not providing** necessary & ordinary care; i.e.; food & water.
[Schiavo]
5. Assisted suicide: Is not the same as euthanasia.
 - a. Euthanasia requires a third party's **direct** involvement in the termination of life.
 - b. In *assisted suicide*, someone provides an individual with the information, guidance, & means to take his/her **own** life with the intention that they will be used for this purpose.
 - c. When it's a doctor who provides this help it's called "Physician assisted suicide."
6. The way to distinguish between Euthanasia & Assisted Suicide is to look at the **last act** – the act without which death would not occur.
 - a. If a third party performs the **last act** that intentionally causes a patient's death, euthanasia has occurred. i.e pushing the plunger on a lethal injection.
 - b. If the person who dies performs the last act, assisted suicide has taken place. i.e. He/she pushes the plunger on a needle already inserted by another into an IV in his/her arm.
7. What Euthanasia is **NOT**:
 - a. There is no euthanasia unless the death is **intentionally** caused by what was done or not done.

- b. Some medical actions that are often labeled “passive euthanasia” are really not euthanasia at all because there’s no *intention* to take life.
- c. These acts include not starting treatment that would provide *no* benefit to the patient,
 - 1) Withdrawing treatment that has been shown to be ineffective, burdensome or is unwanted,
 - 2) The giving of high doses of pain-killers that may endanger life, when they have been shown to be necessary.
 - 3) These are all part of good medical practice & endorsed by law when they’re properly carried out.
- d. Again, there must be an *intent* to end life, either by action or inaction in order for it to qualify as Euthanasia.

B. Legal

1. There are only 3 places where euthanasia & assisted suicide are legal.
 - a. Oregon permits assisted suicide but *not* euthanasia.
 - b. The Netherlands & Belgium permit *both*.
2. Along with these 3, Australia & Colombia have come *close* to legalizing euthanasia.
3. Despite the fact that Florida does *not* permit euthanasia, on March 18th, the court ordered that Terry Schiavo’s feeding tube be removed, an act of Euthanasia by Omission.
4. And the private family dispute that had gone on between Terry’s parents & her husband for nearly a decade, was moved to the national stage.
5. Dozens of polls were conducted asking the American people if they thought Terry Schiavo ought to have her feeding tube removed.
 - a. A FOX News poll found that 59% thought so.
 - b. 24% said it should stay in & 17% were uncertain.
6. The FOX poll was virtually identical to the many other polls taken during the debate over Schiavo’s life.
7. And they mirror the results of polls taken on the Right to Die for the last several years.

C. The Right To Die

1. This raises something more & more people are talking about – is

- there a ***Right to Die?*** And what precisely is ***meant*** by that phrase?
2. The Right to Die refers to the belief that dying is a matter of ***choice*** rather than part of the human condition.
 3. Those who believe in the right to die generally believe that individuals ought to be able to decide for themselves when they can end their lives & how to do so.
 - a. Those who hold to the right to die use the ***quality of life*** standard as the basis for deciding when to terminate life.
 - b. And by advocating the individual's **RIGHT** to die, that means ***each person*** determines for him/herself whether the quality of his/her life is worth continuing or terminating.
 - c. Along with the right to decide the quality of their lives, they're supposed to have the ***means*** available to end their lives if they should so chose, including both euthanasia & assisted suicide.
 4. One of the rallying cries of those who support the right to die is the slogan, ***“Death with Dignity.”***
 - a. What this aims at isn't difficult to grasp.
 - b. With the advances in medical technology, a multitude of medicines, machines, & methods are now available to doctors to maintain the life of serious ill & injured patients.
 - c. And while many of these new practices are helpful in reviving patients & returning them to normal lives – they don't always work.
 - d. While tens of thousands ***recover*** from life-threatening injuries & illness through these procedures, others do not.
 - 1) They remain in comas that last for years while their physical body deteriorates.
 - 2) They stay in what is known as a ***persistent vegetative state*** & doctors give them little to no chance of recovering.
 - e. Compared with a normal functioning person, they're deteriorating condition appears as a ***mockery*** of life.
 - f. So RTD advocates contend they ought to be allowed to die – WITH DIGNITY; that is, with what dignity is ***left*** to them.
 5. But ***Death with Dignity*** is a fiction. There is no dignity in death. Dignity is something that's intrinsic to life! We'll come back to that in a moment.
 6. First, let's deal with this issue of how technology has prolonged life, & in some cases, maybe ***past*** the point it ***ought*** to.

IV. NO MURDER

1. The 6th Commandment is quite clear – Murder is *out*. So Euthanasia & Suicide, in any form, are prohibited because they're forms of murder.
2. The sanctity of life requires us to do our utmost to preserve, protect, & promote life.
3. But at the same time that we hold the sanctity of life as an unchanging principle, we have to recognize the inevitability of death.
4. The Fall has ensured that all people die, it's only a matter of time.
5. So how do we resolve the tension? How do we know when efforts to hang on to life are no longer *proper*?
6. The answer to that is not as difficult as it may seem.
7. *Conventional* medical treatment consists of providing what nourishment is needed to sustain life, & what medicines are needed to assist the body's natural ability to heal itself.
8. Beyond conventional treatment comes what is known as *extraordinary* or *heroic means of treatment*.
 - a. These would include respirators that keep a person breathing.
 - b. And special medicines & procedures that actually keep body functions going.
9. In *most* cases, heroic means of treatment are used *successfully* to get a critical patient through a *temporary* trauma.
 - a. That trauma may last for minutes, hours, or even days.
 - b. But the doctors treating that patient have good reason to believe they will recover.
 - c. In most cases, *they do* – & the extraordinary treatments are no longer needed.
 - d. By their nature, they're meant to be *temporary* – to deal with a *crisis*.
10. But when such heroic treatments are required to *keep* a patient alive *perpetually*, & the general medical consensus is that the patient *isn't* going to recover, then such things as respirators are only *delaying* the inevitable.
11. The reasoning goes – if removal of heroic means of treatment were to lead to the imminent death of a patient with no reasonable forecast of recovery, then it's entirely appropriate to remove those supports.

12. But heroic means of treatment are not to be confused with conventional care of patients by providing food & water.
 - a. Food & water aren't heroic,
 - b. They're necessary for the functioning of even healthy life.
 - c. We **all** need to eat & drink.
13. So it's never appropriate to remove the basics of conventional care from someone, even if there is no prognosis of return to a normal life.
14. Even if the patient were to live for 30 years in a PVS.
15. Now, this is a hard thing – and it's something we all need to have a ready answer for because this is where the rubber meets the road of the people we will talk to about this.
16. You see, whenever we deal with this issue, people immediately think about what they would want for themselves if they were in Terry Schiavo's place.
 - a. And most people say – “If that were me, I'd rather die.”
 - b. Understood! But the fact of the matter is, the timing of our death isn't ours to decide. That rests in the hand of God alone.
17. Think about Terry Schiavo with me for a moment – those who were for the removal of her feeding tube said she ought to be allowed to “die with dignity.”
 - a. Whose dignity? Not Terry's! According to them, she was oblivious to everything around her; they used that as justification for starving her to death.
 - b. So they must mean the dignity **WE** assign her.
 - c. But if we assign her **dignity**, then how can we kill her?
 - d. There's no dignity that attaches to death; dignity only lasts as long as life lasts.
18. It was precisely **because** Terry had life that she had dignity, and the only way to serve the dignity that was hers was by **preserving her life**.
19. Granted, the **quality** of Terry's life was abysmal. But the quality of a life **is not & cannot be** the basis for assigning **VALUE** to that life.
 - a. That's a slippery slope that several societies have slid down in the past.
 - b. The **quality** of the life of a child beggar living on the street in Calcutta does not come anywhere close to the fat-cat who lives

- behind the ivy-covered walls of a mansion in Montecito.
- c. Is that child's life worth any less?
 - d. **Where** are we going to draw the line if *quality* becomes the standard for deciding who lives & who dies? Even more scary, **WHO** will draw that line?
 - e. If you want to know where this whole way of thinking ends, look no farther than the Holocaust & the practices of Nazi Germany.
 - f. Years *before* Hitler rose to power over the Third Reich, the medical practitioners of Germany had adopted the philosophy of eugenics –
 - g. And euthanasia was practiced in wholesale fashion on any & all who were deemed to have a substandard quality of life, as well as those who *threatened* the quality of life of good Germans.
 - h. The handicapped, disabled, infirm, weak, retarded, criminals & even certain ethnic groups were quietly euthanized.
 - i. When we look back on the Holocaust we wonder how Hitler managed to persuade the German people to kill 6 million Jews.
 - j. He had plenty of help. He merely expanded on a policy that was already well underway when he came to power.
20. Those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.
 21. So while Terry Schiavo's quality of life was abysmal, that *cannot* be the basis for deciding to end her life.
 22. The reason Terry ought to have been kept alive is because she *was alive*, & life is sacred.
 23. Even if we could see into the future & know that she would *never* recover, she ought to have continued to be served by her doctors, nurses, family, husband, & friends – because it's exactly **PEOPLE** like Terry that *prove* what kind of people **WE ARE!**
 24. Terry Schiavo became inconvenient to her husband Michael.
 - a. He'd long since found another woman he'd become involved with & had a child by.
 - b. He wanted to be free of the shackles of his marriage to Terry.
 - c. But He made a vow one day in which he pledged himself to remain true & loyal to her as his wife, come sickness or health, prosperity or adversity.

- d. He broke that vow.
25. As human beings, we are all under a solemn, sacred *obligation*
– To esteem others, *all* others, with dignity & honor.
 26. To account to them a specialness that's granted by no One less than God.
 27. And to recognize that just as He's the One who put man's breath in Him at the Creation, He's the Only one who has the right to take that breath away.
 28. Until they take that last breath, *our* duty is to love, serve, & protect, *regardless* of their condition.