

SUICIDE AND SALVATION

Will a Christian go to heaven if he commits suicide?

In other times I would not have attempted to answer this question. It is a question that generates more heat than light anyway, so why bother with it? But suicide has become more common. It's so prevalent among college students that in some areas it's even referred to as the "cap and gown disease." Among youths in the 15-24 age group, suicide is the fourth-ranking cause of death, after accidents, cancer and homicide, and it takes 2500 lives each year. It has been estimated that there is at least one suicide attempt each minute and between 60 and 70 successful suicides each day. It seems obvious, then, that individuals must reconsider this matter since it will no doubt affect more and more people. Yesterday people could just sit back and argue about suicide, but now it is much more likely that they will be forced to encounter people considering it - and there is quite a difference.

Suicide does not play a very prominent place in the Scriptures, nor do they have any specific teaching on the subject. There are only seven suicides recorded in the Bible. According to 2 Samuel 17:23, Ahithophel saw that Absalom did not heed his counsel, so he went home, put his house in order and hanged himself. Saul fell on his sword in order to kill himself (1 Sam. 31:4). It would seem from 2 Samuel 1:5-10 that he was not successful and an Amalekite had to finish the job, but Saul's intent was nonetheless suicide. Saul's armorbearer was number three (1 Sam. 31:5). Zimri committed suicide as a result of a conspiracy that failed (1 Kings 16:18). Abimelech made a foolish move in the taking of a tower and got hit on the head with a stone thrown by a woman. Not wanting to face the indignity of being killed by a woman, he had his armorbearer kill him with his sword (Judges 9:54). Samson pulled the house down on his own head (16:30). And number seven was Judas (Matt. 27:5; Acts 1:16-18).

For many people the reasoning concerning salvation and suicide goes something like this: "No murderer has eternal life (1 John 3:15), and since suicide is self-murder, that settles that!" But I wonder if the answer is that simple?

In writing this column I have been guided by two great fears - that I shall *give comfort* where it is not deserved, and that I will *not give comfort* where it is deserved! It is a grave error for persons to draw comfort from the promises of God when they have not made those promises theirs by placing themselves under the protection and provision of God. I'm afraid a good many people think that they will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, although they have not made the Lord their Shepherd (Psa. 23)! On the other hand, it is just as far off the track for others who are Christians to fail to claim those promises which are theirs by the grace of God.

When one asks whether a Christian goes to heaven if he commits suicide, at least one thing is settled: He is talking about a Christian. Some persons contend that no Christian would commit suicide, which I believe does not fit the facts at all.

We have to go to the Word of God to see if the matter of suicide is explained. If there is any guidance on it, I have not found it. That is, there is no verse which says that those persons who commit suicide can or cannot be saved, or go to heaven. But what about that matter of murder? In 1 John 3:15, the question is not suicide. This verse says, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer."

Are people then to contend that everyone who hates his brother will not go to heaven? It is not a fact to be proud of but one which is real that there is considerable hate displayed among the children of God. Surely such sins greatly affect reward's (1 Cor. 3:12-17) and are not to be considered trifles. But to say that such sins keep a child of God out of heaven seems to me to be going farther than the Scriptures go. If a person has a consistent, longstanding, deep-burning hate, then he should check to see if he ever was a Christian.

On the other hand, I believe it is only realistic to say that a child of God may occasionally get caught up in hate. Hatred is very much a part of the believer's sin nature. However, a truly spirit-controlled child of God will not let it last, and he will repent. True, the suicide victim does not have time to repent, but his eternal salvation is not taken away from him any more than the eternal salvation is taken from the child of God who has been harboring hatred or bitterness for a time.

Some believers contend, that anyone who has committed suicide was not in his right mind. That could be so. In a study of the seven biblical suicides, it seems that each one was under some pressure at the time. Many believers today may not believe that those pressures were enough to justify suicide - but these believers were not present then. Today's believers are living in an age of great despair, fear, pain, incurable disease, guilt feelings, impossible social pressures, poverty and so on. Individuals had better be careful how they judge others who have much more to cope with than they do. Too many believers are quick to judge others before first trying to walk in their shoes. Actually, one would hardly know how he would react if he was caught in a similar situation. Since individuals can never put themselves in the place of anyone who commits suicide, let them be very slow to judge.

Many of the problems that Christians suffer merely point out that believers, for the most part, live far below their privileges. Christians have been promised peace, joy and hope. But somehow many do not know how to appropriate these fruits of the Spirit to themselves. If believers are to remain sane and spiritual in this world, they will have to learn more and more the words of Paul: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). Paul further admonished, "Be careful (anxious) for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6,7).

What about suicide? Suicide is *the voluntary and intentional act of one taking his own life*. Three classic examples of suicide are recorded in Scripture: Saul (1 Sam. 31), Ahithophel (2 Sam. 17), and Judas Iscariot (Matt. 27). Several observations from these texts can be made: First, believers and non-believers both have taken their lives; second, in each instance terribly distressing circumstances affected each life; and third, in two of the examples there was direct demonic or satanic activity involved. It is no wonder that Satan's involvement in human life produces thoughts of suicide. Jesus reveals in John 8:42-44 that the devil is both a murderer ("from the beginning") and a liar ("the father of lies"). In a weakened state, even a believer can become so emotionally distressed that he can murder himself. Satan's unchecked attacks are vicious. When one takes his own life he usurps, in criminal fashion, a right belonging only to God - the right to take life. The suicide of a believer leaves a damnable brand on Christ and Christianity because the devil exploits the information of it to the farthest extreme in the minds of unbelievers.