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A Christian Worldview Perspective on Suicide

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Not too long back, a very deep tragedy happened in our family; I had a cousin take his own life. In recent years I had not interacted with him much as we lived in different places, and our lives took us in different directions. However, when we were younger, we spent a lot of time together, and my sense of connection to him was still very strong.

When the tragedy happened, I felt a couple of different emotions. Of course, the first one was that I was very sad. It hurt to think that he had such turmoil in his life that he would do that. But another emotion also welled up that actually surprised me – it made me angry at the horrible expressions of fallenness in the world. My surprise started me thinking a bit more deeply about this in an effort to understand my own feelings.

As I shared this feeling with others, I found that a lot of people began telling me their own stories of loved ones taking their life, and their feelings about it. Because of the shocking, and sometimes shameful, nature of suicide, most people don't generally like to talk about it much. I found out, though, that people do think about it a lot. As I talked to more and more people, one question kept popping up: Can a person go to heaven who has committed suicide? Because of such a high interest, I thought I would deal with that here.

The Nature of Salvation

To answer that question based on a biblical worldview, we first need to understand the biblical concept of salvation itself. Our answer is rooted there.

One of the most important things we need to address is the fact that Christian salvation is not an event, but a process. It begins when one first enters into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, continues throughout the rest of one's mortal life, and ends with the individual's relationship with God in eternity. The distinctions we make regarding the three parts of the process are important, because when dealing with an issue like suicide we must first see the big picture for the answer to make sense.

First, let's identify the three parts of the salvation process itself. The first two parts relate to our earthly experience, while the last is connected to our life in eternity.

Justification

Justification is the starting point of salvation. This is the place where an individual repents of sin and invites Christ into his or her life. With that, God judicially forgives the individual's sin, gives a new spiritual nature, enters his life by means of the Holy Spirit, and adopts the person into his spiritual family.

Sanctification

Sanctification begins at the moment of justification, and continues throughout the rest of one's mortal life. During this part of the salvation process, a person's life is continually transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit, as the individual works day by day to become increasingly spiritually mature.

Glorification

Glorification is the part of the salvation process that begins at physical death. At that point, the individual leaves the mortal body behind along with its sin na-

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ture, and enters directly into the presence of God to live for eternity.

How We Interact with Salvation in Our Lives

Now that we have looked at the scope of salvation, we need to take the next step and see how that plays out in our lives.

Justification

As was mentioned above, justification is the beginning point of the salvation process. We interact in the justification process when we personally make the decision to follow Christ, repent of our sins, and invite Christ into our lives. From that very moment, we are saved; God forgives us, gives us a new spiritual nature, enters our body in the form of the Holy Spirit, adopts us into his spiritual family, and gifts us for service. With that, our lives are transformed and we are raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. That said, our salvation is still not complete. While we are forgiven and adopted into God's family as his loved child, we still have our sin nature to contend with as we live life in this world, and we continue to struggle with sin.

Sanctification

Once we have stepped into God's salvation, we must then live in it. As was mentioned above, even though we were saved at the point of our justification, as long as we continue to live in this fallen world, we still struggle with our fallenness.

In spite of the fact that we have a new nature, we also still have the old one that we struggle against. The purpose of our life, at this point, is to continually grow in our fellowship with God. The transformation process that began at our justification must be continually expanded with the goal to become completely like Christ.

Of course, as long as we live in the fallen world and still have our fallen

nature, we will never fully achieve perfection, but it should be our goal to get as close to it as possible. We do this as we live in relationship with Christ and allow him to lead and guide us every step of the way.

Of course, there are some Christians who take their growth more seriously than others and work diligently on their faith life to become more and more like Christ. There are also those who don't take it seriously and do not become spiritually mature.

Looking at this from another perspective, in spite of the fact that we grow in our salvation during this life, we still don't achieve perfection. Each person still has the tendency to sin, and each one does sin – and different people struggle with different sins. Our sins, during the sanctification process do not cause a complete break in the relationship with God that was established when we invited Christ into our lives. We are still his child as he adopted us into his family. Of course, the disobedience of sin does affect our fellowship with him, as well as the rate at which we grow spiritually. Those who are diligently working to grow in their salvation are the ones who recognize and correct sin problems quickly. There are others who basically ignore God, create a sinful lifestyle, and do not grow at all. Most are somewhere in between.

So, Does a Person Who Takes His Own Life Go to Heaven?

Suicide is, for sure, a sin. Life belongs to God and we do not have the right to determine for ourselves when to end our lives. However, it is no more serious in God's eyes than any other sin. EVERY sin separates us from God.

Which brings us to the point of this article: One of the things we humans often confuse is the relative seriousness of sins. To understand this, we need to make a distinction between the results of sin in two arenas: 1) the

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seriousness of particular sins in God's eyes, and 2) the seriousness of those same sins in society's eyes.

When it comes to God's viewpoint, he makes no distinction. Sin is sin, and any sin creates alienation between the sinner and God. Even what we might consider the smallest of sins violates his holiness and creates separation.

The consequences of various sins in human experience, though, is a different matter altogether. Some sins are uniquely personal and only affect single individuals. Other sins affect a family and other close human relationships (suicide falls into this category). Still others affect the smooth operation of society (for instance, various kinds of criminal behavior). Human beings regard and react to these different kinds of sins in different ways. Those evaluated to create more damage to society are regarded as worse, and are punished more severely than those judged less serious.

The important thing to grasp, though, is that God's evaluation and man's evaluation are completely different. Man's evaluations are based on outward expressions and involve only temporal consequences, while God looks at the heart and the consequences relate to people's relationship to him and their eternal destination.

So as for whether or not a person goes to heaven after committing suicide, that has

nothing to do with the sin of suicide itself. No particular sin will be the deciding factor as to whether or not a person enters eternity with God. If an individual has genuinely entered into a personal relationship with God while living in this life, that one has been justified, adopted into God's family as his child, and will go to heaven. What is affected by the various sins they commit in this life is not their eternal salvation, but the level of spiritual growth they had in the sanctification part of their salvation.

Thus, it all comes down to whether or not the individual ever made the step to enter a personal relationship with God. If they genuinely entered that relationship, they will be in eternity with God. If they did not, they will spend eternity separated from God – it is as simple and straightforward as that.

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