

## **Can A Person Commit Suicide and Still Go to Heaven?**

**Series: Elephant in the Room #2**

**John 5:24; Ephesians 2:8 & 9; Romans 8:38-39**

**Introduction:** Turn with me to [Romans 8:38-39](#) and follow along as I read these amazing verses about the love of God. ***“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord.”***

**Stories: #1** In my sophomore year of high school I was the back-up catcher on our varsity baseball team. The first-string catcher was the captain of the baseball team, and the football team, as well as being the quarterback. He was THE cool guy in high school. He went off to college in the fall and the next thing I had heard about this amazing athlete, and popular guy was that he had jumped out of his dorm room and killed himself – suicide at age 19.

**#2** – In the early 1980’s I was sent from Seymour-Johnson AFB to Ramstein, Germany for a month of temporary duty or TDY as we called it. One of my friends from Goldsboro had been reassigned there a few months before I got there. He played short-stop on our church softball team, and I played second base and we had turned many a double play back in the day. So, whenever I got a chance, he would pick me up and I would hang out with him and his family. He would show me the sights and we would go out to eat and some nice German restaurants. (Couple things I remembered about Germany...) After the first two weeks, I couldn’t get up with him...didn’t answer the phone...was no where to be seen. It wasn’t until I got home that I found out what happened. His brother back in North Carolina had committed suicide and the family had to rush home.

**#3** – Several years ago we had a lady attending our church that was recently saved and on fire for God. I believe she came to church Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday whenever she could. She was hungry for the Lord, friendly and as pleasant as she could be. She had been to church on Wednesday, and had lunch with a church friend on Thursday, but for some reason no one knows, she killed herself Thursday night.

**#4** – In late summer of 2005 (Sept. 2, 2005) Nancy and I got word that a friend of ours from Goldsboro had died. She was a lovely Christian lady. Her and her husband had six beautiful kids; and those kids thought Nancy reminded them

a lot of their mother. What we found out as we went to the funeral was that she just didn't die, she had taken her own life. My friend Bill Wilson preached the funeral and I've always remembered the title of his message as we all contemplated how this Christian woman with six beautiful children could end her life. His message was – ***“Don't make it worse than it already is.”***

### **Can a Person Commit Suicide and Still Go to Heaven?**

That is the title of this second message in our series: **The Elephant in the Room.**

I hope and pray you never have to deal with this elephant, but in your lifetime, you will probably know someone who will, because Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the United States, accounting for more than 1% of all deaths. And it is the second leading cause of death among young adults ages 15-24, accidents are first. Suicide rates are highest among adults between 45 and 64.

In suicide statistics, 40% of persons who complete suicide have made a previous attempt. Men kill themselves twice as often as women, but women attempt suicide twice as often as men. There are over 5,000 suicides among teen-agers, and 10,000 college students will attempt suicide this year.

Just so you know, the new three-digit dialing code **988** has been designated for the U.S. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which started July 16, 2022.

### **SUICIDE IS NOT...**

- A. Accidental Death
- B. Taking someone off life support
- C. Refusing artificial means of continuing life. (Ventilator, Life Support)

Suicide has been said to be a permanent solution to a temporary problem. The name suicide comes from the Latin word “sui”, meaning “of oneself”, and –cida, meaning “to kill”. And statistics show us a wide range of people have contemplated and committed suicide. Over 25,000 Americans commit suicide each year. One million will try but only one out of fifteen will succeed.

### **One Biblical website I came across had an article called: Is Suicide a Sin?**

Life is a precious gift from God, and it is wrong to end it. Jesus loved people unto death (John 3:16). There is no greater love than that (John 15:13). When

a person gives up his life, he is rejecting God's love and making His sacrifice of no effect to himself. There is nothing more that God can do for him.

Ending one's life is a violation of God's clear command, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). It is a mortal sin, which leads to eternal death (Romans 6:23). Giving up life means giving up all faith and hope. The Bible teaches, "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). The act of suicide is sealing one's destiny to hell because there is no more chance to repent after death.

**Let me just say, Suicide is sin, but is it the unpardonable sin? Is the act of suicide sealing one's destiny in hell?**

**My goal today is to show you what the bible says and try to equip you to know how to bring hope to those who will face this issue.**

### **Let's Pray**

The first impression you get from studying the Bible is the lack of information. There are laws for and against almost everything in the Old Testament, but none specifically about taking your own life. The closest we have is, THOU SHALT NOT KILL. While the Bible itself does not include the actual word suicide, there are at least seven different times in Scripture where a person took his or her own life.

### **SUICIDE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

**In Judges 9**, the son of Gideon named Abimelech committed suicide. As a wicked ruler, he killed his seventy brothers to rule Israel, and during a revolt a woman dropped a millstone on his head from a tower above. And before he was to die, Abimelech called his armor-bearer over and asked him to kill him because he didn't want it said about him that a woman killed him.

**In Judges 16**, we remember the story of the powerful Samson, who fell in love with Delilah, and eventually allowed her and the Philistines to know that God granted him strength through his hair. After the Philistines seized him, cut his hair, and gouged out his eyes. He was MOCKED as he walked around grinding grain like an ox.

Samson's hair eventually grew back, and his strength also returned; and in one last thrust of power granted by God, Samson pushed the pillars with all his might, and collapsed the entire structure on top of his enemy as they

worshipped their false god. Just before he died, Samson prayed to God, "Let me die with the Philistines!" This one act killed more Philistines than all his other feats combined.

**In 1 Samuel 31**, King Saul and his men were fighting the Philistines, and when the effort grew fierce, the archers wounded him critically. Saul then asked his armor-bearer to draw his sword and run him through, but when his armor-bearer refused, Saul took his own sword and fell on it. And when his armor-bearer saw what had happened, in a state of hopelessness he too fell on his sword and died.

There are also the stories of Ahithophel and Zimri. In **2 Samuel 17:23** when Ahithophel realized his advice had not been followed as a respected prophet, he saddled his donkey, went to his hometown, put his house in order, and then hanged himself.

In **1 Kings 16**, Zimri, murdered Elah, the king of Israel, and took his place. When the rest of Israel learned what had happened, they pursued him, and Zimri retreated to the king's palace...set it on fire and remained inside.

Samson is the only one who took his own life who we find in Hebrews 11:32 where he is listed as an example of a man of faith. So, despite his moral failures, he died in the act of killing his enemies after awful humiliation at their hands. It seems more like the sacrifice of self for a cause. It was not that he wanted to die, but that he was willing to die.

### **What do these stories of Old Testament suicides teach us?**

1. Suicide was rare among the Jews, and not a social problem demanding any special legislation.
2. When it did occur it was by violent methods and always successful.
3. All examples are of men, and saving face relates to each case.
4. It is almost always connected with a life that has forsaken God and ended in some form of hopelessness and despair.
5. Every example is conscious and deliberate with a very definite purpose.

***The most memorable account of suicide, and the only one found in the New Testament is the story of Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus.***

### **SUICIDE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT Matthew 27: 3-5 (KJV)**

***When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." So, Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.***

The Romans didn't hang him, the religious leaders didn't hang him, and Jesus didn't hang him. Judas hanged himself.

There have been several reasons given as to why Judas betrayed Christ, but personally I think that Judas was trying to force Jesus' hand. I think that Judas felt if Jesus was arrested that he would exert His power and establish the Kingdom and overthrow the Romans that Judas was looking for. I don't think that Jesus' death was what Judas had in mind when he betrayed him. And it certainly wasn't about the money, he threw that back into the temple.

**"Doesn't the Bible say that Judas 'repented?'"** The older translations do indeed use that word in Matthew 27:3.

A more accurate rendering is **"seized with remorse."** Although Judas was gripped with the wrongness of what he had done, we never see him ask for forgiveness.

**Where is Judas today?** Is he in heaven or is he in hell? In Acts 1:25, Peter spoke of Judas who left his apostolic ministry **"to go where he belongs."**

In John 6:70-71 **Jesus said: "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him).**

He did not literally mean that Judas was a demon, but that Judas was even then (about a year before the crucifixion) acting under Satan's influence.

Listen to Jesus as he prays in the Upper Room as the final act is about to play itself out. **"While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been LOST except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled"** (John 17:12).

But someone else may ask, **"Did Judas go to hell because he committed suicide?"** Good question, and the answer is No.

If someone asks, “Did Judas lose his salvation?” I believe the answer is also No. He didn’t lose his salvation because it appears he never had it and was never a follower of Jesus Christ in the same sense as the other apostles.

In John 13:8-11, **Peter TELLS JESUS, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”**

**Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean. (NIV)**

If you want to use these seven biblical incidences of suicide to automatically condemn people to hell, you are going to have to twist the scriptures.

### **Let’s move on and ask some obvious questions**

#### **Is Suicide Sin?**

The Bible has a high view of life and the recognition of God as the author of all life, and so the assumption is that suicide is evil. Self-murder is certainly as much sin as killing another person.

As Christians, our lives have been bought and paid for through the action of Jesus Christ. Paul shares in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, **“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor Therefore, honor God with your body.” (NIV)**

And so selfish behavior on our part is not an option. In fact, Romans 14:7 & 8 states, **“For none of us lives to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” (NIV)**

When a person commits suicide, it can be a very selfish, unthinking act, designed to gratify themselves and cause remorse for those around them. In those circumstances, a person does not consider God or His plan for their life.

But there are also other times, when suicide is the result of a mental illness or incapacity of rational thought. And so, there’s a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and actions that are present in suicide, which leads us to another question:

## **Is Suicide Unforgivable?**

For many years, the conventional thought of many in the church is that suicide is an unforgivable sin. Augustine argued in the fifth century that suicide was a violation of the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder."

Later, Thomas Aquinas, being catholic and believing that confession of sin must be made prior to departure from this world to the next, taught that suicide was the most fatal of all sins because the victim could not repent of it.

This is because if a person dies while they are committing a sinful act, they are unable to confess that sin and ask for forgiveness.

I believe there are sins we forget, there are even sins that we commit that we are not aware of that we might never specifically repent of before we die. And so, by that logic, each of us would be susceptible to hell and unable to receive the grace given through Jesus Christ.

John 5:24 informs us, ***"Very truly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has eternal life, and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death into life."*** (NIV)

The problem with the view that suicide is unforgivable is that it represents a misunderstanding of God's grace. We are saved by the grace of God, not by works. Ephesians 2:8 & 9 tells us, ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."*** (NIV)

We are told in Romans 8:38-39, ***"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** (NIV)

Those who want to say that suicide is unforgivable attempt to make suicide an elevated sin—a sin that is heightened to a status that even God himself cannot forgive.

There are two problems with this. **First**, such a stance limits the conditions by which God can or cannot forgive someone—resulting in us essentially placing God in a box. **Secondly**, there is only one unpardonable sin that is ever mentioned in the Bible.

And it's found in Jesus' words in Mark 3:28–29 **Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.**"

Which of course leads us to the question, what does it mean to blaspheme the Holy Spirit?

If we keep reading, we put the verse in context. Mark 3:30, **He (Jesus) said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."** And that is a sermon for another day, but suffice to say Jesus didn't say, "I tell you the truth, all sin and blasphemy can be forgiven, but anyone who takes their own life will never be forgiven."

In years past, people who committed suicide were not allowed to be buried in the church cemetery next to their family or brothers and sisters in Christ.

But still, it is important to be incredibly cautious of our approach to this issue. Suicide cannot be condoned, and it should not be dealt with lightly. I dare to say that not every person who has committed suicide will go to heaven, and not every person who has committed suicide will go to hell. **In essence, those decisions are not ours anyway, they are God's because only he knows the heart.**

The question I have often heard after a suicide is: **what could I have done differently?** And then people start playing the blame game, if only I had seen the signs. If only I had gotten them help. If only I had been a better parent, a better spouse, a better friend, a better child.

Suicide has no racial line, it has no economic barriers, and it can take the life of the rich as well as the poor. Suicide does not care if you are a Christian or if you are an unbeliever.

Suicide does not care if you are a mother, a father, a son, a granddaughter, a grandson, a granddad, or a grandmother; it can strike its fatal blow swiftly and leave a trail of brokenness that some will never recover from. It is the most horrible death that those left behind must deal with. The suicidal person has ended his or her problems, but they have now created an innumerable number of problems for those left behind.

Author, Jeannette Walls, writes **"When people kill themselves, they think they're ending the pain, but all they're doing is passing it on to those they leave behind."**



Actress, Marilyn Monroe said, "When you're young and healthy you can plan on Monday to commit suicide, and by Wednesday you're laughing again."

If you're wondering, Monroe committed suicide on August 4, 1962, which was a Saturday.

Ultimately suicide results from two main factors, stress, or shame. If people feel as if they have no other recourse for the pressure they are facing, some choose suicide. If an event occurs that places people in shameful situations, sometimes these people choose suicide.

Depression is the most common condition associated with suicide, and it is often undiagnosed or untreated.

**Illust:** Lewis Smedes, professor of theology and ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary had this to say about suicide in an issue of Christianity Today.

"I believe that, as Christians, we should worry less about whether Christians who have killed themselves go to heaven and worry more about how we can help people like them find hope and joy in living. Our most urgent problem is not the morality of suicide but the spiritual and mental despair that drags people down to it. Loved ones who have died at their own hands we can safely trust to our gracious God. Loved ones whose spirits are even now slipping so silently toward death, these are our burden."

William Cowper, who wrote the popular gospel song "There Is a Fountain" proclaiming Christ's forgiveness and love, repeatedly attempted suicide. Even saints like Moses, Elijah, and Jonah went through periods of extreme depression and, yes, suicidal thoughts (Numbers 11:10-15, 1 Kings 19:1-5, and Jonah 4:9).

In Acts 16:25-34 we have the story of the Philippian jailer who came close to ending his own life because it looked like he was in a terrible unsolvable mess. It was all a delusion, however, and a totally false picture of reality. The fact is he was near the greatest blessing of his life, for that was the night that Paul and Silas stopped him from killing himself and he received salvation by trusting in Jesus as his Savior. By being spared he not only gained life for himself, but he also gained eternal life for himself and his whole family.

**Let me stop here and say: if you are contemplating suicide, or know someone who is, here are some insights that can help you.**

**First, don't be afraid to call someone and ask for help.**

**Secondly, ask Jesus Christ to give you renewed hope and to give your life meaning. His life indwells you, and His resources are constantly available in your most desperate moment.**

**Third, Tell others. As soon as possible, involve the help of others, such as parents, friends, spouse, teachers, ministers, physicians, anyone in a position to assist the distressed individual.**

**The AG has a POSITION PAPER - Sanctity of Human Life: Suicide, Physician-Assisted Suicide, and Euthanasia** (Adopted by the General Presbytery in session August 9-11, 2010)

Consequently, our opposition to the termination of human life must be understood in spiritual terms and must be guided by biblical principles. Specifically, the Church must (1) proclaim humankind's dignity as God's sovereign creation, (2) reassert God's authority over life from conception to death, and (3) affirm meaning and hope for suffering humanity.

We must first clarify the terminology used in discussions of end-of-life ethical issues. Suicide is the act of deliberately and purposefully causing one's own death. Physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia may be differentiated as follows: "Physician-assisted suicide occurs when a physician provides a medical means for death. In euthanasia, the physician directly and intentionally administers a substance to cause death."

Both are acts of killing, distinguished by who administers the life-ending medication or substance.

The claim that human life is valuable, even sacred, has its foundation in God's creation of humankind: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him" (Genesis 1:27). This truth imparts extraordinary value to every life, independent of gender, race, socioeconomic position, age, or health status. Those who hold to biblical creation must attach great worth to human life and will stand in its defense.

The intrinsic value of human beings is confirmed by God's expression of love in the sacrifice of His Son who paid the price for human sin and transgression. God rightly claims ownership of those He has purchased: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have

received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

**Not only does God forbid the claims of others against our lives, He also forbids our own claims against our lives.** Murder is condemned in the Bible in the severest terms (Genesis 9:6; Deuteronomy 5:17). Suicide, the deliberate killing of oneself, finds no support in the Bible.

Advocates of suicide, argue, "I am my own; the time and means of my dying lie at the heart of my private life; I therefore retain the 'right to die', and no one may take it from me."<sup>3</sup>

As with any exercise of personal choice outside the parameters of God's law—abortion, euthanasia, drug abuse, homosexual practices, and heterosexual promiscuity—the invariable consequence is physical and spiritual death.

Conversely, the righteous decision to obey God's commands brings true freedom. Within the parameters of His law, the individual may anticipate the joy of His blessing.

God determines the boundaries of life and holds in His hands the two fragile ends of human experience. **He is active in the conception of life and the conclusion of life, in birth and in death.**

Of his beginning, the Psalmist writes, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.... My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place" (Psalm 139:13,15). The womb is the place of God's creative handiwork. It is there each life is endowed with unique personality, unique physical traits, and a unique spiritual nature.

Death was not God's ideal. Death was introduced by rebellion and subsequently spread from one man to the entire race: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin... in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

God's plan is to deliver us from this last enemy. 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55–57).

For the believer, death is not a final defeat but a transition in which the perishable is exchanged for the imperishable, the temporal for the eternal, the imperfect for the perfect. The believer experiences assurance even when facing death. Job concludes, “You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made” (Job 14:15). The Psalmist implies the symmetry of God’s activity in his birth and death when he writes, **“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be”** (Psalm 139:16).

If life’s beginning at conception and life’s end at death are in God’s hands, both abortion and suicide, assisted or otherwise, represent violations of His prerogative. Abortion steals from the womb a life yet to be **started**; suicide hastens to the grave a life yet to be **completed**.

We must recognize the One in whose image we are made, the One who determines the time of our beginning and the time of our end, and the One who provides meaning and hope to suffering people through the redemptive work of the Cross.

No one other than our Lord himself can know the depths of depression or illness out of which the decision to end one’s life may have sprung. Suicide entails reasoned and deliberate action. However, one who is clinically depressed or emotionally unbalanced is not normally regarded as fully responsible. **Therefore, questions that deal with eternal destiny cannot be decided by the survivors. They must be left in the hands of God who is all knowing, all loving, and forever merciful and just.**

### **Let me close with this Testimony that will hit close to home**

I have spent most of my life struggling with treatment-resistant depression and severe anxiety. It wasn’t until college that I sought out professional help. While it was an important decision, it didn’t immediately change things — and less than a year after beginning psychiatric care, I attempted suicide. My attempt was “as close to death as possible, without dying” according to the emergency physician.

Over 15 years later I was still struggling with those things. I still had times of severe depression where I no longer had the strength to live. I went to a psychiatric facility three separate times to save my life, but still there were times I didn’t want to be saved. But in an interesting twist of fate, I found God and was ‘saved’ after choosing to become a Christian.

Now, finding God is not to say that any of those things changed, because they didn't. I still struggled just as severely with my mental health as before. Becoming a Christian was not some quick fix, but now I had a new question to add to the mix: **Do people who die by suicide automatically go to hell?**

It was a question I had never much cared about before, because when I was ready to end my life, it was because I was already living in "hell." But now I wanted to know and asked my pastor. Here is what he wrote.

**"My answer to this question is different today than it has been in the past. Before, I would have emphatically said that 'no, suicide will not send you to hell'... but today, my answer is different. I know, I realize, I fear, that my words have more power than they have ever had before... I don't know if I could ever say to someone, 'It's ok to take your life, you won't go to hell,' because if that person ever did take their life, I'm just not sure how I would handle it."**

Is it conceivable that there could be someone who would interpret his answer as a green light to die? Anything is possible.

But I believe that a very strong majority of people in that position simply can't be given an "excuse" to end their life.

**Suicide is a touchy issue, but God knows peoples' heart and questions that deal with eternal destiny cannot be decided by the survivors. They must be left in the hands of God who is all knowing, all loving, and forever merciful and just.**

**Let's Pray**

#### NOTES:

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