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Is It a Sin to Remove Someone from Life Support?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether it's a sin to remove someone from life support, whether it would be morally wrong to attend a legal assisted suicide of an unbelieving loved one, and what to say to a pregnant Christian who is justifying choosing abortion by saying God's grace will cover it.

- * Is it a sin to remove someone from life support who has been declared clinically dead and has lost brain function?
- * Would it be morally wrong to attend a legal assisted suicide of an unbelieving loved one?
- * How would you recommend handling a situation where a pregnant Christian is justifying choosing abortion by saying God's grace will cover it?

Transcript

This is Stand to Reason's hashtag SDRask Podcast. Thank you so much for joining us. We love hearing from you, and I just want to say right at the start, just send in your questions.

If you've been thinking about it, go ahead and send those in on X with the hashtag SDRask or go to our website. I really like to find questions that go together so we can get more of your question answered. It just helps us to answer more for each one.

Plus different aspects or facets to similar questions. Yeah, so we'd love to hear from you. Alright, Greg, we're going to start with a question from Mr. Speedy.

Is it a sin to remove someone from life support? The sister-in-law of my brother had a brain aneurysm and has been declared clinically dead and has lost brain function? And they are planning to take her off life support soon. Thanks. Yeah, and that circumstance, no, it's not wrong.

And the answer, the reason why is there, they've already died, essentially, and what the machines are doing is just keeping tissue alive, you know? So the basic rule is, if you're not obliged to put a person on support under a certain set of circumstances, then it's not immoral

to remove the support, okay? And as a general rule, they're the support or the medical aid has to provide a reasonable expectation of benefit, okay? And the benefit here is not, is medical benefit not quality of life benefit? That's a different issue and should not enter into these kinds of questions the way it often has. Is there a reasonable expectation of medical benefit? In this case, there's none. The person is already, when they say clinically dead, that means they're gone, you know? And if you wait, the body is going, you have to fight the body beginning to deteriorate, which is the natural result of death.

So, and, you know, I've had medical people tell me the body begins to smell and whatever. So, no, in those circumstances, I don't think it is. No, I have, I just worked out a couple of months ago, my final advanced directive, and I was very careful how I characterize that, because the kind of boilerplate advanced directive that medical organizations or insurance companies or life insurance, whatever, or estate planning is going to give you is to me as compromised.

And so, I wanted to make clear that I don't have to keep my body going forever and ever, you know? If my body's ready to go, then I'm ready to go. And the Lord is calling me home. But at the same, I don't want extreme efforts being given with no reasonable expectation of medical benefit.

For example, some of these dying of cancer is a classic example, then they code. Well, they usually have a DNR associated with that because they're terminal, they're dying, their death is imminent. So if they code in advance and they have a heart attack, there's no sense to resuscitate because there's no reasonable expectation of benefit.

So those are some guidelines that will help people in that circumstance. Sometimes there is expectation of benefit. And the individual that is being cared for, and this is sometimes comatose victims, they've, they're just a burden to put it simply.

And so the reason that you pull the plug is to benefit other people, not to benefit the patient. And the famous case where this came up was many, many years ago, might have been in the 60s, I can't. Quinlan, I think Anna Quinlan was that the right person.

And so they decided, because it was an ethical case, they're trying to decide, and they pulled the plug, and she kept living. She didn't die, which was crazy, you know, but at least that's my understanding of it. I think Anne was her middle name.

I can't, Marie Anne Quinlan or something like that, but in any event, the thoughtful ethicists have worked this out. And the big difference between Christians and non-Christians on these issues generally has to do with quality, quality of life issues. Well, they're not going to have a good enough life.

Of course, now that's very subjective. What is a good life? Think about having these, you know, down syndrome children. You do amniocentesis, you find out you're carrying a down's baby.

You have an abortion. Oh, this kid can't be happy. So you're making a decision about the

down's child.

When it turns out, down's kids, characteristically are really happy. And so this is where quality of life considerations begin to contort and corrupt the whole moral decision-making process. So that's a big difference between secular thinkers and more careful Christian thinkers.

Scott Ray, R.A.E., over Talbot. He's written some books on this. And it's important to be aware of the kinds of responsibilities we have towards other human beings who are sick.

And it's not just a matter, we'll pull the plug because they're costly, they're inconvenient and whatever. We want to take all these things into consideration. And I made a specification.

I made a distinction in my advanced directive between medical treatment and care. This is easy to figure out. You can deny medical treatment for people, but you can't deny care.

What's care? Care is what every human being needs to stay alive. That if you deprive any human being of that thing, they're going to die. And that's basically air, water, and food.

You deny those things, but a lot of times this is what happens. They shut that off. We're not going to feed them anymore.

They're not going to die of starvation. They're going to die of dehydration, which is really a miserable way to die. Because you need water in three days.

You can go for weeks without food. The water you have to have. And now, well, let's forget about that.

Let's just smother the person. Oh, we can't do that. Why not? Just stop the air.

You're going to stop the food and delay the process. Why not just stop the air? No, obviously I'm not advocating that. I'm just making the point that those are three things that we need.

And sometimes we sanitize it. We think we're not going to smother them. That's wrong.

We'll just let them dehydrate till they die. Anyway, those are some considerations for the question. Yeah, I definitely the food and water thing definitely don't want to or the air thing, although in the case of this person's life support where there's no brain activity.

You're relevant. Yeah, there's a difference between actively killing someone and allowing someone's disease to kill them. So this is what you were talking about.

The medical interventions versus care. So if you and this is where the difference between euthanasia and maybe removing life support or not giving care and that's that's if someone doesn't want care that this is where the difference comes in. So let me go on to the next question because it builds on that one a little bit.

This one comes from Shana. As a Christian who opposes euthanasia for humans, aside from the

tremendous emotional distress of deciding whether to attend the legal assisted suicide of an unbelieving loved one, would it be morally wrong to do so? I don't see that it would be wrong to do so. I don't know why we talk about same sex weddings and there's a concern there because weddings are celebrations.

And by going to the wedding, you're celebrating the relationship that you believe is immoral. Okay. So that's a that's a different kind of circumstance than this.

If a person is going to commit suicide, you're not celebrating that event by going to the event. I mean, on other grounds, I think you'd be completely justified in saying no. Frankly, I don't.

If I had a loved one, I mean, I'm not in that circumstance. But by the friend that wanted to commit suicide, Dr. assisted suicide, why would I want to be there to watch them do that thing to their body, take their own life? I don't know why I'd want to be there. This is why I think I'm not familiar with any sort of of ceremony that people are doing.

Like, I don't know what they do there. But it can't be anything. I don't see how could be anything but affirming of what they're doing because you're coming and you're you're it's almost like a. Well, it's not a celebration, but it is an affirmation.

I think it would be again, I'd have to see what they're doing. But the thing is, like you said, why would I want to go see that. And it would be to give them support.

I would assume. And so I can say goodbye before, you know, I don't. Yeah, that's what I would I would I would plead with them not to do it ahead of time, but I don't think I would go.

But again, I would want to know what they're doing with these things. Like, how are they treating these things? It's hard to answer definitively, but I don't think I would go. I'm not balling us because what we don't want to do is act in a way that affirms in a moral decision.

And if you're sitting there just watching it happen, how could it be anything but affirming? Just I'm thinking of the personal trauma and that was mentioned here. How difficult it is to watch that. Why why why would you want to watch someone kill somebody else, especially somebody that you love? Why would you want to do that? If this is a non-Christian, presumably here, you are you're watching that person descend into an eternity apart from God.

And they think that they are lessening their pain. Now she's at peace. You know, people say stuff like this.

Well, a whole bunch of people are not at peace. They're a worse set of circumstances. If the Christian understanding of the afterlife is accurate.

And by the way, if a whole lot of religious understanding of the afterlife is accurate, you know, not just Christian. And I want to make a distinction between this and the previous question where someone's being removed from life support. There's no there's no reason why you

couldn't be there for that.

I think that would be completely appropriate. You know, if if you're there when they pass away, somebody who's lost their brain function. I mean, there's nothing wrong with that.

So I want to make sure nobody quotes those two. Good. Right.

And there are a lot of people are at the bedside with their loved ones pass away. It's a way of affirming the relationship. It's it can't be easy.

But nevertheless, it's still it's a totally different thing morally. Hopefully that help. We have more on our website.

If if you're looking for more look up assisted suicide, euthanasia, life support, I'm sure we have other things on our website. Hopefully we were clear enough though. There are a lot of complications with euthanasia.

There are different types. There's passive. There's active.

There's voluntary. There's nonvoluntary. There's involuntary.

And all of these things are factors. But there is clearly a slippery slope. That's involved here.

And it's a logical slippery slope. In other words, the kind of thinking that justifies one types of euthanasia is then applied to other types. And anyway, it's Holland is a great example of how bad it's gotten.

You know, but you also see the same problem in in Canada. I saw some amazing statistics of the number of people that die are dying through assisted suicide. That would be voluntary, but still it's shocking.

All right. I could go down that road more, but let's go on to a question from Gretchen. Okay.

This one comes from the front lines of pro life ministry in a lot of your recent podcast handling abortion guilt and God's grace. How would you recommend we handle situations where a self identified Christian who is pregnant is justifying a choice for abortion based on God's grace covering it? Well, shall we? How's the verse going Roman six? You cited that in a earlier show. Shall we sin so that grace bought a bound even more? This, this is not a justification.

This isn't a rationale that makes the action okay. It may make the action forgivable, but it's not a justification. If a person is going to make this decision to take it, make the life of their own child.

I'm choosing my words advisedly here. This isn't rhetoric or histrionics or demagogery. This is the fact that abortion kills a living thing.

And the thing that abortion, the living thing abortion kills is the offspring of the woman. And you might fuss about the word child, but I'm just using the word child in terms of offspring. So I

don't want to use fetus because that dehumanizes the human being.

You're taking the life of your child. What if that child wears one year old and you had all the same justifications then that you feel you have now for performing the abortion? Would you say, okay, God will forgive me if I allow an injection for my one year old child to remove the burden this child is to me in one way or another? Would anybody, would any Christian count in such a thing? But what is the moral difference? It's only one year or six months or two months or one day. How does that make things justifiable? What happens is the child is inside the mother's womb.

It is invisible. He or she is not visible. And therefore it's easier to have the abortion than it is to kill the one day old child that you can see.

That's it. You know, you can have hand in hand combat in the jungle and kill somebody. You can drop a bomb on them.

You know, the first one is psychologically more difficult. The second one is psychologically easy, the bomber pilot. But the ending of the life is still the same.

The moral dimensions are the same given what's involved. And that's what I would want somebody to see. I would not want anyone to think that I am justified in taking the life of my unborn child because God will forgive me.

This goes back to the last episode where we did talk about Romans 6 a little more. As you mentioned, I would go through Romans 6 very carefully with her because Romans 6 comes right after Romans 5, which is about our justification by faith. So then Paul says, okay, so now you're going to have questions.

So if we're saved by faith and not by what we do, so now can we just sin? Yeah, right grace. Can we just sin? Now he says, may it never be? And then he gives all sorts of reasons. We died with Christ.

We were buried with Christ. We were raised again to new life. Now we live for him.

Now we use our bodies to serve him in righteousness. We are new people who want to do what's right. We're not people who are manipulating God and using him to cover the things that we want to do so we can do whatever we want to do.

So Paul goes through this very specifically in Romans 6. So I would go through that and help her to understand that we are new creatures. But there's something even simpler and she just needs to understand what she's saying because by her logic, Christians are free to rape and murder and steal and do whatever they want. So if grace justifies choosing abortion, then grace justifies choosing any sin.

But if grace doesn't justify choosing these other sins, then it doesn't justify choosing abortion

either. Sometimes I think because abortion is acceptable in our culture, it's easy to come up with all sorts of justifications because it doesn't seem so bad if everyone else is doing it. So sometimes you just have to really drill down on the logic that's being used here.

And it's interesting that it came up in the last episode with another sin. I guess this is always our inclination to be tempted to justify things by grace. But you know what? There's a reason why this isn't rampant in Christianity.

And the reason is, is because Christianity is real because we really are new creatures. We really are new creatures who don't want to sin. So that's why you don't see this rampant.

You see people having this temptation such as this woman here in a difficult situation. But you don't see Christians in the main just living however they want. That reminds you of the crazy couplet, say by grace, happy condition, sin as you please because there's remission.

That isn't the way it's supposed to work. No, there's a reason why. We actually are new creations.

We actually do have the Holy Spirit who is praying for us and sanctifying us. And we actually do feel guilt when we go against God. You don't want any of that.

We are always better off doing the harder thing that is what God wants. To do than doing the easier thing. That's what God doesn't want us to do.

And Peter talks about this a lot in verse Peter. Would you rather go along with men and do what they're doing and face the wrath of God or go along with God and face the wrath of men? It's going to be one or the other. So think that through carefully.

So anyway, hopefully that helps. This people get into desperate situations and they're tempted to sin and they're looking for a way out. But just help them to understand you are better off.

You are better off. Even if it looks right now like you will be missing out on something if you follow God. You are always better off doing what God wants you to do.

All right. We're out of time. Greg.

Thank you. Mr. Speedy, Shana and Gretchen. We appreciate hearing from you.

And we hope to hear from you with your question soon on X with the hashtag S T R ask or on our website at S T R dot org. This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for a stand to reason.