

Suicide

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Another disturbing trend in today's society, inside and outside of the United States, is suicide. Individuals, both young and old, are prematurely ending their lives—being deceived by hopelessness and a total disregard to the eternal consequences and trail of pain left for those who survive. Suicide has always stirred up conflicting doctrines within Christianity, leaving open a great deal of interpretation.

Suicide is a Selfish Act that Rivals Murder

Suicide is seen as a grievous act of selfishness before God that limits the spiritual progression in mortality of the victim. While that alone is a serious consequence to suicide, the dreadful act leaves behind other victims in the form of family, friends, and loved ones who are left to sort out emotions and feelings related to pain, sorrow, grief, and guilt to name a few.

God is the creator of man in body and spirit and therefore man has no right to take that which God created—if they do so they are guilty of murder. George Q. Cannon said of those who commit suicide: "...they are no more justified in killing themselves than they are in killing others. What difference of punishment there is for the two crimes, I do not know; but it is clear that no one can destroy so precious a gift as that of life without incurring a severe penalty" (Gospel Truth, 2 vols., Salt Lake City: Zion's Book Store, 1957, 1:30).

The Lord Will Judge Those Who Commit Suicide

While the seriousness of the act of suicide is not to be removed, generally those who commit suicide are not in their right minds when they kill themselves. As such, there are concessions that must be applied. The apostle Bruce R. McConkie wrote: "Persons subject to great stresses may lose control of themselves and become mentally clouded to the point that they are no longer accountable for their acts. Such are not to be condemned for taking their own lives. It should also be remembered that judgment is the Lord's; he knows the thoughts, intents, and abilities of men; and he in his infinite wisdom will make all things right in due course" (Mormon Doctrine, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, p. 771).

Speaking about a friend who committed suicide, M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote: "Peace came to me only when I recognized that only the Lord could administer fair judgment. He alone had all the facts, and only He would know the intent of the heart of my friend. I was reconciled with the idea that a lifetime of goodness and service to others must surely be considered by the Lord in judging the life of a person" (M. Russell Ballard, "Suicide: Some Things We Know, and Some We Do Not," Ensign, Oct 1987, 6).

The prophet Joseph Smith is quoted as saying: "While one portion of the human race is judging and condemning the other without mercy, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard...He is a wise Lawgiver, and will judge all men, not according to the narrow, contracted notions of men, but, according to the deeds done in the body whether they be good or evil" (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938, p. 218).

Suicide and the Resurrection

Although not specifically speaking of suicide, the prophet Alma wrote concerning the resurrection and judgment, which applies directly to everyone, even those who have taken their own lives: "The plan of restoration is requisite with the justice of God; for it is requisite that all things should be restored to their proper order. Behold, it is requisite and just, according to the power and Resurrection of Christ, that the soul of man should be

restored to its body, and that every part of the body should be restored to itself. "And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good" (Alma 41:2-3.).

Conclusion

The subject of suicide is near and dear to my heart, having lost my older brother Robert to suicide in June of 1999. During my family's ordeal I came across many Christians who believed my brother would be relegated to eternal damnation for having committed suicide—obviously not understanding the plan of salvation and the infinite Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Christian doctrine must strongly condemn the act of suicide, but must also leave open a hope for individuals who commit suicide in that God alone will judge the circumstance and decide their fate. Beyond praying for such individuals, Christians are encouraged to perform temple ordinances for those who have not already had such ordinances performed for them (see the Sword Series™ essay on redeeming the dead), proactively facilitating the process of eternal preparation. Such ordinances do not ensure salvation for the individual, as they themselves must accept Jesus Christ as their Savior in the spirit world and embrace the ordinances of salvation performed in their behalf. Joseph F. Smith's vision of the spirit world in D&C 138 is an incredible revelation which outlines in detail the hope given to those who have committed suicide.

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