

Shayla: Does the act of suicide condemn you to hell?

Meforshim:

The concept of suicide being an unforgivable sin is not a Scriptural one. We first find the concept in the early writings of St. Augustine. Then, much later, the medieval church decided to refuse bequests from those who committed suicide, largely due to Thomas Aquinas who pointed out that a dead person can't ask for forgiveness, and to Dante who placed suicides in the seventh circle of hell in his writings. However, neither Luther nor Calvin considered suicide to automatically send one to hell. So, the inception of suicide as being unforgivable very likely finds its source in the medieval church's attempts to artificially distinguish between mortal and venial sins.

The act of suicide is not specifically prohibited anywhere in the Scriptures. However, the Word of God clearly teaches the sanctity of life¹ and encourages us to choose life rather than death.²

Moreover, we need to take into account the type of people who committed suicide in the Bible: Abimelech,³ Samson,⁴ King Saul and his armor bearer,⁵ Ahithophel,⁶ Zimri,⁷ and perhaps most notoriously, Judas.⁸ In every case, these people are not to be emulated. Even the judge Samson was rebellious to his parents, disrespectful of authority, and a womanizer. Even though his suicide brought about the death of thousands of his enemies, he is never considered a hero. It is just one more example of God's amazing ability to bring good things about no matter how badly we mess up.

In each case, the men in the Biblical examples were seeking escape from their problems. This reveals something rarely discussed in conversations on suicide. It is essentially a sin of pride and selfishness. It is a sin of pride because we arrogantly think we deserve better and are unhappy with what God has allowed in our lives. In a temper fit, some choose to "take their toys and go home."

It is a selfish act in that all the problems that are often created by the suicidal person's sin are left after his or her death for their loved ones to deal with. Not only do they have to deal with those problems, but they must also struggle with the residual doubts as to why their loved one didn't think they could find help among their friends and family. They are left with the nagging doubt, "Should I have seen the signs?" People exhibiting suicidal ideation often say or think, "Perhaps it would be better if I wasn't here." For whom? Certainly not for their families or friends! The only person who gets to escape is the suicidal person.

Regardless, suicide is not the "unforgivable sin." The only time the Bible discusses an unforgivable sin we see it associated with "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit."⁹ What exactly is the Holy Spirit's role? What does He do that we could blaspheme against Him? Christ said,

- John 15:26 HCSB "When the Counselor comes, the One I will send to you from the Father--the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father--He will testify about Me.

This gives us our clue. The Holy Spirit constantly points toward the atoning work of Christ. He always speaks of the Son and directs us to accept His Lordship. Since it is only through the finished work of Christ that we may receive forgiveness, refusing the Spirit's message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ means you are in fact refusing to be forgiven. We see this upheld in:

¹ Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7; Psalm 8:5

² Deuteronomy 30:15, 19

³ Judges 9:54

⁴ Judges 16:29-30

⁵ 1 Samuel 31:4-5

⁶ 2 Samuel 17:23

⁷ 1 Kings 16:18

⁸ Matthew 27:5; Acts 16:27

⁹ Matthew 12:31; Mark 3:28-29

- Luke 12:8-10 HCSB "And I say to you, anyone who acknowledges Me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God, 9 but whoever denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. 10 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Therefore, it is my considered opinion that suicide, though a terrible and selfish sin of pride, does not condemn a person to hell.