

## Biblical Ethics of Life and Death

### Session #2: Defining Death

#### I. Definitions of Death

- A. Tristram Englehardt, Jr.: “If the cerebrum is dead, the person is dead.” Or “\_\_\_\_\_ death.”<sup>1</sup>
- B. Robert Veatch: “Death means a complete \_\_\_\_\_ in the status of a living entity characterized by the irreversible loss of those characteristics that are essentially significant to it.”<sup>2</sup>
- C. The departure of the soul from the body: a common belief shared by many. A problem with this view: what then, is the soul and where is it located? A good response would be that the soul precedes the body; you cannot have a body without a soul.
- D. \_\_\_\_\_ Definition of Death: An individual dies when there is irreversible cessation of circulatory function. This is an older and largely non-used definition because the locus of determination is based on a pulse only.
- E. Heart and Lung Definition: Irreversible loss of flow of vital fluids or the cessation of cardiopulmonary function. When the heart and lungs stop functioning, the person is dead.
  - 1. Black’s Law Dictionary: “The cessation of life: the ceasing to exist; defined by physicians as a total stoppage of the circulation of blood, the cessation of the animal and vital functions consequent thereupon, such as respiration, pulsation, etc.”
  - 2. Thomas v. Anderson: 1950 California District Court. “Death occurs precisely when life ceases and does not occur until the heart stops beating and respiration ends. Death is not a continuous event and is an event that takes place at a precise time.”<sup>3</sup>
- F. Total Brain Death: Ad Hoc Committee at Harvard Medical School (Henry Beecher) in 1968. Study done after increasing frequency of the use of biomedical technology to keep physical life going for an indefinite period after consciousness has been irretrievably lost.
  - 1. Four criteria to determine death:<sup>4</sup>
    - a. Unresponsive and unresponsive – no \_\_\_\_\_ to externally applied stimuli.

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<sup>1</sup>Englehardt, Tristram Jr. *The Foundations of Bioethics* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986) 209. Cited from *Life and Death* by Louis Pojman, 98.

<sup>2</sup>Englehardt, Tristram Jr. *The Foundations of Bioethics* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986) 53. Cited from *Life and Death* by Louis Pojman, 98.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Beauchamp and Seymour Perlin, eds. *Ethical Issues in Death and Dying* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1978) 14.

<sup>4</sup>“Report of Ad Hoc Committee of the Harvard Medical School to Examine the Definition of Brain Death” in *Journal of American Medical Association*, vol 205, no.6 (5 August 1968), pp.85-88. Cited from *Bioethics: An Anthology*, Eds Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer (Blackwell, 1999), 287-289.

- b. No movement or \_\_\_\_\_ without the use of artificial mechanisms (organs).
  - c. No \_\_\_\_\_ reflexes, they are fixed and dilated and do not respond to light.
  - d. A flat electroencephalogram – no cerebral activity.
2. Two additional safeguards:
    - a. Tests must be repeated 24 hours later to rule out rare “false positives.”
    - b. Tests must be performed with body temperature in the normal range and without the presence of response altering drugs.
  3. Widely accepted as a safe set of rules.
  4. Pastor’s view as well.
- G. Higher Brain Death: This view holds that the “higher functions” located in the neo-cortex of the cerebrum or “upper-brain” are the necessary components of life. A brief explanation of brain anatomy.
1. The cerebrum: Controls senses, reasoning, judgment, emotions, and voluntary movement.
  2. The cerebellum: The part of the brain below and back of the cerebrum. It regulates balance, posture, movement, and muscle coordination.
  3. The brain stem: The section of the brain that regulates involuntary functions such as heartbeat and breathing. It can still function when the other two parts of the brain are no longer functioning.
- H. Motivations for new definitions:
1. \_\_\_\_\_ (which can serve tremendous goods) have create difficult circumstances but also opportunities to save lives that could not be saved. Unfortunately, technology usually runs ahead of ethics.
  2. Desire to alleviate the \_\_\_\_\_ and financial burdens of families and relatives waiting for the comatose loved ones to die.
- I. Ethical Dilemmas
1. Fact/Value dilemma (*is vs. ought*)
  2. A desire for an artificial separation if “biological life” from “personhood” or “social life.”
  3. Mayo and Winkler: A Four Stage Process of Dying<sup>5</sup>
    - a. Stage One: The dying patient is conscious, in pain and desires to be in stage four.
    - b. Stage Two: The patient is irreversibly comatose because the cerebral cortex has ceased functioning (higher brain) but the brainstem is still active, so that the cardiovascular and pulmonary functions continue.
    - c. Stage Three: The patient is irreversibly comatose because the entire brain ceases functioning, but cardiovascular and pulmonary functions continue because they are maintained by artificial life support systems.

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<sup>5</sup>David Mayo and Daniel Winkler “Euthenasia and the Transition from Life to Death,” in Thomas Mappes and Jane Zembaty, eds., *Biomedical Ethics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1986) 400-408.

- d. Stage Four: All principle life systems of the organism (cardiovascular, central nervous, pulmonary) irreversibly cease functioning. The organism as a whole permanently ceases to function. This is death proper.
4. This shift allows for the question of value (should we keep stages one, two and three alive?) to replace fact (they are alive) and makes the criteria of life subjective to the individual decision maker in the scenario.
5. Who should have the right to decide whether or not a patient in category 1-3 can move to 4?

## II. A Biblical View

- A. Humans were not originally designed for \_\_\_\_\_.
  1. God desired an eternal existence with Himself in the Garden (Gen 2:8-99, 2:15-17).
  2. In a sense, then, death is a direct attack on human dignity. Death is now an enemy. Since enemies are found in warfare, we can see direct implications regarding medicine as a whole.
  3. It goes directly against what humans are created for.
  4. Apart from Christ, it is the ultimate alienation from God. (Romans 5:12).
- B. Death is a result of \_\_\_\_\_.
  1. Genesis 3:1-10
  2. While sin may not be the direct result of each death, it is the ultimate cause of all death.
- C. Death has both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ dimensions to it.
  1. Because we are both physical and spiritual beings. (Gen. 2:7)
  2. Jesus' death is the complete demonstration of this. (Matt. 26:39, 27:46)
  3. We were not created to be separate from our bodies, but death brings that reality to us (temporarily) and that can be scary.
- D. Death is an \_\_\_\_\_.
  1. There can be no theology of death without seeing it as an \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>6</sup>
  2. Death is accompanied by: \_\_\_\_\_ (Psalm 88:15), \_\_\_\_\_ (Psalm 116:3), and \_\_\_\_\_ (Hebrews 2:15).
- E. Physical death is \_\_\_\_\_ for everyone. (Hebrews 9:27)
- F. Death is a doorway into the \_\_\_\_\_ of God. (Luke 16:26, 2 Corinthians 5:10)
  1. For some a doorway into God's eternal judgment. (Revelation 20:11-15)
  2. For some a doorway into God's eternal joy. (2 Corinthians 5:1-8)
  3. "Viewing dying and death as merely a failure of medical diagnosis and therapy is anti-holistic and trivializes the final events in our lives, stripping it of important, non-medical, meaning for patients, family, and society."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Blocher, Mark, *The Right to Die* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 51.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.,34.

- G. Death is both “\_\_\_\_\_” and “\_\_\_\_\_.”
1. Natural in the sense that it will happen to all of us.
  2. Unnatural in the sense that we were not built for it. The unnatural element is what leads us to fear it.
- H. Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ death. (1 Corinthians 15:55-58)
1. For the believer, death does not hold sway over us.
  2. For Paul it did not. (Phil. 1:21)
  3. For the early church it did not.
    - a. A common response in the Roman Empire at the death of Christians in the Coliseum was “behold how they die!” for their nobility in dying demonstrated the truth of their faith.
    - b. “The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church.”
    - c. What should be the modern day view of death?
- I. The transforming \_\_\_\_\_ of the Gospel – death as a friend?
1. Abraham (Genesis 25:8)
  2. Paul (Phil 1:21, 2 Timothy 4:6-7).

