

## Snapshot: Euthanasia

What is euthanasia? Is it compassionate? Should Christians oppose legislation on euthanasia? What do we do when we, or our loved ones, face decisions on euthanasia? How can we think about issues of life and death in the light of the gospel?

# Euthanasia

Literally means “good death”.

The word is used to describe a wide range of actions that might lead to the ending of a person’s life and to situations in which deliberately refraining from acting leads to someone’s death.



**Terminology matters!**

### Active Euthanasia

Involves an action, such as giving an injection, which is intended to cause a patient’s death. In the past this has been called mercy killing. Active euthanasia is wrong because it consists of taking a life.

### Passive Euthanasia

Allows a patient to die from the effects of their disease. It may involve taking the patient off a ventilator that has been sustaining breathing. It is better to call this ‘allowing to die’, than to think of it as a way of euthanasia.

The intentions of actions are important in assessing them. God has made us as people who are able to plan our actions and set goals, so the morality of our actions depend significantly on our intentions. That is not the only relevant way in which we judge our actions, but it is an important one. It is wrong to treat a person in a way which deliberately seeks to end their life; but usually it is very appropriate to seek to relieve pain and make the person as comfortable.

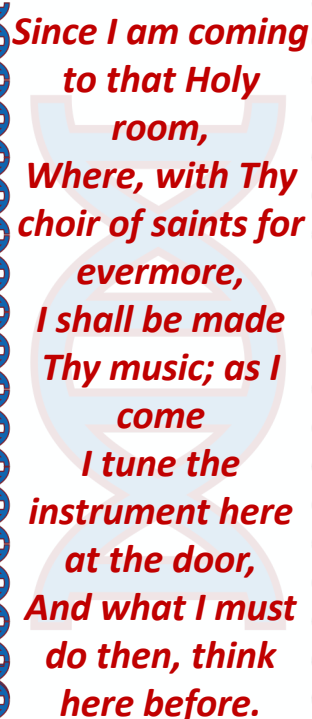
**Intention matters!**

## Worldview matters!

God is the Creator of all life. It all depends on him and it all praises him (Ps 104). All people are made in God’s image, so every person is valuable and every life counts. God, the Creator, puts a boundary around human life, since humans are made in his image. So God says that murder is wrong (Ex 20:13; Gen 9:5-6).

There is a particularly special value and sacredness about humans. It is not just productive lives that matter, or those of or the rich, strong, male, white and able bodied. It is a terrible shame that people who claimed to follow Christ have allowed slavery or supported apartheid, because in doing so they robbed people of the dignity and protection they deserved as those in God’s image.

A Christian view of life and death is premised on human life being God’s gift that no one is free to take; life belongs to God and is meant to serve him even through suffering; in the face of inevitable disease and death Christians seek healing and offer care; and in Christ there is the promise of resurrection life beyond death. Together these mean that Christians oppose taking life, are realistic about death but refuse to live as if death is the end.



*Since I am coming  
to that Holy  
room,  
Where, with Thy  
choir of saints for  
evermore,  
I shall be made  
Thy music; as I  
come  
I tune the  
instrument here  
at the door,  
And what I must  
do then, think  
here before.*