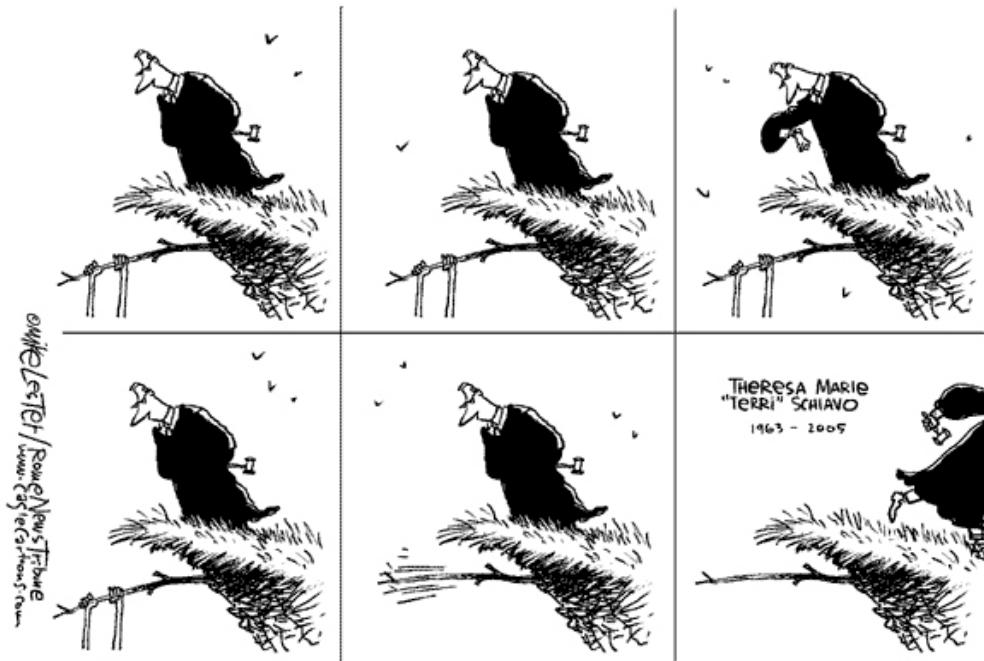


Exit Strategy

Last week, Terri Shiavo died after being denied food and water for two weeks. While many are talking about “right to die” issues, I tend to think this has more in common with the recent rash of “wife-murders” that we have seen in the media. Only this one was in reverse – the husband went through the judicial system before committing the act.



In a time when many are simply reacting with revulsion to the entire episode saying things like “I certainly don’t want that happening to me!” and “Be sure to get yourself a Living Will!”, let me offer some thoughts to remind you that Christians are not to be pressed into the thinking of the world or gripped with a spirit of fear.

Ω Ideas have consequences.

The Shaivo case demonstrated clearly not just a clash in wishes but in worldviews. When it comes right down to it, there really are only two. The one view was quoted by the Apostle Paul but has really been the attitude of man ever since the fall: “eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die”. According to this view, this world, this life, this opportunity is all there is – what you can get for yourself and yours, how prosperous and happy you become, are all terribly important. Selfishness is the only motivator, the only thing that makes any sense – for decisions regarding your own life as well as those that are in your life. Over the last generation, this kind of thinking has become dominant in our society and it has yielded abortion on demand, the political advocacy for stem-cell research, euthanasia and advocacy for suicide. And because this world is all there is, this view claims that there is nothing to fear about death. We can send ourselves and our loved ones “into oblivion” as if

we knew what we were actually doing and with comforting thoughts of no more pain and struggle. John Lennon wrote the hymn for this view in the words "Imagine", and the world has been practicing its imagination on itself.

The other worldview comes from the light of God's word and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that causes you to become born again. The Westminster Shorter Catechism sums this view up reminding us that "man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever". "End" there means not just where we wind up but our entire life's mission, our very purpose for being here throughout all of our lives. And that is true no matter what the Lord himself brings our way. Nobody would ever have wished this ordeal upon Mrs. Shiavo - to have endured this bed-ridden state for 15 years. But the struggle was not really hers, it was her parents'. Their motivation was not to debate or consider her "quality" of life, or to come up with tactful language to express why we should put *her* out of *our* misery. It came because they asked themselves the question: "What would God have me to do? What would glorify Him?"

Ω True "death with dignity" is not just the absence of humiliation.

The Christian is called both to live and die "well". That means to face all of life, and all of its changes and developments with humility, grace and peace, knowing that all of our days are numbered. When medical care can do no more, when viable options are over, it becomes the Christian to be prepared for the end of his days with the hope and full expectation of entering into the presence of God for all eternity.

And for the Christian who ministers to the dying, treating that person with honor means:

- taking care not to ignore the elderly and the infirm among us in their last years.
- not wishing to hasten death but prayerfully expecting God to act and to teach with each new day.
- not yielding to the temptation to preserve life through extraordinary means for merely selfish reasons.

Ω Be careful before rushing into formal, legal bonds regarding your own future.

We must be a nation of laws. That is a good thing. But, too often, the laws of our land and the practicing judiciary have been disconnected from the moral foundation of the Word of God and have been set adrift in the courts of human opinion. As a result, man's law is fickle, manipulated and unpredictable. What your legal friend and aid is today might be your inflexible and unbending taskmaster tomorrow. Respect and utilize the rule of law as a tool and you will not need it as a last resort. Legally, Michael Shiavo had custody over his wife. In most other circumstances, we would adamantly defend and desire that. We want such authority to rest in the hands of the one(s) we trust the most. We don't want courts deciding for us.

A Living Will or an Advance Medical Directive may express our desires in a general fashion but things change in the world and in our lives, and what is black

and white now may not be so at all in only a few years from now. Such legal documentation may be the best thing for you if you find that you are all alone in the world. But for most of us, it is better to depend on a “committee” of family members who know your wishes and are together committed and loving toward you and will work and discuss, pray and determine what is best for you in a circumstance that you probably could never have predicted, no matter how much detail you put in your document.

Ω *Be careful who you marry.*

Terri chose to marry someone who thinks entirely differently than the way she was brought up. At the time, it probably did not matter to her. But marriage choices must not be made just “in love” and in the flower of youth but with a sober union of thought, worldview and belief, and with an eye toward the future. The vows of marriage must not be taken lightly or else they will be taken lightly. Those vows are your protection in a day and age when many will ignore the marriage bond and treat those they married as expendable, as cramping the other’s “desire (and right?) to be fulfilled”.

Christian marriage is a principal commitment you make first to God while you are single, long before you may even meet your spouse. It is a resolve to be faithful with mind and body in preparation for that bond. Then, at the wedding service, the commitment is made to the other person and it is for the rest of life. Expediency, misery, tragedy – nothing is to change that. That is why Christians must only marry Christians. They must see God, themselves, and the world in the same way. For all else Michael Shaivo might wish us to think he was doing to honor his wife, the choices he has made all along the way have done much more to dishonor God, ignoring that which should have been his first priority.

Ω *Be careful who you vote for.* Participation in our government system at every level is important and not to be ignored or put aside. The making of laws is only one aspect of how people in our country are treated. The other aspect is how those laws will be interpreted and enforced. We have the duty and responsibility to elect those who will either make those decisions or appoint others who will. All of that has implications for you.

Ω *Finally, remember: it is appointed for man once to die and then the judgment.* Do not be hasty to send yourself or someone else into the court of the Almighty before doing all you can to prepare for what comes next. Pain and suffering have their purposes. The one view says merely to “escape them”. The other may call you to embrace and endure them. Death is not the end and will not be a relief to all who enter it. If all parties truly understood that, this present case would not have turned out this way.