

PASTOR'S THOUGHTS

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"They Shoot Horses, Don't They?"

The issue of death and when life comes to an end has been debated for decades. Medicine has enabled doctors to extend life with the aid of technology. An option to terminate lives early has been a long and well-debated conversation. Dame Esther Rantzen has been a significant voice in the support of early life termination of ill adults.

However, two reforms on assisted dying and another on abortion by Parliament have sparked heated debate about morality, autonomy and safeguards.

Assisted dying for the terminally ill

A private member's bill introduced by Labour MP Kim Leadbeater, known as the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, narrowly passed its third reading in the Commons on 20 June 2025, with a vote of 314–291. It grants mentally competent adults, expected to live six months or less, the right to legally request medical assistance to end their lives.

Approval requires endorsement from two independent doctors and a multidisciplinary panel, which includes a lawyer, psychiatrist, and social worker. Supporters describe it as compassionate, respecting dignity and choice; dissenters warn of pressure on vulnerable groups and urge investment in palliative care.

Abortion decriminalisation

In a separate move, MPs voted on 17 June 2025 to decriminalise women terminating pregnancies, that is, removing criminal liability for the woman, though maintaining medical oversight and the 24-week gestational limit. The vote passed easily, 379–137, thanks to cross-party support. Critics, including former minister Kemi Badenoch, voiced

concern that removing criminal sanctions introduces legal ambiguity and risks reopening the door to abortions up to full term.

Whilst they are two separate arguments concerning the termination of life, they both lie in the same bed of ethics and morals. The assisted dying bill moves to the House of Lords next, and if passed, will be implemented by 2029. The abortion change already takes effect, reframing criminal liability without altering clinical practice.

The Welsh pop band Racing Cars had a hit single in 1973 called "They Shoot Horses, Don't They?" which peaked at number fourteen in the UK Singles Chart in 1977, which was a melancholy song considered a mercy to shoot a suffering horse, so why not the same being applied to suffering humans.

The apostle Paul addresses the temporary nature of suffering in Romans 8:18, stating, "I consider that our present sufferings are not comparable to the glory that will be revealed in us."

People suffer, and it is hard, but as Job said in Job 1:21 "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

The floodgates are being strained by the torrent of arguments to which we, as the church, must hold fast and pray, for if they are opened, a new challenge will overcome the church. Yes, they shoot horses, but humans are not horses; we are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God.
