

The Sanctity Of Human Life

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This message was preached in Trinity Baptist Church, Burlington, Ont. during a Mothers' Day service. It is printed by request in the hope that others might find it helpful and instructive. It has been deliberately left in sermonic form.

I am taking as my subject this morning "The Sanctity of Human life". When we talk about the sanctity of human life we mean that human life is sacred. Now I intend to deal with the subject in this way. I want to suggest to you three things from the Word of God which bring the sacredness of human life into focus, and then I want to suggest three implications from these Biblical truths.

First of all then, the sanctity or sacredness of human life is brought to life by the fact that humanity was made by Divine creation and in the image of God. This is one of the most important and foundational facts of all the Bible, and it immediately brings us into conflict with humanistic and non-Christian opinion.

The non-Christian of course refuses to acknowledge the Bible as an authority in any matter. But I am speaking this morning as a Christian minister who is unashamedly committed to the inspiration and authority of the Bible, and our purpose this morning is to discover what the Bible has to say about this issue of human life. And the very first thing it says, I repeat, is that human life was a Divine creation in the image of God.

Then God said, 'let us make man in Our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Genesis 1:26,27.

God created man! There is nothing more important than that statement. The testimony of the Bible is that humanity is not the product of impersonal evolutionary forces; man is not the result of random natural processes; humanity is not the result of the chance coming together of various chemical particles blown together by amazing coincidence. Humanity is the result of the creative work of Almighty God. God created man.

Furthermore the Bible tells us that God created man in His own image." Let us make man in our own image, according to our likeness.. ."What does that tell us about humanity? Well it tells us that humanity was unique in all of Gods creative work. There was something very special about the human creature which distinguished them from all other creatures. This distinction between man and the rest of creation is brought out very graphically in the second chapter of Genesis where we are given the record of Adam the man naming the animals.

And the Lord God said, 'it is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him, out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. Genesis 2:18-20

This is not just a case of Adam saying "Oh let's call that one a lion; let's call that one an elephant, etc.!" There is something much more profound here. It is probable that in naming the animals Adam was describing their nature, and God was using this process to make it clear that between him and the animals there was an enormous gap. There was nothing among the animals comparable to him; no animal could be the helper and companion suited to his needs

as a man; and so the record goes on to describe the creation of woman. But you see the point of the narrative is to demonstrate the difference between man and the animals; and that difference lay in the fact that man was made in the image of God.

Now what does this expression mean — made in the image of God? Millions of words have been written on this subject and you can read the profound scholars until your head is reeling, but oftentimes you come away with precious little understanding. I don't think that many of them can beat the plain explanation of the beloved commentator Matthew Henry. Henry says that the image of God in man consists of three things. First, the constitution and nature of the soul of man with its faculties of understanding, will and active power. Second, in man's position of dominion and authority over the earth, cp. Gen. 1:26. Third, in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness; and of course he draws that from Eph. 4:24 and Col. 3:10 where the New Testament comments on the renewal of God's image in man through Jesus Christ.

Now the profound might say that's not adequate, but it is adequate enough for our purpose today and it is helpful and straightforward. Made in the image of God; with a rational soul, with understanding, will and power; with a charge to exercise dominion over the earth, and with moral rectitude, righteousness, holiness and knowledge. It was that, that image of God in man that made the enormous difference between humanity and the animals; and even though that image of God has been terribly affected by the Fall into sin, yet it still makes all the difference.

Now secondly, the sanctity of human life was brought into focus when we consider that human nature was dignified by the incarnation of the Son of God. Incarnation means "in flesh", and it refers of course to the fact that the Son of God became man. The second person of the Trinity, whom we now call the Lord Jesus Christ, existed from all eternity as a spiritual Being. He was what John calls "the Word". You remember he begins his gospel "in the beginning was the Word". So here is the second person of the Trinity, this eternal Word, existing from everlasting ages. But now the time comes for Him to play His crucial role in the amazing plan of salvation which the Triune God has devised; and in order for Him to play that crucial part and be the saviour of sinners, the second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Word of God becomes man. He wasn't man before; He was a Divine spiritual Being, but now in this miracle of the incarnation the second person of the Trinity takes into union with His Divine nature human nature. He does not cease to be what He always was; that is He doesn't cease to be God; but He does become something that He was not before, that is man. That is the mystery of the incarnation and it is one of the wonders of the Christian faith. God takes human nature into union with Himself, and He becomes a man. What dignity that bestows upon human nature! This was an amazing action for God to take; it was a great stoop of humility and condescension; and yet God the Son is quite prepared to take it; He is prepared to become man.

You remember the carol we sing at Christmas, "Oh come all ye faithful". Remember that one of the verses says "Lo He abhors not the virgin's womb". Can you imagine the discussion within the Godhead concerning the plan of salvation? Can you imagine the Father saying to the Son. "for you to become the redeemer of men my Son you will have to assume human nature; you will have to take a human body and soul; you will have to become one with them, become a man". What was the reaction of the Son? Did He recoil in horror and say "Father do you realise what you are asking; that I the eternal Word should be conceived as a human in the womb of one of my creatures. That 1 the Creator should become as a creature; Father this is too much to ask." Thank God that was not the reply! "Lo He abhors not the virgin's womb"; and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God became a man, and human nature can never be viewed in quite the same light again.

The third thing which underlines the sanctity of human life is the fact that humanity has an eternal future. Oh says the evolutionist men are no different from the beasts; they are simply a mixture of chemicals, and when they die that is the end of them. Not so says the Word of God. It is true that there is a physical part which returns to its elements; you remember the Biblical statement "dust you are and to dust you shall return;" but the clear testimony of the Word of God is that the spiritual nature of man continues forever. Indeed we have to go further than that and remind ourselves of the Biblical doctrine of the resurrection. Even from that physical part of us which crumbles and disintegrates God in some miraculous fashion is going to raise up a new body and reunite it to the soul. As a person then you will have an eternal future. You ask me "how can God do that, how could that possibly be brought about". My friends I cannot tell you how. I can direct you to Paul's great discussion of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians:15 where there are many wonderful things said about the resurrection of the body, but I cannot explain how it is to be brought about. Do you think that any man alive can explain all the things the eternal God has done or will do?

I haven't time this morning, nor is it my purpose in this message to try and provide reasons why this will come about. My purpose this morning is simply to point out to you that it is the revelation which God has given in His Word, that you are not destined for extinction after 60 or 70 years, that on the contrary you have an eternal future. You will live forever either under the sunshine of God's love and smile as a child of God through faith in Christ, or under His everlasting punishment and wrath as an unforgiven sinner who rejected the mercy of the gospel freely offered to you in this life. But what an awesome and sobering thought; you will live forever! That great reality underlines the sanctity of human life.

Now we must consider some implications from these truths of God's Word. The first is this; that human life has a God-bestowed dignity upon it which must always be recognised. People are meaningful; people have worth; that is the message of the Word of God. It is true that the human race fell in Adam, and the image of God was terribly marred through that sinful fall. It is true that in sin man is a rebel against God and worthy of punishment; all this is true. But these three great Biblical facts which we have brought out this morning tell us that there is a God-bestowed dignity about men and women that can never be denied by those who accept the testimony of the Bible. Human beings are not just beasts who can be despised, treated with contempt and kicked around by other human beings who may have power over them. No, they are creatures of God, and were made in His image; their nature was dignified by the incarnation; they have an eternal future. Every man and woman; every boy and girl has enormous worth.

We are told these days that teenage suicides are at alarming proportions. Statistics would make one weep. But is it surprising when they have been brought up on teaching that has told them that they are no different from the beast of the field and that they are just an accident of evolution without any true meaning? Here is a message for our teenagers: you are creatures of God made in His image; you are of tremendous worth and significance; every thing about you is important and meaningful. Here is a message for all human beings.

Do you see what an application this has for such things as racism and prejudice? Is a person any less worthwhile, any less meaningful or important, because he has a different colour skin than ours? Because he wears a turban? Because he speaks a different language? Because he has different customs? Because he is of a different nationality? What do these things mean in the light of the three great truths brought out earlier? You see those three truths apply to all human beings. The last people on earth who ought to be prejudiced against people of other colour or culture or nationality are Christians. Those who believe the Word of God ought to

demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ to all human beings, and to be a witness to them of the saving gospel of grace.

Implication number two is this: to destroy human life without divine authority is a crime of terrible proportions. Notice I said "to take human life without divine authority" is a crime. Sometimes God does sanction the taking of a human life as in the case of the penalty for deliberate and willful murder. It is very significant that in Gen. 9:6 where the death penalty for murder is declared we have a reference to this very issue of man being made in God's image.

Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man.

It is because men and women are made in God's image, and that therefore human life is so sacred, that when someone dares to take away that human life that crime is viewed by God as so enormous and terrible that only the forfeiture of his own life can render justice.

What does this have to say then to the practice of the wholesale abortion which is practised in so many countries today, our own included? It surely says that this butchery of human life must stink in the nostrils of God and will inevitably ultimately bring a fearful judgment from God. When millions of lives are snuffed out, in most instances the only reason being that that life is going to inconvenience those who conceived it, going to upset their future plans and ambitions, such a thing can only be viewed as a national and indeed worldwide disaster by everyone who takes the Bible seriously. If we believe these things which we have looked at in the Bible today then we must raise our voices in protest against the mass killing which goes under the name of abortion. Some will be in a position to do more than others; providentially some will be able to be more effective than others; but everyone who accepts these three great truths ought to give what support they can to the protest against the slaughter of millions of human beings.

The implications can be multiplied. We are living in a world where people are being put to death in enormous numbers by oppressive political regimes for instance. What a century this has been, and continues to be, in terms of human slaughter. It is a tragedy of staggering proportions. I suggest to you that these things ought to make those who believe the truths of the Bible zealous in opposing them. The third and final implication is this: the only message which can truly meet human needs is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why do we have prejudice and hatred and racism? Why do we have political oppression and the horrors of abortion? We have them because of sin; because human nature is in a fallen sinful condition and in rebellion against God. And my friends the only message for this fallen and sin-sick world is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is a gospel which tells of God entering the arena of human existence in order that He might make a way for sinful rebellious men and women to be brought back into that fellowship with God for which they were originally made. It is a message of the forgiveness of sins through the precious blood of God's dear Son. It is a message of new life through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a message of eternal life through the salvation of God.

The Word of God in all its fullness must be proclaimed throughout the world. God has committed that task to His church. Churches must be careful that they don't get sidetracked from that task. We need Christian men and women to get involved with the pressing issues of the day, just as great men such as Wilberforce and Shaftesbury got involved in the crying issues of their day. But the pulpits of the land must remember that their primary function is to preach the gospel and to declare the Word of God, so that sinners might be saved and so that

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God's people might be equipped for ministry. The ultimate answer to the world's need is the conversion of sinners and the propagation of the truth of God. That's why all Christians should be seekers of souls; that's why all Christians should be bringing others to hear the Word of God; that's why we should be seeking to disseminate the truth by all means.

Remember the last point of our three Biblical statements - humanity has an eternal future. You have an eternal future. Our eternity depends upon our relationship to God through Jesus Christ. Let us all be sure that we have been born of the Spirit of God; let us be sure that our hope and trust is in the Lord Jesus alone and that we personally know His salvation.