

# Sermon: The Sanctity of Life and the Culture of Death

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## Introduction

On January 22, 1973 the United States Supreme Court handed down the decision we know as *Roe v. Wade* that effectively legalized abortion on demand throughout the United States of America. When the decision was handed down it was recognized that this was an historic occasion. The Supreme Court had now declared a right that heretofore had never been recognized within the Constitution. But even the justices who voted in the majority in that decision seemed to have had little understanding of what they had unleashed. Several of those justices were later to indicate that they thought abortion would still be rare and occasional and unusual. Little did they know that 30 years after *Roe v. Wade*, over 40 million pre-born human beings would have been murdered in the womb. But they bear responsibility for that decision and the logic behind that decision—a logic and legal precedent the Court has yet to reverse and disavow. That is the lamentable anniversary that brings us to “Sanctity of Human Life Sunday.”

Now I try to continually remind congregations and myself as I preach across this land that the Christian calendar is an arbitrary thing. That is to say, every Christian church should have Sanctity of Human Life Day every single Sunday. And we talk about Resurrection Day on the calendar, but the very fact that we gather together on Sunday is a testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is a season in the year in which we focus on the resurrection in a particular way, but the resur-

rection is what summons us, and gives us hope and faith in the foundation of confidence every time we gather. Christmas is absolutely arbitrary on the calendar and yet it is not wrong that we dedicate a period of the year to focus especially on the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the incarnation is the ground of what calls us together week by week. We celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, the sinless Son of God, assuming human flesh. And it is of that Christ we bear the same testimony.

“We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). And so these particular Sundays in the church year—Sanctity of Life Day included—are not to remind us of what we don't yet know, nor are they to concretize in our hearts what may be an open question the rest of the year. No, these days are to remind us of what always and everywhere should be present in the confidence and in the preaching and in the hope of the Christian church. But on the Christian calendar—to the degree that Southern Baptists have adopted such a calendar—this Sanctity of Human Life Day is a day of particular poignancy and it is a day we share with other evangelical denominations whose hearts are torn and greatly grieved about the scandal of abortion in the land.

The twentieth century assaults on human life and human dignity are very difficult for us to take into full scale. The century saw wholesale, even mega-scale assaults on human life and human dignity.

To review the century just past you would have to begin with the totalitarian assaults upon life. Historians now believe that perhaps as many as a billion human beings were sacrificed on the altar of totalitarian ideologies in the twentieth century. It may be that a half a billion died in Communist China alone. Over 200 million died in Stalin's death camps and by his execution squads. Add up all of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century and just imagine the death scale that represents. The human mind simply cannot comprehend it. The twentieth century also gave us a new word that heretofore had not been used in the English language. Our lexicon now includes the word "genocide"—a word that was developed after the murderous regime of Adolf Hitler to describe an attempt to wipe out an entire race, or multiple races of human beings.

The symbols of the twentieth century are not only the symbols of progress and technology—the Apollo program that took man to the moon and the development of such things as modern antibiotics and medical technologies, modern transportation, flight and all the other technological marvels of the twentieth century. The symbols of the twentieth century also include Treblinka, Dachau, and Auschwitz. The smoldering ovens that even now remain as an eloquent and speechless testimony to the murderous desire that is inside the human heart.

But, it is not only totalitarian regimes that represent the assault on life in the twentieth century; it is also the killing fields of Cambodia. The century ended with "ethnic cleansing" as the new term for a form of genocide in the Balkans and the atrocities that continue across much of the world.

Once again, however, it is not only political regimes that have taken their toll,

but technologies as well. Laboratories that produce some of the great marvels of medical innovation for the treatment of diseases and the eradication of human suffering have also been the laboratories that have produced new mechanisms of death perfected on a scale and with a sophistication the human mind can hardly take into full account. These laboratories have produced not only antibiotics and miracle drugs, but also poisons and strains of diseases that threaten the extinction of the human race if unleashed by human minds and by human hands.

It is in the decadent West—the western cultures that prided themselves on the greatest epic of civilization and the greatest extension of human liberty—that we find the assaults on human life addressed to a consumer culture of self-esteem and self-centeredness—abortion, euthanasia, and the use of certain medical and reproductive technologies for such things as designer babies, embryo transfers, and stem cell research. All of these come packaged with a worldview that treats human beings as things rather than as persons, as objects rather than as men and women made in the image of God.

Even as we look back to the twentieth century, we understand that actually there was an historical pendulum that seemed to be swinging between two false alternatives all throughout that century. Two polarities attracted this pendulum as it swept back and forth. On the one side was an inflated humanism and on the other side was a devastating anti-humanism. In the twentieth century, we also had the rise of humanistic ideologies that tried to claim the human being as the source of all meaning in the universe, the apex of all sophistication, the source of all glory. God was denied, atheism and agnosticism became

enshrined in the elites of the western mind, and this humanism became the ultimate fulfillment of the ancient philosophical motto, that man is the measure of all things.

As we look deeper at this issue, those two poles both manifest one common element and that is opposition to the biblical gospel. Both reflect the attempt of human beings to define humanity by humanity, which in turn inevitably leads to the deadly destruction and distortion of human dignity. We need a rescue from this and, of course, the rescue is biblical.

A powerful corrective is found in Psalm 139—one of the great worship Psalms identified in the Psalter as a Psalm of David. Psalm 139 is known and precious to virtually all Christians and those who love the Scriptures. I want us to look particularly at verses 13 and following, but I want to begin by reading the entire psalm together that we may understand it in its context.

O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. *Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is *too* high, I cannot attain to it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike *to You*. For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my

mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *And* skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained *for me*, When as yet there was not one of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You. O that You would slay the wicked, O God; Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed. For they speak against You wickedly, And Your enemies take *Your name* in vain. Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; They have become my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (NASB)

Psalm 139 is made up of four different stanzas. Each of the first three represents one of the attributes of God. In the first, David confesses that God knows His words even before he speaks them and his thoughts even before he thinks them. *Omniscience* is the first of the attributes.

The second attribute is *omnipresence*. Here the Psalmist affirms that God is present by His Spirit in all places at all times. Here David says, "If I go anywhere, I find myself in Your presence—I can't flee your presence. If I ascend to heaven, You are there and if I go even to the realm of the dead, behold You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn and I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me." It is a great comfort to us to know that there is no place we can go, or be taken, or find ourselves away from the presence of God. God is omni-

scient and omnipresent. He knows all things unconditionally—our thoughts before we think them, our words before we speak them—and He is in all places at all times.

The third stanza is about God's *omnipotence*. It is about His power and as we shall shortly see, this is the power even to form a human in the innermost parts of the womb, and to form that human being to His glory. The last stanza of the Psalm is David's response, and about that we shall have more to say in just a moment.

### Origin of Human Life

The theme today is the sanctity of human life. Psalm 139 reminds us that as human beings we are fearfully and wonderfully made. But in order to understand this, we need to try to step back and gain a more comprehensive biblical understanding of what this would mean—that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

We must consider the origins of human life. These days the issue of origins is very much debated in the American popular culture, in the public schools, in the media, and amongst the cultural elite. The prevailing worldview of naturalistic scientism tells us that human beings are the product of an understandable and traceable process of biological evolution. The argument has its very intricate and detailed form, but in its barest essence it says that through purely naturalistic means, by purely natural processes, by an accident of history in the intersection of space and time and energy, somehow life came to be—all things came to be, and as more sophisticated life forms developed, eventually there came the development of what we now know as the human being.

We would confuse and fail to understand reality if we do not understand that

such is the prevailing worldview of most of our neighbors and of the cultural and media elite. As a matter of fact, most persons are sure that evolutionary naturalism is now, at least in its barest forms, an unassailable axiom. Worldviews have results. They have implications—ideas have consequences—and if evolution is understood as the evolutionist intends it to be understood, then human life has no inherent sanctity, no dignity, and no special status at all.

The late Stephen J. Gould, who was Professor of Paleontology at Harvard University, actually critiqued the idea that human beings have any special status or any special origin at all by suggesting that we are simply an accidental "twig" on the "amazingly arborescent tree of life." A pure, biological accident. There is a wonder in humanity, he argued, but it is the simple wonder at the scale of the purely naturalistic accident that produced a being as intelligent and gifted as *homo sapiens*. The wonder is not that some creator called us into being, or some plan produced us. Rather, said Gould, in all the randomness of natural process, look what resulted— isn't that amazing? But, it is not meaningful in any moral sense.

Richard Dawkins of Oxford University says that all of evolution is about the contest of "memes"—the basic units of genetic data. It is a rather bizarre idea, but what he is saying is that the survival of the fittest works its way down to the tiniest elements, such that human beings are simply machines produced by biological evolution in order that germs can replicate themselves. We are basically germ factories and germ hosts until we die, and then they will move to another body in which to take up their form and shape and sustenance.

Now if you think those are bizarre ideas,

just remember that this is what is taught at Oxford and Harvard Universities. This is what is established in the curriculum, and this is the worldview that shapes the minds of those who make our laws and judge our cases and teach our children and tell us the news. Worldviews have implications; ideas have consequences, and the idea of evolutionary naturalism tells us that human beings are simply an accident. There is no special status, no special quality, no special sanctity or dignity of life. And if human beings really are just a biological accident, then why not abort in the womb or put them into Hitler's ovens or snuff them out on the altar of political expediency?

There is a biblical answer to this, of course, and it is found in particular in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. A very different understanding of humanity is found in Genesis 1:26-28:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

One of the qualities rarest in our contemporary day is a basic honesty. But if we are truly honest, we have to say that between the biblical worldview and the prevailing worldview of evolutionary scientism there is an absolute conflict—an irresolvable conflict. This isn't something that can be negotiated or finessed. The whole idea of theistic evolution is about combining two

things that are absolutely incompatible and irreconcilable.

If we really understand the necessary logic of evolution there is no design, no designer, and no plan—it is all an accident. The evolutionist has no respect for the view that somehow God was using these processes in order to accomplish His purpose, because a supernatural influence violates the naturalistic worldview of evolutionary theory. Furthermore, the Bible does not present human beings as the eventual product of a divine experiment. No, Genesis tells us that God in His own sovereign council determined to create human beings as a specific species—the only being that bears His image. In Genesis 1:26-28 and then in Genesis 2 there is the further elaboration of the story in telling us how man was made male and female. Here is the direct confrontation of the evolutionary worldview with the biblical declaration that human beings are not the process of some kind of naturalistic experiment, nor the process of some chance mutation, but rather are the loving, sovereign, intentional creation of God. The book of Genesis helps us to understand even in this text that human beings are the pinnacle of the divine creation, unique among all creatures in bearing God's image.

Once we understand that worldviews have consequences, we will understand that ascribing human origins to chance evolution can only mean that human life is basically worthless. Alternatively, if the evolutionist does find value there, it will only be that which he has manufactured or constructed. This, of course, is contrasted with the worldview that tells us that God created all things and in particular, that He created human beings by His own special act of intentional sovereign creation in order that we would be His image bearers.

## Dignity of Human Life

A second issue is the dignity of human life. In the secular worldview whatever dignity human beings have is a function of our social relatedness or of our intelligence—and even that is being contested as a form of “speciesism” today. You see, if you could rewind history a couple of decades, you would find the naturalistic evolutionist and the sociologist and the anthropologist all basically saying that human beings are special. *“Aren’t we special? We are all special. And why are we special? Well, because we have greater brain mass than others. We have more sophistication, we have a relational ability, and we have linguistic ability. That is what makes us human, and that sets us apart from the rest of creation. It gives us a certain dignity, and that dignity is worthy of preservation.”*

This kind of humanism is what is evident in the United Nations declaration of human rights. If you go back and read the UN charter, you will find a lofty declaration of human rights and human dignity, but no real argument for why this is so. We are glorious. Why? Because we can see in ourselves our own glory. That is how glorious we are. And we can talk about it. You know, dogs do not get together and talk about how glorious they are. They lack the necessary linguistic ability and intellectual capacity. But we human beings can do this. We do possess such a linguistic ability.

But some scientists argue that we are not really unique in this linguistic capacity. Some evidence of language exists among whales and apes. Furthermore, many animals demonstrate strong relational bonds. Though these capacities are clearly sub-human, the animal rights movement has now built an entire argument against human dignity apart from other animals. This kind of argument, they insist, is a form

of “speciesism.” Humans, these animal rights activists argue, are not superior to other animals—just more powerful in manipulating the environment.

Now, just try to follow this argument through. For example, your dog is no longer a pet. What do the animal rights people call them? They are companion animals. Isn’t that great? And there are serious arguments—hear me, this is not a joke—there are serious debates in some elite law schools as to whether primates should have standing in court. Now I respect attorneys, but that is taking it a bit far. If an attorney shows up with an ape as his client, I am going to argue that it is going to be hard to tell the one from the other. If you are going to be so ridiculous as to claim that it is “speciesist” to insist that only human beings bear these rights, then in some sad way, you are almost making the point.

I was debating an animal rights activist some years ago and this woman seriously made the claim that to wear animal skins and eat animal meat is the equivalent of cannibalism. What right, she asked, do we have to deprive the animal of its life or of its skin? Well, ideas have consequences. These things are being taught in a lot of schools, and promoted in the media.

But over against that secular worldview there is the biblical worldview. What about the dignity of human life? It is rooted in the Genesis vision that tells us that our special place in God’s creative design is rooted, in God’s own determination to create human beings in His own image. We alone of all creation bear the image of God. We are the ones who bear the stewardship of the image of God. It is what makes us human. It is what sets us apart from the rest of the animal world. Human dignity and the sacredness of human life are

established on the fact that God made us in His image for His glory.

Theologians have long debated exactly what that image is. It is not a physical image, for God does not have a body. Clearly, if you take the Bible at its word, it is a spiritual image. It has to do with the fact that there is a spiritual capacity in us. Most profoundly it indicates that spiritual capacity in us that cries out as Augustine said, "Our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee." There is a souliness to us that sets us apart from the animal kingdom. This is a dignity about which the Scripture is very clear. Alone of all creation, human beings may consciously know and worship God.

Speaking of humanity in Psalm 8:5 the Psalmist said to the Lord, "You have made him a little lower than the angels and you have crowned him with glory and honor." In Matthew 6:26, Jesus Himself said, "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" So we have in Psalm 8:5 the testimony of the Psalmist that God had made human beings a little lower than the angels. We do not reflect the glory of God as perfectly as do they, but one day those of us who are believers will. He has made us a little lower than the angels and higher than the animals. Jesus, in Matthew 6, called upon his disciples to look at the birds of the air. Look at how well God takes care of them. Are you not of much more value than a bird?

Job 35:11 speaks of the dignity of human life in terms of wisdom that human beings have and knowledge that is entrusted to us. Human beings alone have a knowledge about God that is revealed to us and marks our stewardship.

Looking to Psalm 8, we understand that

the dignity of human life consists not only in the fact that we were created a little lower than the angels and crowned with glory and honor, but also that we, as image bearers, are assigned dominion over the rest of creation. Dominion, of course, reeks of political incorrectness. Nevertheless, there are two images in the Bible about our relationship to our fellow creatures and to the larger world—dominion and stewardship, and they must always be held in tandem. We do have a dominion, but it is a dominion that is assigned to us as vice-regents. For the biblical model of stewardship recognizes the domain as not our own, as if—to use a fitting analogy—we had been given a garden to take care of, but do not own it. But those things we are given in the garden are for our use. How much clearer could the Bible be than when God told Adam and Eve to eat of everything in the garden except of the one tree? How clear is the biblical command that we are to make use of the goodness of creation that God has given us? Now we are not to be marauders of the animal kingdom. We do not kill for the joy of killing or hurt for the joy of hurting. We are the stewards, the tenders of the rich, abundant, vibrant garden of God. But, we are to be the users of it and gratefully so.

Psalm 8:6-8 makes this clear. The Psalmist continues, "You have made him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under His feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the fields, the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas." So there is a dignity unique to human beings: the dignity of being the image bearer of God; the dignity of being made a little lower than the angels; the dignity of being higher than the animals by God's own declaration; the dignity of being wiser

than the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea because these are not given the revelation that is given to us—the knowledge of God. And this dignity is reflected in the dominion that the Lord assigns to us.

We need to know our rightful place, that special dignity and status that is given to human beings, and we need to address this against the prevailing secular worldview of the animal rights activist and all others who live in confusion. One classic text against the animal rights activist, who claims that all flesh is the same and to insinuate anything else is speciesism, is found in 1 Corinthians 15:39. “All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish.” All flesh is not the same flesh. You see, human flesh is of a different order entirely. That is why cannibalism is of an entirely different order than eating a steak.

### **Beginning of Human Life**

Having spoken of the origin of human life and then about the dignity of human life, we must move on to discuss the beginning of human life, of which Psalm 139 is such an eloquent testimony. I think back to the 1980s when a Swedish firm of photographers, led by Lennart Nilsson, developed microphotography, where the womb was invaded by fiber-optic photography such that you could see every stage in the life of a baby all the way from conception to birth. It was the first time human eyes had ever seen such a thing. It was an eloquent testimony. Evolutionists could only look at this and say, “Look how sophisticated the evolutionary process is that it would produce something like this. The incubator we know as a woman and this baby-making factory we know as the

womb, and this amazing process of reproduction.”

Without the time to comment in detail, we might point out that one significant issue that evolutionists have difficulty explaining is human reproduction because it is extremely complex. But, of course, if you follow evolutionary theory it ought to be becoming less and less complex rather than more so. And yet, this moment we call conception is so biologically complex that we can't really explain why it is that those two cells come together. But it happens. And while it was only recently that human eyes were able to see what took place in the womb, the Psalmist reminds us that the sovereign Creator has seen from the very first moment everything that takes place in every womb.

Take note of David's personal language here. It is not just that God has some knowledge of what is taking place in a biological sense; and it isn't just that God knew that even in David's mother's womb there was life. Rather, it is that God knew *David* in the womb; God knew him personally and He knew him from the moment of his conception when that divine miracle took place, when the Creator said, “Let there be life” and there was life and that life was David. Look at the clarity of the testimony here. “You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb” (v. 13). The language here is simply beautiful. Without going into the intricacies of the Hebrew, the weaving together is like the making of a cloth. It speaks of different threads being drawn together in order to make the perfection of the human infant. “I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully



wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance” (v. 14-16a). So in other words, God’s creative, sovereign power and presence extended to the womb where unformed substance became the fully formed human being. And that fully formed human being was David.

From the moment of conception (defined as the exchange of chromosomal information) to the end of natural death we are made in the image of God. We are the image bearers of God, and we are fully deserving of the dignity that should be accorded by every human being to every other human being. Human life must be defended, as this personal knowledge is rooted in God’s own sovereignty and omniscience. It is a knowledge that is not given to any other human being. A mother does not even know that she is pregnant the very moment she becomes pregnant. That is hidden from her, but it is not hidden from God.

When does human life begin? When do we accord human status to that new life? This issue is legally, politically, and socially contested. Aristotle, suggested that this pre-born, unborn human being becomes human the moment quickening occurs. Now no man in this room has ever experienced quickening. But those women who are mothers have experienced quickening as one of the most wonderful moments of life. Quickening is the moment when life is perceived in the womb. Not just growth, not just largeness, not just the other signs of pregnancy, but when there is a movement, a shift, a kick, a jab, a right hook in the womb—that is quickening, but quickening tells us very little about the baby and very much about the mother. This is seen in the fact that we now know the baby has been moving around in there all the time—

imperceptible to the mother. The baby has been going through motions; those little muscles have been moving; those feet have been kicking; and the torso has been shifting all during the course of time as that body has been knitted together. Quickening tells us when the mother can perceive such a thing is happening, not when such a thing first happens. Quickening cannot be the moment when human status is accorded because it tells us something about the mother, not something about the fetus.

The logic of *Roe v. Wade* is that human status is to be designated or located at what was called a moment of viability. That is, the moment when the infant can have an existence separate from the mother. The medical technology of that day suggested that it was at the third trimester that such a moment of independence could be achieved. But this proves that bad science when combined with bad ideology leads to bad laws, because we now know that viability comes much sooner than the third trimester. All of us know, or knew of, some babies who were born prematurely long before the third trimester and who are now very much alive.

The ideology of death tries to draw these arbitrary distinctions about what life is and what life is not—about what is human and what is not. And it is this logic that is written into the decision of *Roe v. Wade* and subsequent decisions as well. But there is more at stake than this. For there are those who suggest that not even all born human beings bear human dignity. Peter Singer, who holds a chair of bioethics at Princeton University, argues that human dignity is not to be granted to human beings until they have developed linguistic and relational ability. Accordingly, he suggests that a mother killing her born baby should not

be considered an act of murder if that baby is not yet able to develop relationships and communicate. Thus, he finds infanticide morally acceptable. The mother who does not want her child, says Singer, should not raise it, for she will not raise it well. So, if she wants to kill it after its birth, that should be recognized by society as possessing the same insignificance as the mere flipping of a switch.

Now again it would be frightening if we were looking back at Hitler's demonic regime to find this argument. But, this is now being taught to the best and the brightest of America's young people in one of our most respected universities. But as you have seen, according to the biblical worldview, our only option is to recognize that life begins at conception. Yet, even this calls for careful consideration as many in our day are redefining words. You will find many obstetricians today who define conception, not as the moment when the exchange of chromosomal information and cellular division begins, but instead some now define conception as the successful implantation of the embryo in the womb.

But conception has no fixed meaning medically or morally, if it does not refer to that moment when fertilization takes place and genetic information is exchanged. We have no right but to insist that it is at that point when God says let there be life, that human dignity and the sanctity of human life now prevail. We have no right to interfere with that process. Now this means that abortion is murder no matter what others may seek to call it, because it is the intentional taking of a human life without cause. There is no biblical ground or cause to take the pre-born life. Correctly then, it is called murder and has been recognized as such from the very beginning of biblical time, when what set Israel apart from the pagan-

isms of its day was the refusal to treat life with that kind of callousness.

Israel refused to sacrifice its children and infants on the altar of Molech, the idol that demanded infant sacrifice. And it was murder in Israel to kill an infant born or unborn. So it should be today, but it is not. We find ourselves now with the death toll in the United States alone of over 40 million babies aborted in the womb and something near 1.5 million abortions a year. Yet, it is interesting that the world seems to celebrate if that annual number goes down. Of course, they say abortion is morally neutral, but even the liberals seem pleased when abortion numbers go down because their conscience compels them in such a direction even against the strain of their thought. But, if abortion goes down from 1.5 million to 1.45 million that is not a tribute to America's recovery of the sanctity of human life. The beginnings of human life must be recognized at the moment of conception and about this we must be very clear and we must refuse to negotiate.

### **Threats to Human Life**

Finally, we need to speak very candidly about significant threats to human life. Both the ideologies of unbiblical humanism and anti-humanism undermine human life. Humanism, by seeking to exalt human beings in an unbiblical way, becomes an ideology of death. Human beings have enough moral insight to know we are not as good as the humanistic philosophers would tell us we are. On the reverse side, you often find the logic of humanism leading to the kind of anti-humanism seen historically in Nazi Germany. The ideology of death that drove the Nazi death camps did not arise from within Nazism. It arose instead in the culture of Weimar Germany, the liberal democratic

culture that preceded Adolf Hitler. It was in the nurture of that liberal, humanistic culture that the expression “life unworthy of life” arose. Consequently, those German medical “ethicists” began to define persons who were “life unworthy of life.”

Who did they deem unworthy? The severely retarded, the physically deformed, those with a substandard intelligence, those of the wrong race, those who had the wrong skin color, those who were not as productive as they should be toward the genetic stock. Gypsies, Jews, and those with Down’s Syndrome were all judged to be “life unworthy of life.” It became not only the right of the society according to this philosophy to execute the unworthy; it became a duty. By the time Hitler came to power the German medical establishment had already accepted the ideology of death. It was understood that the responsibility of the medical physician was to kill those who were not worthy of life, lest they pass on their genetic abnormalities to others. We can now see where this logic leads—directly to the death camps.

That logic has reached these shores. Eugenics, the science of good birth or of good breeding—good genes, as it is called—drove Margaret Sanger, the mother of Planned Parenthood, who was one of the chief proponents of eugenics in the United States. Sanger, who called for “more children from the fit, less from the unfit,” suggested a hierarchy of races and categories that ought to be encouraged to have children and those who were not to be encouraged. And so the ideology of death has come to be packaged even in American consumer society. Planned Parenthood is really about planning *un*parenthood.

Abortion and infanticide are now more widespread than ever before. Abortion on demand is the law of the land, and it is very

difficult to prevent any abortion in all fifty states. In many states, the medical standards that would apply to any doctor’s office are not applied to the abortuary. Just think of the legal mentality that goes behind this. A fourteen year old girl has to have parental permission to have a tetanus shot, but the Supreme Court says that it is none of her parents’ business if she has an abortion—it is her right.

Abortion has become such a part of the culture that abortions of convenience are now routine. But abortions are performed for other reasons as well. The main reason for abortion is clearly the convenience of the mother, but there is another cause of abortion in our day because medical technology has allowed testing that reveals whether the baby is a boy or a girl. An obstetrician recently told me that his colleagues are heart-wrenchingly torn over the issue of whether they can do these tests, because sometimes a woman comes in, has the test, and never comes back. The gender was simply not what was wanted, so you simply abort and start over again. The only explanation for why these women never return is that they have aborted the baby.

Eventually, amniocentesis and advanced genetic testing will be able to tell us not only whether the baby is a boy or a girl, but what the intelligence level is likely to be, the color of the eyes, the color of the hair, the likely height, whether or not there is going to be exceptional athletic ability. You’ll be able to have designer children, and if this embryo—this unborn baby—doesn’t meet your genetic expectations then, according to the logic of eugenics, you should simply eradicate that baby and start over again. We say that we are far too sophisticated a culture for infanticide, but what is commonly known as partial birth abortion is nothing less than infanticide. It

is the killing of a living, breathing baby.

We move beyond infanticide and abortion to euthanasia. The same logic that drives the ending of life at its beginning is also driving it at its end, now under the rubric of what is alleged to be concern for the quality of life. According to the logic, persons are now saying not only that there is the right to die a good death, but there is also the duty to die and get out of the way lest you use up so much of the nation's economic capital. The care required near the end of some lives comes at a high price. Anyone who has a loved one in a nursing home or anyone who has been responsible for end of life care knows that palliative care is extremely expensive. We can see how the momentum would build in a society to avoid those expenses. Euthanasia advocates proclaim that when the elderly or infirm reach a certain point, we simply need to declare that they are no longer deserving of life and then use whatever means necessary to bring about a good and peaceful death so that they won't have to endure suffering. Euthanasia is spreading as a movement and as an ideology. When the Attorney General of the United States, speaking on behalf of the 50 states, tried to force Oregon to come into compliance with United States law, the outcry was enormous.

Cloning, embryo experimentation, *in vitro* fertilization, stem cell research—the modern technologies promise designer babies, and potentially new medical treatments to treat diseases such as diabetes, Alzheimer's, and Parkinson's disease. But these promises come at the expense of the destruction of a human embryo made in the image of God. And these are not just matters of theoretical importance. These issues are being lived out in the laboratories of America where even now there are

untold numbers—somewhere between 300,000 and half a million frozen human beings—in America's reproductive clinics. These embryos were created "in excess" of what was needed for implantation.

One of the great ethical questions of our day is what to do with these embryos. In Great Britain there is now a five-year expiration date. After 5 years the embryos must be destroyed. Why? They are just cells according to scientists. But the Bible insists they are human beings made in the image of God. The ideology of death continues to press on and on—in the womb, in the laboratory, in the Congress, in the court, in the schools, in your neighborhood.

Perhaps it has even crept into conversations you have had with neighbors and with friends. This is the age of novel euphemism. Some scientists pressing stem cell technology call the embryo a "pre-embryo." What is a pre-embryo? It is an embryo you do not want to call an embryo—that's what it is. Or it is an "embryo-like entity." Well, you and I are "human-like entities." This is a signal of moral confusion and rebellion—a refusal to call a human embryo what it is.

Human life is threatened at its origin, undermined in its dignity, and threatened by multiple technologies and ideologies in the Culture of Death. The Bible calls us to a different worldview. Here we find a testimony to the glory of human life which is not based in ourselves, but in God. You see, between the poles of that false humanism and that anti-humanism, there is a *biblical humanism*—a clear biblical teaching that tells us that we are unique in all creation as the image bearers of God, and that we are made to reflect God's glory. We are not glorious in and of ourselves. There is no glory in *us*. But God has created us that we should reflect His glory.

## Conclusion

These threats to human dignity are symptoms of our fundamental problem—sin. And because we are sinners, not only by the sin we inherit, but by the sins we commit, we are headed for hell and we deserve it so. Well, how in the world can God rightly send His own image bearers to hell? It is because we have sinned against Him and because we abuse the capacity He gave us by which we could know and honor and glorify Him. We abused this capacity in order to become rebels. The Bible is very honest. You see, we cannot speak about what it means to be human without talking about the totality of the gospel. And there is a right way and a wrong way to talk about the totality of the gospel. There are some persons who say, “I will tell you how important human life is. Human beings are so valuable that God sent His Son to die on Calvary’s cross. He sent His Son because that is how valuable we are.”

Brothers and sisters, that is wrong! It sounds good, but it is profoundly wrong. God did not send Christ Jesus to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, because we are so good and we are so worthy. The miracle is that God did it because He is so glorious and He is so gracious, and He is so loving that He did it to His own glory. He didn’t save those who loved Him—He saved those who hated Him. He didn’t come to save His friends; He came to save His enemies—and that is the glorious gospel. You see, human life has a certain dignity we are all bound to protect and yet human life and human dignity are finally and ultimately only anchored in the gloriousness of the grace of God. For by grace we were created, by grace we were given the gift of life, and by grace we are made the sons and daughters of the Most High

by the atoning work of Jesus Christ, His Son.

Christians must be the people of life in the midst of the culture of death, even as we are the children of light among the children of darkness. We do not worship life for the sake of life, or human beings for the sake of humanity, but we seek to contend for human life because we know that it is to God’s glory that we do so, and it is God’s command that we do so. For it is we who are the stewards, and as the stewards of life our responsibility is to contend for life from every moment from its beginning to its end. And yet, we know that this life is so transient. It is so short and no matter whether we live what is considered a long life or a short life, in the span of eternity it is meaningless as an instant. We cannot bear our testimony to the sanctity of life without speaking of the One who came to give us life and life eternal. It is not because of who we are, but in spite of who we are, that Jesus Christ came. It is not because Jesus was so awed by our humanity, but because He knew our frailty and experienced it, as the writer of Hebrews teaches, even by knowing our temptations, yet without sin. It was because He knew our need that the Father sent the Son. And it was to His own glory He made that provision.

Christians must be defenders of human dignity and human life because we know the value of every single human being—born or pre-born—made in God’s image. We are stewards of the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus to all who believe. Thus, we are advocates for life and ambassadors of the gospel. There is no time to waste.