THE IMAGO DEI

“The Sanctity of Life & The Image of God”

Genesis 9:5-7

Sunday, November 6, 2016

By David A. Ritchie

“And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.” (Genesis 9:5–7, ESV)

Heavenly Father, you alone are the author and giver of life. I pray today, as we look into your Holy Word, that your Holy Spirit would open our eyes to behold the wondrous truths of the life you have given us by creating us and the new life you have given us by the redeeming work of your Son Jesus. It is in his glorious name that we pray, AMEN.

I. Introduction

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

These words from the “Declaration of Independence” were foundational words and foundational values for the United States of America. These are important words to remember as we enter the eve of a truly historic election. Our founders were convinced there was something sacred about humanity that came from God himself.

Today, I want to examine how this idea is not just an American idea or a political idea, but that it is in fact a biblical idea. Today, we are going to talk about the sanctity of life and how it relates biblical concept of the image of God.

We have a lot to talk about, so let’s dive right in. Here are four questions I want to ask of God’s word today: 1.) Why is human life sacred?, 2.) What does it mean to honor the sanctity of life as a society?, 3.) What does it mean to honor the sanctity of life as an individual, and 4.) How does the sanctity of life point us to the gospel?

II. The Text

1.) Why is human life sacred?

2.) What does it mean to honor the sanctity of life as a society?

3.) What does it mean to honor the sanctity of life as an individual, and 4.) How does the sanctity of life point us to the gospel?

† Declaration of Independence.
For most of our study of this fall, we have looked at the early chapters of Genesis where we see God’s beautiful design of humanity and creation. Now here in Genesis 9, sin has entered the world and caused unbelievable brokenness. And in order to save humanity from destroying itself, God has sent a flood to destroy humanity with the exception of one righteous man named Noah and his family.

At this point in the story, the floodwaters have subsided, and God is giving instruction to Noah and his family on how to live. It is here that God directly sets up laws that are intend to protect the sanctity of life.

Now, the first biblical reason the sanctity of human life derives from the fact that God is alone the Creator and Lord of life. Only one who possesses absolute authority over life can say, “And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man” (Gen. 9:5, ESV). Humans can “create” by rearranging things in different ways. But only God can author life. According to the Bible, all life is a miracle that only God performs. Thus, men and women are called to respect life as a mysterious and sacred act of God. Thus, as one scholar says, “To take human life unlawfully therefore is to usurp God’s sovereignty over life and death.”

The second biblical reason the sanctity of life relates more specifically to human life. Our text says, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (Gen. 9:6). In other words, human life is sacred because it bears the Imago Dei – the image of God.

This is a powerful idea that has shaped history, because the Imago Dei forms the only rational basis for human rights. Now, don’t get me wrong. Secular people and atheistic people can believe that we should be kind and fair to one another, but it is the idea that people are created in the image and likeness of God that generates a sense of obligation that is deeper that whatever cultural fad is going on at the moment.

Because of the Imago Dei, every man, woman, and child is worthy of dignity and honor, not because of their power or wealth or attractiveness or what they can “contribute to society,” but because they are assigned value by God.

God is a personal God, and so we are to honor the personhood of all people. God is a holy God, and so we are to honor human life as holy and sacred. Politics will not conquer the sins of racism, sexism, and classism. But the truth of the Image of God can. This is the power and the importance of the sanctity of life.

2.) What does it mean to honor the sanctity of life as a society?

From the idea of the sanctity of human life here in Genesis, the Bible will later give the famous commandment: “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13).

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Now this is something most Christians and non-Christians would agree on: murder is bad and human life is worth protecting. This concept is essential for civil society. Indeed, the mark of a failed state or society is the widespread lack of the sanctity of life. A government that does not guard against random acts of murder is no government at all. The late Christian ethicist John Murray once wrote, “Nothing shows the moral bankruptcy of a people or of a generation more than disregard for the sanctity of human life.” Few people would argue with him. But it would be a mistake to think that as long as we don’t go out and murder people, we are honoring the sanctity of human life. There is more that is required.

This is why after denouncing the sin of murder in verses 5 and 6, verse 7 says this: “And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it” (Gen. 9:7, ESV). The positive implication of this is not only to refrain from murder, but also rather to actively value and seek the flourishing of human life. You could say this verse calls us to be very much “pro-life.”

Now, it is in this context that I need to address a very sensitive social issue that is abortion. Now as preacher, I very intentionally refrain from politicizing my sermons. But with all of my heart, I do not view abortion as a political issue. It is a deeply moral issue that Christians must talk about.

Here are the words of Psalm 139: “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them” (Ps. 139: 13-16). These inspired words were true for the Psalmist, and they continue to be true for every single person inside and outside of the womb. In every instance that a fetus is referred to in Scripture, the fetus is referred to as a person (e.g. Ex. 21:22-25); not as a tumor that can be optionally removed; not as a fingernail that can be clipped. Likewise, medical science confirms that a fetus is a living human being with a unique DNA, blood type, heart-beat, brain activity, and the ability to feel pain. And because an unborn child is a person made in the image and likeness of God, his or her life must be honored and protected.

I know many Christians who carry deep regret and shame, because they made the decision to have an abortion. If that is you, I want you to know that there is absolutely no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). None. God’s grace is greater than our greatest sins.

However, while we affirm God’s infinite grace to his people, the practice of abortion on-demand itself is worthy of condemnation. Like the issue of slavery in nineteenth century, it is an uncomfortable truth that must be acknowledged. It is one of the most horrific moral evils of our time. Tragically, it much easier and much cheaper to abort child that it is to adopt a child, and that reveals something very wrong about our society. In modern America, more people are torn limb from limb in their mother’s womb each day than died in the terrorist attacks on 9/11. And though most of our political dialogue about abortion centers on women’s health, women’s rights, and extraordinary or extenuating exceptions, the vast majority of abortions are performed for nothing more than the sake of personal convenience – not

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“medical necessity.” Like the ancient pagans who would sacrifice their children to dead idols, we have offered up tens of millions of children to the false god of self. Abortion is a holocaust, and Christians need to oppose it.

I am well aware that this is a socially unpopular opinion. I am aware that there are many that would call me and anyone else who would hold to these views as misogynistic and anti-choice. But our world is in need of people of conviction who will defend the lives of those who do not have a voice. It was Christians who invented the first hospitals, when others forsook the diseased. It was Christians who first fought against slavery, when others benefited from oppression. And it is Christians who now must stand and speak for unborn children created in the image and likeness of God.

But it must be said being consistently pro-life must be more than just being anti-abortion. It means committing to bear the burdens of single moms who choose life. It means rising to the occasion to adopt and foster children, and seeking to support those who adopt and foster children. It means being agents of gospel-empowered racial reconciliation. It means seeking to serve the immigrant and refugees on our city’s doorstep. It means seeking to remedy global poverty and global slavery.

This may sound overwhelming because I can’t do this and neither can you. But the body of Christ, filled and empowered by the Spirit of Christ, can. But it all begins with embracing the call to honor the image of God in our fellow man.

If you hear nothing else today, hear this: The same doctrine that beckons us to honor the image of God in the unborn beckons us to honor the image of God in the immigrant, the refugee, the elderly, the special needs child, the single-mom, the slave, the starving, and socially down-trodden. Our gospel calls us to nothing less.

3.) What does it mean to honor the sanctity of life as individuals?

When we talk about the role of the individual, the Bible challenges us to dive beneath all of the social issues and structures that are so easy to externalize and to instead look deep into our own hearts.

Honoring the sanctity of life begins in the heart – as does murder.

Jesus himself shows that the sin of murder begins in the heart and can even happen through words. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus preaches: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you, that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matthew 5:21-22).

This means that if we are to truly honor the sanctity of life, we must avoid bitterness, hatred, and vengeance. Instead, we are to proactively pursue forgiveness and reconciliation, even it costs us something.
Now as a pastor one of the most common things that I have to walk people through is not just the pain caused by the sins they commit, but rather the pain that is caused by sins committed against them. And one of the most important steps in this process is to encouraging people to truly forgive those who have hurt them.

I often have to say that when you truly forgive someone, you are not saying that what that person did was right. You are not acting like it never happened. What you are saying is that you are choosing to no longer create your own justice by harboring bitterness and murder in your heart. Instead, you are entrusting your justice to the true and perfect judge.

In fact I would argue, our ability to totally forgive derives, in part, from trusting in God’s perfect justice. If you think about it, when we hold onto bitterness and un-forgiveness, we do so because we desire justice, we desire vindication, and we think we have to get justice for ourselves. But God invites to let go of the poison of our bitterness. Why? Because he is judge who is perfectly wise, perfectly good, perfectly merciful, and perfectly just. You can entrust your pain to him. You can rest in him. He will bring forth our justice like the dawn (cf. Ps. 37:6-7). He will be your vindication.

Is there bitterness in your heart that you need to give to God? Who in your life do you need to forgive? This too is honoring the image of God.

4.) How does the sanctity of life point us to the gospel?

Our text says, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.”

Murder here is condemned as one of the most heinous and irreversible crimes that a person can commit. Therefore, God says, a price must be paid. However, in the context of the broader storyline of the Bible, there is a beautiful irony in these words. For though murderous bloodshed is evil and reprehensible, it is through the shed blood of God’s Son Jesus that redeeming grace would enter the world.

God sent his only Son to enter our world of brokenness. He lived the righteous life we could never have lived. And he died the death we deserved. Apart from him we are all murderers in our hearts. But his shed blood washes us anew, so that we have new hearts. Our sin gave way to murder and death, but by the power of Jesus’ cross and resurrection, the power death has been swallowed by the power of new life.

And as a redeemed people we are called to bear the new life of Christ to the world around us. This is from 1 John 3: “We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:12–16, ESV).

III. Conclusion
So Redeemer Christian Church, may we be a people who honor the sanctity of human life. May we be a people honor the image of God in every man, woman, and child. May we put to death the practices and passions of murder in our hearts. And may we seek forgiveness and reconciliation with one another, for the name of the one who bled for our sake while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). AMEN.

Questions for Community Groups:

1. According to Gen. 9:5-7, why is human life to be considered sacred?

2. What are several ways that we should seek to honor the sanctity of life as a society?

3. How should we seek to honor the sanctity of life in our own hearts (see Matthew 5:21-22 and 1 John 3:15)?

4. How does the idea of the sanctity of life relate to the cross of Jesus Christ?