

Loving God's Image Everywhere

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In a strange irony, two defining dates in American history are only one day apart: January 21 and January 22. Both of these events were recognized this past week. One is a national holiday in which banks and many schools were closed to recognize it. The other is not a holiday, but for some, it is a somber day remembering a judicial decision affecting millions and millions of Americans.

I am speaking of January 21, the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. and January 22, the day the Supreme Court in 1973 made abortion a right protected by the Constitution of the United States.

Dr. King is remembered and memorialized for standing for human rights and the dignity of men and women regardless of the color of their skin. In his famous "I have a dream" speech in 1963 he said, "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.'" The irony is that ten years and one day later, January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court said that rights do not extend to Americans in the womb of their mother. This past Tuesday was the 40th anniversary of that decision.

In the last 40 years, 53 million Americans still in the womb have been killed. Of course, millions upon millions more around the world have been killed as well. For example, in China, the one child only requirement has led to the genocide of numbers that boggle the mind. In Russia, abortion is so significantly declining the population that it is being viewed as a threat to national security. 42 million children worldwide are killed every year; 123,000 in-womb children are aborted every day.

The important number is one. Each *one* of these statistical children is an image bearer of God. That is what Dr. King got right in a time in our nation that needed to get that right. The dignity of personhood is extended to each human person regardless of category. If they are human, they are an image bearer of the Almighty. Black. White. Asian. Hispanic. Our children's song uses color, "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight." That was and is a needed truth for all of us.

Another irony is that the principle applied to race is celebrated with a holiday and Dr. King is memorialized in granite in our nation's capital. If the principle applies to race, it must also apply to place. Does the place of the human decide worth or personhood? Clearly place matters. Sandy Hook's horror was magnified because of the place where it happened—an elementary school—a place that is supposed to be safe.

How safe should a child be in the mother's womb? That should be the safest place for the most vulnerable of all. Yet clearly it has not been for 53 million Americans over the last 40 years.

We are taking a break from 1 John and speaking to this on the week of the 40th anniversary of Roe v. Wade. The title of today's message is "Loving God's Image Everywhere."

All Human Life is Sacred Because it Bears God's Image

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and 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. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it." (Genesis 1:26-28 ESV)

In the very first chapter of his book, God lays out who he is and who we are and how our purpose and value are derived from his.

God created man *in his own image*. What does that mean? *It means human life is unique*. God created everything else, and nothing else is given this distinction. All other species and biological life have their own level of value as God calls them "good." So it is good and right for us to seek to promote the good of the environment and to enjoy God's beauty in this amazing creation. That's a message for another time.

Here we need to see the unique dignity and honor that God gives to human life. Bearing God's image means that we have more likeness to him, more in common with him, than anything else in all creation. More than all the galaxies. All the herds of migrating animals in Africa. All the birds. All the atoms and molecules. All of them reflect the glory of God and say something about his divine nature (Romans 1:18-20). But there is more of God's likeness in one human being than all the galaxies combined.

Every human being, young or old, inside the womb or out, is a moral and spiritual being. They have a soul with relational and spiritual capacities unique to us and God. We are moral and spiritual; we have a soul. This is what makes human life sacred.

As a side note, understanding the fact that human value is a derived value from God is why it's important not to give up on this point. Abortion carries with it DNA in terms of philosophy and worldview in so many other areas, so that when you take God out of the picture, old people become expendable and children with birth defects become expendable. If there is no God, then there is no image bearing and no human uniqueness, which elevates the whales and snails and dolphins to the same value as humans. If there is no God, then there are no gender roles in marriage or family or the church. Marriage is not picturing anything sacred and can be applied to whatever you want to apply it to. That is the direction of the secular culture as no-god presuppositions lead to no-god moral conclusions.

Life (Even in the Womb) is a Precious Gift From God

- *Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Genesis 2:7)*
- *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...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. (Psalm 139:13-16)*

The Genesis 2 verse shows human life as a gift from God. Adam didn't live on his own. God gave him life. "[He] *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*" That is not said of any other species in all creation. He gave us life and with

it, consciousness and self-awareness. We are much more than a collection of molecules and much more than simply tissue.

This truth is why murder is wrong. *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."* (Genesis 9:6)

This shows what is really at stake in the taking of human life. Murder is about God. Euthanasia is about God. The battle over the unborn is about God. God is the ultimate reality. Our worth is derived from him, like the American flag derives its worth from the nation it represents, or the painting of Queen Elizabeth derives its value from the glory of the queen. We derive our value as image bearers of the Most High God. To care about murder you have to care about God's glory. Otherwise, it's no big thing.

An article was written this week, by author Mary Elizabeth Williams, entitled *"So what if abortion ends life?"* (see below)



Beyond the appalling nihilism behind the question, Williams says she does think the baby is a real human life, yet killing it is morally acceptable. Why? The mother's life is spared. It's her freedom to live fully as she so determines.

This is often at the core of why women abort. I had an interesting conversation this week with a man well-connected on this subject. He related to me what he was told by an expert in the field, that the common issue with women coming to a pregnancy center or Planned Parenthood is not whether their child is human yet or not. Most often, this unwanted pregnancy feels to them like their life is over. For them, it's not about God or legal or philosophical debates, or even the fetus, it's about them. It's about their freedom to live unencumbered by the responsibilities of raising a child. They want the problem fixed.

We Honor God When We Love His Image Bearers, Especially the Vulnerable Ones

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (James 1:27)

This is an often quoted verse and rightly so, but we do know why? Widows and orphans have something in common. They are both vulnerable. Widows lack the protection and care of a husband and orphans lack the care and protection of parents. What makes care ministry to orphans and widows so noble is that they have nothing to offer in return.

In this way, they act as a kind of litmus test of our motives: *why am I doing what I am doing?* When I care for people who can offer me nothing in return, I show that I love them for the right reasons.

A child in the womb is neither a widow nor an orphan, so how does this apply? "If God wants us to care about the orphan whose life is endangered because his parents are dead, he would want all the more that we care about the child whose life is endangered because his parents choose to make him dead." (John Piper) We honor God when we give care and compassion to the most vulnerable of his image bearers, no matter where they are, including in the womb.

How to be a Church and a Christian Who Loves God's Image Everywhere

Consistency

One of the criticisms of the early pro-life movement is that they cared only about the child, not the woman. What was being pointed out was an inconsistency. What about the woman in crisis? That is less heard now because of the flourishing of Crisis Pregnancy Centers. I read that there are now more Crisis Pregnancy Centers in America than abortion clinics. That certainly is a victory and blunts the accusation that Christians for life don't care holistically for the woman.

I think consistency has to cause us to integrate these same principles broadly. We need to love God's image everywhere. Loving God's image everywhere means we cannot say we value little image bearers and not all image bearers. This includes care for the mothers and fathers regardless of race or age or anything else and children regardless of race or age or anything else. We need to love on parents with special needs children who carried them to term. They would probably love some help and encouragement. ALL image bearers are worthy of our love.

There is another group this must include. That includes women among us or who may come to us who have themselves aborted children. Statistics would suggest that to be a pretty big number right here among us. Do we care about you? Yes. Are you welcome? Yes. Jesus died to redeem all sin and sinners who come to him by faith. Every sinner is welcome at this church. As long as we come to see our sin as sin, there's no sin Jesus didn't die for.

Support and prayer

It probably goes without saying that to care for the unborn requires the support of those who are most actively involved in that cause. We have partnered with the Women's Center of Northwest Indiana. Our church supports them financially. I support them personally. I would encourage you to do the same.

We show what we care about by what we pray about. How about adding the unborn children and parents struggling with tragic choices to that list?

Be ready to be personally involved

It's easy to say "amen" at this kind of thing and then escape to our homes for refuge from the moral slide of our culture. Our Salt and Light guide book gives many practical ways to love God's image bearers in Northwest Indiana. We will send suggestions from it in this week's eNews.

I want to tell a quick story that shows the difference that actually caring for an image bearer in the womb can make.

One of our members, let's call him John (not his real name), was at a family gathering this past summer. John's nephew is in the military and mentioned that a woman in his division was having an abortion in the morning. John asked if he had talked to her about this and he said that she was determined to do it.

John says, "I want to talk to her. Do you have her number? Can you call her?" The nephew gets her on the phone and says, "My uncle wants to talk to you." She doesn't know John at all. John gets on the phone with this woman and asks her to reconsider the abortion. They talk. He offers her financial support, no questions asked, to keep the child and put it up for adoption. They talked for two hours trying to offer practical help for her problems. They asked if she would talk with a leader at the Women's Center here in NWI. She said yes. That leader talked with her for an hour and when it was done, she called John and told him that she still seemed determined to do it.

John's family is up much of the night praying that she would not take the life of the child. The next morning, the nephew brought him the phone and said that the woman wanted to talk to him. She proceeded to tell him that she and her boyfriend had called their parents to let them know they had decided to keep the baby...and that woman will give birth to this child in a few weeks.

What can you say about John and his family other than that they saved that child's life? Why should they care and get personally involved like that? How many of us would have made that call?

That child has value as an image bearer of God. That child's life is precious. When we treasure God we value all human life including in the womb.

So let's be a church that loves God's image everywhere because we love the God whose image we bear.

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