

Every Life is a Gift from God—Selected Scriptures—1/22/2023
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Today is *Sanctity of Human Life* Sunday when churches in our nation celebrate the value of human life from conception to the last breath.

We can be thankful to God for His mercy last year to overturn the Roe versus Wade Supreme Court decision of 1973 that had made murder of infants in the womb a legal right.

Of course, it was never a right nor morally right in God's estimation for the over 70 million times life was taken from a mother's womb.

I hate to tell kids, but they need to know what abortion is—abortion is killing a baby that is inside a mommy's belly.

It's a terrible evil & people use big words like abortion or pregnancy termination to cover up how wicked & violent it is.

They may do it with drugs that make a mommy's body reject caring for the baby or they may also do it with medical tools.

Roe vs Wade was a government ruling 50 years ago allowing abortion & we praise God that ruling was overturned last year.

Despite that supreme court decision, the sad reality is that the moral standards of many people are still murderously wrong.

Even some Christians have opposed laws that would outlaw abortion.

So it seemed timely to address this topic with some reminders about what God says about the value of every human life.

To cover a lot, I'll outline 3 basic applications that can sum up our response to what the Bible teaches on the value of every human life.

The 1st takeaway response to God's view of human life is this—point #1, submit your cravings to God's wisdom.

We all have desires—cravings or longings & ideas of what we think will be best for us & what will satisfy us & make us happy & fulfilled.

But those cravings & ideas, those values & passions, are not automatically true or right simply because we have them.

If you feel angry & it seems like you will feel better to scream or hit something, that is not true or right & you should not believe the lies of your angry feelings & fleshly impulses.

Our feelings are not the standard of right & wrong & that must be said in our society that exalts feelings as the authority.

Wrong feelings lead to warped rationalizations & excuses for lying & hatred & violence & stealing & evil of all kinds as Romans 1 says.

So to frame up any conversation on these issues, we need to start by recognizing that what we feel is not necessarily right.

We need to humbly admit that we all have evil impulses & thoughts that need to be restrained & repented of.

We need ethical guidance & transcendent direction & universal standards—we need moral laws from our Maker.

Every system of thought & behavior appeals to an authority & we need not be ashamed that we are creatures who all know we have a Creator who is in charge & who we will answer to.

Romans 2:15-16 describes God's moral law in the conscience accusing people of wrongs & affirming what they do right.

That moral Law of God is revealed in the Bible where we find His design for human flourishing & fulfillment & harmony & happiness.

God has spoken in the Scriptures starting with the account of creating the universe with man & woman as the crown of it.

Genesis 1 explains that & Genesis 2 expands on it.

Open your Bibles to Genesis 1 & let's read verses 26-28 to be sure you see those familiar words—Genesis 1:26-28. [READ]

This is foundational for defining who we are & how we are to live.

The creation account makes it obvious that we need God to tell us what to do because He made us & He is good & so we should trust Him & not trust our own desires.

Genesis 3 describes the fall into sin because of how unwise & untrustworthy Adam & Eve were when left to themselves.

We don't want that, especially in how we view human life.

That's this 1st point—we must submit our cravings to God's wisdom.

We need God's wisdom to direct our steps not only in daily decisions & temptations & interactions with others.

We also need God's wisdom to shape our broader perspectives & priorities to free us from the many lies & lesser values that saturate our society in ways that are almost undetectable.

And the issue of human life is certainly one of those because the biblical value system consistently extols every human life as a gift from God to be appreciated & our culture does not.

For example, just ask any parent with 4 or more kids about comments they get from people at the grocery store or elsewhere.

When I explain I'm buying so much food for my 6 kids, I hear how hard or busy or work-intensive or expensive that must be.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with such comments & I agree that I don't have much me-time or free-time or much money left for me.

But that reflects a value system too, doesn't it?

Recall what God told Adam & Eve at creation that we just read in Genesis 1:26-28 & repeated to Noah when he got off the ark—“*Be fruitful & multiply & fill the earth & subdue it.*”

When did that no longer became normative & applicable to us?

If it still applies as a creation ordinance, then think about it—that included having children & working, right?

But our society typically views children as a hindrance to personal freedom & views work as a necessary drudgery.

Most people believe that sex without responsibility & doing whatever you wish is better than having children.

And there are Christianized, marital versions of that too.

Of course, listen—I don't want to be misunderstood because I'm not saying we should never relax or enjoy leisure.

And I'm not saying you must have as many kids as possible or that it's more spiritual to have more kids or that all kinds of planning or restraint or birth control are necessarily wrong.

But we should stop & think about how we view children & work & our lives & plans & priorities & goals.

We should listen to & believe Psalms 127:3 when it says that children are a gift from the Lord & a reward & blessing.

That's a reason that being childless was not desirable in Scripture.

We should ask older saints & seek wisdom from Scripture to evaluate your perspective on what to do with your life.

Getting married & having children & portraying God's good design in that most basic setting is what His Word assumes you should want as His wise blessings to enjoy.

At every age & stage of life, serving family members & fellow Christians & kids & others in need is valuable & purposeful.

That's fulfilling & fruitful because every human life is a gift of God.

Exodus 4:11 & John 9:3 point to God as the Maker of a mute mouth & deaf ear & blind eye in His plan in this fallen world.

That treasured gift of every human life starts in the womb of a mother & is to be honored with thanksgiving to God.

Turn to Psalm 139 with me to see just one place that Scripture marvels at God's work in forming a life in a mother's womb.

In praising God's knowledge, read Psalm 139:13-16. [READ]

Clearly Scripture speaks of the developing child in a mother's womb as a real person, as a fully human life to be cherished.

That's why Exodus 1:17-21 praises the Hebrew midwives who feared God & saved babies from being killed at birth by Pharaoh's decree.

That's why Exodus 21:22-25 prescribed laws to protect unborn children & to punish those who murdered the unborn.

That's why 2nd Kings 8:12 & Amos 1:13 speak of the evil of those who ripped open pregnant women.

That's why Leviticus 18:21 & 20:1-5 warn against the evil of sacrificing children to the false god Molech.

That's why 2nd Kings 3:27; 16:3; 17:17 & Psalm 106 & Isaiah 57:5 & Jeremiah 7:31 & 19:5 & 32:35 & Ezekiel 16:20-21 all repeatedly condemned such killing of babies as worthy of intense judgment.

And that's why when Proverbs 6:16-17 lists the 7 abominable things the Lord hates, it lists hands that shed innocent blood.

As we hear that biblical worldview, we should ask if we value what God values & if we are submitting our cravings to God's wisdom.

If we trust God's wisdom, we may find out that it actually is more blessed—meaning more happy & fulfilling—to give rather than to receive as Acts 20:35 says Jesus said.

Maybe it's not so bad or unspiritual or unfruitful to be tied to do a wife or husband or children or aging parents or needy relatives or friends or difficult church commitments or continual work demands.

Maybe those normal constraints are God's design for His glory to be shown & for the Gospel to spread to the nations.

Our missionary Mark Borisuk shared how his family life was one of the most powerful proclamations of the Gospel in his ministry.

So examine influences of the world & even subtly ones in the church & be sure #1 to submit your cravings to God's wisdom.

Then as a 2nd application today—submit your choices to God's Word.

Abortion or euthanasia are often framed as issues of choice.

Abortion advocates say it's about a woman's right to choose, a woman's freedom to choose what she does with her body.

Those promoting euthanasia claim that it's a person's choice to whether or not to live with their circumstances or challenges.

If you don't know, euthanasia is a word made up to claim that dying is good for a person who has problems or who is a problem.

That kind of murder was excused initially with people who were older or who had accidents or illnesses.

It was said their suffering should end to make it sound compassionate.

It was said that they would not contribute to society & so they should be able to choose to die or have others choose for them.

Such reasoning is warped & wicked in many ways but one of the most obvious is simply to step back & state that we are not God.

God gives the gift of life & God has the authority over life.

The problem with such reasoning is that God alone gives & sustains life & He has given clear teaching on protecting & valuing human life.

Human life is ultimately a gift from God & He alone is the One who has the authority to give it or take it away.

So we submit to His rule over life & His laws for life.

We cannot play the role of God as if we know the future or know what value a person may or may not have.

We are not able to estimate the true quality or influence of a life.

We need to let God's Word define our thinking about human life & the parameters for how to protect & promote life.

We need to be governed by the clear categories of His Word & not by attempts to play God that guess who will be better off no longer alive.

James 4 reminds us that all our plans are subject to what the Lord wills in His providence in governing all circumstances.

Since we do not know what God plans, we submit to His clear Word.

Recall the 6th commandment given by God to Moses & reiterated by our Lord Jesus Christ—you shall not murder.

It appears in Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5 & Matthew 5 & 19 as Scripture repeatedly affirms that life is in God's hands.

The Hebrew term used for murder is one of 8 OT terms for killing that distinguishes it as unlawful taking of human life.

Exodus 21 & Numbers 35 describe such unlawful cases of what legal systems classify as 1st & 2nd degree murder & manslaughter.

God's civil laws for Israel flesh out God's unchanging, moral law with degrees of guilt & governmental punishments.

The church is not a nation like Israel was & so it is not our role to enforce or execute punishment as a civil authority.

But the church is the pillar & support of truth, as 1st Timothy 3:15 says, & we speak God's law to the conscience to call people to repent of sin & come under God's authority.

We shine the light of His Word, not participating in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather exposing them, as Ephesians 5:11 says.

We are salt, as Jesus said in Matthew 5:13, to flavor with God's goodness & preserve from the rot of evil.

And since the Gospel is about salvation from sin, we are always proclaiming God's law to show all of us as sinners needing the Savior.

We must clearly explain God's Word about choices not only in issues of life but also in issues of gender & sexuality & more.

The moral intent of God's protection of human life is rooted in the reality that every human is made in the image & likeness of God.

Even in situations like self-defense, God's permissions are designed to protect human life from being unlawfully taken.

And in Genesis 9 after Noah departed the Ark after the flood, God established capital punishment as the governing authority's righteous role to punish murderers & to deter & prevent violence.

The reason God gave there was that man is made in God's image & so man's blood must not be shed without punishment.

And since many passages affirm that God knows us even in the womb, human life should be protected from conception.

So in all these issues, we need to be clear that we must submit our choices to God's Word to be governed & guided by Him as our wise Maker & good Designer & loving Lawgiver.

For humans to take the responsibility & power of such supposed choices into our own hands is to usurp God's place.

Instead, #1, we must submit our cravings to God's wisdom & #2, we must submit our choices to God's Word.

Then note a 3rd takeaway application related to outreach on such issues—point #3, submit your character to God's ways.

When we say, 3rdly, to submit your character to God's ways, that focuses more on how God shows His care & compassion.

Turn to Genesis 16 to close with a story about God's care for an unwanted lady and her unwanted baby that illustrates this 3rd point.

This story of unwanted pregnancy created no small amount of strife in a family and bore far more strife in time and history.

It is the story of Hagar and Ishmael, the story of Abram and Sarai attempting to take God's matters into their own hands and thereby creating problems for all of subsequent history.

It is the story of how God dealt with an outcast & her child who would father a hostile enemy to God's people.

This section of Genesis has a number of grand themes, but I find it intriguing that God spent a whole chapter on His care for Hagar.

Let's look at the story together a piece at a time, starting with verses 1-3—read Genesis 16:1-3. [READ]

Here are Abram and Sarai, over 10 years after God promised a son and many descendants through that son—but still no son.

God had given promises filled with hope, but they were still hoping for Him to fulfill those promises.

Instead of waiting for God to accomplish His promises in His time, Sarai decided to take a socially acceptable route.

Since Hagar was her property as her maid, Hagar's children would be her children & that was socially acceptable then, especially in barrenness—but it was not God's design.

And Abram, feeling the intense temptation of someone close to him just like Adam, wrongly listened to his wife's error.

Look at verse 4. [READ verses 4-6]

Now listen men—it's not always wrong to listen to your wife!

A godly wife is God's gift as a man's helper to be listened to & over in chapter 21, God told Abram to listen to his wife.

But God calls men to lead and Abram did not lead in this passage & his failure brought about this problem with Hagar.

Hagar must have gotten a little arrogant toward Sarai after she conceived and so they now had a problem.

And though Sarai wrongly blamed this on Abram, he allowed her to deal with Hagar however she wanted.

In the ugly bitterness that arose, Sarai afflicted Hagar, though all of this was Sarai's own idea originally.

Sarai was so harsh that Hagar had enough & was not going to live under that anymore.

But that wasn't a right response either—Hagar should not have left & yet look at what God did with Hagar.

Hagar was part victim & was also an outcast & problem in the family.

If you think of yourself like that, watch how God responds.

Or if you view someone an unwelcome problem in your life—watch how God displays His care in this mess as we read verse 7. [READ]

Who is this that found Hagar? Is it AN angel, just ANY angel?

No; it is THE ANGEL of the LORD, the angel of Yahweh who is distinct from the Lord and yet speaks as the Lord.

He seems to be God and yet is sent from God & that means this is one of several OT appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was a pre-incarnate coming of Jesus, the 2nd Person of the Trinity before He was born in Bethlehem.

And what is striking is that HAGAR was one of the few individuals that Jesus chose to appear to.

In the Old Testament, Jesus Christ appeared to Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joshua, Elijah, Isaiah, a few others—& then also, HAGAR!

How does Hagar fit in that list?

She fits because God wanted His compassionate character revealed.

Early on in here, when God was making a distinction by choosing Abram's seed, God also gave a picture of His care for the unwanted by sending Jesus to Hagar.

Look what He said to Hagar in verses 8-9. [READ]

The Lord Jesus asked Hagar questions to get her thinking of what she was doing & then pointed her in the right direction.

He encouraged her to stop running from and rebelling against her troubles and instead return and submit to her rightful place.

So God's care was not devoid of truth—Christ came with both compassion & correction, with both tenderness & truth.

And that is a marvelous example of how we can be like God in our character toward people in crisis.

We know God's character far better now over 4000 years after Hagar because we have far more revelation now.

That revelation is God's coming as a man in Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not come as a man to merely be a good example or help people get their act together or gather good people.

No. As 1st Timothy 1:15 puts it, "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*"—sinners—that's what we are by nature—people who deserve to be outcasts left alone to endure punishment.

1st Corinthians 1:26-31 shares why God saves the unwanted.

1st Corinthians 1:26-31 says, "*consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to*

shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

God often saves the most unlikely souls to show His glory.

God shows His grace & mercy in saving sinners today like He did in coming to care for Hagar thousands of years ago.

No matter what you have done or are ashamed of & want to cover up, God knows & He is a God of great compassion.

So don't run FROM Him—run TO Him.

Even if you know your sin has caused & will cause all kinds of problems to all kinds of people around you.

You are not worse than what began with the birth of Hagar's son.

Read verses 10-12 to see what God said was coming. [READ]

This was a divine ultrasound—no ultrasound tech can give the kind of future details that God gave here about Ishmael's life and descendants.

Verses 10-12 show how being compassionate does not mean we make all the consequences of sin go away as seen in the future prophesied for Ishmael and his descendants.

Verse 12 makes it clear that Ishmael would be a problem child & a father of a problem people—his was a line of problem, not promise.

Opposition to God's work with Israel could often be found from this predicted source of strife that started with Ishmael.

Of course, all people are sinners by nature & God has saved & will save descendants of Ishmael as Revelation 5 says some from every tribe, tongue, people & nation will be in heaven.

But God knew & predicted that much trouble would come upon Abraham's descendants through Hagar's offspring.

If God knew that, why didn't He terminate the pregnancy?

Because God was showing His merciful character.

What God did with Hagar was to show compassion to the start of a people who would often be His enemies throughout Israel's history.

And God's love for His enemies is what Jesus appealed to when He taught us to love our enemies in Matthew 5:44-45.

He said to "*love your enemies... that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*"

Why are we to love our enemies?—to show God's character as sons of our heavenly Father who loves His enemies.

Ultimately, we want people to worship God as we read Hagar did in verses 13-16. [READ].

Hagar commemorated God's appearance and worshipped Him.

She obeyed Him by naming her son Ishmael, which would remind her always that God hears.

Ishmael's name & the name of Beer-lahai-roi honor God's care for an outcast who apparently became a child of God.

God sees, hears & attends to the cry of the needy, those who humble themselves before Him & cry out for His help.

God proved this again in Genesis 21 after Isaac was born & Ishmael was sent away with Hagar into the wilderness again.

God intervened again to care for Hagar & Ishmael because that is His character to care for the unwanted & outcast & shamed & disgraced.

If you don't know that care, we'd love to share more with you.

You may be ashamed because you are one who has taken another's life at some point in the past or you've helped others do so or you crossed some other line that you now know is horribly sinful.

You need to know God cares for you & He came in the Person of Jesus Christ to suffer the punishment that such sins deserve.

And He offers you and me and every other sinner forgiveness for all our sins if we turn from sin to faith in Christ.

God's mercy is shown in Jesus as the sinless Lamb sacrificed on a cross to provide forgiveness for all who trust Him.

If you know that mercy today, then be moved to fresh gratitude.

Let God's mercy to you motivate your mercy to others.

If you wonder what you can do for others, you can realize what God did first—He spoke & explained right & wrong & provided salvation.

Speaking is one of the simplest & most neglected means you to spread truth & reach lost people & protect innocent lives.

As Proverbs 31:8-9 says, "*Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.*"

There may be other ways to love your neighbor as Jesus illustrated in the Good Samaritan story in Luke 10:30-37.

Psalm 82:3-4 says, "*Vindicate the weak & fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted & destitute. Rescue the weak & needy; Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.*"

James 1:27 says—"*This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*"

As Proverbs 24:11-12 says, "*Deliver those who are being taken away to death, & those who are staggering to slaughter, Oh hold them back. If you say, "See, we did not know this," Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?"*

In addition to speaking clearly, you can be involved in local ministries like the Blue Ridge Women's Center or LoveLife or you can serve others in need or pursue adoption or foster care.

I love hearing older saints mention how they pray for others because that's a way they can keep serving others in whatever health battles.

We don't need to replace Gospel ministry with social work, but we can invest in people to show the value of life as we preach the Gospel.

James 2:15-16 & 1st John repeatedly advocates love for other believers being shown by meeting practical needs.

I know many of you are serving in ways you do not publicize & I thank God for you & encourage you to keep it up.

May God help us to submit our cravings to God's wisdom, submit our choices to God's Word, & submit our character to God's ways.

And may God help to us to lead others to do the same.

Pray with me as we close.