

Abortion and Euthanasia

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Note: This article is dated but still very relevant.

One of the most distressing developments of recent years is the growing disregard for human life. The widespread acceptance of evolutionary theory is an important milestone in the denial of the biblical view of life, for it seems that as our society abandons any pretense of belief in God and ultimate judgment, less attention is paid to the importance and sacredness of human life. When society views life as beginning merely as a blob of protoplasm, and ending with decomposition into the elements, it is no wonder that life is thought of so carelessly. Evolution makes life ultimately meaningless.

But human life is sacred, for it is something created by the Living God. Human life has always been under attack. Satan sought to destroy the life that God brought forth on the earth. Cain killed his brother Abel in the first murder. Lamech, in **Genesis 4**, boasts of his murder of another human being. War takes murder and expands it to a mass scale.

When conflicts between the United States and another country arises, it is not long before someone says that the U.S. ought to “nuke ’em”—meaning the total destruction of human life and property. Video games and cartoons glorify the elimination of the hero’s enemies. Motion pictures, television programs and news coverage tend emphasize violence and killing, knowing that they attract viewers.

Violence in the media has gained a great deal of attention. Churches have petitioned against it, and the government threatens broadcasters in order to curb it. Violence in the media, it is said, is a powerful influence toward violence in society.

But more subtle and troubling is the growing tolerance and acceptance of abortion. We have been witnessing the war on the unborn. With the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973 by the United States Supreme Court, abortion has gone from a last desperate attempt

to avoid the consequences of pregnancy to being simply “another choice” in birth control methods. Erwin Lutzer, in *Twelve Myths Americans Believe*, points out, “Today, abortion is big business. With 1.5 million abortions each year, costing an average of \$350 each, abortion clinics make tens of thousands of dollars daily. When business is slack, those who admit pregnant women do all they can to encourage an abortion regardless of the medical or emotional consequences” (p. 106). Because it happens in the sterile surroundings of a clean, gleaming “health facility,” abortion lacks the shocking effect of the same number of deaths on a battlefield or even on the highways. This is what makes it so subtle and able to be ignored.

Now, a grimmer specter is approaching. Mercy killing or euthanasia—from the Greek words meaning “easy death”—is becoming more acceptable. Some healthcare providers are actively assisting those who wish to take their own lives, and some are taking others’

lives into their own hands. A former Colorado governor and candidate for president once said that older persons “have a duty to die and get out of the way.” Since 1990, retired pathologist Jack Kevorkian has assisted in the suicide or self-murder of 41 individuals, as of this writing. Now Kevorkian was tried for several of the crimes, juries—one of which included a United Methodist bishop—refused to convict him, for they were convinced that human beings have a “right to die.”

While big news for a while, Kevorkian’s ghoulish work is less visible. Perhaps by the time he kills 50 people, it won’t draw any more attention than a car accident. But Kevorkian is only the most outlandish of those advocating the so-called right to die. He recently appeared before the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., and said, “Do you think it’s dignified to hang from wood with nails through your hands and feet bleeding...? Had Christ died in my van—with people around him who loved him—it would be far more dignified. My rusty old van.” Of course, Christians know that Jesus Christ died a horrible death, a repugnant death, with all dignity stripped from him. Jesus came to die for the sins of humanity, not to die a dignified death.

Abortion and euthanasia are related, for they confront the common thread of the sacredness of human life as the highest creation of God. They engage in common work to destroy the life that God alone can give, and they are sinful humanity’s ultimate act of rebellion against a holy God.

The Divine Gift of Human Life

If we consider the creation of human life by God in **Genesis 1:26-2:6**, we find that human life is a precious gift from God for several reasons.

Human life is a result of *God's sovereign choice*. God said, “**Let us create man in our image, after our likeness.**” God did not have to create humanity. He chose to do so, as the crowning glory of His creation. God made human life important in the very choice of its creation.

Human life reflects *God's image*. It shows God's natural likeness or personality. Human beings, unlike all other creatures, express choice, are aware of themselves, and have the ability to reason. These traits are shared by God and man. Man also mirrors God's moral likeness, by knowing the difference between right and wrong. Animals do things out of instinct; humans do things out of choice and will give an account for their actions. Joni Eareckson Tada—the well-known Christian artist, quadriplegic and disability advocate—writes, “Created in the image of God, humans are imprinted with transcendent qualities—beyond-this-world characteristics such as compassion, kindness, self-control, and patience. It is these qualities that place us worlds apart from brute beasts” (*Christian Research Journal*, Spring 1996, p. 17).

Human life fulfills *God's purposes*. God gave Adam and Eve a position. In **Genesis 1:26, 28** we find that humans are to have dominion or rule over creation. God also gave them a job to work out the position. Eden was not a place of idleness, but a place of God-given employment. In **Ephesians 1** we find the even greater goal of human existence, in that “**as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love**” (**Ephesians 1:4**), and “**that we should be to the praise of his glory**” (**Ephesians 1:12**). Mankind is to reflect God's glory.

Human life is a *personal work of God*. **Genesis** tells us that God took a special interest in this aspect of his creation. The other creatures were created by the mere word of God (if indeed it can be called “mere”). Simply the fact that God personally made man out of the dust of the earth has of tremendous importance.

Further in the Scriptures, *God upholds the value of human life* in the Ten Commandments. He says, “**You shall not murder**” (**Exodus 20:13, NIV**). This is an all-encompassing directive. It includes homicide (murder of another), suicide (murder of self), regicide (murder of a ruler), feticide (murder of a fetus), infanticide (murder of babies), and genocide (murder of a whole people). The Sixth Commandment also presumes the positive duty to do all the good we can to ourselves and others both physically and spiritually.

Human life is important as well because it was *redeemed for eternity* by Jesus Christ on the Cross. “**God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners,**

Christ died for us” (**Romans 5:8, NIV**). Christ did not die for dogs, horses, whales, or snail darters. He died for sinful, lost, degraded human souls.

Implications of the Divine Gift

What does all this mean today? It means that the Christian must stand for the inherent value of every human life at whatever point of existence, and the sovereignty of God over that life. **Romans 14:7-8** says, “For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord” (NIV). This is the only view of humanity that keeps us from being exploited by tyrants and keeps people—unborn children and Alzheimer’s victims—from being destroyed for anyone’s convenience.

The Christian must value the life of the baby in the womb. The Bible teaches that God knows the unborn child (**Psalm 139:13-16**) and has a plan for it. John the Baptist, as a six-month old fetus in Elizabeth’s womb, leaped for joy when Mary, the mother of Jesus, entered her house when Jesus was only recently conceived by the Holy Spirit. “If Mary had gotten an abortion, what would she have aborted—a potential human being or the eternal Son of God? There can be only one answer” (Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of Grace*, p. 117.)

The whole tenor of Bible teaching on life is in direct opposition to abortion in general and specifically to abortion on demand. Abortion on demand—for the convenience of the mother—is the reason for 90 percent of all the abortions performed in this country. In the United States alone, nearly 35 million human beings—almost the same number as the total killed in World War II—have met their end in an abortion clinic since 1973. The figures worldwide are even more horrendous. One could say that abortion is one of the worst human health hazards of the late 20th Century.

Abortions claim the lives of 28,000 babies per week. The detestable “partial birth abortion”—all but the head of the baby is delivered and then the skull is crushed and the brain is suctioned out—is performed on thousands of babies per year. It has been performed on babies as late as 32 weeks. This is only six weeks short of delivery, at a time when such infants are clearly viable outside of the womb.

The abortion issue has cropped up in the Church of the Brethren. In 1972, Annual Conference said, “Brethren oppose abortion because it destroys fetal life.” The **1984 Statement on Abortion** says, “The Church of the Brethren opposes abortion because the rejection of unborn children violates the love by which God creates and nurtures human life.” It would be good for Brethren leaders and ministers to more strongly

uphold these positions, and for congregations to take the lead in helping those with unwanted pregnancies.

Michael Horton writes, “In order to engage in this serious sin [abortion], a Christian must actually deny a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith. He or she must deny that God is the Sovereign author of life who alone has the power and right to give and take away human breath, and he must also deny the creature, destroying his or her dignity as an image bearer of God Himself” (*The Law of Perfect Freedom*, p. 151).

The Christian must stand for the value of those who are no longer productive in society’s eyes. This includes older persons, the mentally retarded, the handicapped, and those in chronic pain. The world says our value depends on how much we can produce (functionalism). This was the controlling view of Nazism and Communism; hence those who were not productive or who did not mean certain standards found themselves in concentration camps. Those who do not or cannot function have no right to life, is the thinking of this worldview.

The Bible teaches that our value depends on God’s grace and mercy in creating us and sustaining our existence. Human life is therefore valuable in itself; its value does not depend on achievement, quality, or any other human standard. It has value simply because God made it so. The life of a skid row bum is just as important to God as that of Billy Graham.

Holding human life as sacred means that Christians stand against assisted suicide and euthanasia. Annual Conference in 1996 adopted a strong statement, saying, “Every life is important and precious in the sight of God... The active and intentional taking of life, including assisted suicide, is unacceptable” (1996 Annual Conference Booklet, p. 282).

God calls us to support others in their living and in their dying. Some think such persons are a “burden” to their family or to society. But **Galatians 6:2** reminds us that we are to “**Carry each other’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**” “Even a deaf, mute, blind, severely retarded, unborn quadriplegic is viewed by God as the ‘the apple of His eye.’ This is essential to the orthodox Judeo-Christian worldview” (Thomas K. Johnson, *The Outlook*, Vol. 46, No. 1, January 1996).

Some may argue that we are more humane to our animals when they suffer, than we are to fellow human beings. They wonder why we can’t have “mercy” and end the painful existence of another person. But it is not the humane nor the human thing to do. Again, Joni Eareckson Tada writes, “Injecting a terminally ill person with a lethal drug would be inhuman. We put animals to sleep because they do not know they are dying. They can make nothing of their misery or mortality.... A person who asks for mercy

killing, however, is no mere animal. Humans have immortal souls and will one day either walk through gates of pearl or gates of hell. Humans are capable of making something of their misery and mortality. For this reason, they deserve to have their spirits bolstered; they need courage and encouragement. Dying people are not failures—their lives must be shored up against defeat and despair.”

Standing for human life also means upholding the value of each individual. This means we stand for purity, holiness, and righteousness, and against pornography and extreme exploitation. It means we will not engage in harboring anger and contempt for others, for Jesus taught that murder in mind and heart is as wrong as murder in action. Paul condemned “hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy” (**Galatians 5:19**). Christians must also stand for the value of the lives of our enemies. Jesus taught us to love our enemies (**Matthew 5:43-47**), whether they be personal or national. This means we stand against war and the indiscriminate taking of human life.

May we pray and work that we will stand for the weakest and most vulnerable human lives. May we honor the image of God and his highest creation by upholding the sacred right to life. May we do our part in assisting expectant mothers to bring their babies to term and caring for them after birth. May we also encourage those who are discouraged and despairing of life. Remember, Jesus said, “I was sick and you visited me” (**Matthew 25:36**).