

The Precious Gift of Life
Genesis 2:7
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INTRODUCTION:

Today we are joining with many of our sister SBC churches around the nation to observe “Sanctity of Human Life” Sunday. This day has been set aside by many Christians, not just Baptists, to honor the precious, sacred gift of life.

Why this date? We observe this date because it marks the 39th anniversary of the day, on January 22, 1973, when the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in this nation. Since that date over 50 million unborn babies have been legally murdered through abortion in the United States. In answer to the critic who wonders why Christians seem so obsessed with this practice, I hope to show you from the scriptures today why we find this practice such an affront to the precious gift of life.

And this issue does not relate just to abortion. The sanctity of human life is a thread woven through many of the most hotly-contested issues of our day: capital punishment, war, stem cell research, euthanasia, human trafficking, immigration and more. My hope today is to equip you with a set of biblical principles to guide you as you think on these important issues.

I. Our life and worth are gifts from God (Genesis 1:27, 2:7).

A. *We are not here by accident.*

1. Contrary to the opinions of many modern scientists and philosophers, the Bible affirms that we were designed and created by an intelligent, personal God.

a) Those who reject God assert that we are simply the random product of time plus chance.

(1) *If this is true, there is no qualitative difference between human beings and another other living thing.*

(2) *If this is true, there is no purpose or meaning to our existence.*

b) In contrast, the Bible asserts that we were *formed* by God.

(1) *We may not understand the details of the process, but as believers we affirm that however we got here, God was behind it and in control of it.*

(2) *The Hebrew word translated “formed” in Gen. 2:7 carries with it the idea of “craftsmanship.”¹*

(a) This idea of craftsmanship implies that God put a great deal of thought and skill into our design.

(i) (Psalm 94:9) “He who planted the ear, does He not hear?

He who formed the eye, does He not see?”

(ii) (Psalm 139:14) “I will give thanks to You, for I am **fearfully** and **wonderfully made**; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.”

(b) The idea of craftsmanship implies that God exercises ownership over us.

(i) (Isaiah 29:16) “You turn *things* around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, That what is made would say to its maker, “He did not make me”; Or what is formed say to him who formed it, “He has no understanding”? “

(ii) (Colossians 1:16) “For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.”

(c) The idea of craftsmanship implies that God has a purpose in creating us.

(i) (Ephesians 2:10) “For we are **His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

(ii) (Proverbs 16:4) “The LORD has **made everything** for its own purpose, **Even** the **wicked** for the day of evil.”

¹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids:InterVarsity Press, 1968), 60. Copyright © Alan Rogers 2011

(iii) Instinctively, most human beings understand this at some level, or else we would not be bothered so much when life doesn't seem to make sense.

B. The Bible asserts that not only did God create us, but He has endowed human beings with special worth and dignity.

(1) The Bible agrees with modern scientists about what we were formed from.

(a) Modern science says we were formed from the “primordial ooze”.

(b) The Bible is clear that we were formed out of the “dust from the ground.”

(2) If we come from such common stuff, what is it that causes us to be more than the sum of our ingredients?

(a) By most calculations, human beings and chimpanzees share 95-percent of the same genetic code.²

(b) Human beings and mice are estimated to share 99-percent of the same genetic code.³

(c) If we are so similar, why are human beings walking on the moon while chimps are going extinct and mice are living in the garbage dump?

(3) The Bible asserts that human beings are qualitatively different from other living things because God has chosen to invest in us special qualities.

(a) In Genesis 1:27, the Bible asserts that God created human beings in His own image.

(b) In Genesis 2:7, the Bible asserts that God breathed into us directly the breath of life.

(i) In the Bible other living things are said to possess

² John Pickrell, “Humans, Chimps Not as Closely Related as Thought?” *National Geographic News* (September 24, 2002): page nr., http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/09/0924_020924_dnachimp.html (accessed January 21, 2012).

³ Marsha Walton, “Mice, Men Share 99 Percent of Genes,” *www.cnn.com*, http://articles.cnn.com/2002-12-04/tech/coolsc.coolsc.mousegenome_1_human-genome-new-human-genes-genes-that-cause-disease?s=PM:TECH (accessed January 20, 2012).

the breath of life, but human beings are the only living beings about whom it is said that God personally breathed life into us.

(ii) Breathing life into someone is a personal, intimate, self-giving act, describing the personal nature of what God has done for us.

(c) **Genesis 2:7 also describes God's actions in making humans into "living beings."**

(i) The Hebrew word used here, *nephesh*, can be translated "being", "person" or "soul."⁴

(ii) Intrinsic to the biblical conception of personhood is the fact that while we may have bodies, we *are* a soul.

(iii) Our very personhood is a gift from God.

II. Because our life and worth are gifts from God, it is a serious transgression to deny or diminish the life and worth of another human being (Genesis 2:7; Ex. 20:13; Matt. 5:21-22)

A. When we deny or diminish the personhood of another person, we are trespassing into a territory that belongs to God alone.

B. If God has given life, what right do we have to take it away?

1. This is why God speaks out so strongly against the taking of a human life.

a) (Exodus 20:13) "You shall not murder!"

b) When we choose to take upon ourselves individually the decision to end someone else's life, we are usurping a prerogative that belongs only to God.

⁴ Kidner, 60-61.
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2. The Old Testament endorsement of capital punishment is not a sign that life is cheap, but a demonstration of just how valuable a human life really is (Genesis 9:6; Numbers 35:33).

(1) (Genesis 9:6) *“Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.”*

(a) Note that this injunction was given to Noah, long before the Law of Moses.

(b) Note also the wrongness of murder is based on the concept that God created human beings in His own image.

(2) (Numbers 35:33) *“So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.”*

(a) The inappropriate taking of a human life created a taint on the land that could only be cleansed by the death of the one who caused the taint.

(b) The Old Testament law took capital punishment out of the realm of personal retribution and established squarely as a matter of justice.

(i) Capital punishment was restricted to particularly heinous crimes which destroyed or demeaned others, including murder, rape or rebellion.⁵

(ii) A capital sentence required a trial involving testimony from multiple witnesses to establish the guilt of the accused.⁶

(iii) In most cases the sentence was carried out by the community, acting under delegated authority from God, and not by an individual.

(iv) The Old Testament law placed strict limits on the tribal practice of personal retribution.

(c) In these ways, the Old Testament testifies to the value and seriousness attached to human life.

⁵ See Exodus 21-22; Leviticus. 20; Deuteronomy 18-19.

⁶ Deuteronomy 19:15.

C. If God has given dignity and worth to an individual, what right do we have to take that away?

- 1. We do not have to physically murder someone to attack their God-given worth.**
- 2. Jesus himself said, “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.” (Matthew 5:21-22)**
- 3. Whenever we do anything to diminish the dignity of another person, we are telling God that He did not know what He was doing when He made that person.**

III. Because life is a precious, sacred gift, God expects His people to care for and protect those who are defenseless and disadvantaged, including:

A. *the unborn* (Psalm 139; Jeremiah 4:4-6; Ezekiel 16:20-22)

- 1. All children are precious in God’s sight.**
 - a) Jesus expressed this love when he said “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” (Mark 10:14)**
 - b) Psalm 127 calls children “a gift from the Lord” and a “blessing.”**
- 2. This concern extends even to those waiting to be born.**
 - a) The Bible is unequivocal about the personhood of the unborn:**
 - (1) (Psalm 139:13-14) “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."

(2) (Jeremiah 1:4-5) "Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."

b) Thanks to modern technology it is becoming harder and harder to deny the personhood of the unborn.

(1) Most people are so wired that for them to rationalize the murder of an innocent person, they have to find some way to "de-humanize" the victim.

(2) High-resolution ultrasound and other technologies have made it difficult to deny that the humanity of the unborn.

(3) The only logically defensible interpretation of when life begins is at conception.

(a) The distance between abortion and infanticide can be measured in mere inches.

(b) Technology is continually pushing back the limits of "viability."

(c) Absent an intervention by God, nature or human hands, a fertilized , implanted egg will develop into a human baby.

3. God severely condemned His chosen people when they mistreated their own children: "Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter? You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through *the fire*. Besides all your abominations and harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare and squirming in your blood." (Ezekiel 16:20-22)

4. How can we deny that God will similarly condemn any nation that fails to protect innocent children?

B. *the helpless (Deut. 27:19; James 1:26-27)*

1. The Bible is full of references describing God's concern for those who have no one else to protect them, including:

a) (Deut. 27:19) "Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow."

b) (James 1:26-27) "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world."

2. In ancient times, widows and orphans represented two of the most vulnerable classes in society.

3. In our day, this category would include widow and orphans, as well as people with special needs or handicaps, the homeless or any others who cannot support or defend themselves.

4. In many cases, this would also include those mothers who consented to the abortion of their unborn babies.

a) Many women who go for an abortion do so because they do not see any other way out.

b) If we are to be consistently pro-life, the church must be concerned not only for the unborn, but also mothers who see themselves trapped in an unplanned pregnancy.

C. *the poor (Deut. 15:7, 11; Prov. 21:13, Prov. 19:17)*

- 1. (Deut. 15:7) “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother.”**
- 2. (Prov. 21:13) “He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered.”**
- 3. (Prov. 19:17) “One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deed.”**

D. *the immigrant (Ex. 22:21; Lev. 19:33-34)*

- 1. Immigration, illegal or otherwise, figures to be a factor in the upcoming U.S. elections.**
- 2. A nation that does not figure out a way to manage immigration and assimilation will soon find its cultural integrity and stability threatened.**
- 3. However, in debating how to handle immigration we must not forget that immigrants also possess worth and dignity deserving of respect.**
- 4. God has always called on His people to welcome the immigrant:**
 - a) (Ex. 22:21) “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”**
 - b) (Lev. 19:33-34) “When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.”**

E. *the aged (Ex. 20:12; Mark 7:10-12; 1 Tim. 5:1-16)*

- 1. (Ex. 20:12) “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.”**
- 2. (Mark 7:10-12) “For Moses said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER’; and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH’; but you say, ‘If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’ you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother;”**
- 3. (1 Tim. 5:1-16) Paul laid out a plan for families to take care of the elderly, including : “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but *rather* appeal to *him* as a father, *to* the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, *and* the younger women as sisters, in all purity. Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God...”**

F. *the “least of these” (Matthew 25:31-46)*

- 1. In Jesus' description of the Judgment Day, the eternal destiny of those determined to be either “sheep” or “goats” hinges on how they treated the most helpless in their midst.**
- 2. This is not to say that we are saved by our good works, but a person who has had true saving experience through Jesus will give evidence of that through how they treat others.**

IV. Down through history God has judged those who failed to protect the lives of the helpless and innocent (2 Kings 21:15-17, Mal. 3:5).

A. (2 Kings 21:15-17) God listed the reasons why He was preparing to allow Israel to be sent into exile, ...“because they have done evil in My sight, and have been provoking Me to anger since the day their fathers came from Egypt, even to this day.” Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; besides his sin with which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD. Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh and all that he did and his sin which he committed, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah?”

B. (Mal. 3:5) “Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts.”

C. Some may tremble at the thought of what God’s judgment will be against America.

D. It may be that God is judging America already.

1. For example, Abraham Lincoln expressed his belief that the incredible carnage of the Civil War was God’s punishment to America for the sin of slavery.⁷

2. Is it not ironic that a nation that has allowed the murder of 50 million unborn babies is now facing a crisis because it does not have enough current workers to pay for benefits promised to older citizens?

⁷ Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address; endorsed by Lincoln, April 10, 1865. Transcribed and annotated by the Lincoln Studies Center, Knox College, Galesburg, Illinois. Available at *Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress*, Manuscript Division (Washington, D.C.: American Memory Project, [2000-02]), <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/malhome.html>.; accessed 20 January 2012.

V. Because God loves and values each person, we honor God when we love and value our neighbors (Matt. 22:35-40; 1 John 3:14-17, 4:7-12)

A. (Matthew 22:35-40) Jesus called loving our neighbor one of the two greatest commandments underlying all the other commandments given by God.

B. (1 John 3:14-17) "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who 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. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

VI. The gift of earthly life finds its ultimate fulfillment in the acceptance of the gift of eternal life (John 3:16, John 10:10).

A. (John 3:16) "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

B. (John 10:10) "...I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

C. In the New Testament, "eternal life" does not refer only to the quantity of life but to its quality.

1. Some might look at the life they have now, with all of its struggles, and shudder at the thought of enduring this kind of life for eternity.

2. The biblical concept of eternal life is the life that is restored and reconciled in a never-ending fellowship with our Creator.

D. When we give our lives over to Christ in faith and discipleship, we experience the life God intended for us.

CONCLUSION:

God has given us the precious gift of life. He lovingly designed each one of us and endowed us with worth, dignity, and the potential to enjoy a relationship with Him. Honor and treasure the life of every human being. Give thanks for God's gift of life, use it wisely, and experience its ultimate expression by accepting God's gift of eternal life.

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