

SLIDE 1. ANCHORED: A Study of What We Believe and Why Teaching: Article 14. The Sanctity of Human Life

Sunday May 19, 2023

It has been estimated that the avg. North American spends 3 years in business meetings, 15 years watching t.v. and scrolling phones, spends \$89,281 on groceries, consumes 109,354 pounds of food, makes 1811 trips to McDonalds, eats 35,138 cookies and 1483 pounds of candy, catches 304 colds, is involved in 6 motor vehicle accidents, is hospitalized 8 times (if you're a man) or 12 times (if you're a woman), and spends 24 years sleeping.

Is this all that life is cracked up to be?!

Surely it is more!

APPETIZER

SLIDE 2. "The tragedy of life is not that it ends so soon, but that we wait so long to begin it." *Richard L. Evans*

MAIN COURSE

Let me begin by saying that no matter how we spend it or when we start it – life is a GIFT!

We believe – as people who love God, who follow Jesus, and who are indwelt by the Spirit of God – that each person is created in the image of God and ought to be celebrated and nurtured.

And so, we stand against anything that devalues human life – whether it be – abortion or euthanasia or suicide or something else - because we believe that all human life belongs to God – His to begin and His to end.

And yet we also journey (or – at least we should journey) with each other who have been affected by suicide or human trafficking or euthanasia or abortion – with compassion and respect.

The bible describes life as a property of God – that He gave life to all organic forms of creation – but man and woman are uniquely described as being made in the image of God and as being given rule over the rest of creation.

This is the story of Genesis 1: the beginning.

SLIDE 3. *God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground"* (Gen. 1:26).

This is God talking to Himself about what He is about to make.

Please note the pronouns He ascribes to Himself: "Let **us**" / "**our** image" / "**our** likeness" – this is our first whiff of God as one God in 3 persons.

God will make men and women – humankind - in His image – which is our first whiff of God as having maleness and femaleness located in Him.

God made us – which is to say that He created the prototype who could procreate for themselves. In this sense – then – our lives are a GIFT – begun by God and then given to us by our parents.

Ours to decide what we would do with it – even if our lives don't belong to us.

SLIDE 4. *So, God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them* (Gen. 1:27).

God created men AND women. Each has equal value because God gives it to them both.

We are like hand-stitched sweaters – made by a loving parent or grandparent – with a "Made by..." patch sewn into it – the sweater made special by the one who created it.

We are valuable because God made us!

And our value is distinct from all creation because – out of all creation – we are the only created beings who are made in God's image – or – in the Latin – to sound erudite and poetic and a little bit pretentious – the *Imago Dei*.

What does it mean, though, to be made in the image of God?

I suppose – thus far in our reading – it means (at minimum) that we are made to think and to create and to be in loving relationships with others – incl. God – even as God has always existed in a loving relationship with Himself as Father, Son, and Spirit.

SLIDE 5. *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground..."*

SLIDE 6. *Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food."*

SLIDE 7. *And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food."*

SLIDE 8. *And it was so.*

SLIDE 9. *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good* (Gen. 1:28-31).

Man and woman. Life as gift. God-stamped.

And a God-initiated relationship with Him. This is what makes us sacred – set apart from creation – that God establishes a covenant with humankind – and therefore sees relationships as central to being human – relationships with the creation itself, with one another, and relationship with Him.

Relationships we can choose to accept or reject – because we are free-thinking and willful image bearers.

Let me just add this observation: that it is God who gives human life value and worth – that it is NOT something we acquire or earn.

Man and woman had worth before they did anything.

I was, for instance, if we are to compare God-the-Father to our earthly parents - highly valued by my parents before I could even say their names or even something as simple as – “Please pass the ketchup!”

We could say it this way - before we did a thing – God established relationship with us and gave us a purpose for being – to steward His creation.

SLIDE 10. To which the Psalmist humbly proclaimed: **When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?**

SLIDE 11. *You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.*

SLIDE 12. *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!* (Ps. 8:3,4, 6-9).

God gives our lives value and worth - so that the sanctity of life is independent of the value we often place on people by virtue of their efforts, accomplishments, talents, success, and overall productivity.

The balance of nature, the process of reproduction, and the supremacy of mankind are all part of this “goodness” – crediting God as Creator – not as some other religious myths of the day might have it – and establishing His stamp of approval on the natural order.

God succeeded in creating the perfect version of what He decided to create. After 6 days of creation, the universe not only existed, but it was flawless in beauty and design, function and purpose, and latent with potential.

And then there was the fall of humankind.

Our image-bearing nature cracked. Our ability to reflect the glory of God refracted.

Pain and suffering began.

Which is to say (now): To be human is to suffer – to suffer alongside Christ who suffered for our sake (1 Pt. 4:13). May we suffer for His.

Sometimes this suffering is in our very bodies – sometimes from birth and sometimes as we grow old. None of us are perfectly formed.

It is as my doctor says: “We are all -asymmetrical!”

Human life – then - is sacred – despite our inabilities, despite the grinding, bone on bone contact in my left knee, and despite us losing our eyesight and hearing and... hair.

Human life is sacred – warts and all!

Christians are called – then - to accept God’s sovereign will in giving each of us our basic makeup.

SLIDE 13. *Who are you*, says the apostle Paul, *O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'*” (Ro. 9:20-21).

No, it is ours to say, “Thank you.”

In addition to pain and suffering – the curse after the fall also included an end to life – “for dust you are and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

But the story of the fall is followed by the story of redemption – which ends in a resurrection life: a life after this life – also sacred – an extension of the sanctity of this life when our bodies will return to dust (Gen. 3:19), when our spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecc. 12:7), when our bodies will be transformed to be like Christ’s glorious body (Phil. 3:21), and when we will be re-established in relationship with God and with all those who trusted in Jesus Christ for their forgiveness and redemption (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

But, for now, we are here – in body and spirit.

And we face tough questions about abortion and euthanasia and suicide.

So, let’s talk about them for a few moments...

As we have been saying – God has a high view of humankind – as does His word – which is to say – that it is His to give and His to end – so any taking of life – on our own terms or in our own timing – whether it be someone else’s or our own - displaces God as the rightful owner of our lives – and puts us in willful opposition to Him.

SLIDE 14. The bible says: ***There is a time for everything... a time to be born and a time to die*** (Ecc. 3:1-2).

And that time is God's to decide (Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 1:5).

Independent of the status we give or don't give an unborn child. Independent of how sick or frail a friend or family member might be who wants to end their life.

Independent of how overwhelmed and full of fear we might be about our own lives that we would choose to end them.

But let me say this – these and other moral situations like them are nuanced – AND – I don't think we've always been very good at journeying with people who have suffered such things.

While the bible doesn't condone abortion – and while I would advocate for the life of the child - there are cases where women are raped and yet conceived, and cases where mother's lives are threatened during delivery – that deserve meaningful conversations with the individual, the family, the physician, and a praying church family.

And a gracious church family – that will love and support these women.

Often - women who abort are hurting. They are weighed down by the irreversibility of their action, maybe even crushed in their spirit. They can bear the weight of their sin on their own for the guilt and shame they feel. It is quite likely that they didn't fully comprehend the significance of their decision when they made it.

So, what do we do? Do we judge her? Do we tell ourselves that her sin is too grievous? Do we see her only as someone who had an abortion?

Wayne Grudem offers a concise summary of how all of us should think about sin - that one sin – even a small one – makes us legally guilty before a sinless God.

SLIDE 15. Or as the bible says: ***For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it*** (Jas. 2:10).

Not one of us – then - is different than another. We are all sinners saved by grace.

It is not a time to judge but a time to love and support these women – a time to listen and empathize, a time to pray for and with, a time to be present and to hold hope, a time to grieve with them and a time to cry with them.

All of which will take time – as in - a long-term commitment to journey with them.

And may I also say this: If you have had an abortion, I am so sorry that we may not have been a safe people-space for you to reveal that, I am so sorry if you have felt judged or condemned by the church, and I am so sorry for the burden of guilt and shame that you may still be carrying.

While the bible doesn't condone euthanasia or medical assistance in dying – helping someone determine when to stop an aggressive medical procedure can be an act of compassionate care for both the dying person and for those who stand alongside them.

There are times – otherwise - too – when it might be appropriate for someone to refuse medical treatment (for example – when a disease is already widespread), or to reject the use of artificial life-support systems.

Because - while we greatly value the medicine and technology that allows us to sustain and care for life, we also acknowledge that this earthly life cannot be sustained *indefinitely*... And even more - that in our dying – we are given a chance – as Christians – to witness to God's grace in the way we endure suffering and approach the end of our earthly life.

That we would *live* lives that point to Jesus - and *die* in ways that would point to Jesus.

Identifying with Him in His suffering. Having hope in a life to come. Making those who would care for us, "Why are we so hopeful and kind – even when we are dying?"

As someone has said – the secular slogan of "dying with dignity" ought to be replaced with a Christian call to "suffering with dignity."

While the bible doesn't condone death by suicide – there are those amongst us and our family and friends who have survived those who took their own life.

So, what do we do? Do we judge? Do we not talk about it so that we don't re-traumatize people? Do we avoid survivors?

In addition to the deep grief of loss – suicide survivors often also feel doubt, anger, guilt, fear, and confusion.

They question *why*. Why did their father take his life? Why didn't God-the-Father prevent it? If God is good – how could He allow this?! These kinds of doubts.

And anger - that they are left behind. Angry at what they see as the selfishness of the one who took his life.

And the "if only" – if only I would have talked to him, or emailed him, or been there – then this probably wouldn't have happened.

And fear – fear that this would be their story – that they would end up like their father – that the family is cursed – that their loved one did something unpardonable.

It can be very confusing for those who survived.

So again – we need to help each other bear the pain that life often brings (Gal. 6:2). We need to mourn with those who mourn (Ro. 12:15).

And when they are ready – to remind survivors that it is good to turn to God to lament and ask why – the Psalmists often prayed this way – it is good to choose to forgive the one who took his life – to unshackle from bitterness - it is good to acknowledge their agency and that their choice was theirs to make – it is good to remember that there is no sin so grievous to God that it wasn't forgiven at the cross, that curses collapse but blessing goes on for generations, and that we are not our fathers or our mothers – we are who God made us to be.

And may I also say this: If you are struggling with suicidal thoughts or plans – please talk to someone – please let us help you or help you find someone who can help you. And if we have not been a safe people-space for you to talk about your struggle (or any other struggles) – I am so sorry and would you please forgive us.

And if you are a suicide survivor: I am so sorry for your loss. I am so sorry for the possible doubt, anger, guilt, fear, or confusion you may have felt/might be feeling. You are not alone. Please contact me or someone else who can listen to you and pray with you – and – if need be – to recommend a good counselor.

This life *is* a gift, and we *are* born into pain and suffering. May we continue to be a people who choose things – more and more – that lead to more and more life – a people who suffer with dignity - and a people who - when we don't choose things that lead to more and more life - would be a people who would – more and more – be less judgmental of each other and more gracious.

TAKEOUT

Article 14: The Sanctity of Human Life
Liturgical Reading

SLIDE 16. ME: All human life belongs to God.

SLIDE 17. YOU: We have been created in the image of God, crowned with dignity and honor.

SLIDE 18. ME: God opposes every action and attitude which devalues human life.

SLIDE 19. YOU: Since the beginning of time, God has shown Himself as a shield for the defenseless, caring for the poor and needy, providing for the widow and the orphan, comforting the sick and lonely. Spirit of God, use us as Your instruments for justice, peace, and blessing.

SLIDE 20. ME: O God, You are Lord over life and death. When You open Your hand to us, we are filled with abundance; when You take away our breath, we die and return to dust.

SLIDE 21. YOU: Lord, You were present at the moment of creation, for You lovingly shaped us in our mother's womb. We praise You, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made! Your care over our mortal body is unending. It extends from that earliest spark of life to our final breath.

SLIDE 22. ME: God has given to us individuals gifted in medical sciences and care-giving who aid in His work of healing.

SLIDE 23. YOU: We receive them as a blessing to the human race. We pray that God would use them to promote the well-being of all people. But we reject any medical procedure designed to take life as an attempt to undermine God's authority over life and death.

SLIDE 24. YOU: As God's children, we say with confidence: whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. Teach us to number our days aright, O Lord, that we might gain a heart of wisdom.