

The Sanctity of Life and the Sin of Omission

Proverbs 24:11-12

Sermon by Phil Kayser at DCC on 1-20-2008

I had written a check at the Grocery Store, and the store clerk asked for my driver's license to verify my ID. As soon as she looked at it she said something to the effect of, "You're illegal. Did you know that your license has expired?" I looked at it and to my horror discovered that it had been expired for several months. That was 18 years ago; so don't bother getting on my case. But I couldn't believe that I had overlooked such a simple thing. If a police officer had stopped me, it would have done no good to plead ignorance. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. Now I can't say that was a sin. I'm not convinced that the civil government even has the authority to be issuing licenses. But that's a totally different question. But I bring that up to illustrate how easy it is to omit doing things that you had every intention of doing. In the area of sin, sins of omission are often just as serious as sins of commission. And today we are going to look at a sin of omission; failing to do that which we ought to have done in the area of preventing abortion.

And this is a tough balance to maintain. Next time we are going to be looking at Acts 16 and examining the subject of guidance. We need God's guidance because as limited creatures there is no way that we could engage in all possible opportunities that present themselves every day. So you are not necessarily in sin simply because you are not involved in a pro-life activity that someone else thinks you should be. Just because there is an opportunity to go the abortion clinic every morning does not mean that we should. Nor is every man, woman and child called to the same levels or kinds of involvement. We need God's guidance. So today's sermon is not going to be complete until we look at the subject of guidance. Ecclesiastes says that there is a time and a season for every event under heaven. So it would be very easy to get legalistic on this question of the sin of omission.

But the reason I decided to preach on this subject was because a friend of mine told me last week that he had no intention of being involved in stopping abortions in America – except perhaps among Christians. He had several reasons for his stance. His first reason was that until we convert people, train them in the law and change politics, it is a hopeless endeavor and wasted effort. So he said that even though he is opposed to abortion and

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he considers it a great sin, in the scope of what is needed in America he considers it a lower priority. His second reason was that he thought there was no precedent for interventions at Moloch temples in the Old Testament or for picketing. His third reason was that he thought such children of pagans were better off dying young than growing up to be sophisticated enemies of Christ who are bound for hell. Why would we want them to be judged for more? He said that by rescuing them we are making their judgment more severe.

But whatever you think of his reasons, his conclusion is wrong. He is wrong because the blood of pagans does defile the land and make it subject to judgment. He is wrong because Christians should be doing all they can to avoid God's judgment and not just be passively expecting it. He is wrong because the sixth commandment applies to everyone. He is wrong because Romans 13 says that even pagan magistrates are responsible to be God's ministers to avenge all murder. He is wrong because there is such a thing as the sin of omission. And we are only going to look at that last little slice today. The Scripture we read says that there is a law against non-involvement, there is a God who stands against non-involvement and there is a providence that comes against non-involvement. Certainly there are different callings and ways in which we are expected to be involved in the pro-life cause, but I want to build a case for saying that all of us should do something to stem the tide of God's judgment against America. Even the person who is an invalid on his bed can do something.

I. There Is A Law Against Non-Involvement

So point number 1 - love needs to be reminded that there is a law against non-involvement. Verse 11 says, **Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.** He's saying, "It's not enough to abstain from murder. It's not enough to abstain from abortion. You have also got a responsibility to do what you can to deliver." You may have never thought about that before. You knew that there was a law against abortion, against pornography, against murder, against theft. But you never realized that Scripture says that there is a law against our non-involvement when we see others being victimized by crime.

The Larger Catechism, when commenting on how to read the commandments, said this: "where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden, and where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded." In other words, when Scripture says, "thou shalt not murder," it implies that "thou shalt seek to preserve life." Otherwise the Ten Commandments

couldn't be a summary of the whole law of God. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Pharisees probably would not have beaten up a Samaritan and robbed him. Their concept of righteousness was avoiding evil and that was one reason why a Pharisee would have passed the Samaritan by on the other side – they wanted to avoid associations with sinners. Theirs was an avoidance ethic and it led them to non-involvement in areas that they should have given life.

We have a society that has become so uninvolved that you read of reports of citizens witnessing rapes, murders, robberies and other crimes without even lifting a finger to call for help on telephone, and without coming forward as a witness or in any way becoming involved. They have moral outrage and feel terrible about what happened, but they didn't so much as call the police. I've often wondered how much television contributes to this inaction. Ordinarily the emotions these people experience when they watch a crime on a movie would drive a person to action. That's what God designed those emotions for. But there isn't any action possible when you watch a movie. And we begin to develop a habit of passivity even when the emotions are calling for action. And over time our body is conditioned to not respond to crisis situations. Now I can't prove that that theory is correct. I'm sure that there are other reasons. But in any case, if we are passive in the face of crime, we need to realize that it's not just the policeman's job when someone robs a house. We need to call. We need to be witnesses. When you see a car accident, don't just drive on by. Stop and check to see if they need a witness. Now obviously there are ifs, ands and buts that qualify what I have said. If you are a single lady and the guy on the side of the road looks kind of rough, you may want to call for help rather than stopping. But there are things we can do.

This verse indicates that we need to be involved even when there are corrupt courts that sanction violence, or when a police department gets abusive, or when prison guards rape and maim. What is our position? Should we be silent simply because it is the law of the land? That's what some people say: "I can't get involved. Abortion is legal." Dietrich Bonhoeffer scolded the churches of Germany for using the law as an excuse for non-involvement during the horrors of Nazi Germany. He said it may be legal but it is unlawful on God's books and we must speak out.

There are two different phrases that are used in verse 11: the first one deals with rescuing a person from the court (**deliver those who are drawn toward death**), and the second one deals with rescuing a person who is being killed in some other general way (**And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter**). The Hebrew of the first phrase reflects the purpose and

deliberate legal process that a court goes through and the words of the second phrase reflect situations that a person stumbles into.

Let's start with the first phrase: "**Deliver those who are drawn toward death.**" The phrase "**drawn toward death**" is the phrase that is used in the legal process when a person is being handed over by the courts to an executioner. Exactly the same Hebrew words are used when it says in Deuteronomy 19:12 "**then the elders of the city shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die.**" "**Deliver him over to die**" is exactly the same in the Hebrew as "**him who is drawn toward death.**" So the first phrase is really dealing with a civil magistrate inflicting capital punishment on someone. God is saying here that you need to be involved even when the courts are unjustly sending these people to death. There is a law against ignoring what the courts are doing to millions of unborn children in America. The number of abortions has gone down considerably. It's been lowered 25% from 1990 to 2005. But in 2005 there were still 1.2 million abortions – that's 1 in five pregnancies deliberately terminated; that's 20% of all babies slaughtered with the sword.

But there are other forms of slaughter that have been going on in our world. There is a law against ignoring the afflicted behind the bamboo curtain. There is a law against turning a blind eye to the beatings, the maimings, the torture and the killings of Christians in Muslim countries. The governments in Nigeria, Sudan, Turkey, Malaysia, Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, and elsewhere have been turning a blind eye to Muslims who kill Christians, and several of those countries openly persecute them.

You might feel helpless in doing anything about the plight of such people. But the results are in God's hands. It is our duty to try. He is not saying that you have to succeed. And when it comes to mothers getting abortions, there are many, many testimonies of mothers who have been ever so thankful that someone was there to turn their child away from death, and to keep them from making a horrible mistake. There are mothers in PATH groups who wish someone had helped them to not choose abortion – just to educate them on what was involved. We can make a difference. We have gotten reports that our letters to Egypt have resulted in charges being dropped and prisoners being released. Your involvement through lobbying and voting can all be used to help the unborn. We cannot say that just because it is legal we cannot do anything about it. God says, "There is a law against non-involvement, even if the courts are doing it." Why don't we do some research on which judges need to be voted out?

Another example where this language is used is Numbers 35:25. In the context a person has been falsely accused of first degree murder and he flees to the city of refuge, gets a fair hearing and verse 25 describes the result: **So the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall return him to the city of refuge where he had fled...** That word “deliver” is used of the *congregation*. This means that the citizens were preventing a magistrate from executing someone. That verse is the basis for the American jury system. America has a fine tradition of jury’s deciding in terms of the constitution rather than a wicked judge’s prejudices. If you ever serve on a jury you need to realize that American tradition. Judges probably won’t tell you about that. In fact, judges are sometimes forbidding juries from doing this nowadays. But the jury has a responsibility to the constitution and to justice. American judges have many times in early American history said that juries are responsible to judge both the facts and the law. If the judge is seeking to pervert justice the jury is a check and balance to his power. They are not to be “yes-men.” If you want more information on the critical role you can play for the pro-life cause as a juror, talk to me sometime to recommend some 18th and 19th century books and a little booklet called *The Citizens Rule Book*, which contains among other things the Jury Handbook. You may have to serve on a jury where fellow pro-lifers have been charged and you need to educate yourself now on what you can do to uphold justice.

I’m trying to give you creative different ways in which this involvement can take place. It doesn’t all have to be at the abortion clinic, though I think a lot more needs to be. Let me give you another example: Abigail was a wise woman who prevented David from engaging in murder in 1 Samuel 25. It’s a marvelous passage on what one citizen can do to keep someone from going to death. And David praised her. He said.

1Samuel 25:32 ... “Blessed is the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!

1Samuel 25:33 And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand.

1Samuel 25:34 For indeed, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Nabal!”

1Samuel 25:35 So David received from her hand what she had brought him, and said to her, “Go up in peace to your house. See, I have heeded your voice and respected your person.”

She was creatively thinking outside the box on how she could prevent a murder from happening. And there are other creative things that we can do.

We can support organizations that are doing something in the legal realm. The Rutherford Institute, the Foundation for Moral Law, the National Legal Foundation, Alliance Defense Fund, The Leadership Institute, the God and Caesar Foundation and many other Christian legal societies are starting to go on the offensive. For example, some of them have successfully sued police departments who have been deliberately injuring pro-life protestors. Old and young have had their nerves damaged permanently, have had their arms snapped by the nunchuks, have suffered injury to their noses and heads, and some have even died at the hands of police departments in the USA of America even though they were peacefully protesting. These organizations are seeking to deliver those who are being drawn toward death and as you contribute funds and pray for organizations like this you are personally involved in doing the same – you are sharing in their ministry.

But let's take other forms of murder such as occur under rape and burglary and violent assault. How can we stop people from being slaughtered by criminals? I would say you could do it by teaching your family self-defense. You could also do it by making sure that you own weapons of self-defense, whether that is pepper spray or guns. The right to self-defense is an inalienable right according to the Bible (and by the way, according to our constitution as well). And Jesus indicated that the right to own weapons for self-defense is an inalienable right. In Luke 22 Jesus gave several ways that His disciples needed to be responsible. He told them that He had previously sent them out without money, knapsack and extra sandals in order to teach them how to depend upon God. And they did not lack anything. But now that He was leaving, He told them, **...he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.** We must be responsible. And He was indicating that it is not responsible to own a garment but not a weapon of self-defense. His disciples, seeking to take him seriously said, **“Lord, look, here are two swords.”** Spiritualizers can't get around that phrase. They were literal swords. The text says, **And He said, “It is enough.”** (vv.35-38). What do we learn from that passage? We learn first that Jesus was rescuing his disciples from a false submission to tyranny. Rome had outlawed the carrying of weapons because of how many Romans had been stabbed. And He wasn't advocating stabbing Romans, but neither was He willing to submit to their solution to that problem - weapon control. You see, the Romans had strict weapon control, and Jesus ignored it. Weapon control by the government is not a new thing. Think of Saul and Jonathan. They were the only ones in all the army that had any weapons. The Philistines had confiscated all weapons. Think of David when he fled

from Saul. He didn't have a sword, and went to the tabernacle to get Goliath's sword. Saul didn't trust anyone with weapons and even the soldiers had to turn theirs in. Think of the times of the judges when tyrants disarmed the citizens. Well, the same was true of the Romans. BBC did a program on this and thought that Rome's idea of only allowing it's own soldiers to carry weapons was a great idea. But Jesus didn't think so. He allowed his disciples to carry two illegal swords. That is in exactly the same category as rescuing a victim from an unscrupulous judge. This is rescuing potential victims from unscrupulous laws. Peter was not allowed to use it to resist a civil magistrate, but such weapons are needful to protect from criminals. That is being pro-life. You are defending the lives of your family and loved ones from attack from thugs and criminals and the potential of anarchy. So take serious Christ's command to sell some of your clothing so that you can get a reliable weapon. But along with that, I would study of the life of David in 1 Samuel which shows how you may or may not that weapon. He never raised a sword against a civil magistrate except when he was a civil magistrate or was deputized by one.

And there is a multitude of ways that we can be involved in the political and legal system in protecting the rights of citizens. The Anders could give you suggestions. So when it comes to all the issues that are making our society a pro-death society, don't say that it's none of your business and there is nothing I can do. If everybody had that attitude there would be nobody to make it his or her business when it was your turn to be drawn toward death.

Proverbs 14:25 uses the same Hebrew word when it says, **A true witness delivers souls...** You may not have the money, the resources or the physical strength to deliver people in some of the ways that we have outlined, but you can come forward as a witness when you see a violent crime. Some will be involved as lawyers, others as judges, others as police officers, others as informed citizens with money, others as informed citizens with paper and pen, others as informed citizens who storm the gates of heaven with intercessory prayer until the Lord abolishes abortion and other forms of violence in our land. But all must be involved in one way or another. We can't ignore the curse that hangs over America.

I know quite a number of you pray outside the abortion clinic in Council Bluffs on Saturdays. That is a simple and concrete way that some might be involved.

But let me amplify a bit further on the meaning of this phrase. If it is our responsibility to intervene when the courts are against the person, how much more so when the courts are seeking to uphold justice. Don't expect

the police to do all the work of stopping violence. Americans depend too much upon the police. We've become soft. In the book of Deuteronomy God says that He expects every citizen to be involved in the process of governing, and a government is only as good as its citizens. God doesn't want a police state. He wants a state where there is no need for police because the citizens are so self-governing.

Now let me mention that there needs to be a balance even on these things with our other duties. Involvement in preventing murder is not the only duty God has commanded us. If we pursue the pro-life cause so much that we neglect our families, our devotions, our health, our involvement in the church, and our other responsibilities, the Lord is not pleased. So don't think that this is a call to spend an hour every day in the pro-life cause. Each person needs to evaluate his own schedule. There needs to be a balance. And the order of priorities is God, your family, your church, and then your society. But the point is, if we have never done anything about the Pro-life movement, then we have clearly violated Proverbs 24:11. Verse 12 says that God will hold *each* person accountable for their pro-life stance – **will He not render to *each* man according to his deeds.** There is a law against non-involvement.

II. There Is A God Who Is Against Non-Involvement

But it's not just a law that you can file in your cabinet and store away. This law is accompanied by a God who is against non-involvement and He makes very clear that He is not about to be filed away. Look at verse 12: **If you say, "Surely we did not know this," Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it?** There is a multitude of ways that people can rationalize their non-involvement. Now it may be that a person does not know about abortion, or that a person does not have adequate time, or does not have the health, or does not have the freedom. But God knows if your excuses are legitimate or illegitimate.

Now that can be an encouragement too. God, knowing your situation may be very pleased with your minimal involvement even when other proliferators are trying to make you feel guilty. It is before God that your conscience stands, not before Pastor Kayser. So some of you may find this a relief.

But to the rest of you, I want to remind you that the God who holds your soul is asking you today, "What have you personally done to stop abortion?" This is a holocaust! 20% or more of all babies have been slaughter every year. We cannot just ignore this.

What did you do personally when you received the letter about the weeping and pleading cries of my people in Nepal and Saudi Arabia and Malaysia? Did you have a good reason to pitch that letter in the trash? Could you not have offered up at least a one-minute prayer?" When we say that we do not have time to write a short letter that may save the life of the Christian being tortured, God looks at the hours you sit in front of your TV's and His face turns against you. Day by day we need to be a people who is in fellowship with God, and non-involvement brings us out of fellowship. He's offended by it. When you say, "I can't get up early enough to sound a protest of the murder of babies," God looks at the times that you get up at four in the morning to go skiing, or to go camping and His face turns against you. He's not saying, "You can't go camping." He's not saying, "You can't watch T.V." He's saying, "Don't use those excuses with Me. I know all about your time. I know all about your ability to get up. I know all about your energy level. And what is good for your pleasure ought to be good enough for obedience too."

The God who blesses and curses; the God who wrote Deuteronomy 28; the God who is with you moment by moment; the God to whom the blood of the land cries out for vengeance hates non-involvement. I think there is so much more that we could do on some level of fulfilling this verse than many in our churches have done.

III. There Is A Providence That Is Against Non-Involvement

Finally, verse 12 indicates that there is a Providence against non-involvement. In other words, God doesn't just hate our non-involvement. He does something about it. Verse 12 goes on to say, **And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?** The mess that America is in today is partly because of the church's non-involvement. It has been a pietistic church that has escaped from culture and dominion. The church bailed out of culture and the humanists filled the gap. Well, that is a judgment from God's hand. It is God's will for humanists to dominate us when we refuse to be light and salt. Matthew 5 says that when the church stops being salt in society that the church is not even fit for the dung heap. It is only fit to be cast out and trampled under foot of men. This means that humanists rule and Christians have to take it. That's exactly what has happened. God has rendered to us what we deserve.

Turn to Ezekiel 20:24-25. This is a passage that indicates that the American church has only itself to blame for the mess in America. God promises that when we fail to follow His law we will become the tail instead

of the head. When we fail to promote His laws in the land we will become subject to laws that are unjust. And it grieves me that Reformed people have been just as guilty in our generation of ditching the case laws of Deuteronomy. Ezekiel 20:24-25. You may want to underline these words: **because they had not executed My judgments** [Those would be the case laws of Deuteronomy], **but had despised My statutes** [Those would be specifically state laws that God gave. And just as Christians today despise God's civil law, they did too. He goes on...], **profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers' idols. Therefore I also gave them up to statutes that were not good, and judgments by which they could not live...** "I gave them up to those terrible laws," is what God is saying. Tyrannical laws are part of God's providence. The wicked statutes that are cropping up around our nation have come because of the church's neglect. Years ago you probably read how the pedophile in Nebraska had his case thrown out by the US Supreme Court because some words of Scripture were quoted during the court case. Well, those kinds of cases have been accelerating in the years since. Our nation is fast becoming not just a post-Christian nation, but an anti-Christian nation. There are faithful men in government who are trying to do something about it. But they are lonely because not many citizens support them. Frequently Christians take the attitude that such candidates are not electable. Instead of electing good men, these Christians seek to elect the lesser of two evils. We deserve what we have been getting. Ezekiel 20 says that when we reject the cultural and civil laws of the Old Testament, God will make sure that we taste the bitter fruits of humanistic culture and humanistic civil statutes. That is a providence that is against us. Don't be part of the problem in these upcoming elections. Think Biblically.

Back in Proverbs 24 I want you to notice that it is not just a culture as a whole that has God's providence against it; it's not just the church as a whole. In this passage, the emphasis on each man. The last phrase of Proverbs 24:12 says, **And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?** There is a providence against our own lives individually when we neglect our duties. The Lord knows how to mess up our finances, our health, our training. According to Deuteronomy, He knows how to bring mildew into our building and keep the bread from rising. His providence is constantly very active in each of our lives. And we need to get used to thinking of the good and the bad things that are happening to us in the light of Deuteronomy 28. Now, I should hasten to say that not all bad things that happen to us are because of a discipline. But this passage says that uninvolved will receive negative results from God's hand. It is not

enough that my wife is involved. The question is, am I involved myself? Are you part of the process? The Lord will hold each man accountable. And God is faithful in rendering to believers an afflicting Providence when we ignore His Word. The New Testament repeats this concept several times. It is the law of the harvest. You reap what you sow.

We've seen that we all need to be involved in social issues and in preserving the lives of people. Let me repeat some of the ways that we can do that: We can be engaged in writing, praying, protesting, appealing, supporting ministries that can protect and stand up for rights, spreading the news about such organizations, lending books and videos, telling neighbors about abortion, voting appropriately, instructing magistrates that you have access to, giving out literature, picketing, training in self-defense, informing others about their jury duties, and many other ways. God only expects you to do what you have been called to do and what you have the gifts and the abilities to do. But all must do something.

IV. Excuses we give (vv. 10,11,12)

But the immediate responses that we might get are summed up in these verses as well. In verse 10 it says, **If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.** The first reason we quit is that we are opposed – we have had a day of adversity. We tend to get discouraged when we get resisted. Year after year of faithful witness at the abortion clinic has not produced much effect. It has produced some. We've had a 25% drop in abortions, and that is nothing to sneeze at. Vital Signs and other faithful workers have closed down two clinics in Nebraska and stopped one hospital from performing abortions. And so there has been some effect. But when people get discouraged, they are tempted to think that we should put our time and energy into more productive efforts. But God still calls us to deliver those who are drawn toward death. Can you think of a more direct way of doing that than standing at the very place of execution? I am so thankful for our members who go there. We've got a great representation. Our church has a designated Saturday once a month when we are supposed to be present. In other words Vital Signs Ministries has spread the responsibilities among the churches. There are many Saturdays when only one, two or three are there, and they are the same faithful ones. So perhaps the Lord is calling you to that ministry. One commentary on this verse said that exceptional strain is a fair test of a man's mettle. Difficulties are fair tests of a man's mettle. What kind of mettle do we have? Our perseverance in such a task shows mettle.

So hopeless conditions are no excuse (verse 10)

Avoidable responsibility is no excuse (verse 11)'

And ignorance is no excuse (verse 12). **If you say, “Surely we did not know this,”** realize that God examines the heart. It is ultimately before the Lord that we will all stand. And if there is something specific that you believe God has called you to do to help those being drawn to death, then I rejoice. We are not all called to do it in the same way. But I want you to come away from this place with a specific plan of action. What will I do to help the helpless in this and in other countries? Perhaps it will be to instruct my children in the rights of jurors to judge the law. Perhaps it will be to talk to my elected officials. Perhaps it will be to run for office. How can I stand up for life when life is being trashed? May God help us to have less and less unintentional sins of omission and may He make us us more deliberate in crying out on behalf of the helpless. May we be a church known for its stand for life. Amen.

Children of God, I charge you to stand for life and seek to rescue those drawn toward death. Stand up for the helpless and ask God to cleanse the land of all that cries for judgment. Amen.