

The Least of These: Unborn Babies

Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church

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Tuesday is the 40th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in this country, making it a mother's right to terminate a pregnancy. The title of the sermon this morning is *The Least of These: Unborn Babies*. Last week I focused on the atrocities of modern-day slavery. This week we'll take a look at abortion. I want to say at the very outset that whatever your opinion is on this issue, whatever your past is, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has application to your life. And I hope you will hear me out on this. If you are pro-choice, if you have had an abortion, if you are a man who has supported and encouraged a woman in having an abortion, I want you to hear this morning what God's Word says about life, and also about forgiveness, about healing, and about new life in Jesus Christ.

I know this is a very heated topic in our culture, and understandably so. It is certainly a topic we need to consider and discuss. Over the 40 years since the *Roe v. Wade* decision, approximately 50 million abortions have taken place. That's 50 million babies whose lives have been taken. The youngest, the most helpless, as they begin their lives within the safety of their mother's womb—their lives have been cut short even before birth.

Let me read you a series of quotes from a prominent voice in America today, and then I'll tell you who this individual is.

“These are our kids. . . . And so what we should be thinking about is our responsibility to care for them, and shield them from harm, and give them the tools they need to grow up and do everything that they're capable of doing . . . This is our first task as a society, keeping our children safe. This is how we will be judged. . . . [W]hile there is no law or set of laws that can prevent every senseless act of violence completely, no piece of legislation that will prevent every tragedy, every act of evil, if there is even one thing we can do to reduce this violence, if there is even one life that can be saved, then we've got an obligation to try.”

“This is the land of the free, and it always will be. As Americans, we are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights that no man or government can take away from us. But we've also long recognized, as our Founders recognized, that with rights come responsibilities. Along with our freedom to live our lives as we will comes an obligation to allow others to do the same. We don't

live in isolation. We live in a society, a government of, and by, and for the people. We are responsible for each other.”

“[W]hen it comes to protecting the most vulnerable among us, we must act now. [For those] in big cities and small towns who fall victim to senseless violence each and every day. For all the Americans who are counting on us to keep them safe from harm. Let’s do the right thing. Let’s do the right thing for them, and for this country that we love so much.”¹

Those are the words of President Obama, which he shared at press conferences following the school shooting in Newtown, CT, and as he has been speaking about the need to change our gun laws. I’m glad that our president has this kind of compassion toward children, and it certainly is heartbreaking anytime there is senseless evil like this. What is sadly ironic and tragically inconsistent is that this compassion toward the children of America is apparently not felt toward children in the womb. This is an inconsistency that is widespread in our society. Many claim to care deeply for the lives of children, the weak, the vulnerable. But when it comes to the most vulnerable, the tiny baby in the womb, that life somehow falls into a different category.

What I want to do this morning is walk us through a couple of biblical passages that show us how precious human life is in God’s eyes. God has created us in His image. There is a unique sanctity to human life that sets us apart from the rest of creation. And when we recognize human life as a precious gift from God, we must recognize that it includes all human life, from the point of conception all the way to natural death. There is a God who has created life, and has commanded us to have a high level of respect for life. We are not God, and it’s not up to us to arbitrarily determine who is worthy of continuing to live, and who is not.

I read a story this week about a couple, Daniel and Crystal, who lost two babies to the same genetic abnormality. In each case, the amniocentesis indicated that this severe abnormality was present, which was incompatible with life. Abortion was recommended. But in both pregnancies, the couple persevered. They confessed that they had an abortion years earlier during their dating relationship, and they grieved over that decision. They would not entertain that option again.

Additionally, they had friends who had aborted a baby based on the same report from doctors, only later to find out the

¹ From transcripts of President Obama’s comments following the Newtown, CT school shooting.

amniocentesis was wrong. Their friends had aborted a healthy baby boy.

For Daniel and Crystal, however, the reports were accurate. Each baby girl died shortly after birth. But as they share their story, and as some ask them why they put themselves through the pain, why they didn't just end the pregnancy, Daniel answers, "That's not our call to make. God is the only one who can decide who lives and who dies. And besides, I'm proud to talk about our girls."²

Daniel makes a great point about life. God is the One who decides, not us. This respect for human life, and God's creation of human life, takes us back to the first chapter of the Bible.

Made in the Image of God

Genesis 1:26-27, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

What does it mean that we, as human beings, male and female, are created in the image of God? I think it's very evident from Genesis 1 that humankind is a special and unique piece of God's creation. We are distinct from the animals. No other part of creation was made in God's image, after God's likeness. So the fact that we bear God's image is something special about us that sets us apart from the monkeys. As wonderful as monkeys are, and even though they may have some superficial similarities to humans, we are entirely distinct because of this fact that we are created in God's image.

We are like God in many ways. Not identical, of course. God is in a category of His own. But God made us to resemble Him in many ways. In Genesis 5:3 the same two words are used: likeness and image. It says, "When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth." Seth was not identical to his father. They didn't share all the same characteristics. But they were alike in many ways. And that is what God is saying about His creation of mankind. He chose to make us with many of the same attributes that He has.

For instance, we are spiritual beings. Each of us has a soul as well as a body, and our souls will live forever. We are rational

² WORLD magazine, "Grace and Faith," Jan 26, 2013, pages 48-50.

beings. We can think abstractly and use reason and logic in ways that animals cannot. We are creative, modeling God's creativity. We cannot create out of nothing, like He can. But humans can produce amazing works of art and build beautiful buildings and invent useful tools and machines—many things animals are incapable of doing. We are also moral beings. We have a moral conscience which gives us a sense of what is right and wrong. We are personal and relational, modeling the fellowship within the Trinity, which I think is alluded to when God says in verse 26, "Let *us* make man in *our* image after *our* likeness."

In all these ways we are like God, and distinct from the rest of creation. We are uniquely made to reflect God's character and to rule over God's universe. God made us like Him so that we would represent Him and mirror forth His glory in this world, and also so that we would be His stewards of His creation. Do you see that in verse 26, "And let them have dominion . . ." Then in verse 28, "God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" We were created to be kings and queens over creation.

This story which starts so beautifully takes a very sad turn in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve fell into sin, and all these ways in which we were created in God's image were severely affected by the Fall. Physically, mentally, spiritual, morally, we are thoroughly corrupted by sin. We continue to bear the image of God, but it is tainted. Sin hinders us from mirroring forth God's glory as we ought. And it hinders us from ruling over creation as we ought. Much has been lost.

Yet God has a plan for regaining what was lost. He sent His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to earth as the perfect display of God's image, "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature," (Heb 1:3). Jesus is God-in-flesh, and He lived a holy, perfect, God-glorifying life. He showed us what it means to truly and completely bear God's image. Jesus Christ is the image of God, and it's only in Him that we have any hope of regaining the fullness of God's image in our lives.

As an unbeliever, a person still bears the mark of God's image. Even with the perversions of sin, it's still evident that we are all made in God's image. But when God saves a person, he or she will begin to be conformed more and more into Christ's likeness. 2 Corinthians 3:18, speaking of believers, says, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same *image* from one degree of glory to

another.” We will become increasingly like Christ as we are sanctified.

Still, that process will not be completed until Christ returns. 1 John 3:2 says, “when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

So we were originally created in God’s image. That image was severely distorted in the Fall. Jesus Christ came to perfectly display God’s image, and those who trust in Him will gradually be conformed more and more into that image, still imperfectly in this life, then perfectly in the life to come. We see the Gospel in this. Even though our sin has done much damage, there is hope in Jesus Christ. And that gives us a brief overview of the Bible’s teaching on the significance of our being created in the image of God.

Now let’s talk about what this implies. The fact that every human being is made in the image of God means that we are all equal before God—equal in value, worth, dignity. Human beings are the pinnacle of God’s creation. We are distinct from the rest of creation. And we are equal as bearers of God’s image. No matter what age or gender or skin color or intelligence level or financial status, we all have equal worth and value in God’s eyes. This should transform the way we view one another. There should be no favoritism or sexism or racism among us. We should treat every person with respect and honor and kindness, because they are a human being created in the image of God.

This is where we observe a troubling parallel between those who supported legalized slavery in our country and those who today support legalized abortion. Both arguments are based on the premise that certain human beings are sub-human. Certain human beings, based on skin color or stage of development early in life, are not worthy of the same rights that other human beings have.

Political science professor Hadley Arkes points out how Abraham Lincoln “asked slave owners, why are you justified in making a slave of the black men? Is it because he is less intelligent than you? Ah, beware! The next white man who comes along, more intelligent than you, might enslave you. Is it because he is darker? Ah, beware again. The next white man who comes along with a complexion even lighter than yours may enslave you.” Professor Arkes shows that similar arguments can be made about unborn babies. Are these babies considered less than human because they can’t speak yet? Well, there plenty of people in the world who are deaf or mute. Is it because the baby doesn’t have fully developed arms and legs? Again, there are plenty of people in the world who are missing limbs, but that doesn’t call into

question their personhood.³ These superficial differences cannot legitimately be used to say that certain people can be taken advantage of—whether that’s African-Americans who were legally enslaved in this country for so many years, or unborn babies who are legally killed in this country today. Those are unjust laws.

The truth that we are all made in the image of God should cause us to stand against injustices that are done toward the weak and powerless. Abortion is wrong, because the unborn baby has value and worth as a bearer of God’s image. Euthanasia is wrong, because every person, no matter how weak or ill, still bears God’s image. Slavery is wrong, because a person made in God’s image must not be treated as a piece of property. All forms of abuse are wrong, whether it’s toward children, or spouse, or co-worker, or classmate. We need to respect one another, and treat all persons with dignity. We are NOT animals. We are beings created in God’s image.

Children Are a Blessing

Another thing we need to see from God’s perspective is that children are a blessing. Psalm 127:3-5 says, “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!” Children are truly a blessing from the Lord. Our society often misses that. We, too, are prone to missing this. It’s easy to view children as a hindrance to our freedom, a burden, a headache. A pregnancy may not be exciting news. It may be overwhelming news, depressing news, if you feel like you just can’t handle the responsibility of a child. Or, if you already have kids, and you feel like you can’t handle the responsibility of yet another child.

Even when parenting is hard, which it is, even when we feel overwhelmed, we can affirm God’s goodness in blessing us with children. About 3 and a half years ago Stacy and I found out that we were expecting another baby. We didn’t feel ready for another baby. Our hands were full with the 3 we have, who were at that time 6, 4, and 13 months. Stacy was preaching to herself Psalm 127, “children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward.” She didn’t feel that way, but she was praying that God would help her to feel that way. We didn’t share this news immediately with others, because it was quite a shock to us and we wanted to wait until we could share the news with joy. And, gradually, that happened. God gave us an authentic excitement about this new baby. We told our kids, and they got

³³³ WORLD, “Debate like Lincoln,” Jan 26, 2013, page 39.

excited, too. We told you all, our church family, and you rejoiced with us. But it was just a week after we shared this happy news with the church (some of you will remember this), that we lost the baby. Based on the ultrasounds, there were some concerns about the development of the baby. On Friday of that week, we heard the heart beating. On Saturday the baby died.

Stacy and I wept together. Then we tried to figure out how to explain this to our young children. We told them the sad news, and then we asked them to draw a picture or write a note for the baby. Milaina wrote how she wished the baby didn't die, that she was so sad and she wished Mommy wasn't so sad. Noah drew what he imagined the baby would look like. Then he told Stacy, "I drew some silly things too to make you laugh- a circus and an elephant." That's the wonderful empathy of a 4 year old.

That night we had a little funeral service for that baby, which Milaina and Noah still remember. I read Psalm 139, "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." (Psalm 139:13–16, ESV) Stacy read a prayer from the Valley of Vision. We hugged each other. And as we walked away on that warm September evening, Stacy said, "It's like burying a dream." And it was. We didn't know this child like we know our other children. In many ways, his or her life was like a dream. The things we had hoped and dreamed for this child had just been buried in the ground.

Just a couple weeks ago, we shared our news with you that we are pregnant again! I have some ultrasound pictures here of our baby at 8 weeks old. The images are not real clear, but clear enough for the technician to label the head and the body. In our pregnancy book there's an illustration of a baby at 9 weeks, which is where we're at now, and the fingers and toes and eyes are clearly forming. The baby is still very small—the book says the crown-to-rump length is almost an inch, or the size of a medium green olive (which is not very flattering comparison, but these books like to make such comparisons; week 10 the size of small plum, week 11 a large lime, and then a peach, a softball, etc.—somebody had a lot of fun with this). Our daughter, Annalyse (4), has been curious to know when the baby's ears develop to be able to hear us talking.

And we've assured Annalyse that when the baby is born he or she is going to recognize her voice right away.

The point I want to make, which is very personal to us, is the fact that this is a life in the womb. For someone to tell us that this is just a piece of tissue would sound utterly absurd. And this is why 90% of women who see an ultrasound of their baby do not go through with an abortion. It would take a lot of deception and voluntary blindness to hear a beating heart and see the form of a tiny person, and still claim that you have the right to end that life.

When we were talking as a family the other night about the miscarriage, and asking the kids what they remembered about that, Noah said, "I hope that doesn't happen to this baby." And, of course, we told him that we feel exactly the same way. We are praying for this baby. We love this baby, even though we don't even know yet whether it's a boy or a girl. This baby is a precious gift from the Lord.

As believers, we should look for ways to show the value of life. We should seek to challenge people in our society with the reality that all humans are made in God's image and therefore precious in His sight. Human life should be precious in our sight as well.

When we think about abortion in our country, our prayers and our involvement cannot be merely with the aim that abortion becomes illegal. Abortion *should* be illegal, because it is ending innocent life. But the legality of it cannot be our only or even our main concern.

Think about it. Even if abortion became illegal today, there would still be hundreds of thousands of unwanted pregnancies. This is far more than a political battle. We need to pray that God will show people the beauty and the sanctity of human life, even when the pregnancy is a surprise, even when the pregnancy comes at an inconvenient time, even if the pregnancy is truly a crisis in the woman's life. The child in the womb is still a human being.

Some encouraging things are happening in our country. There are now more crisis pregnancy centers in the U.S. than abortion clinics.⁴ That's a positive sign. And that's something we can pray for and support—like the pregnancy resource center we'll have a chance to hear from at our meeting next month. These

⁴ <http://www.albertmohler.com/2013/01/07/losing-ever-since-roe-time-sounds-the-siren-for-abortion-rights/>

centers offer very practical and powerful help to women in crisis pregnancies, showing them an ultrasound of their baby, and showing them that abortion is not their only option (even if many people are trying to persuade them to abort).

God's Mercy for Sinners

I want to close by talking about God's mercy for sinners. It's very likely that some of the women here today have had abortions. One in three women in America have an abortion by the age of 45. It's also very likely that some of the men here today have pressured or encouraged a woman to have an abortion—your girlfriend, your wife, your daughter. Maybe some of you have worked in the abortion industry. So I know that there may be many here who are feeling guilty about past mistakes, past sins. It *is* necessary for you to acknowledge your guilt, but I also want to show you the path of God's mercy that will lead you beyond that.

I found something very helpful this week—it's a personal liturgy of confession, which David Powlison, a biblical counselor, put together using an old prayer of confession.⁵ And he does this specifically geared toward a person dealing with the shame, guilt, and regret of an abortion. He walks the reader through this Gospel-centered prayer, suggesting various ways to personalize the prayer and voice very specific items of confession, and then clinging to the promises of God concerning forgiveness.

“Almighty and most merciful Father, I have erred and strayed from your ways like a lost sheep, in my abortion, in my immorality, in caving in to the pressure of others, in living my life willfully, in living for convenience, in not wanting to interrupt my education, my career or my job, . . . in simply being overwhelmed with fear and confusion . . . I have erred and strayed.” Other items of confession follow. Then the prayer turns to a plea for mercy. “But you, O Lord, have mercy upon me, miserable offender. Spare me, O God, I who confess my faults. Restore me when I turn to you according to your promises that you have declared to me in Christ Jesus, my Lord.”

This is a good place for us to conclude this morning, because this is the place each and every one of needs to come to. Whether or not you have committed the sin of aborting a baby, or in some way encouraging that happen. If you have been selfish, lustful, greedy, spiteful, gossiping, slanderous, etc. We all need to bow before our Maker and confess our many sins. And then,

⁵ [http://www.ccef.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Personal%20liturgy%20v6-09%20\(3\).pdf](http://www.ccef.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Personal%20liturgy%20v6-09%20(3).pdf)

praise be to God, we can plead for His mercy because of what Christ did for us on the cross. There is forgiveness. There is mercy. There is grace that not only removes our guilt but also brings healing and new life.

Let's be a Gospel community that repents and believes, and that prays for the most vulnerable among us as well as praying for and showing mercy to those who would do them harm. For such is the glorious message of the Gospel.