

# PROTECT HUMAN LIFE

Since God values every life He creates, we are to value and protect human life.

Our culture has become a dangerous place where human life holds decreasing value. The morning headlines confront us with cases of murder, abuse, torture, and other crimes against fellow human beings. In the world today, human life seemingly has little worth. For all too many people, if another person stands as an obstacle to fulfilling one's desires, that obstacle is viewed as something to be eliminated by any means possible. Selfishness and egotism have replaced responsibility and community.

Our culture's attitude as a whole stands in stark contrast to biblical teachings about the value of human life. Is the life of the poor youth from the other side of town less important than the life of someone from our community? Is the life of the elderly person in the nursing home less valuable than the newborn baby we bring home from the hospital? Is the life of the unborn child in the womb of less worth than the lifestyle of the mother who is carrying that child?

The sin of selfishness has invaded our homes and even our churches. Cultures change, and what is acceptable in a society changes along with the culture. What God holds as right or sinful, however, does not change. No society has ever prospered while trying to hit a moving moral target. Moral constants must be present, or society itself will eventually crumble.

What values should we maintain as Christians in a world where values seem to change constantly? The answer must take into account God's purpose from the beginning of creation. After all, no one knows the purpose of creation better than the Creator. What is mankind? What is humanity's purpose? Until our culture's answers to those questions is based on God's teachings from the Scripture, our society will continue on its downward slippery slope.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

This session on the sanctity of human life comes out of four important contexts—the Scriptures, the family, the church, and the world. First, as the perfect treasure of divine instruction, the Scriptures provide clear direction regarding the sanctity of human life. Second, God created the family as the first and basic place for human community. He gave the family the primary responsibility for nurturing children, helping them learn of Him and find their purpose in Him. Thus, any culture that disregards the sanctity of human life, in effect, launches an attack on the family. Third, the church is the body of Christ in the world. As such, the church is to shine the light of the Lord's truth regarding life's value into the world's darkness. The final context out of which this study arises is the world. The widespread presence in our world of horrendous sins including abortion, murder, genocide, terrorism, abuse and child sex-trafficking, along with a multitude of other sins reveals that human life is consistently devalued.

This Context section will focus specifically on the Scripture passages on which this session is based. The flood narrative of Genesis 6–8 included God's judgment because of the widespread wickedness on the earth. God judged humanity with the flood, yet at the same time He extended grace. The sin of humanity that began in the garden of Eden had mushroomed until “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and . . . every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5, ESV). At this point God allowed the inevitable consequences of sin to fall on rebellious humanity. The flood served as God's instrument of wrath. In the midst of the judgment, however, God showed grace and favor to Noah, a man who walked with God (6:8-9). The account of the flood ended in Genesis 8 with Noah, his family, and the animals leaving the ark. God promised life would continue with cycles of “seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night” (8:22). God established His covenant with Noah and his descendants, promising that the earth would not again be destroyed by the waters of a flood (9:11). He established the rainbow as the sign of that covenant and promise.

For Noah and his family, life continued in a manner similar to life before the flood, but the world had changed. When God created human beings, He commanded them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (1:28). After the flood, that command was repeated (9:1). God also made a statement regarding the fundamental sinfulness of humanity (8:21). The flood, although judging the sin of that generation, did not solve the basic issue of sin for humanity. To deal with the sin issue, God would ultimately send His Son to die on behalf of sinful humanity. For Noah and his descendants, God noted the continuance of the sin problem. Sin would continue even in its horrendous

expression as murder (9:5-6). Human life is precious, and God warned of the consequences of shedding human blood.

Psalms 8 also affirms the sanctity of human life. Within the Book of the Psalms, the various psalms can be categorized as different types. Some psalms are laments that plead for God's forgiveness (see Ps. 51), while other psalms offer thanksgiving to God (see Ps. 32). Still other psalms are hymns of praise that extol God's character and His gracious acts toward humanity. Psalm 8 is a hymn of praise. In Psalm 8, David praised God because of His creation, but especially, because of His love for and interaction with human beings. The God who created the totality of the far-flung universe also cares intimately for each individual person. Human beings are the pinnacle of God's creation. They have a capacity for a relationship to God that no other creature possesses. God has placed people in the role of stewards over creation. They are responsible to serve God faithfully in that role.

Verses 10-12 of Proverbs 24 warn against failure to take positive action at a critical time. Particularly these verses command rescuing "those being taken off to death" (Prov. 24:11). Presumably these individuals have been wrongfully condemned to death. James stated, "So it is a sin for the person who knows to do what is good and doesn't do it" (Jas. 4:17). God warns His people against the sin of complacency.

In his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul admonished Christians to exhibit godly character in their daily walk. The apostle urged Christians to model their attitude and behavior after that of Christ, the supreme Example (Phil. 2:5). Jesus, although coequal with God (2:6), humbled himself to become a servant (2:7), and became obedient even to the point of death on a cross (2:8). The Philippian Christians, and believers today as well, were to "work out" (2:12) the salvation God had freely given. Obedient living is evidence of the changed heart that Christ brings.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### PART OF OUR PURPOSE (Gen. 9:1-7)

#### VERSE 1

**God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."**

The depravity of humanity and the resulting pervasive sinfulness had prompted God to send floodwaters upon the earth. Of all the families of the earth, only Noah and his family were spared. Immediately after the

small group of human beings exited the ark to begin their lives anew, God **blessed** them. The word *bless* in the Bible appears both with human beings as the recipients of blessing and with God as the One being blessed. When blessings are toward people, the recipients receive the benefits. When God is the recipient of blessing (for example, Ps. 16:7; “bless” in KJV, ESV; “praise” in NIV, HCSB), the intended meaning is “to praise.” In Genesis 9:1 God endowed Noah and his family with blessings or benefits.

The blessing of God entailed the command: **“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”** This statement echoes the initial command of God to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28. In both contexts (1:28 and 9:1), the charge is preceded by the notation: **God blessed** them. Blessing would result from obedience to God’s command. In Scripture, children are clearly viewed as a blessing from God (see Ps. 127:3). Therefore they are to be treasured from the moment of conception.

The blessing in this context relates to the command to be fruitful and multiply. Obedience to God in any context brings blessing although we must be careful not to conceive of blessing merely in terms of material things. Spiritual blessing is the fruit of following God’s plan for our lives. Joy arises from obedience. God created us to have a relationship with Him through faith in Christ. That relationship is available to us by God’s grace through faith. We are then to live out that relationship in an obedient walk with God (Eph. 2:8-10). Disobedience and rebellion, however, cause us to miss God’s blessings.

## EXPLORE FURTHER

Is your life characterized by obedience to God? How might you be missing God’s blessing through disobedience in some area of your life?

Human beings were to *be fruitful*. They were to produce offspring as part of God’s plan. Often this verb appears in conjunction with the verb to *multiply* (Gen. 1:28; 8:17; 9:7; 28:3; 35:11). God desired for humanity to *fill the earth*. Although not stated in this passage, the institutions of marriage and family were the vehicles through which the command was to be obeyed. Marriage and family are basic institutions ordained by God to provide stability to society, the framework for intimate companionship, the means for procreation of the human race, and a place for the nurture and training of children in the ways of God. Any society that ignores these basic institutions as God established them will ultimately reap the disintegration of society that such disregard brings.

## VERSE 2

**The fear and terror of you will be in every living creature on the earth, every bird of the sky, every creature that crawls on the ground, and all the fish of the sea. They are placed under your authority.**

The blessing God originally stated in Genesis 1:28 reappears in this context with the blessing of Noah and his family (see 9:1). Sin, however, had taken its toll on the earth. Noah and his descendants would rule over a creation characterized by **the fear and terror** of the animal world toward humanity. Before the flood the animals had come to Noah (see Gen. 6:20, HCSB; Gen. 7:9, NIV). The basic relationship between humanity and the animal kingdom had been altered by humanity's sin.

The changed relationship between humanity and the animals illustrates the effects of sin. Sin always divides and destroys; it never unites. Sin separates human beings from God. It also divides people from one another, and it separates people from the creation God had placed under the stewardship of Adam and Eve.

Noah and his descendants maintained the original responsibility given to Adam to be stewards of God's creation and to subdue the earth. God reminded Noah that creation remained under his authority. The Hebrew phrase rendered **placed under your authority** could also be translated "they have been given into your hand." The term "your" in the Hebrew text is plural; thus, the authority was given not only to Noah but also to his descendants. In Hebrew thought "to be given into someone's hand" meant to be placed under that person's authority. The stewardship of humanity over creation was to continue.

## VERSE 3

**Every living creature will be food for you; as I gave the green plants, I have given you everything.**

Another change in the relationship of human beings to the created order after the flood concerned diet. In the narrative of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, their diet consisted of green plants (1:29-30). Beginning with Noah, animals could be eaten. Specifically for Noah, **every living creature** could be used for food. No restrictions were stated. Later, the Lord would give the Israelites dietary restrictions regarding the eating of meat (see Lev. 11:1-47).

God specifically noted that just as He had given green plants earlier, from this point forward He gave everything as food. No meat was permitted as food until this point in time.

#### VERSE 4

**However, you must not eat meat with its lifeblood in it.**

Meat became part of people's diet, but an important principle appeared in connection with the animal's life. The **lifeblood** could not be eaten. The phrase **meat with its lifeblood in it** is a good interpretation of the Hebrew words that literally read, "flesh, with its life, its blood." This verse is difficult to translate from the original Hebrew. Despite the difficulties of how best to translate the meaning into English, the overall intent of the verse is clear. The blood represented the life of the creature (Lev. 17:14). Although the meat of the animal could be eaten, the life of the animal was still to be treated with respect.

The sacrificial system of Israel carried the recognition that the blood of the sacrificed animal represented life that was shed as a substitute for the worshiper. The Israelite laws later codified this prohibition against eating blood (Lev. 7:26-27). The prohibition was so important that in the New Testament era Gentile Christians were urged to avoid eating blood so as not to offend their Jewish brothers (Acts 15:19-20).

#### VERSE 5

**I will require the life of every animal and every man for your life and your blood. I will require the life of each man's brother for a man's life.**

While all life is to be respected, of supreme importance is human life. The expression translated **I will require** actually occurs three times in the original Hebrew (see Gen. 9:5, KJV), emphasizing that God demands an accounting when a human life is taken. The general rule was that when the life of a human being was taken, whether by animal or man, the offender's life was required. Every creature stands responsible for the life and blood of a human being. So sacred is human life that when it is taken by another person, that person must be held accountable.

#### VERSE 6

**Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His image.**

The principle stated in the previous verse is repeated in this verse. The life of human beings must not be viewed as expendable. The words **sheds man's blood** imply premeditated murder. The penalty for such disregard of human life was proportionate to the crime. The expected outcome was that death should come to the murderer. In Romans 13:1-5 Paul wrote that God gave

human government the authority and the responsibility to bring about His justice. Individuals have no right to take this judgment into their own hands. Later God gave Israel specific restrictions that govern how society, particularly the blood avenger in the case of a family member's death, was to respond to the homicide (see Ex. 21:12-14; Deut. 19). In Genesis 9, capital punishment is assumed because human life is that precious.

The reason for human life being viewed as sacred derives from the creation account itself. **God made man in His image.** Human beings share a likeness with God that is not shared by other creatures. What is distinctive about human beings in contrast to the animal world? Over the centuries Bible scholars have offered varying answers to that question (see Gen. 1:27). Is it people's mental and spiritual capacities to relate to God? That surely is part of the answer. In the context of Genesis 1:27, the image of God in humans also is associated with people's stewardship over creation. In the context of Genesis 9:6 the authority of humanity over creation is also noted (see 9:2). Thus the contexts in which the reference to humanity's being created in the image of God appear, imply that human beings' role as stewards of creation is an important aspect of the meaning.

Regardless of whatever aspects the image of God in human beings may encompass, Noah and his descendants still possessed that attribute after the fall and the flood. The image of God is still firmly imprinted on humanity. Human life remains sacred because it is created in the image of God.

## VERSE 7

**But you, be fruitful and multiply; spread out over the earth and multiply on it."**

The command to **be fruitful and multiply** is echoed again (see 1:28). God's purpose for human beings was, and is, that they rule over creation under the lordship of God. In order to thrive, however, human life must be protected from the unbridled evil that pervaded the world prior to the flood.

## VALUED IN HIS CREATION (Ps. 8:4-8)

### VERSE 4

**what is man that You remember him, the son of man that You look after him?**

In Psalm 8, a hymn of praise, David magnified God for His greatness as evidenced in creation. When in awe the psalmist viewed humanity against the backdrop of creation, the question immediately came to mind, **"What is man that You remember him?"** People appear weak and insignificant in

contrast to the vastness of space. Why would God set His attention on mere human beings? The answer lies in God's purpose. David recognized God's greatness, and was amazed that He cared about human beings.

#### VERSE 5

**You made him little less than God and crowned him with glory and honor.**

Human beings were created a **little less than God**. The Hebrew word rendered *God* in this verse is *'Elohim* [EL oh heem]. The inspired writer of the Book of Hebrews quoted this verse in Hebrews 2:7, where humanity is depicted as a little lower than the angels. Most often the Hebrew word designated God. However, in some contexts, the term could also indicate "heavenly beings," or "angels." The translators of the Septuagint [sep TOO uh jint], a major Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, translated *'Elohim* into Greek as "angels." The writer of the Book of Hebrews quoted from this Greek translation. In any case the overall intent of the passage is clear. Humanity, though neither God nor angels, was created in the image of God. As such, human beings are **crowned . . . with glory and honor**.

#### VERSE 6

**You made him lord over the works of Your hands; You put everything under his feet:**

This verse echoes the Genesis account of creation. Humanity was given dominion over creation as stewards. Even the sinfulness of Noah's generation as well as that of countless generations who have lived and died since that time could not erase God's image. Thus, the value and worth of human life remains.

#### VERSES 7-8

**all the sheep and oxen, as well as the animals in the wild, the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea that pass through the currents of the seas.**

Verse 6 noted the dominion of human beings over "everything." Verses 7-8 elaborate on what that means. **Sheep and oxen** represented domesticated animals. The wild animals also came under humanity's authority, as well as the birds and fish. The responsibility of a steward is to use the owner's property in a faithful manner so that the value of that property does not diminish, but rather increase. How might you as a Christian take more seriously your responsibility of being a good steward of God's creation?



In summary, the psalmist declared his amazement with God's created order, identifying humanity as the crowning point of that creation. The writer of Hebrews viewed Psalm 8 as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ, linking salvation and creation (see Heb. 2:9).

## **CALLED TO ACTION** (Prov. 24:10-12; Phil. 2:12-16a)

### **PROVERBS 24, VERSE 10**

**If you do nothing in a difficult time, your strength is limited.**

The overall purpose of the Book of Proverbs is to provide insight into how people should behave in light of their responsibility toward the Creator. One of the principles in the book relates to a person's inaction during a **difficult** or critical time. The verse doesn't specify a particular difficult time. Therefore we can apply it in a variety of situations. The phrase translated **if you do nothing** carries the idea of "being lazy" or "being slack." We live in a difficult or critical time because our culture increasingly devalues human life. As believers we must not be slack. Instead we must take positive action to uphold the value of human life. Failure to act results in a loss of moral high ground.

### **VERSE 11**

**Rescue those being taken off to death, and save those stumbling toward slaughter.**

Part of our responsibility as Christians relates to rescuing persons who are threatened with harm. Old Testament prophets voiced similar commands as they spoke against the mistreatment of individuals who had no defenders in society (see Amos 2:6-7). Christlike love should compel us today to speak out when vulnerable members of our society—including unborn babies—are at risk.

### **VERSE 12**

**If you say, "But we didn't know about this," won't He who weighs hearts consider it? Won't He who protects your life know? Won't He repay a person according to his work?**

In a difficult situation, the temptation is to remain inactive while claiming ignorance: **"We didn't know about this."** However, God does not allow such an easy escape from a moral decision. Failure to act when people are wrongfully treated is sin (see Jas. 4:17). This verse reminds us that the Lord truly knows our hearts, and He will judge us accordingly.

## PHILIPPIANS 2, VERSE 12

**So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**

As part of their obedience to God, the Philippian Christians were to **work out** their salvation. Paul clearly did not mean that a person can earn salvation. Salvation comes only by grace through faith in Christ (see Eph. 2:8-9). However, genuine salvation exhibits good works as evidence that a change has occurred. Such good works arise in part from proper **fear** or reverence of God.

## VERSE 13

**For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to desire and to work out His good purpose.**

Paul explained his statement in verse 12 by noting that God was working in believers' lives to bring to fruition His purpose for them. God's work in us provides both the motivation and the ability to accomplish His purpose.

## VERSES 14-15

**Do everything without grumbling and arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world.**

Obedience to God, without complaining, leads to a good testimony. We are to shine like stars, showing an unmistakable contrast between the light of Christ and the darkness of the world (Matt. 5:15-16). The changed lives of Christians provide the most convincing evidence for the claims of Christ.

## VERSE 16a

**Hold firmly to the message of life.**

In the context of Philippians, this admonition related to **the message of the life** found in Christ. However, it also can apply to the sanctity of human life. Human beings are created in the image of God and for His purpose. We are not to live out the always changing norms of culture. Rather, we must live out the unchanging principles of Scripture. We are responsible for valuing and protecting human life. How might God be calling you to demonstrate the value He places on people in a culture that increasingly devalues human life? Are you receiving your "marching orders" from God or from culture?