



## The Imago Dei & Sanctity of Life Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #3

Genesis 1:26-31

David Sunday

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We believe that everything God has revealed about His truth is designed to set us free. We want to know the truth, so that we can walk in the freedom that God has for His people. If the Word comes as a sword in order to cut, it does that to heal us. God never opens us up just to leave us wounded. He only opens us up to take out that which is destroying us and to heal us. Let's trust that God has good in store for us as we talk about the sanctity of human life.

We are addressing this subject along with many churches in our country today because we can't forget that 42 years ago this week, on January 22, 1973, our Supreme Court issued its decision in Roe v. Wade. That decision, along with its companion decision, Doe v. Bolton, gave women the right to abort their babies at virtually any point in their pregnancy. Since 1973, over 57 million abortions have taken place in the United States.

If you have driven through Chicagoland from northwest Indiana up to southeastern Wisconsin—this whole, vast metropolitan area—and then out through the western suburbs toward Rockford, you know that you can drive and drive and drive. There are 9.6 million people in greater Chicagoland. This is the third largest metropolitan area in the United States. Take the Chicago metropolitan area and multiply that by about six—that is the number of lives that have been eliminated through abortion in our country in 42 years.

For the church to act like God's Word has nothing to say about this is a scandalous oversight. How we talk about this matters a great deal. Again, I emphasize that I do not come to you because I want to pound on a political subject. It is easy to say, "We don't want to talk about this in the church. It is controversial, divisive and a source of secret and silent shame for millions of people, including friends who are here today." So we say this doesn't belong in the church and shouldn't be addressed from the pulpit. This is a political issue; it's not a gospel issue.

Even if we are convinced it is a gospel issue and that abortions are wrong, we just hold up our hands and say, “Nothing is going to change. Abortions have been taking place throughout the history of the world. Nothing we say or do is going to change it.” We get weary of talking about this subject and fighting this battle. I have to admit that, year after year, as I have stood to speak and pray about this issue on Sanctity of Life Sundays, it is a battle. It’s a battle because I don’t want to talk about it either. I don’t want to be misunderstood. I don’t want to be a voice of condemnation. I wish it weren’t necessary. But I’m persuaded that I and other Bible preachers, who are Christ’s shepherds of His church, must talk about this issue that is painful and polarizing.

### **Why Satan Doesn’t Want Us to Talk about the Sanctity of Life**

I am convinced that I must call us, as God’s Word says, to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). There is someone who doesn’t want us to think about the sanctity of life. There is someone who doesn’t want us to talk about abortion even more than we don’t want to think about it. There is someone who doesn’t want the shepherds of Christ’s church to talk about this issue more than we don’t want to talk about it. I’m talking about Satan.

We have sung about him in our songs. He is our cruel enemy. We prayed about the fact that this is a spiritual warfare. Satan does not want the church to think about the sanctity of human life and abortion for a number of reasons.

First, all human life is created in the image of God and Satan hates to see God’s image multiplied in this world. Please open your Bible to Genesis 1. These famous words trace the theology of what this means. The sanctity of life is a huge implication—an undeniable, unavoidable implication of the doctrine of the image of God.

Genesis 1:26-28 says:

*<sup>26</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

*<sup>28</sup> And 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.”*

So God created human beings in His image. This is what distinguishes us from all the other creatures that God made. This is what differentiates us from the animal kingdom. We are in the image of God. Theologian Carl Henry captures what it means to be created in the image of God with this statement: “Humanity is made for personal and endless fellowship with God, involving rational understanding, moral obedience and religious communion. Humanity is given dominion over the animals and charged to subdue the earth, i.e. to consecrate it to spiritual service of God and humankind.” That’s what’s involved in being created in the image of God.

If you weren’t able to hear last week’s sermon, I’d encourage you to go back and either read the transcript or listen to it because we unfold the theology of that more fully than I’m going to here.

God’s design for human beings is that we would reflect God’s glory in the world and that we would represent His rule in the world. Those are two of the results of being created in the image of God. We should reflect the glory of God and we should represent God’s rule in the world.

It is like the king of a vast domain. In order for him to represent his rule in far off parts of his realm where he could not be physically present, he would set up images, or statues, of himself, so as to say, “This is my domain. This is my realm. I rule here.” In the same way, God has placed humanity in His creation as a representation of His rule.

We are God’s vice-regents. We are princes and princesses of His royal dominion, and Satan hates that so he endeavors to snuff out the very beginnings of human life. We see him doing this throughout the Scripture story. At times, Satan rose up and endeavored to snuff out a vast swath of humanity, like when Moses was born (Exodus 1-2)..

Jesus said this about Satan in John 8:44: *“He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”* Satan tells us lies about life in the womb, including the following:

- Because this life is so tiny, it’s not fully human.
- Because this life is not fully developed yet, it does not have any rights.
- Because this life resides within the body of another, it is not a distinct human being.

- Because this life is totally dependent on another for its survival, it is not worthy of protection.

Satan lies about the unborn because he knows that every unborn child is a masterpiece of God in the making. He knows that and he hates that. We know in our consciences that this is true. We know it.

Two years ago, Mary Elizabeth Williams wrote an essay on Salon.com that is chilling in its brazenness. She argued that human life does indeed begin at conception. Nevertheless, she said, women should have the right to end the lives of their unborn babies. She doesn't question the humanity of the unborn. She says that is a given. She simply unabashedly argues that some people's lives are more important than other people's lives.

Now, let me tell you some of her own words because these words have been applauded by many abortion rights supporters. These words have been promoted on many university campuses. These words have been all over the media; they shape the way we think if we do not take these arguments captive and make them obedient to Christ. These words will shape the way my son and daughters think about the sanctity of life if they do not learn how to bring these thoughts under the authority of God's Word.

Listen to what Mary Elizabeth Williams said. I don't want to speak these words with scorn and derision, but with love, compassion and longing that Mary will repent of these words and thoughts one day and find life in Christ. Williams says:

Here's the complicated reality in which we live: All life is not equal. ... Yet a fetus can be a human life without having the same rights as the woman in whose body it resides. She's the boss. Her life and what is right for her circumstances and her health should automatically trump the rights of the non-autonomous entity inside of her. Always.

Now what's being assumed is that the woman who is bearing a child is an autonomous, self-ruling entity. Listen to what she's going to say here because we who believe in the sanctity of life have been making this argument for a long time and she concedes the argument to us.

When we on the pro-choice side get cagey around the life question, it makes us illogically contradictory. I have friends who have referred to their abortions in terms of "scraping out a bunch of cells" and then a few years later were exultant over the pregnancies that they unhesitatingly described in terms of "the baby" and "this kid." I know women who have been relieved at their abortions and grieved over their miscarriages. Why can't we agree that how they felt about their pregnancies was vastly different, but that it's pretty silly to pretend that what was growing inside of them wasn't the same?

Fetuses aren't selective like that. They don't qualify as human life only if they're intended to be born.

We would say a hearty, "Yes, very true!"

When we try to act like a pregnancy doesn't involve human life, we wind up drawing stupid semantic lines in the sand: first trimester abortion vs. second trimester vs. late term, dancing around the issue, trying to decide if there's a single magic moment when a fetus becomes a person. Are you human only when you're born? Only when you're viable outside the womb? Are you less of a human life when you look like a tadpole than when you can suck on your thumb?...

How does Genesis 1 answer that question? You're human from the point of conception. God formed you in His image. He is creating a human being who is in His image in the womb and Williams is in full agreement with biblical Christianity on that point. She says this is a human being but her conclusion is radical and stark. She dismisses the relevance of the reality of human life in the womb, with the stroke of a pen. She goes on to say:

And I would put the life of a mother over the life of a fetus every single time—even if I still need to acknowledge my conviction that the fetus is indeed a life. A life worth sacrificing.

She is saying, "My way of life always trumps the other life." You can take that kind of reasoning and use it to justify genocide. You could use it to justify the most horrendous actions. This is evil unmasked. This is Satan's logic. This is what we become as images of God who rule and have dominion when we leave God out of the picture.

Satan aims to keep the image of God from multiplying in this world by causing us to become lovers of self rather than lovers of God. Satan causes us to forget that this is a stewardship issue, that we have been entrusted by God to reflect His glory. He turns us into people who worship our own images rather than reflecting the glory of God. In doing so, we become caricatures of the *imago dei*. We become grisly shadows of what God created us to be. Satan hates God's image. He doesn't want us to think about the sanctity of life.

A second reason Satan doesn't want us to think about the sanctity of life and abortion is because the way we treat the unborn is the foundation of civil rights for all humanity. That's a pretty vast claim that I am making, but I believe it is true. The way we treat the unborn is the foundation of all civil rights.

Now, I want to be very clear about something in this message. Being pro-life involves much more than just advocating for the rights of life for the unborn. It includes how we respect and care for the mothers of these children. It includes how we serve the poor, how we abhor racism, how we steward the environment and how we administer justice for the disenfranchised. It includes all of these things and more.

Sometimes people who are pro-choice argue that pro-life people are hypocritical because we only care about life in the womb, implying we do little or nothing to care for the lives of people who are suffering in the real world. You will hear that argument often. To whatever extent it is true, we need to repent, because being pro-life involves much more than just caring for the unborn.

However, I want to argue that it is equally hypocritical to advocate for justice for the poor, the vulnerable and the defenseless, then turn a blind eye to justice for unborn life in the womb. I want to argue that the foundation of all human rights starts with life in the womb. I have believed for many years that abortion is the fundamental, most-relevant, most-pressing civil rights issue of our day and our culture.

I read an article by Jared Wilson entitled “What Does Job 31:13-15 Tell Us about Abortion?” I’d like you to turn to that passage in your Bible. In Job 31:13-15, Job is giving his closing argument. As he is protesting his innocence, he is not suffering the way he is because of some gross sin in his life. He looks back on his life as a very wealthy man and reflects on how he treated his servants. He has a great high conscience about the importance of treating people justly.

Job says:

*If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant, when they brought a complaint against me, what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?*

Think about Job’s logic here for a minute. He is speaking of his life as a wealthy man, contending that he has always viewed his servants as equal in personhood to himself because they were equal in their status as unborn children in the womb. We have a common origin. We were made by the hand of God, fashioned in the wombs of our mothers, therefore, Job says, “I have a duty to treat my servants with dignity and respect.” It goes all the way back to life as preborn children.

Job believes God will hold him accountable for how he deals with people who were fashioned by God's own hand in the wombs of their mothers. Thinking about going all the way back to the beginning of life, Job provides a compelling argument for justice and equity in his dealings with real people in his adult life. I want to argue that, if we are unwilling to respect and protect the rights of children in the womb, we may also find that we lack the resolve and consistency to respect and protect the rights of humanity throughout the world.

The womb ought to be the safest refuge for human life. The way we protect the human rights of those who are unborn sets the trajectory for how we will pursue human rights for all. John Calvin made a similar argument in the early 1500s:

The fetus carried in the mother's womb is already a man, already human. And it is quite unnatural that a life be destroyed of one who has not yet seen its enjoyment, for it seems more unworthy that a man be killed in his home rather than in his field, because, for each man, his home is his safest refuge. How much more abominable ought it to be considered to kill a fetus in the womb who has not yet been brought into the light?

It's worse to go into a man's own home and kill him than in the field, Calvin says, because he should be safe in his own home. Satan doesn't want us to think about this. If Satan can make us complacent about the rights of the unborn, he can also make us calloused about justice and civil rights for our neighbors and for humanity throughout the world. \*

Third, Satan does not want us to think about the sanctity of life and abortion because the more we think about the work of God in the womb, the more we will be moved to worship God in the world. Now, I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this because we have already done this throughout our worship service. Our call to worship was Psalm 139, where David marveled at the fact that God knew everything about him. When he sat, rose, went places—every way of his life, before a word was on his tongue—God knows everything. David traced all of this back to the work of God, knitting him together in his mother's womb. As he thought about the fact that God, in His mysterious, wise, kind and merciful providence embroidered him—knit him together as a human life—and breathed into him the breath of life in his mother's womb, David said, *"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well"* (verse 14).

If we do not think about the work of God in the womb, we have just taken away one of the chief reasons for praise and worship to God. We have done something in our thinking to mute the fact that we are not our own. We were made by God and thus, we owe Him our

worship and praise. When David reflected on this wonderful truth, he found an appropriate and healthy view of himself. As he reflected on God making him, he said to God, *“How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you”* (verses 17-18).

David pondered God’s work of forming him and it filled him with worship. It also filled him with a godly sense of self-worth. Those are two things that are lacking in our culture—worship of God and self-worth. People are searching for who they are and how they should view themselves. They are trying so hard to find a sense of dignity, worth and value. I argue that we cannot do that apart from knowing we belong to God and were created by Him. His thoughts toward us are precious and vast beyond number. The more you ponder that reality, the more you are filled with praise; peace and security. Satan doesn’t want us to have that in our lives. He doesn’t want us to think about the fact that God knit us in our mother’s wombs.

Fourth, Satan doesn’t want us to think about the sanctity of life and abortion because God has a plan for each individual life. We are not just a mass project that is generating itself, where God set things in motion and people are just popping off the assembly line. God individually creates each life. God has a purpose for each life. God has a purpose for the life in the womb. He has a plan—a purpose that Satan would like to thwart.

Look at the word God speaks in Jeremiah 1:5. God called Jeremiah to be His prophet, to be His spokesman to the nation. In Jeremiah 1:5, God undergirded His call to the prophet by saying these wonderful words: *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”*

If we are listening, we have now heard Job expressing the fact that God fashioned him in his mother’s womb. We have heard King David praise God for knitting him together in his mother’s womb. Now, we find God saying to Jeremiah, *“Even before I formed you in your mother’s womb, I knew you. I had a purpose for you even before I started to knit you together, Jeremiah.”*

God knows every human life that He forms and fashions, even before the point of conception. Indeed, it is only through this sovereign, creative, powerful, wise and merciful work of God that any of us have life. In a million years, we could not have created ourselves through conception and birth. It is beyond us.

Psalms 145:17 says, *“The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.”* If every human life that is conceived is a work of God, that means God has righteous ways and kind

purposes for that human life. If the Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His works, that means no human being is conceived apart from the righteous and kind purposes of God.

These are purposes Satan wants to thwart. He does not want us to think about the person God is creating and forming. He does not want us to have the conviction that there is a rock solid, objective, irreducible glory, significance, value and worth about that life.

I am going to read something to you that is startling. However, I believe it is poignant and moving. It is a poem entitled "How to Have an Abortion" was written by Bryce Taylor and was published two years ago in the journal, First Things:

Don't think about the freckles he, or she,  
Might have, or how much hair, how big a grin,  
Or whether swimming would come naturally,  
Or whether "it" might play the violin.

Don't think of prom, don't think of puppy love  
Or calculus, or snow, or spring in bloom,  
Or anything that might remind you of  
The future now contained within a womb.

Don't feel anxiety, don't feel regret,  
Don't fret about some otherworldly guilt.  
Don't feel the bond of parenthood, don't let  
Insane outmoded Don Quixotes tilt

At private windmills, don't spill any ink  
Examining yourself. Don't feel. Don't think.

That is how to have an abortion. Don't think. Don't think that this is a life created by God with kind purposes in mind. Satan does not want us to think about that. There is only one time Satan wants us to think about abortion: after you have had one. It is after you have participated in this sin that he wants you to think about it. He wants to torment you and make you suffer in silent, secret shame.

At that time there is a collision in the intersection of failure and shame, when your life has been totaled by sin, when you have taken a beautiful work of art and shattered it. That is when Satan wants you to think about what you have done. That is when he whispers sinister sneers like this: "There is no one who would accept you after what you have done. There is no one who can forgive you. There is no one who can cleanse you of this guilt." Satan is a thief, a murderer and a liar; he comes to steal, kill and destroy.

Let me tell you the testimony of someone I know, love and respect. She wrote this out for me and gave me permission to share it with you. She did this so that you would have hope.

She did this to help other young ladies like herself. She was 15 years old when she found out that she was pregnant after a date rape. She said that, even at the age of 15 and not yet a Christian, she knew that abortion was destroying a human life. However, she felt that there were absolutely no other options. She felt it was ultimately her fault that she allowed herself to be put in this spot. So she rode a bus all alone at the age of 15 to a clinic and had an abortion without anyone ever knowing what she was doing. She was 15 years old and all alone.

Here were some of her thoughts as she rode that bus; thoughts that are difficult to articulate even today, many years later. She felt that she had to do it, as no one would ever marry her if she had this child. She thought there was no way anyone would ever know what she had done. She was hoping the child would be given back to her at a later date. And she honestly thought that her dad would kill her if he ever found out about any of this.

As Satan whispered these lies into her ear, he also had her convinced that, once this was done, it would be in the past and she would never think about it again. What a lie that was! For years, she tried to suppress her guilt and shame. Satan continues to use the guilt of abortion, as he does with any other sin, long after it is done. It was not until she was married and pregnant that she started to think about it and deal with what had happened many years earlier. When she heard the good news that Jesus Christ died for her sin and rose from the dead to give her new life, the Holy Spirit enabled her to believe that good news and receive Christ. That was when she said, "I know I am forgiven." The shame was gone; the guilt was removed. She rests and rejoices in that knowledge today, decades later.

### **Why the Gospel Gives Us Hope**

I tell you this testimony to encourage each of us to embrace the gospel when it comes to the sanctity of life. Embrace the gospel, both for its forgiveness and for its empowerment to show compassion and grace in our culture. The gospel offers you hope. Abortion says, "Your life for mine." The gospel says, "My life for yours."

Jesus Christ stepped into our humanity. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. He became an embryo—a fetus—in the womb of the Virgin Mary. He lived a holy life that we have failed to live. He died on the cross for our sins. He rose from the dead. This is the gospel. Jesus entered into every aspect of our humanity, so that He could redeem us from every aspect of the Fall.

I want you to hear this today if you are struggling with guilt and shame: there is more mercy in Christ than there is sin in you. On our church's blog, we are publishing a personal

liturgy of confession (to read it, [click here](#)). This was written by David Powlison, a counselor with Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation. He walks through the example of a woman who has had an abortion, including all that led up to that choice and all that follows in someone whose conscience is alive. We hope this will be a means of grace and healing for some of you. It is a way to put into practice the call to repentance from Hosea 14:1-2, which says, *“Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for your sins have brought you down. Bring your confessions, and return to the Lord. Say to him, ‘Forgive all our sins and graciously receive us, so that we may offer you our praises’”* (New Living Translation).

God promises He will do that. I proclaim grace, mercy and peace to you today in the name of Jesus. On the authority of God’s Word, I say to you Isaiah 55:7: *“Let them turn to the Lord that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously”* (New Living Translation). That is God’s promise to all who turn to Him.

As one of your shepherds, I call us as a church to be a people who know that you have been forgiven much, so that you will be a people who love much. Each of us has a role to play in cultivating a culture of life. None of us should play the role of the one who pounds his fist in condemnation on those who are guilty. Instead, let us pray that God will so move in our hearts that we would be a people of grace, mercy and peace. May each of us know what it is that we need to do to support and sustain a culture of life.

There is a young couple in our church right now who is preparing to adopt a child right now whose mother was planning to have an abortion a few months ago. Maybe some of us need to come alongside and help them. There are others who serve in Crisis Pregnancy Centers; maybe you can donate money to help support the good work being done in these Crisis Pregnancy Centers in our communities. Whatever we do, let’s make sure we don’t do nothing. Let’s make sure we are not just hearers of the Word, but doers also (James 1:22).

Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, we are going to sing these words and as we do, we pray that You would form their reality into our lives:

Confirm our will to do the right,  
And keep our hearts from envy’s blight;  
Let faith her eager fires renew,  
And hate the false, and love the true.

(O Splendor of God’s Glory Bright by Ambrose/Wareham, 1738)

Lord, let us take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. Lord, we pray that we would fight this battle, not in the flesh, but with the gospel that sets us free. We rise to

give You thanks, our great Creator, that, though we have fallen short of Your glory through sin, You have sent Your Son to lift our humanity to the heights of Your throne, restoring the glory, dignity, worth and value that sin forfeited. We thank You that Jesus makes all things new and we worship You. Amen.

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.*

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