

**Sermon for Sunday, January 15, 2012**  
**Dr. Dan Doriani**  
**Life in the Balance**  
**Psalm 139**

*Psa. 139:13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. (14) I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (15) My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, (16) your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*

### **1. Perspectives on life - Of horses and humans**

In the 1930s, horse-racing was America's favorite spectator sport. Thousands came to the races and millions listened to them. In the world of horse-racing, people dedicated their lives to animals. They bred and fed them, trained them and timed them, jeered them and cheered them. Sadly, that culture's respect for animal life did not extend to the jockeys who rode the horses. They had to stay light; 110 pounds was ideal. They lived in a constant state of malnutrition and dehydration. Injury rates were high, medical care was poor and there was no insurance. Jockeys rode horses, at nearly fifty miles an hour, with broken bones in their hands and feet. One man rode for weeks after a horse fell on him, causing multiple internal injuries. When he finally collapsed in a hospital, he was fired that day. Horses were treated better than people. This inversion of values is not unique to a past horse-racing culture. There are worse cases of moral blindness. As a culture, we often treat unborn babies far worse than we treated our jockeys.

It has been several years since I have addressed this topic. I know it is painful to some, I know some disagree with me. That's inevitable because it's widely debated in our day. But I believe God's word sheds light for all of us.

### **Of gladiators and Christians<sup>1</sup>**

Sadly, the pattern of disregard for human life is very old. In the Roman Empire the gladiatorial games featured professional fighters, drawn from the ranks of slaves, criminals and prisoners of war. Friends were forced to fight each other to stay alive. The games started in 250 B.C. as public entertainment. The masses loved them. Emperors wasted fortunes on them. Gladiators fought wild animals and fought other men, to the death. The games featured up to 100 pairs of combatants per day – 100 deaths, 100 murders, for public amusement. Thousands of warriors died each year. This continued for 700 years, till 450 A.D.

Christian leaders protested from the start. New converts vowed not to attend the games. The discipline for attendance was excommunication. Sadly, a few Christians argued that it was OK to watch the gladiators. They said Scripture never condemns them, that Paul compared the Christian life to Olympic games and to warfare. Today the situation is similar. Some Christians believe that abortion is a possible solution to a problem pregnancy.

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, 2:338-43, 3:122-61

At first, the church could merely protest the gladiatorial games. Eventually Christian emperors ruled and had the power to outlaw the games. But change came slowly. Shortly after his apparent conversion in 312, Emperor Constantine condemned some defeated barbarians to combat with wild predators. By 325 B.C., he considered himself a Christian leader, but he merely outlawed the bloodshed during times of peace.<sup>2</sup> So despite the Christians in Rome, the games continued, with a few limits.

It isn't always easy to find moral clarity. Today, America is viewed as the most Christian Western nation. Yet our faith seems to have little effect on social morals. Gambling is everywhere, ruining countless families. Our divorces are near the highest in the world. Each year, about 4.1 million babies are born and about 1.2 million are aborted. Yet rates vary greatly from state to state. New York is 37-38 percent. The upper Midwest has states with rates about six percent.

## 2. The Biblical witness affirms life

The Bible never directly addresses abortion. No verse says, "You shall not get an abortion." But the Bible constantly affirms life in every way, including the life of unborn children. There is no law against abortion because, from a biblical perspective, abortion was unthinkable.

There are certain commands parents don't give their children. When a mother leaves her older children over the lunch hour, she may say, "Don't eat the cake, it's for supper." She doesn't say, "Don't eat the Tupperware; I need it for leftovers." To eat Tupperware is *unthinkable*. Similarly, abortion was unthinkable in Israel. No law forbade abortion because no one would think of it. Here is why.

First, children are a blessing from God. "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward" (Ps 127:1). When a woman is pregnant, the news is received with joy, songs and thanksgiving. Pregnancy is never seen as a problem in Scripture. Barrenness or childlessness is a tragedy. To abort a child would be to invite a curse and a disgrace. The Bible doesn't forbid abortion because everyone wanted their children. God is the author of life. We are stewards of the gift of life. Who would destroy God's gifts?

Second, The Bible views unborn children as people.

- In Psalm 139:13-16, David says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb... your eyes saw my unformed body." God knew and loved David while he was in his mother's womb.
- Lord told Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5).
- In Luke 1:44, when Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, met Mary, the mother of Jesus, Elizabeth said, "The child in my womb leaped for joy." Scripture calls John the Baptist a child before his birth.
- If God knows little ones before their birth, then they are living humans.

Third, the Bible grants legal protection to the unborn. Exodus: "If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman" there are penalties. If there is premature birth, but no harm, there is a fine. "But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth..." (Ex 21:22-25). So the law protects the unborn.

---

<sup>2</sup> (Schaff 2:338-43).

## And some secular people disagree

For God's people, abortion wasn't simply wrong, it was absurd, almost unthinkable. The church may not always agree today. Opinions differ. Long ago, a few Christians thought the games were OK and many pagans protested them. Today, lots of secular people oppose abortion and some believers think it's a woman's choice. Let's spend a moment exploring some reasons:

Today, over 50% of all women who terminate a pregnancy are already mothers (and most are unmarried). When polled they say they're afraid they won't be able to care for another child. It's a practical reason.

Princeton professor of ethics Peter Singer thinks we should make decisions through the question: What causes pain and pleasure? Happiness or misery? He believes an unborn baby is clearly a living human. But, "We should recognize that the fact that a being is human, and alive, does not in itself tell us whether it is wrong to take that being's life? What is so special about the fact that a life in human?" Over many pages, in several books, Singer says there is nothing special about being human.

Decisions about abortion should weigh the preferences of a woman against the preferences of the fetus. But for eighteen weeks, he says, a fetus cannot even feel pain or satisfaction, so it can't have any preferences. There is nothing to weigh against a woman's preferences, therefore she can do what she pleases. But there is more.

Singer says, "There is no sharp distinction between the fetus and the newborn baby." Newborns lack the essential traits of a person: "rationality, autonomy, and self-consciousness".<sup>3</sup> Therefore it's permissible to kill a newborn baby if, for example, it has birth defects that will cause pain to mother and child. The newborn has no capacity to desire to live, therefore...

But let's distinguish: Some people have opinions; others are involved. Every pregnant woman is involved. Ideally, she is thankful for her unborn child. She cares for herself and prepares for the child's birth. She prays for her child, even in the womb. But some pregnant women are frightened, conflicted, confused. We need to foster a atmosphere where we are free to talk to friends, mentors, pastors and helpers. The talk of winning hearts and minds is not rhetoric. The abortion rate in Missouri was twenty to twenty-one percent in the 1980s. Today it is eight percent. We can forge consensus.

Some of us are involved in a different way. Some of us had a role in a past abortion. Perhaps you had an abortion. Perhaps you abandoned a woman who carried your child. Or you pressured someone to have an abortion. It may be a faded memory; it may be an open wound. I have two words for you:

First, Jesus forgives every sin, every sin, if we repent, believe, and ask his grace. Perhaps you have a spot on your hands. You are trying to atone for a past decision by being the best parent today. Hear me: That's impossible. You can't atone for past sins. Only God can. He offers forgiveness freely. He is not interested in our penance. He doesn't want us to pay for past mistakes. Jesus paid for our mistakes. He bore our punishment. If you trust him, you are free from guilt because of the work of Christ, not because of work you perform. If you've sought God's mercy, but you still feel troubled, we can help you find a conversation partner.

---

<sup>3</sup> Practical Ethics, 1993

### 3. The Gospel gives life

Many life-affirming groups advocate legal and political solutions to the plight of the unborn: "If we elect pro-life politicians and they appoint pro-life judges, we will bring abortion to a halt." The political process is important. All Christians should be good citizens, which includes staying informed, voting and more. But this issue is not essentially political. It is not an issue for one party or another.

Barry Goldwater, Republican presidential nominee in 1964, was pro-choice on libertarian grounds: He believed in personal choice and privacy. Democrats believe in protecting the rights of the weak, who cannot speak for themselves, so they should, logically, affirm life and protect the unborn. Of course, each party has an alignment on this issue. But the parties could easily flip.

It's not a political issue, it's a human issue. Everyone should promote justice and life for all, especially the weakest of the weak – unborn children, the aged, the infirm, those who cannot speak for themselves. Besides politicians follow the people at least as much as they lead. We care best for the unborn when we capture the moral imagination, when we win hearts and minds to the biblical world view.

The Lord captures our imagination through the gospel. The gospel says God cares for the weak and that he gave his Son for them – for us. Romans 5:6-8 says, "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man — though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

The gospel shows us God's character. He rescues the weak, the defenseless. He could cast us aside as useless and troublesome. But he rescued us from death and gives us life. The great Rescuer has saved us from death. He called us. He gives us ears to hear his call. We answered. Now by faith we are united to him. It is our destiny to become more like him. Because he rescued us and gave us life, we want to rescue and give life to others.

This is the way the world works. We slowly become like the people with whom we spend the most time. Parents and children have the same mannerisms. Husband and wife slowly come to look alike as they mirror each other's smiles and frowns. That's true with the Lord, too.

#### **We pass it on: God is life-giving, life-affirming.**

He rescues the weak, the hopeless, the defenseless and if we are united to this Lord, by faith, we will become life-giving and life-affirming. The character of God, demonstrated in his action in the gospel, is the foundation of all life-affirming ministries.

#### **Winning the moral imagination**

Around 400 A.D. a monk named Telemachus felt God compelling him to travel to Rome to preach against the city's corruptions, especially against the games pitting a man against another man. He preached on a street corner but no one paid attention. Then came a day for the games. As the crowds bounded to the amphitheater, Telemachus decided to join them. Telemachus saw and was horrified. He leapt into arena and shouted to two combatants to cease their bloody contest.

There are two accounts of what happened next. One says the combatants briefly stopped fighting each other, killed him, and then resumed their battle. The second says the crowd picked up loose stones from the crumbling coliseum and used them to stone him to death. Either way, his protest *seemed* to fail.

But the story of his protest spread. It strengthened those who opposed the games. In God's providence, the empire was crumbling. It was growing harder for governors to sponsor the contests. By 450 A.D., they essentially ceased.

We wish we could say the games ended as soon as Christianity became the empire's favored religion, around 310 A.D. Christianity enjoyed official favor, but the masses didn't accept it. Telemachus loved God, so he saw the games as God did. In his day, most people simply saw a spectacle. It took a long time, but eventually the world saw the games as a crime and an abomination.

The Christian protest against the games was part of the life-affirming character of the early church. People noticed how Christians cared for the poor. A pagan said: "How the Christians love one another." Early Christians loved another group: unwanted infants that were "exposed," left to die, by their parents. At that time, abortion was rare. Instead, people deposited unwanted children in town dumps. Parents hoped someone *might* pick them up. This wasn't adoption. These infants typically became slaves, often as prostitutes. But Christians tried to claim them first, to spare them. So the first Christians affirmed life.

Psalm 119:25 says, "Give me discernment that I may understand your statutes." Paul prays for believers "that your love may abound... in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may... discern what is best..." (Phil 1:9-10). With abortion, insight is essential. We see a human life, unborn and defenseless. The Bible says we should defend the weak and we apply it to unborn babies.

Advocates of abortion rights see abortion as a medical "procedure." Their slogan: Every child should be a wanted child. They say: most women who seek an abortion are unmarried. The child would be a burden. Almost ninety percent occur in the first three months. They see abortion as the removal of a cluster of cells, the "product of conception." They don't see a human – unless the parents choose to see one.

#### **4. The Lord gives discernment**

At a high point in his life, Solomon prayed, "Give your servant a discerning heart" (1 Kgs 3:9). May God give us discernment to see the unborn as He does.

When someone considers abortion, they're often in agony. The father, who had recently talked of marriage, is half-way out the door. A poor family learns of a child just as Mom or Dad loses a job. A sixteen year-old is pregnant. A forty year-old couple with two high school children learns their baby has Down's syndrome.

So often there is heartache in the woman who considers abortion. Perhaps a man is pushing her "to take care of the problem." Friends and family may be hinting that they will not be there for her. She may have no church; if she does, she may be afraid to tell anyone.

How can we help this woman do what is right? We must see the situation as God does. We must support women when they make the right decision. But first we have to make the right choice attractive. Jesus told a story that does that.

## In the parable of the Good Samaritan<sup>4</sup>

When someone says, "Shall I keep this baby?" she may mean "Will I be happier if I keep this baby? I'm frightened and confused, but I still feel something for this child." Or she may mean "Do I have a responsibility? Is this actually my child? Do I owe her anything? Is she a person, whom I should love? Or is this an alien cluster of cells in my body?" Jesus told a story about that.

One day a legal expert asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asked, "What do you think?" The expert replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" and, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:25-27).

"Correct. Good answer. Do this and you will live" (10:28). But the lawyer knew that will prove difficult, so he asks, "Who is my neighbor?" He means: If I can narrow the category of "neighbor" so that a relatively small group of people, maybe I can love them enough to gain life. If only a few count as 'neighbor,' then maybe he can love them, and gain God's favor and eternal life. If he can define some people as "non-neighbor," it might be possible. So Jesus answers the question "Who is my neighbor?" A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

The priest and Levite both decided, "This man is a stranger, not a neighbor." They had their reasons. Thieves stole the clothes that might reveal his identity. He is unconscious, hence speechless, so that neither his language nor his accent can reveal if he is Jew or Gentile. They didn't know, so they decided not to act.

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.

The Samaritan saw the same thing: A man in need. Samaritans were few in number and lived miles from Jericho; it's very unlikely that the man was his neighbor. But the Samaritan became a neighbor to the beaten man.

The story says we must not ask, "Who is my neighbor and who is not?" Rather, we should become neighbor and render aid to the helpless, whenever paths cross. The parable gives us Jesus' perspective on crisis pregnancies. If someone asks, "Is this cluster of cells a person?" they're asking the wrong question. The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" so he could define people away: "This is my neighbor, that's not my neighbor." Jesus says: "Don't ask. Become a neighbor."

But he didn't just reject it in the story! In real life, Jesus played the role of Good Samaritan. When sin beat us up and left us more than half dead, he became our neighbor. He owed us nothing. We aren't his friends or neighbors, but he became our neighbor. Jesus is the Good Samaritan because he walked our road and stopped to help us when we were robbed, stripped, beaten and left for dead. We ought to become

---

<sup>4</sup> (Hays, Moral Vision, 451-55)

neighbors, as the Good Samaritan did, because Jesus did so for us. That's what motivates us to protect the lives of the weak.

In abortion a mother says the unborn child is "Not my neighbor." But both the child and the mother are *our* neighbors, so we should help them however we can. How? First, if God called himself our neighbor, let's do the same for others.

Second, let's offer personal help to anyone we know who faces a problem pregnancy. We can listen or talk, give things or take our friend to an agency that offers clothes, strollers, medical care, and child care.

Third, let's not just jump in to help in the crisis. The church can promote a biblical view of sexuality and marriage that prevents problem pregnancies.

The church takes comprehensive interest in justice for the weak. We offer relief to the needy. We oppose unjust wars. We oppose the practice of heaping debts on the next generation. And we protect the life of the unborn. Then, if there is a problem pregnancy, people won't even ask, "What shall I do?" Our minds are already made up to go to the church, where they will find help.

So Christian, let us be convinced. May the Lord send his Spirit to illumine our minds. May abortion become as unthinkable as slavery or gladiatorial shows or treating horses better than people. So we plead for the truth of Christ.

Follow the way of Christ. Paul said we should "live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us" (Eph 5:2). As Jesus became our neighbor and rescuer, may we become neighbors and rescuers to many.