Chapter 2

The Sanctity of Human Life

“So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

**Genesis 1:26–27**

**The Learner Will:**
1. Describe what the sanctity of human life means.
2. Explain why human life is valuable.
3. Learn about the sanctity of human life and the pre-born.
4. Understand the consequences of the rejection of the sanctity of human life.
5. Understand why we must respond the rejection of the sanctity of human life.

**Key Points**

- Mankind is unique among all creation because men and women are made in the image of God.
- All human life is of equal worth and immeasurable value from conception to natural death, because man is made in the image of God.
- The rejection of the sanctity of human life has ended the life of hundreds of millions of people and caused untold damage around the globe.
- We must value human life as God does, and choose to be life-giving in our views of and responses to other people, including the pre-born.

**Scripture References**

“Two things will be true of every human being you and I encounter: This is one who bears the image of God; and this is one for whom Christ died. These two truths mark human life as sacred, holy and precious.”

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The Bible teaches that when God created man, He created him in the image and likeness of God: “So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26–27). Every human life bears God’s handprint. This creates deep ramifications about how human beings are to be perceived and treated, a significant directive being that the penalty for murder is the death of the murderer (Genesis 9:6). The foundational principle of being created by God in His image is also the moral and practical foundation for the protection and defense of human life at all ages and stages. The phrase “sanctity of human life” means then that all human life is of equal worth and immeasurable value, from conception to natural death, because man is made in the image of God.

“The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). Man was given life by God, who breathed life directly into him; this is not true of any other living creation. The Hebrew word for breath (neshamah) is also found in Job 33:4 where it says, “the breath of the almighty gives me life.” Man is also set apart from animals due to our spiritual comprehension and because we have a conscience, both of which come directly from God.

“Made in the image of God” means that men and women are intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual beings that will never cease to exist; all of these attributes are reflections of characteristics possessed by God. Every virtuous character trait we possess also reflects God’s image: love, faithfulness, justice, righteousness, patience, kindness, humility, forgiveness, mercy, and grace.

The concept that all human life is sacred is rooted in the Bible, which is the Word of God. While the Bible speaks clearly about God’s sovereignty over all of His creation, it makes a special distinction for mankind—men and women—for we are the only beings created in the image of God. This distinction is not reserved only for followers of Christ, but extends to every member of the human race. It is this biblical truth that allows us to speak of the sanctity of all human life. Each of us is made with a purpose by God (Psalm 100:3, Psalm 139:13–16a), and He has a plan for our lives that begins at conception—the first moment of our existence (Jeremiah 1:4–5).
Are All Human Beings Equally Valuable?

It is important to understand that, while the sanctity of human life does begin in the womb, it extends throughout our entire lifetime, and that an act of violence against the infirm, the weak, the handicapped, or the elderly is just as much an affront to God as an act of violence against the child in the womb. The taking of innocent human life is such a great affront that God spoke about it specifically in the Ten Commandments: “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13 NKJV).

Our value to God remains the same no matter what differences there are among us in sex, age, skin color, ethnic background, religion, language, nationality, level of intelligence, social status and class, or other factors. Every human life is made in the image of God and therefore must be respected, treated with dignity, protected, preserved, nurtured, and developed—not disrespected, disregarded, devalued, cast aside, diminished, discarded, or killed.

Men and women both bear God’s image, so men and women are equal in dignity and worth. One is image of God male, the other is image of God female. “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). Men and women have different roles in the family, different levels of physical strength, and different ways of thinking and feeling about many things, but they are both image-bearers of God, and therefore of equivalent value. To treat a woman in any way as if she has less value than a man is disrespecting a person made in the image of God. Treating women as though they are somehow less valuable than men is a great problem in many countries. Christian men, especially in countries where men have most of the power and authority, should lead the way in demonstrating the proper treatment of women by treating their spouses and all other women as equals—that is, in a godly, respectful manner.

Why Is Human Life Sacred?

**Human life is sacred because God created man in His image.**

The Bible says, “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). This fact establishes the value God places on human beings and serves as the basis for the sanctity of human life.

**Human life is sacred because God declared mankind to be very good.**

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). This all-encompassing declaration of the goodness of God’s creation included the making of man.
Human life is sacred because God prohibits the taking of innocent human life.

The Sixth Commandment simply says, “You shall not murder.” By this command God prohibits the taking of human life, which strengthens the sanctity of human life.

Human life is sacred because God cherishes us and has a purpose for every moment of our lives.

“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” (Jeremiah 1:5).

Human life is sacred because God creates every life.

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 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, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:13–16)

The Sanctity of Human Life and the Preborn

It’s difficult to find any issue that has had a more harmful impact on the lives of individuals, families, and the community than the rejection of the sanctity of human life—and the parallel rejection of Biblical sexuality. While most societies have become complacent about the loss of human life through abortion, the devastation on our world due to the killing of innocent preborn children has become immeasurable: 42 million lives lost every year, countless more lives shattered, populations diminished, and societies undermined.

Because all human life is invaluable to God, we who follow Christ must commit ourselves to placing a high value on human life as well—primarily because our allegiance to Him demands it, but also because the world simply does not, and cannot be expected to, share God’s perspective. Many people and sometimes entire societies deny humanity to the preborn, deceiving themselves and others into believing that abortion is something less than murder. This deception is rooted in their deep spiritual blindness, for how much a person values human life is tied to how he views God, himself, and the world around him.

If a man believes that human life is the result of a series of random biological mutations, why would the life of a preborn child be of any worth? If a woman believes that she is the property of a man, and without him her life has no meaning, how can she be expected to highly value the life of her unborn child? An individual’s worldview—the sum of all of one’s viewpoints about life—is highly shaped by culture and family, and it will
affect how we interact with other human beings—including those yet in the womb. (See the next chapter, “The Biblical Christian Worldview,” for a deeper discussion on this subject.) When we don’t acknowledge the sacredness of human life, and revere its Creator, we are at risk of treating others—including the preborn—without the dignity and respect that they deserve as image-bearers of God.

**The Rejection of the Sanctity of Human Life**

The rejection of the sanctity of human life has led to the greatest loss of life in all of human history—from the taking of one life at a time to genocide’s systematic eradication of millions.

- Rwanda genocide (1994): 1,174,000 Tutsi and Hutu people
- Cambodia genocide (1975–1979): 2,000,000 Khmer people
- The Holocaust/Shoah (1933–1945): 13,000,000 Europeans, including 6,000,000 Jews
- The Stalin regime (1941–1953): 20,000,000 Soviets
- Global abortion: 42,000,000 unborn children every year

The rejection of the sanctity of human life has led societies, political leaders, and the common man into deeply destructive behaviors. Fathers will pay to end the lives of their unborn children. Couples will conceive a child in order to provide donor organs for their other born children. The cells of aborted babies, and living—but frozen—human embryos are being harvested for research in laboratories around the world. Unborn girls are being aborted solely because of their sex. In medically advanced nations babies are partially delivered, only to have their skulls forcibly opened, their brains removed, and their skulls collapsed. The elderly and terminally ill are being “humanely” euthanized, mostly with—but sometimes without—their consent.

Abortion, euthanasia, fetal experimentation, infanticide, prostitution, rape, sexual abuse, sex trafficking, slavery, and other offenses all have their roots in the loss of reverence for human life. The moral decay of our world is increasing, and offenses against our fellow man are growing in scale and in boldness. We are engaged in activities that were inconceivable mere generations ago, and we will no doubt soon encounter previously unthinkable evils until, and unless, a biblical theology of life is adopted by individuals, families, communities, societies, and nations.

**Why Must We Respond to the Worldwide Abortion Issue?**

Because God’s perspective regarding the preborn—that they are precious, valuable, and human—is not held worldwide, the lives of millions of children are ended before they’ve had a chance to experience God’s plans for their time on earth. Furthermore, the lives of millions of women and men—as well as all of those in relationship with them—are impacted
negatively by these abortions. As followers of Christ, we are required to act for many reasons.

1. **God calls us to be defenders of the defenseless.**

   God Himself is a defender of the widow and a father to the fatherless (Psalm 68:5). He exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth (Jeremiah 9:24), and He designed us, His image-bearers, to do the same. God expects His people to defend and care for those in need or those without a voice.

   Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

   Proverbs 31:8–9

2. **God tells us that faith without works is dead.**

   Since God is sovereign, no life is an accident. Since human life is sacred, every child is precious in His sight. We believe this, and so we must act, for the Bible tells us that faith without works is dead.

   What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

   James 2:14–17

3. **God gives us the ministry of reconciliation.**

   Christ’s love compels us to speak for those who cannot speak.

   All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

   2 Corinthians 5:18–19

4. **If we have the ability to save a life, we have the responsibility to save a life.**

   God holds human beings accountable for the lifeblood of their fellow human beings. The implication of not killing human life is that we are to nurture and preserve life, including human life developing in the womb.

   From each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.

   Genesis 9:5–6

**Conclusion**

When we wake every morning, we decide which side to be on: the life-giving side or the life-taking side. We reveal our choice through our language and actions, beginning with the first person we speak to and
proceeding throughout the rest of the day. When we speak with God, are
our words and actions life-giving? When we interact with our family
members, friends, co-workers, and enemies, do our words and actions
increase life or diminish life? Your spoken and unspoken message of life
and hope will be most effective when you treat all human beings—
including yourself—with the value, love, respect, and dignity given by God
to each and every person.

Review Questions

1. What unique feature sets human beings apart from the animal
   kingdom?
2. What are two reasons, supported by Scripture, that all human life
   is sacred?
3. How does Scripture support the mission of defending life in the
   womb?
4. What is the greatest holocaust perpetrated as a result of the loss of
   reverence for human life in the world?
5. What choice does each of us have to make every day when we
   wake?