



Biblical Ethos:

The Sanctity of Human Life

We believe that every human being possesses an equal and inherent worth simply because they were created by the same Lord, in His image, and for His glory. The sanctity of any and every human life is not dependent on any other qualification.

We therefore affirm, with our words and by our deeds that all human life is to be cherished, nurtured and protected without any discriminating qualification.

We also therefore oppose all ideologies and practices that deny the equal and inherent worth of all human life.

Biblical assumptions

1. God is the Creator of all life (Genesis 1). As the creator and source of all life, He alone has the authority and power to end any life.
2. Of all life that God has created, only human life is inherently sacred because only humans were made in God's image (Genesis 1:26).
3. In the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, God further emphasised the value of human life. In contrast, Satan and the demonic powers of hell have little regard for human life and have always sought to attack this dignity when it is at its most vulnerable (Pharaoh, Herod, Marie Stopes, etc.).
4. The sixth commandment in Exodus 20:13 ("you shall not murder") gives a direct commandment that forbids the killing of any human and an implied commandment and obligation to do the opposite of murder and preserve life.

As a result, we oppose the direct forms of disobedience to this commandment: abortion, euthanasia, murder. And we oppose the indirect forms of disobedience that do not value human life: oppression, racism, abuse, trafficking, etc.

Also, as a result of the sixth commandment we encourage the high regard for human life by promoting non-discrimination, equality, adoption and foster care, care for the poor, disabled and marginalised.

5. This is not only an Old Testament practice. Jesus gives us the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:35-39:

"Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

The principle of the sanctity of human life is the underlying foundation for how we are to relate to others, but our motivation for honouring life is to be based on our love for God and our desire to see Him honoured and glorified by all people (Nehemiah 9:5-6, Isaiah 42:5-9). We do not

want to be issue-driven, but rather driven by our love for the Creator who has the sole right to give and take human life.

6. In God's grand scheme of salvation, He cares so much for human life that He sent His only Son, as a human, to give His life as a ransom for all humans. He is unwilling that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9) but makes provision and gives instruction to His people that they should *"defend the poor and fatherless, do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked"* (Psalm 82:3-4).
7. Upholding the value of human life is a task of every believer, every family and every church. It is not an issue to be reserved for ethical debates and political wrangling. The sanctity of human life is a kingdom issue, and since the church is the embassy of the kingdom, it must have a firm stance and active voice God on the issue.

Listen to the words of Martin Luther King Jr. from a book published in 1962:

The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.

We must move beyond what someone has called "moral arousal" to genuine moral OUTRAGE, where we are willing to actually get our hands dirty and do something. The age in which we live is filled with moral arousal, but not so much with genuine moral outrage. To illustrate, consider these opening paragraphs from a recent article in *USA Today*:

Millennials (those born in the early 1980s) have a message for the next president.

Get serious about converting to renewable energy, the under-35 generation says by an overwhelming margin, and require every gun buyer to undergo a background check. They endorse putting body cameras on police officers and accepting refugees from war-torn countries such as Syria.

A USA TODAY/Rock the Vote Millennial Poll finds an emerging generation that is more pragmatic than ideological and not yet firmly aligned with either political party. Donald Trump leads the Republican field among millennials, and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders the Democratic one – especially among millennial women. Across partisan lines, millennials have reached a generational consensus on some of the major issues that have proved divisive for their elders.

What is less certain, the national survey shows, is whether they'll bother to vote in 2016, even in an election where they identify an agenda they call crucial.

Christians are to be salt and light in a corrupt and dark world while realising that their concern for the sanctity of human life is not merely addressing a social ill but rather it is something of eternal significance and importance.

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare **are** not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.*

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, "Surely we did not know this," does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?

Proverbs 24:11-12

Abortion

With specific regard to abortion:

1. We affirm that life begins at the moment of conception and anything that results in the cessation of the human life created at that conception is a violation of the sixth commandment (Psalm 51:5, Psalm 139:13-16).
2. We acknowledge that, in some cases, the circumstances of a pregnancy might be unexpected, unwanted, unwelcomed and even dangerous. However, none of these circumstances validates the deliberate and intentional ending of the pregnancy with the resultant loss of life of the developing human.
3. For these reasons we deny that abortion is just an issue of choice or the simple exercise of a woman's rights over her own body. We recognise that the unborn human has the same rights to life and dignity as the woman who carries the pregnancy.
4. We desire to not only condemn the evil practice of abortion but also to practically support and encourage those who are anxious, abortion-minded and even unable to care for an infant. This is achievable through direct involvement in their lives, offering support at a pregnancy crisis centre and exposing such people to the local church and the truth of the gospel.

Related issues

Christians who share the ethos of BBC regarding the sanctity of human life are sometimes accused on inconsistency. It is sometimes said that if we hold to the sanctity of human life with regard to abortion, we must, if we are consistent, condemn the taking of life in every instance. But this is not the biblical position.

Nonhuman Life

God has authorised humans to kill and consume other forms of life but the killing of other humans is forbidden and carries with it a severe penalty: capital punishment (Genesis 9:1-7).

Questions might be raised about practices like hunting for sport (as opposed to hunting for food), and these issues that do not always have very clear answers. Nevertheless, it must be affirmed that the Bible places significantly higher value on human life than on animal life.

Capital Punishment

Speaking of capital punishment, what about the death penalty?

Murder is the crime of unlawfully killing a person especially with malice or forethought. Matthew 5:21-22 shows that murder issues from anger in the heart. This is a sin, an affront to God and a disregard of the sanctity of human life. The act of murder is still subject to God's just punishment as described in Genesis 9:6. This calls for the death penalty which entails the putting to death of the murderer.

The difference between the two relates to the issues of MOTIVE and AUTHORITY. Capital punishment is not murder because it is not done out of malice – so long as it is carried out by appropriate governmental authority (see Romans 13:1-7).

Genesis 9:6 is clear: If a man kills another man, his life should be taken. This shows the value that God places on human life by the severity of the punishment. This punishment is instituted before the giving of the Mosaic law and therefore applies to all, not only to the specific covenantal people of God.

The vehicle for doing this is supposed to be the God appointed just government (Romans 13). The governing authorities are to wield the sword and deliver justice to ensure the safety and security of those under their care.

The Old Testament lists a wide range of other crimes for which capital punishment is permitted: idolatry, false prophecy, necromancy, blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, adultery, rape, bestiality, kidnapping, bearing false witness in a capital crime, etc. A thorough consideration of the evidence suggests that the death penalty was the MAXIMUM penalty that could be inflicted for these crimes, with the victim having primary say in what penalty was exacted. Murder, however, is a “victimless” crime (in the sense that the victim is not present during the trial), and the state therefore has the responsibility to inflict the maximum penalty for the crime.

Opponents of capital punishment point out that: (1) it is expensive to tax payers; and (2) it does not serve as a deterrent. We reply that: (1) it is expensive because of the way that it is carried out in contemporary society, with lengthy appeals processes, etc.; and (2) even if this is true (and there is research that suggests otherwise over the long haul), the primary purpose of the death penalty is not deterrence but the punishment of the evildoer.

Self-defence

The Bible also allows for the use of lethal force in the event of self-defence.

If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep. If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed. If the sun has risen on him, there shall be guilt for his bloodshed. He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

Exodus 22:1-3

The same principle applies to a man doing what he must do to protect his family.

And our adversaries said, “They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease.” So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, “From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us.” Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”

Nehemiah 4:11-14

Just War

God sanctions the action of taking a life in the act of a battle and distinguishes it from the intentional and evil act of murder. While Christians in God’s kingdom are not called to take up arms for the sake of the kingdom, God has placed them within sovereign nations who may require their citizens to go out and fight. The Christian is not necessarily exempt from such participation.

Prolife and pro-capital punishment?

The accusation that a prolife stance is inconsistent with a pro-capital punishment position is weak. They are two completely different issues.

Abortion is the intentional destruction of an innocent, vulnerable preborn human. The preborn human, made in the image of God, has the right to life.

Capital punishment is the taking of the life of one who has been proven to be guilty of the intentional and deliberate murder of another. The murderer has forfeited his right to life and has earned capital punishment through his sin.

Doug van Meter