

“Wise About Life”  
Genesis 1:26-28

We’re in this short series, “Make Your Life Count in 2005.” The best way to do that is to live with wisdom. That is, you exercise sound judgment in your decision-making; you follow the best course of action to ensure your success in the days ahead. To live your life wisely, you do well to understand and live in the truth about the life you live here on earth. Today is Sanctity of Life Sunday. It’s a day set aside to recognize and affirm that our life, all human life has infinite value, worth, and dignity. This is not because we believe or because we have decided it is, but because this is what the Creator God says. The two points I’d like to make today are: first, truth affirmed and second, truth rejected.

Our first point today is God’s unambiguous, unmistakable declaration that human life is precious. God has given it great dignity and value for this reason: we are created in His image. In Genesis 1:27 we read, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.’” Created in the image of God is a statement of incomparable dignity. Men and women, boys and girls have been given a unique make-up that isn’t like the animals, but is like the very nature of God Himself. We possess five distinct characteristics that reflect what God is like. First, we have intellectual capacity – we’re able to accumulate vast amounts of knowledge and are able to integrate and analyze it to make complex decisions. Second, we have a capacity for language and creativity – we’re able to communicate effectively with each other and with God. Our creativity can produce new inventions, advances in technology, and magnificent works of art. Third, created in God’s image, we’ve been given moral integrity – the ability to discern what is right and wrong, good and evil. God doesn’t have a body, but in our bodies is the physical capability to exercise dominion over the earth, which is the fourth characteristic. And fifth, God has given immortality to our bodies and souls. “Created in the image of God” is an affirmation of our nature as human beings that is distinct and incomparable in all creation. As Psalm 8 declares, God has made man “a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned him with glory and honor.” That glory and honor extend to the unborn. Psalm 139 says, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. 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.” This is a statement of God’s attention, care, and protection of the unborn. God has declared that children are a blessing and a gift from Him. The psalmist sang, “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children are a reward from Him” (Psalm 127:3). We’re all familiar with Jesus’ words in Matthew 18:4: “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of God.” At the other end of the spectrum of life, in Leviticus 19:32 God has said this: “You shall rise up before the gray headed,” (that is, stand up in respect for them), “and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the Lord.” In this verse honoring the aged and honoring God are set side by side. We’re warned in Exodus 20:12, “Do not despise your mother when she is old.” The testimony of God’s Word is that the elderly are to be honored. They are a mark of security, prosperity, and wisdom in a society. Why? Because they are created in the image of God. Genesis 9:6 tells us why the taking of innocent human life is always wrong: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God has God made man.” In the western world, these truths were acknowledged, endorsed, and promoted for thousands of years. Only in the last 40 years have they been rejected on a culture-wide level. Today, partial birth abortion, the harvesting of fetal tissues and organs, embryonic stem cell research, euthanasia, and doctor-assisted suicide are all widely acknowledged as commonplace, with hardly a shrug of the shoulders by many people. What is behind this wholesale rejection of life? The answer in part is that God has been rejected, or as Romans 1:25 puts it, “the truth about God has been exchanged for a lie.”

Our second point looks at the rejection of God and truth. Back in 1889, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche asked the question, “Where is God?” and provided this answer: “We have killed Him—you and I. We are all His killers!” It didn’t matter to Nietzsche whether God existed or not. His point was that God had become irrelevant to our lives. He doesn’t matter, doesn’t make a difference, so for all intents and purposes, He’s dead. You might object, “How can it be said that ‘God is dead’ in America? After all, surveys regularly report that more than 90% of Americans believe in God.” But Nietzsche argued that religious belief makes very little difference, for the death of God is not a matter of belief, but of life. We become atheists in thought and practice if we live, die, procreate, and kill as if He did not exist. And I would argue that that’s where our culture is today.

God doesn't matter, He's irrelevant; for all intents and purposes, He's dead. With that rejection of God has come the rejection of the truth, and with it the rejection of the precious and infinite value of human life. With God dead, there is now a new god, man, and a new truth, new criterion used to evaluate life: Is this life useful? Is it wanted? Is it inconvenient or a drain on others? Is it inferior or defective? Is it economically productive? In an era where "God is dead," the question is not, "May we kill innocent human beings?" The new god, man, has moved far beyond that. The question is, "Under what conditions should we kill human beings so as to ensure for ourselves a desirable quality of life?" Of course, the people who ask and answer that question are the strong, the healthy, the politically and economically powerful, not the weak and defenseless. That the value of human life is determined by sinful men and women is the thought system that drives holocausts, genocide, racism, and ethnic cleansing. It also drives the death industry at both the beginning and the end of life. Charles Colson has commented, "We've reached the point where human life is treated with all the dignity of a used Kleenex." We are where we are today as a culture because the truth of God has been rejected for a lie.

How do you as a follower of Jesus Christ live wisely in the midst of this barbaric onslaught against life? Your first responsibility is to know God's Word, to understand and grasp and live in the truth. I read a newspaper article this week about a liberal pastor in Seattle who attacked churches who (as he put it), "claim to have a monopoly on the truth." Not for a minute do I claim that our church or any church has a "monopoly on the truth." What I do claim, and I stake my life and ministry on is this: The God of the Bible is the God of truth, He is truth, He does have the monopoly on the truth, and we are wise to listen to, acknowledge, and conform our lives to that truth. How do we act on that truth? There's no question that we must continue to contend for life in the political arena. We must hold our public officials to account concerning their duties to defend the sick, the elderly, the unborn, the defenseless. But the type of change required to shift the fundamental mindset and lifestyle of our culture on the issue of human life will not take place as a result of a law being passed. The only way in which a culture is changed in such a radical way is when a group of people within it live by different values. That will take not only wisdom, but courage, too. As followers of Jesus Christ we must step up and act as the moral conscience of a nation that is bent on stripping human life of its God-given value. We must stand against the erosion of the sanctity of life in all its forms—taking of innocent human life at the beginning and end of life—and against activities that also cheapen life, such as the glorification of violence, pornography, racism, and crime. We must care compassionately for the poor and sick. We must stand with and encourage adult children who are loving and caring for and struggling with aging parents who are nearing the end of their lives here on earth. We must stand with and encourage mothers who have said no to abortion and yes to life, regardless of their circumstances. We must live in such a way that our lives declare, "God is not dead. He is alive, and I'm living my life in response to His will, His truth, His plan for my life!" If followers of Jesus Christ don't do this, who will? Let the world see that those who live by truth and values founded in God offer something today's godless culture cannot. For you see, the promoters of "God is dead" said this about the hope, the promise of human life: senseless, meaningless, and useless. That's what Nietzsche said life is: senseless, meaningless, and useless. Bertrand Russell was a philosophical ally of Nietzsche. He argued that your life "can be safely built" on this foundation, "the firm foundation of unyielding despair." This is life: senseless, meaningless, and useless? This is the foundation for living life: unyielding despair? Is that all? I think not! Jesus Christ offers to us something infinitely better, for Jesus came that we might have life, and have it abundantly! Let me bring this closer to home. Do you affirm the value and dignity of human life by the way you're living your life? Do you know that your life is so valuable to God that He sent His only Son into the world to die for you on a cross? The life that enjoys the true and full dignity and value meant for it in this life and in the life to come is found only in Jesus Christ. The best and wisest way for you to affirm the preciousness of your life is to enter into a relationship with Him as your personal Savior and Lord. Anything less will bring you a life of despair, a life senseless and meaningless because it is a life based on a lie. Life, precious, valuable, abundant is life lived in the truth, in the grace, in the love that is Jesus Christ!