

The Dignity of Man (2nd version preached on 1-28-2024)

Recently, in New York, a law was passed that allows for an abortion during all nine months of a woman's pregnancy, and for any reason. The law also expands abortion that even a child born alive in a botched procedure is not protected. It removes abortion from New York's state criminal code, meaning if a baby in utero was to die from an assault on a woman there could be no severe prosecution. This bill was met with cheers and thunderous applause in the gallery of the State Senate. Also, this same kind of law is already in effect in many other states. In 2017 a similar law was introduced in N.C., but never made it to the floor our senate.

If you turn on the news, you are aware of these issues (and a slew of others). With this said, I want to give a biblical response to help us think rightly on these issues (and others). Instead of preaching a sermon on abortion, or the sanctity of life (which would be appropriate), I would like for us to consider the dignity of man, and the value of human life. In the midst of Job's suffering, as he admittedly complained of his state, and even wanted to die, he says, "**What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him . . .**" This morning, I have 5 truths and 5 applications about the dignity of man that will help us think and act rightly as Christians.

1. The source of dignity is God our creator. "**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**" And after each part of creation, God says, "***It is good.***" The value and dignity of all creation is seen clearly. God is the source. When He is finished, He looks at everything and he says, "***It is very good***" (Gen. 1:31). But when He comes to the creation of mankind, he says something more than "*it is good.*" In vv. 26-31 we read that God created mankind "in his own image . . . male and female" (The dignity of gender is also being greatly attacked in our culture today.) Above all his creation, we are special. A special dignity is given to us because we are created "in God's image." We are like God. And, we are given the task of ruling the earth (under his care of course). Brothers and sisters, any sin against the image of God is a sin against dignity, and ultimately the ONE who gives dignity.

2. The purpose of dignity is to bear the image of God. Gen. 1:28: "**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.**" Dignity means "worth" or "value." And since there is no greater value or worth than God Himself, we are given the task of spreading the image of God in this world. Adam and Eve were given the most blessed job: to reflect the image of God in the world. In the oldest written book in the Bible, Job ponders the question, "**What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him?**" (Job 7:17). "*Why . . . God . . . Do you consider us? Why have you given us DIGNITY and WORTH and VALUE!*" It is because this dignity, "*bearing the image of God,*" is given to bring glory to God. And when we murder our children and sell our sons and daughters as "slaves," and take part in the big business of pornography, and do not esteem our fellow brothers and sisters through racism, and when we neglect the orphan and the widow and the homeless, we SCREAM "*there is no value in them!*" And we SIN in our disregard for the image of God in man, which attacks the dignity of man!

3. The dignity of man reflects the image of God in this world through love of neighbor. A religious leader once asked Jesus, “**What is the greatest commandment in the law?**” First, He says, “**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.**” But he didn’t stop there. He continues: “**And a second like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself**” (Matt. 22). It is interesting, the highest goal of man is to love God, which is worship. This means we sing to him as we gather. This means we honor him in our hearts. This means we look forward to our time in the prayer closet. But at the same time, our worship is displayed PRACTICALLY as we love our neighbor. And when we do, the dignity of man is displayed as we reflect the image of God toward our neighbors. At the end of the day, it means to do to EVERYONE (our neighbor) as we would like them to do to us. When we ask, “*Who is my neighbor?*” we must say, “EVERYONE.” The infant in the womb is my neighbor. The mother of the child is my neighbor. The doctor who performs the abortion is my neighbor. The widow, the orphan, the homeless man, the man of different color next to me, the owner of the adult store, my neighbor who opposes every political stance I take . . . is my neighbor. And as Christians, we manifest the dignity of every man when we bear the image of God in love.

4. The pinnacle of dignity is Jesus Christ. God’s proof for the dignity of man is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The incarnation of Christ is the pinnacle of dignity. That God would take on flesh says it all! Christ IS the image of God, the fullness of God, the exact imprint of his nature. He was born of a virgin. His birth was just like any other birth. He grew just like us. He was hungry. He was tired. The VERY same tests of life that come our way, also came his way. In his flesh, He was just like us! However, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, He did not inherit the sin nature, nor could He. In his motives and in his actions, He was supremely dignified! He was true humanity. In all the ways Adam failed, Christ did not! In EVERY WAY Jesus fulfills the law: He loves God the Father perfectly. And He serves his fellow man by doing good to his neighbor . . . always.

And the greatest display of service came as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for man (Mark 10:45). And he laid down his life as a sacrifice on a Roman cross (the most undignified way of death at that time). And God received his sacrifice; our sins were punished in Him. Our lack of dignity in our failures to display the image of God was laid upon Christ. And God, in his death, poured out his righteous wrath, so that the dignity of man could be restored. And He rose again, proving there is no real dignity in death itself. Death is the enemy! And today He lives forevermore at the right hand of God. And one day, He will return. “**For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea**” (Hab. 2:14). If you want to know what the true dignity of man is, look unto Christ!

5. The enemy of dignity is Satan and his kingdom. Brothers and sisters, this world is fighting against the dignity of man. And Satan, though his power is greatly limited, is still active and has been give certain authority here. And from one perspective, He fights against the dignity of all mankind. Of course, He will fight against the pinnacle of God’s creation! All the sins, evils, atrocities I have mentioned are a direct assault on the dignity of man, because all mankind are created in the image of God. However, I must point out that Satan’s attack is directed at Christians. We are the center of the line. Just read the Book of Revelation in one sitting and take note of ALL the ways the antichrist, the false prophet, the beast, etc. dispense ALL their artillery

against the people of God! This means the world is unified with a purpose against human dignity. The nations rage and plot against God, his anointed, and his people (Ps. 2).

Romans 1 speaks about this joint effort against God and his people. Starting in v. 28: **“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”**

And though there are many ways the dignity of man is being attacked, the two main areas of attack in our culture are: 1) the killing of innocent (children); 2) the sexual revolution. And both attack dignity in different ways. But whatever it is, Satan and his kingdom attack the dignity of man.

Applications:

1. As God’s children we must care for those things that move the heart of God. Human dignity begins with God. He is holy and righteous and his commands to this world are clear. And He cares greatly for injustice in this world. And as his children so must we! If the thought of murder in the womb does not cause great emotions and thoughts of justice and righteousness within you, then you have never read the Bible. Racism, human trafficking, the neglect of orphans and widows, pornography, and a slew of other issues that degrade the dignity of man must move our hearts to action.

2. As God’s children and as citizens of this world, we must take action. It is interesting that right after Jesus instructs the religious leader on the law about doing good to his neighbor, he asks, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, **“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back. ’Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?’” He said, **“The one who showed him mercy.”** And Jesus said to him, **“You go, and do likewise”** (Luke 10:29-37).**

What about us? What can we do? We can pray. We can use every opportunity to speak with neighbors, friends, co-workers, etc. We can give as a church to organizations that promote the dignity of man in some of these areas I have mentioned. We can get involved at an abortion clinic, soup-kitchen, food pantry, homeless shelter, abused women shelter, victims of sex trafficking, etc. We can do all we can to make sure that ALL people are welcome at GBC.

Racism has now place in the mind or heart of the Christian. We can write and call our local and federal representatives. We can write letters to the local paper. (On and on we can go.) (Mention two ways we can get involved to fight against abortion: Love Life & Abolition movement.)

3. As God's children we must preach the gospel of Christ! We must preach the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ! We must tell sinners that Jesus saves. We must not simply live ethical lives, do social justice, etc., and leave out words. We must tell! This is the first part of making disciples, which is our mission.

The government has the God-given task to "bear the sword." This means it must promote justice, keep the peace, sustain order, protect the dignity of life, and the sanctity of life itself. But, the government CANNOT change the heart. This is why we preach. The church is given the gospel, which can and does change the heart. **"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. For it is the power of God unto salvation . . ."** (Rom. 1:16). Brothers and sisters, we preach the gospel of Christ! Why? Because of its power. As the church, we have the power of the Gospel. And it is the gospel that changes the HEART! Government cannot change the heart! And we cannot expect the government to change the heart. We preach the gospel of Christ ultimately because ONLY IN HIM will the dignity of sinful men be achieved.

Let me also speak for a moment about the unique death of Christ as it relates to justice. At the center of the gospel stands the most unjust murder in the history of the world. Yet, it is also the center of justice. The cross is NOT the place of dignity. Yet, ONLY there is the dignity of man restored. Only there, can we find the wrath of God appeased. In his death, wrath is appeased. In his resurrection, life is given.

4. As God's children we must always remember the grace of God in our lives. Paul says in 1 Tim. 1:12-14: **"I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."** In 1 Cor. 6:9-11 we read: **"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."**

Where would any of us be without the grace of God, the grace of God that brings dignity to our lives. We must remember this as we treat EVERYONE with respect and honor. This will help us not to be mean spirited or angry with EVEN those who, for now, persecute us. This helps us with the woman who opposes us all the way to the abortion clinic and back, knowing **"the Spirit blows where He wills"** (John 3:8), and there is mercy and grace to be found in the great providence of God. We must know that our real enemy is not another person, but Satan himself. Eph. 4:32: **"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."** (This flows over into every area of life!)

5. As God's children we must expect great persecution and hardship. As we care about what God cares about, as we get involved physically in our communities and in the world, as we preach the Gospel of Christ, persecutions will come. Satan and his children are at war against the dignity of man. There will be no rest until Christ has crushed ALL his enemies under his feet . . . Let's end with Jesus' words. Concerning persecution, He says, "**But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake**" (Luke 21:12). And in John 15:20: "**Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.**"