

SERMON NOTES
Genesis 1:26-28
“What’s So Special About Humans?”

Intro:

- Dialogue between abortion advocate and pro-lifer:
- Abortion Advocate: *Abortion is a private choice between a woman and her doctor.*
- Pro-Lifer: Do we allow parents to mistreat their children if done in private?
- AA: *Of course not. Those children are human beings.*
- PL: Then the issue isn’t privacy. It’s ‘What is the unborn?’
- AA: *But many poor women cannot afford to raise another child.*
- PL: When human beings get expensive, may we kill them?
- AA: *Well, no, but aborting a fetus is not the same as killing a person.*
- PL: So, once again, the issue is ‘What is the unborn? Is the fetus a human person?’
- AA: *But you’re being too simplistic. This is a very complex issue involving women who must make agonizing decisions.*
- PL: The decision may be psychologically complex for the mother, but morally it is not complex at all. When blacks are mistreated in a certain society, do we spin a tale about complex, agonizing decisions for the whites in power or do we condemn the evil of racism?
- AA: *Aborting a fetus that is not a person is one thing; discriminating against black persons is quite another.*
- PL: So we’re agreed. If abortion kills a defenseless human being, then the issue wouldn’t be complex at all. The question is, ‘What is the unborn?’
- AA: *Enough with your abstract philosophy. Let’s talk about real life. Do you really think a woman should be forced to bring an unwanted child into the world?*
- PL: The homeless are unwanted. May we kill them?
- AA: *But it’s not the same.*
- PL: That’s the issue, isn’t it? Are they the same? If the unborn are human like the homeless, then we can’t kill them to get them out of the way. We’re back to my first question: ‘What is the unborn?’
- AA: *But you still shouldn’t force your morality on women.*
- PL: You don’t really believe what you just said. You’d feel very comfortable forcing your morality on a mother who was physically abusing her two-year-old, wouldn’t you?
- AA: *But the two cases are not the same.*
- PL: Why is that?
- AA: *Because you’re assuming the unborn are human, like the two-year-old.*

- PL: And you're assuming they're not. So the issue is quite simple, isn't it? It's not forcing morality; it's not privacy; it's not economic hardship; it's not unwantedness; it's **'What is the unborn?'**
- This dialogue written by Scott Klusendorf exposes the central question of the abortion debate in our society: *What is the unborn child? Is the embryo or fetus a human being or not?*
- **Show slides of Images of fetal development as I speak the following:**
 - **7 weeks – image # 3** -- *Is this a human being?*
 - **8 weeks – image # 2** -- *Is this a human being?*
 - **4 months – image # 1** -- *Is this a human being?*
 - **5 months – image # 1** -- *Is this a human being?*
 - **Slide of Pastor Mark** -- *Is this a human being?*
- (Personally, I'd be more inclined to give a thumbs up if he were wearing Hawkeye gear)
- As Richard Stith notes in an excellent article in *Touchstone* magazine, many people think of a fetus as an individual under construction – much like a car on an assembly line
- When you think of a car on an assembly line – at what point in the line would you first say: *"There's a car!"*?
- Some might call it a car as soon as the body is fairly complete and it looks like a car
- *Others would look for something functional and wouldn't call it a car until a motor and tires and steering wheel are in place*
- Some might hold out until the car is actually being driven on the street
- *But no one is going to say "That is a car" at the very beginning when the first screw or rivet is inserted or the first two pieces of metal are welded together*
- That is how many people look at an embryo – as the first stage of construction
- *Just as you don't have a car yet – neither do you have a human being yet when it is in the first stages of construction*
- Maybe the embryo will become a fully functioning child or adolescent or adult some day – but it cannot rightly be called a human being at that early stage of construction
- This perspective helps to explain why so many people were baffled and even outraged by President Bush's opposition to embryonic stem cell research

- Michael Kinsley (*Washington Post*): *“I cannot share, or even fathom, the pro-life conviction that a microscopic dot – as oblivious as a rock, more primitive than a worm – has the same rights as anyone reading this article.”*
- Many Americans – and most of the media – were absolutely dumbfounded that any thinking, caring person could possibly regard an embryo no bigger than a tiny dot as a human life as valuable as those of living, breathing, suffering children and adults desperately waiting for cures to horrible diseases
- *An embryo is a thing under construction -- not yet having the form of a human being -- and therefore cannot be regarded as a human life*
- Richard Stith: *“But the construction metaphor is radically mistaken about the nature of gestation. It is not true that living beings are constructed, by God or by anyone else. **Life is not constructed. Life develops.***
- *“In construction, the form defining the entity arrives only slowly, as it is added from the outside. In development, the form defining a life is within it from the beginning...”*
- *“Its form or nature is there, in its activated genes, and begins to manifest itself from the very first moment of its existence. The only thing embryos need are food, oxygen, and protection from external hazards, not form. They don’t need to be molded into a type of being. They already are a definite type of being.*
- *That microscopic embryo is a human being in its first stage of development. We each started off looking like that. But we each have been the same organism and the same kind of being at every stage of development.”*
- Granted that an early embryo does not look like a newborn baby – but then again, a newborn baby does not look like a teenager
- **Human development is a continuum from conception to natural death**
- *You did not come from an embryo – you once were an embryo*
- *You did not come from a fetus – you once were a fetus*
- You did not come from a toddler – you once were a toddler
- *You did not come from an adolescent – you once were an adolescent*
- **These are all stages of human development – and none of them imparted to you your humanity – your humanity has been there from the beginning of fertilization**
- **Show Human reproduction and fetal development video**
- *At the moment of conception, you were given your own genetic code that would determine your development through all the stages of embryonic life, fetal life, infancy, adolescence and old age*

- **An adolescent is much more highly developed than a toddler – though some parents would probably dispute that – but a toddler is just as much a human being as a teenager**
- *The difference is one of development – not essential humanity*

Dr. Jerome LeJeune (Doctor in Medicine and Science in Paris / Professor of Fundamental Genetics / Recipient of numerous awards / Discoverer of extra chromosome number 21 typical of mongolism / etc.):

When does a person begin? Life has a very long history, but each individual has a very neat beginning - the moment of its conception.

To accept the fact that after fertilization has taken place a new human being has come into being is no longer a matter of taste or opinion. The human nature of the human being from conception to old age is not a metaphysical or religious contention, it is plain experimental evidence.@

- There is no essential difference between a fetus and a newborn baby – there is no special human essence that is imparted in the birth canal to transform a non-human into a human being
- *A human fetus is a human being*
- **It is morally incoherent to hold that it is all right to kill a fetus a week before birth, but as soon as the baby is born everything must be done to keep it alive**
- There is no difference in the humanity of a 6-month premature infant or a 24-week aborted fetus – the only difference is one was wanted and one was not
- *Is the unborn child a human being?*
- **Science and the Bible both say Yes**
- *That there is even a debate on this issue in our society has nothing to do with science – it has everything to do with politics*
- But there is a second crucial question – that has everything to do with one's worldview: *Is a human being anything special?*
- You see, it is one thing to demonstrate that an unborn child is a human being – but does that make the unborn child anything special? *Does being a human being make any of us anything special?*
- It is easy to demonstrate the pigness of a fetal pig – but that gives it no special dignity – pigs are destined to become bacon or ham or pork chops
- *So even if the human fetus is fully human – does that make it – or us – anything special?*

I. THE DARWINIAN EVOLUTIONARY VIEW OF HUMAN BEINGS

- Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*): “*The granting of uniquely special rights to cells of the species Homo sapiens is hard to reconcile with the fact of evolution.*”
- “*The humanness of an embryo’s cells cannot confer upon it any moral status. It cannot, because of our evolutionary continuity with chimpanzees and, more distantly, with every species on the planet.*”
- **In other words, evolution precludes the possibility of granting humans unique and special status simply because they are human**
- According to Darwin’s theory, modern monkeys or apes and modern humans are cousins – descended from some common, more primitive primate ancestor
- *We are one branch and apes are another branch of this evolutionary tree*
- Eventually, some new species will surpass both apes and humans
- *Some of you can trace your genealogies back several hundred years – back to ancestors who used to live in Germany or Sweden or Scotland*
- If you just traced your ancestry back far enough – according to Darwinian evolution -- you would find not only Europeans in your bloodline but also more distant cousins such as orangutans, tigers, cows, tapirs, dolphins, whales, zebras, bats and hamsters
- *And just as it would be inappropriate to say that Germans are superior to Italians – it is also inappropriate to say that humans have any superior status or special dignity compared to chimpanzees or dolphins*

This modern naturalistic, evolutionary world-view is stated, for example, in the 1995 official Position Statement of the American National Association of Biology Teachers: “*The diversity of life on earth is the outcome of evolution: an unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable and natural process of temporal descent with genetic modification that is affected by natural selection, chance, historical contingencies and changing environments.*”

Notice: **Unsupervised / impersonal / unpredictable – no intelligence or design or meaning or purpose behind any form of life, including human**

- Evolutionist George Gaylord Simpson: “*Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.*”
- *There was – and is – no planned or intended outcome in evolution*
- There is no plan // There is no design // There is no higher intelligence
- **The key word in evolutionary theory is “undirected”**
- *There is No One directing the process of evolution with some intended outcome in mind*

You see, if nature is all there is / and if human life is the result of unsupervised and impersonal natural processes -- **then it is meaningless, futile, and even a foolish waste of time to discuss religious ideas such as God's love for humanity or God's purpose for humanity or any kind of special dignity or eternal destiny for humanity** -our existence is a fluke rather than a planned outcome - and there is no more significance to our existence than there is to the existence of tadpoles or bats

- ***“Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.”***
- Most people who believe in Darwinian evolution don't like to think through the implications of such a statement, but one rare Darwinist who has done so is Cornell University Professor William Provine:
- *“Modern science directly implies that the world is organized strictly in accordance with mechanistic principles. There are no purposeful principles whatsoever in nature. There are no gods and no designing forces that are rationally detectable...*
- *Second, modern science directly implies that there are no inherent moral or ethical laws, no absolute guiding principles for human society.*
- *Third, human beings are marvelously complex machines. The individual human becomes an ethical person by means of two primary mechanisms: heredity and environmental influences. That is all there is.*
- *Fourth, we must conclude that when we die, we die and that is the end of us.*
- *Finally, free will as it is traditionally conceived – the freedom to make uncoerced and unpredictable choices among alternative possible courses of action – simply does not exist... There is no way that the evolutionary process as currently conceived can produce a being that is truly free to make choices.”*
- **That is the Darwinian Evolutionary worldview:**
- *There is no God*
- *There is no life after death*
- *There is no absolute foundation for right and wrong*
- *There is no ultimate meaning for life*
- *And people don't really have free will*
- ***And consequently – human beings have no special dignity that would differentiate humans from any other animal species***

II. THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF HUMAN BEINGS: CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

- *In contrast to that rather depressing view of human beings is the biblical view:*

Genesis 1:27 (NIV) ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

- *Many people today get confused as to whether we are nothing more than animals or whether we are gods – or both*
- The Bible clearly differentiates us from both:
- **God is God and we are not**
- ***We are created in the image of God, and animals are not***
- *We may share a similar skeletal structure with some animals – and we may share similar DNA with some primates – **but human beings are unique among all God’s creatures in that we alone are created in the image of God***
- We do not share a common ancestry with apes – we are special creations of God
- ***We have been created to relate to God in a way that no other animals are capable of***
- In the course of this series, we will be revisiting these key verses several times, but for now these 3 points about what it means to be created in the image of God:

(1) Human Dignity

- If we are nothing more than evolved apes, then there is no intrinsic dignity to human beings
- **But the Bible teaches that God deliberately and purposefully made man in His own image and likeness – thus imparting to man special attributes and special dignity that distinguish man from all other creatures**
- *Furthermore, this dignity is not something that humans have to earn by reaching a certain stage of development or intelligence or productivity or social status – **this dignity belongs to every human being by virtue of being human***
- This dignity belongs to the unborn child in the womb // this dignity belongs to the Alzheimer’s patient in the nursing home // this dignity belongs to those who are disabled // this dignity belongs to the poor and homeless as much as to the wealthy and successful // *this dignity belongs to Australian aborigines and native Americans and Africans and Asians and Latinos as well as to Europeans and Caucasian Americans*
- **This dignity has nothing to do with social-economic status or lifestyle or morality or religion or educational level or intelligence or physical health or strength or beauty or material prosperity or occupation or age or race or gender or nationality**

The foundational truth that God has created all human beings in His image makes any kind of racial prejudice or contempt for the poor an offense against Almighty God

(2) Human Responsibility

Genesis 1:28 (NIV) ²⁸God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

- **God has given to mankind the responsibility to reproduce and to be stewards of His creation**
- *Overpopulation has been a concern for centuries – but the Bible teaches: **Have a lot of children and populate the earth***
- **Children are always regarded as a blessing in the Bible**
- Do you know what one of the greatest threats to Western civilization today is?
- *Most Western Europeans and many secular Americans are not reproducing themselves*
- Europe is committing cultural suicide before our very eyes – the combination of cohabitation / abortion / birth control / homosexuality / and a low view of children as a nuisance or burden has led to such low birth rates that white Europeans are rapidly diminishing in number
- *The only Europeans having enough babies to increase their numbers are immigrants – many of them Muslim*
- The problem is not as bad in the USA because Americans are generally more religious, and religious people generally have more babies – but even here abortion and birth control have taken their toll – *and without adequate numbers of immigrant workers many states such as Iowa will be facing worker shortages, and a looming national crisis is the shrinking number of workers paying into Social Security compared to the rising number of retirees receiving SS benefits*
- **The problem in Western nations is not overpopulation but under-reproduction**
- Our Creator has also given us the responsibility of stewardship and care of His earth and creatures
- **The Environment is a Christian cause**
- Yes, some radical environmentalists have a pantheistic worldview and fail to differentiate between humans and animals and are pursuing a radical agenda that proceeds from a false worldview
- *But the proper Christian response to that is not a knee-jerk reaction to oppose all environmentalists or wash our hands of our God-given responsibility*

- ***The proper Christian response is to take the initiative to advance a concern for the environment that is based on a biblical worldview***

(3) *Human Capacity*

- Scientists estimate that there is about a 98% DNA similarity between humans and chimpanzees
- *Evolutionists use that as evidence pointing toward common ancestry*
- But here's the question: *With that much DNA similarity, how does one explain the vast difference between the mind of a chimp and the mind of a human?*
- Is there any evidence that chimps ask and search out answers to these kinds of questions: *Where did we come from? Why are we here? How are we related to humans – or to dolphins? What are the physical and chemical laws of the universe? Is the universe expanding? What is our responsibility toward the environment? What is truth? Is there life after death?*
- And even more significantly: ***Is there any evidence that chimpanzees worship or engage in any religious rituals?***
- Why is it that there is no evidence of any other primate or animal engaging in any kind of religious worship – and yet – *even though there are individual humans who are atheists – all human cultures – however primitive or advanced – practice some kinds of religious rituals?*
- With a 98% DNA similarity – wouldn't it make sense that some chimpanzee groups would be religious like humans?
- How does evolution explain religion among humans? Is it simply a function of a more advanced intelligence? *Do scientists really want to subscribe to the theory that religious faith is a function of intelligence?*
- **The Bible teaches that God has given human beings – and only humans – the capacity for knowing Him and loving Him and worshiping Him**
- ***A major component of what it means to be created in the image of God is the capacity for worship and relationship with God***
- *At the very core of our humanness is the capacity and desire to worship God and to pursue a love relationship with Him*
- Adult chimpanzees do not evidence any such capacity – but even very young human children do
- *Why? Because God created humans in His image*

III. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

- Of all of the commands and instructions that God has given in the Bible, which is the most important for us to obey? Which is the most important in teaching us how to live?

Matthew 22:36 - 40 (NIV) ³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷Jesus replied: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”** ³⁸**This is the first and greatest commandment.** ³⁹**And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’** ⁴⁰**All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

- *Can you see how both of these commands are rooted in the foundational truth that we are created in the image of God?*
- **God created us in His image – with the capacity to know and worship Him – therefore, *love the Lord your God with all your being***
- **God created all human beings in His image – with special intrinsic dignity simply by virtue of being human and God’s image-bearers – therefore, *love your neighbor as yourself – treat your neighbor in accordance with the dignity God has bestowed upon him or her***

The early church stood against abortion - for the reason that the life of the fetus is a creation of God, and because the fetus is not merely a part of a woman=s body but is a human neighbor to be loved and cared for and preserved in what should be the most protected place on earth - the mother=s womb

-the early Christians advocated that Jesus reached out to the poor and weak and needy and defenseless - and there is no one more defenseless than a baby in the womb

-the early church regarded abortion as an offense against the image of God in

human beings and as a violation of the command to love your neighbor as yourself

- the baby in the womb being regarded as a neighbor

- ***Why do Christians with a biblical worldview oppose abortion?***
 - (1) **The unborn baby is a human being**
 - (2) **All human beings are created in the image of God**
 - (3) **Therefore, the unborn baby – as a human being created in the image of God – is a neighbor that we are obligated to love as ourselves**
- *Of course, this same line of reasoning applies to all human beings*
- *Yet History is replete with examples of religious people forgetting or ignoring this foundational truth and treating others as less than human*
- *The most dangerous prejudices are those which seem perfectly justified to a majority of the population*

- Persecution and imprisonment and execution of Jews seemed perfectly justified to many Germans because, after all, Jews are Christ-killers and inferior to the Aryans and their financial successes were a threat to the Aryan Germans – *therefore, Jews are not our neighbors*
- Mistreating blacks and lynching blacks and segregation laws discriminating against blacks seemed perfectly justified to many Southern white church-goers because, after all, Negroes were an inferior race, cursed in the Bible, and giving them equal civil rights would be unnatural and would ruin our way of life – *therefore, Negroes are not our neighbors*
- The question: ***Who is my neighbor?*** has been around a long time – because religious people are always looking for a loophole – a justifiable reason to exclude certain individuals or groups from “neighbor status”
- *Today, some people exclude illegal immigrants from “neighbor status” because, after all, they’re illegal and therefore they are not my neighbor*
- The most dangerous prejudices are those that seem perfectly justified to a majority of the population
- *But God’s Word to us is clear:*

Proverbs 31:8 - 9 (NIV) ⁸ “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.” ⁹ Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

- *God gives to us, His People, the responsibility to defend the cause of the poor and weak and needy and to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, including the unborn*

Psalm 146:6-9 ⁶He is the one who made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them.

He is the one who keeps every promise forever,

⁷who gives justice to the oppressed and food to the hungry.

The LORD frees the prisoners.

⁸The LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts the burdens of those bent beneath their loads.

The LORD loves the righteous.

⁹The LORD protects the foreigners among us.

He cares for the orphans and widows, but he frustrates the plans of the wicked.

- *Love your neighbor as yourself*

- It all goes back to the foundational truth that God created all human beings in His image

IV. RESTORING THE FALLEN IMAGE

- *If God made us in His image – then whatever happened to the human race that we are in such a mess?*
- That is the subject of another sermon – from Genesis 3 – but I want to conclude this message with a word about restoring that fallen image
- *One of the major purpose for the Son of God coming to earth – one of the major components of Christ’s saving work – is to restore the image of God in us*
- The image of God has been marred by sin
- *Human cruelty and greed and hatred and violence and immorality and dishonesty do not reflect the likeness of God*
- Neglecting the poor and killing the unborn do not reflect the likeness of God
- **Jesus Christ died on the Cross and rose from the dead not only to forgive us of our sins – but also to renew the image of God in us**

Ephesians 4:22-24 Throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception.

²³Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. ²⁴You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God’s likeness—righteous, holy, and true.

- *You receive this new nature by being born again – by receiving Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior*
- You grow in the likeness of God by yielding to the control of the Spirit of the living Christ within you and by obeying God’s Word

Prayer of Salvation

Hymn # 387 “O to Be Like Thee”