

THE PRO-LIFE ETHIC

2 Kings 3:16-27, Deuteronomy 30:15-20a (NASB)

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Proverbs 23:7 says: "**For as he thinks within himself, so he is.**" In other words, what we think in the quiet of our own minds and hearts, to a large part, determines who we are. And who we are determines what we do. Every once in a while we see someone do something that is so far off that we have to ask: "What were you thinking?" What mental process could possibly have led to such behavior?

And our thoughts are not entirely private. We are powerfully shaped by the huge moving mass of thought in our own time and place. It is like a great river in which we are caught, and unless we exert great energy to swim against the stream we will simply think like everyone else and then act like everyone else. This great river of thought is sometimes called a plausibility structure. We do specific acts because they make sense within our current pattern of thought.

So killing about a million unborn babies a year apparently makes sense to us here in America, including many babies who are partly delivered. These partial-birth abortions would be viable babies except that we pierce the back of their heads with a scissor and evacuate the brain with a suction hose. This is in a country which has the following words in its Declaration of Independence, that we are "endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." America also has these words in the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution: "Nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law."

In between the births of our sons Christopher and Alex my wife Barbara and I had another son who died in the womb before the twentieth week of pregnancy. He was delivered normally and I held him in my hand. He had all his parts, including fingerprints. I thought, as I was choking down the emotion: *This looks like a person to me.* In God's special timing I was scheduled to speak that very night at a large meeting promoting the founding of a crisis pregnancy center which has now been in operation for several decades in Rockland County, New York.

But somehow the plausibility structure for the protection of life, which had stood inviolate in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution for two centuries, was declared mistaken by the Supreme Court in 1973. A viable baby inside the womb was suddenly stripped of protections accorded the same baby when not covered by an inch of his or her mother's flesh. The contradictions in logic and heart have been dramatically overridden by a new plausibility structure affirming death instead of life.

1. THE PRO-DEATH ETHIC

One might call this a pro-death ethic. It is a pattern of life and thought which makes death a positive value--a lifestyle choice. An event in the history of the kings of Israel reveals how this

comes to pass. The story begins in the days of the divided kingdom with Israel split into two parts, Israel in the north under King Jehoram, also written "Joram," and Judah in the south under King Jehoshaphat. King Mesha of pagan Moab, who had been forced to pay a huge tribute to Israel of one hundred thousand lambs and the wool of the same number of rams, grew weary of his servitude and rebelled.

The Kings of Israel and Judah joined their armies and tried to circle around the Dead Sea to the south in order to attack Moab from Edom. The army rode for seven days in that wilderness with no water to be found. When it seemed that they would simply swoon from thirst and fall into the hands of the very king they were attacking, they decided to seek out Elisha the prophet.

Elisha was not eager to see Jehoram because the King of Israel had continued to promote the vile worship of golden calves established by his father, Jereboam. But for King Jehoshaphat's sake, Elisha sought the Lord for the combined armies of Israel in prayer, and God spoke these words through his prophet: **"He said, 'Thus says the LORD, 'Make this valley full of trenches.' 'For thus says the LORD, 'You shall not see wind nor shall you see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, so that you shall drink, both you and your cattle and your beasts. This is but a slight thing in the sight of the LORD; He will also give the Moabites into your hand. Then you shall strike every fortified city and every choice city, and fell every good tree and stop all springs of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones'"** (2 Kings 3:16-19).

The Lord fulfilled his promise by sending rains upon Edom which ran down and filled the trenches Israel had dug. When the Moabites arose early in the morning, the sun shone on the water and they concluded that it was blood and that the army of Israel had turned upon itself. The Moabite army then attacked in an uncoordinated, hasty fashion and discovered that the Israelites were waiting for them. The Moabites were slaughtered, and then the Israelite army gave chase into Moab, performing all that they were commanded to do by the Lord through the prophecy given to Elisha. What happened next reveals the plausibility structure of the pro-death ethic: **"When the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, he took with him 700 men who drew swords, to break through to the king of Edom; but they could not. Then he took his oldest son who was to reign in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. And there came great wrath against Israel, and they departed from him and returned to their own land"** (2 Kings 3:26-27).

The king of Moab tried to escape through the Israelite lines but failed. In the logic of paganism he then slaughtered his eldest son to the abominable gods of Moab in the hope of gaining favor and deliverance from the Israelites. This last sentence has been hard for translators and interpreters: **"And there came great wrath against Israel, and they departed from him and returned to their own land."** The Hebrew is difficult. Was it the wrath of the Moabites rising up against Israel because they had caused the king to sacrifice his son? Not very likely. Perhaps it was the wrath which rose up in Israel because they saw such a heinous act. The answer is unclear, but what is certain is that Moab was defeated and Israel went back to their land in disgust.

The Moabites had a pro-death ethic. Even the king's own son, heir to the throne, was not safe in that environment. And the saddest thing in this whole tragic story is that there is little doubt that

the Moabites would have thought that their murderous sacrifice worked! Evil was powerfully reinforced and the plausibility structure for death was confirmed because it looked like the desired earthly goals had been achieved.

This is what happens every time a woman has a crisis pregnancy and solves the crisis by killing the baby. It also happens when the pregnancy is no crisis at all, merely an obstruction to an easier or more successful life. The culture of death is reinforced in Islamic society every time some of the billions of dollars of oil money gets into the hands of extremists who pay families to send their children to be mass murderers by suicide bombing. Think of the cheering crowds pictured in the news when three thousand Americans, foreigners, and hundreds of Islamics working in America were murdered on September 11th, 2001. Do you know how the terrorists justify killing Islamic people just to kill citizens of the Great Satan? They say that either they were sellouts to degenerate American culture or they were fellow martyrs, who nevertheless did not ask to be martyred. Either way the plausibility structure of death is strengthened, and therefore likely to happen again. Little boys and now also girls eagerly desire to be the one for whom all the crowds are cheering, not thinking very clearly about their own impending deaths.

Abortion also is protected by the mental deceptions of the pro-death ethic, which has as its motto: "I want what I want, and I do not care who dies in order to get it!" You can see that this is a vacuum sealed human thought. It comes from the self-life, even when embedded in Islamic terrorism. The successful jihadist seeks glory for self and his or her cause. A web of lies must be weaved to get people to commit a heinous evil and yet maintain their social status as a good person.

In India for generations families practiced *suttee* because wives were considered to be the sole property of their husbands and thus it was "logical" to burn them upon the husband's death. That's a powerful lie! The practice of honor killings continues in Palestinian culture, where a single woman who commits sexual sin is killed by her own family to preserve "honor". This happens even if the sin was committed by the other party, such as in a rape. With "logic" and "honor" like that, who can be safe?

The pro-death ethic can be seen in lesser forms in the indulgence of self-destructive habits which appear to be giving us what we want. Substance abuse, eating disorders, unprotected fornication, perverse sexual practices--you name it. They are all based on the motto: "I want what I want, and I do not care who dies in order to get it--even me!" If you conceive of yourself as being your own god, you can also kill yourself. That is the linchpin of the pro-death ethic.

2. THE PRO-LIFE ETHIC

In stark contrast, the pro-life ethic originates in God and gets its strength from him. He specifies it and enforces it, and we may not deviate from it without serious consequences. So Moses explained to Israel, speaking as a prophet: **"See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not**

obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days..." (Deuteronomy 30:15-20a).

These words were spoken to the nation Israel, but these are the basic principles of the kingdom of God. There is a way of living which works life and there is a way which works death. I have called these the pro-life and the pro-death ethics. Loving God and obeying his commands works life, and turning away from him works death.

While there are many ways to survey the pro-life ethic as found in the Bible, I have broken it down into five key areas. The first priority of the pro-life ethic is eternal life, as Christ taught his disciples: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life"** (John 5:24). Nothing else can compete with the importance of eternal life. The whole world was created to know God and most of it does not. The first priority of the pro-life ethic is to receive the gift of eternal life through faith in Christ and then pull as many people as possible into it with you. This is what Jesus was talking about when he said: **"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"** (Mark 8:36-37).

The second priority of the pro-life ethic is human life, as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount: **"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell"** (Matthew 5:21-22). The pro-life ethic protects human life with one radical standard which stretches from premeditated murder to acts of hatred.

No society can tolerate murder. The Bible validates the possibility of the death penalty in Genesis 9:6. Incarceration for life may be another possibility if paying some \$70,000 per year to house, feed, dress, and give medical care to a murderer makes sense to a rich society. But Western culture has clearly lost its collective mind. While we protect the lives of murderers the number one statistical reason for depriving unborn babies of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is that the biological parents did not even bother to use birth control. God is the Creator of every person, he has made every person in his image, and so the life of every person is sacred. Even hating others is a violation of the pro-life ethic.

The third priority of the pro-life ethic is care for vulnerable people of all sorts. God's heart goes out to those on the down side of life for every reason, and he has commanded us to serve him by helping them: **"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I**

was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me'" (Matthew 25:34-36). This passage speaks about the sheep and goat judgment of the nations at the beginning of the millennial kingdom of Christ, but since it is based upon the character of God and his love for the people whom he made, it reveals a principle that should be followed in every age.

This is the basis of crisis pregnancy center ministry. Women and their men get caught up in the sexual insanity of Western culture and the woman finds herself pregnant with no means of protection or support. Furthermore, a multi-billion dollar abortion industry eagerly wants to take her money and not tell her about the physical complications and the post-abortion depression which is coming her way. While biological fathers have all kinds of rights and responsibilities for children already born, they are cut completely out of the decision of the woman to abort or give birth. The pro-death ethic acts as a river of deceit to carry such vulnerable women into the arms of people who do not care about them. The ministry of the crisis pregnancy center is to bring genuine caring, vital information, free pregnancy tests, ultrasound images of the baby, and the truth of God to vulnerable women.

Because of God's care for the vulnerable Christians should be in the forefront of social concern while keeping the priority of eternal life first on the agenda. The list of concerns Jesus gave includes the thirsty, the hungry, those who have no one, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. Because of the inclusion of the imprisoned we learn that Jesus does not exclude those who are in need because of their own bad decisions. Just because the people of New Orleans chose to live below sea level does not mean that we should not help them when the levees fail. The same can be said of AIDS patients, gambling addicts, drunks, and women in out-of-wedlock pregnancies. The question is not whether Christ wants us to love and serve such people but how.

The fourth priority of the pro-life ethic is care for your own life as a gift from God. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "**Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body**" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). If we are not our own our lives are not ours to do with what we wish. This rules out suicide and any form of self-destructive behavior like cutting oneself, bulimia, substance abuse, and the like. By contrast, everything we do to take care of ourselves should be done with a view to the sacredness of the gift of life. So we should eat right, exercise sensibly, strengthen our minds through study, feed our emotional natures, and grow our spiritual lives in Christ out of a desire to honor God.

The fifth and last priority of the pro-life ethic is care for the earth and the creatures on it. The Lord commanded Adam to do this both before and after the fall: "**Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it**" (Genesis 2:15). This included plants, animals, and the physical earth. We should be the right kind of environmentalists. Unfortunately much of the environmental movement today has become so politicized that it is not a reliable source of information. We should be those who defend the preciousness--notice I did not say sacredness--of animal life. The best path to this is a wise application of real empirical science as focused through a genuinely Biblical world view.

CONCLUSION

Christians are some of the last people on earth left who can point the way to the true pro-life ethic. We will succeed by living it, not primarily by talking about it, as the Apostle John wrote: **"Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth"** (1 John 3:18). As we learned in Deuteronomy, the real pro-life way of life finds its source in love for God and the people God made. That is the only way we will not depart from it when it becomes inconvenient.

For those who have heard or read this message and know that they are carrying the weight of some sinful behavior, some abortion, some self-abuse, or some act of hatred toward others, there is hope. God's word to you is: **"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"** (Romans 8:1). Even the brokenness of having taken the life of another can be forgiven and healed. The pathway of hope is the path to the open arms of our forgiving Father, whose arms are always extended to receive those who repent of their sins. The devil will tell you that you cannot be forgiven, but he is a liar and the Lord Jesus says: **"...The one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out"** (John 6:37b). That's why we call it good news!