

**THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN LIFE**  
**GENESIS 9:1-7**

There is a sickness abroad in the land. One symptom of this sickness is the low value that we put upon human life. There is evidence abroad everywhere reflecting this low view of human life.

Just this past week a national newspaper carried statistics that reveal this low view. More than 50% of those interviewed in the polling process felt that it is appropriate for doctors to terminate the life of the terminally ill patient under certain circumstances. They feel that it is proper for man to take the role that in the past we have relegated to God. The increasing incidence of violence in our society is another sign of this sickness. In the next 24 hours, 65 men, women and children will die in handgun fire. Kids die at a rate of about one every two hours – 25 every two days – in gun violence in this nation. Between 1970 and 1991, about 50,000 of our children were killed by guns. This year we will lose 5, 000 more.

In 1987, thirteen hundred males under age 19 were murdered with guns in the United States. In the same year, in Canada, Japan, France, West Germany, Australia, England, Wales, and Sweden, fewer than 80 males under 19 were murdered with guns.

Another study reports that in the United States last year 2,861 children 19 years of age and under were murdered with guns, an increase of 114% since 1985.

On and on we could go accumulating evidences of this sickness in our land. When you add to it the millions of aborted babies in our society it becomes a staggering reality.

We need to go back to the original word from God concerning the dignity of human life. We have listened too long to the evolutionist who has set forth a view of humankind that has made violence possible, and we have watched too many deeds of violence that treated human life as being of little worth. We need to hear what the Creator said. He calls for you and me to see human life as something with special dignity. The word for our consideration is a word that God gave to Noah immediately following the flood. As Noah and his sons moved out into the world freshly cleansed by the judgement of God, God gave them a word concerning the dignity of human life. This word is still valid.

## **I. THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN LIFE IS BASED ON MAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.**

In the word that God gave to Noah and his sons this view of human life is reflected. Whether God spoke the closing words of this paragraph or the inspired editor added them to explain what God had set forth really doesn't matter. In either case they reflect God's understanding of the basis of the dignity of human life. It is summed up in these words, "For in the image of God has made man."

### **1. God is the Creator.**

Moses says that "God made man." This is an abiding relationship between God and humankind. Every human being has been specially made by God the Creator. It is this relationship with God that gives to man special dignity. You should see your own life as being special because you

were made by God. You must see the life of every other human being as special because they were made by God. It is this special relationship that makes your life special.

## 2. Man is made in God's image.

This is the concept that we found in the opening words of the book of Genesis. When God created man he was made in the image and after the likeness of God. Here God reminds Noah of the truth that was revealed to Adam in the beginning. Even though humankind has fallen from the beautiful heights upon God placed man in the beginning, he is still bearing the image of God in his person. Apart of what the image means is that each human being has a unique capacity to know God and to reflect the nature and character of God in the human family. This view of humankind needs to be recovered in our generation.

The evolutionary view of man that he is the product of a process naturalistically determined has given us an excuse to relate to human beings as though they had no dignity. Charles Colson reports in one of his devotional books that scientists have studied chimpanzees and monkeys that kill their infants. They have concluded "if evolution has selected the behavior, scientists argued, it must confer some kind of adaptive benefit. A Newsweek article entitled "Nature's Baby Killers" said, Infanticide can no longer be considered abnormal. It is, instead, as normal as parenting instinct, sex drives, and self defense." Such a view of human nature stands in open conflict with the view that human beings are created in the image of God. We are closer in our relationship with God than we are in our relationship to the chimpanzee. There may be some physical similarities to the chimpanzee, but there are spiritual similarities with reference to God.

So the dignity of human life is based on this special relationship that each human life has to God.

## **II. THE DESTRUCTION OF HUMAN LIFE WILL BE PUNISHED.**

This is the burden of this passage and the central truth set forth in this word to Noah. The dignity of human life is such that whomever is responsible for destroying a human life will be accountable to the Creator. “And for your life blood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, to, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellowman.”

### **1. God’s commitment.**

The “I wills” in this passage are impressive. It is the sovereign Creator of man who is saying “I will surely demand an accounting.” It is God’s commitment to see that no human life is destroyed without consequences. No one can destroy someone who bears in their person the image of God and not suffer consequences from the hand of the Creator Himself. God has committed Himself to the preservation of the dignity of human life.

When you consider how many lives are being destroyed on the earth tonight, this becomes a frightening truth. The Creator is holding someone responsible for each incident where a human life is destroyed. This includes those who destroyed in the senseless wars around the world. UNICEF reports that wars were once fought between armies, but in the wars of the last decade far more children than soldiers have been killed and disabled. Over that period, approximately two million children have died in war, between four and five million have been physically disabled, more than five million have been forced into refugee camps and more than twelve

million have been left homeless. The Sovereign God of this universe holds someone responsible for the death and maiming each of these children. Consider the millions of abortions that are taking place in our society! God holds someone responsible for the death of each of those unborn infants. God is committed to protecting the dignity of human life. Our culture is headed for a meeting with the eternal God.

## 2. God's instrument.

In the text itself God did not make clear how he would hold man accountable for the destruction of human life. However, when he said, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed," it is obvious that responsibility is delegated to man to maintain the dignity of human life. As we read the rest of scripture it becomes obvious that God has delegated responsibility for human dignity to the institutions of man, more specifically to government. And government becomes the instrument of God in protecting the dignity of human life.

A few days ago when the young man was convicted in Colorado for the death of the 160 people in the government office building in Oklahoma City and then was subsequently given the death sentence, one of the local newspaper reporters came by to interview me concerning my view on capital punishment. As I was interviewed I cited to the young lady this specific passage. It is still true that man is responsible for the protection of the dignity and the sanctity of human life. And this responsibility is embodied in the institutions of government. God carries out His protection of the dignity of human life through these human institutions. The Sovereign Creator has entrusted to the governments of man the awesome responsibility of bringing vengeance to bear on someone who has destroyed a human life. In my view if someone has received a fair and

impartial trial and has been convicted of the malicious destruction of human life then it is appropriate that person pay for that crime with his own life.

Some of those who oppose capital punishment reply that such an act of violence will only generate other acts of violence. They ask why a government should be free to do that which they condemn a person for doing – the destroying of a human life. We need to understand these experiences from God's perspective. God places such value upon a human life that that human life must not be destroyed without severe consequences.

I would hasten to add that the thing that bothers me most about the practices of our governments in this land is that there seems to be an inordinate number of the poor and the minorities that are put to death. There is a basic unfairness in our system that allows those who are able to hire expensive lawyers and experts to avoid the consequences of the law while the poor and disfranchised are regularly being put to death. There needs to be justice and fairness in the whole system, but the abuses of the system do not negate the principle that the Creator has laid down. The destruction of human life must be punished.

### **III. THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN LIFE IS TO BE PROTECTED.**

When you look at this passage and search for its positive implications, this is what you find – we are responsible for protecting the dignity of human life.

1. The government.

Because of the strategic position that human government has in the affairs of humankind, the government must use this awesome power to protect human life and human dignity. The government establishes the laws by which we live, and then enforces those laws. The laws that are established and the enforcement of those laws must protect human life and human dignity. The laws that permit the destruction of human life must be repealed. The laws that result in the destruction of human dignity must be set aside. You and I should use all of the influence that we have at every level in government to work for laws and the enforcement of those laws that protect human dignity.

## 2. The individual.

Since this great passage stands at the beginning of human history, it is applicable to all human beings. This is not a uniquely Jewish law. It antedates the formation of the nation of Israel by hundreds of years. This is not uniquely a Christian perspective for it precedes the formation of the Christian Church by thousands of years. This principle is applicable to all individuals in every period of human history. Each human being is personally responsible for protecting the dignity of every other human being.

This means that I myself must nurture a view of my own life that encourages the protection of human dignity. If I succumb to a low view of my own identity then it will effect how I see you. It's when I see myself as having unique worth because of my relationship to a Creator God that I will begin to see you as a person of worth for the same reason. I must nurture such a view of myself.

We must also nurture such a view of one another. I must not allow myself the luxury of seeing any other human being as being of less worth than myself. They may not have the same social status that I have, but they have the same relationship with God. They may not have the same economic privileges that I have, but they enjoy the same relationship with God. They may not have the same color of skin or national heritage that I have, but they are related to the same God that I am related to. They are as much in His likeness as I am in His likeness. For me to seek to depreciate any human life by word or deed is a sin against their Creator and Maker.

If there is a question about the validity of the dignity and the worth of a human life, let me remind you of God's ultimate testimony to the dignity and worth of human life. The ultimate testimony is not found in this first book in our Bible. It is found in the Gospels that open our New Testament. In the Gospels God gave testimony that human life is of such worth that He freely gave His only begotten Son to die upon a cross to bring forgiveness and redemption to human life. If you doubt what one life is worth to God, then let me encourage you to watch while Jesus the Son of God dies on the cross on behalf of that individual. He considered each to be of such worth that He willingly gave Himself for that individual.

The best cure for this sickness that is abroad in our land is a return to the Bible and its view of human life.