

The Value of and Respect for Human Life

The Bible teaches that human life is sacred because human beings are all created in the image of God:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26-27; also Genesis 5:1 and James 3:9).

This precept underlies the biblical positions on such issues as abortion and euthanasia (see the EPC’s Position Paper on Abortion and Position Paper on Problems of Suffering, Death, and Dying). To undervalue or take a human life without a clear biblical warrant is expressly prohibited, as it defiles the image of God:

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man” (Genesis 9:6).

“If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death” (Leviticus 24:17).

God declares this truth in the sixth commandment: “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13), which is expounded upon in the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession:

Q (68): What does the sixth commandment require?

A: The Sixth commandment requires making every lawful effort to preserve one’s own life and the lives of others.

Q (69): What does the sixth commandment forbid?

A. The Sixth commandment forbids taking one’s own life or the lives of others unjustly or doing anything that leads to suicide or murder.

And in the Larger Catechism of the Westminster Confession:

Q (135): What does the sixth commandment require?

A: The sixth commandment requires us to do our best to make every lawful effort to preserve our own life and the lives of others. We do this by not thinking about or planning, by controlling our emotions, and by avoiding all opportunities,

temptations, or actions that would promote or lead to the unjust taking of someone's life. In the pursuit of that goal, we must defend others from violence, patiently endure the afflictions from God's hand, have a quiet mind and a cheerful spirit, practice temperance in the way we eat, drink, take medications, sleep, work, and play. We should also harbor charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, and kindness. Our speech and behavior should be peaceful, mild and courteous. We should be tolerant of others, be ready to be reconciled, patiently put up with and forgive injuries against us, and return good for evil. Finally, we should provide aid and comfort to those in distress as well as protect and defend the innocent.

Q (136): What particular sins does the sixth commandment forbid?

A: The sixth commandment forbids taking our own or anyone else's life, except in the pursuit of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense; neglecting or withholding the necessary means for the preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, or desire for revenge; all excessive emotions and distracting anxieties; intemperate eating, drinking, working, or playing; speaking in a provocative way, oppressing, quarreling with, hitting, or wounding others; and anything else conducive to the destruction of anyone's life.

Finally, human life is sacred because of the redemptive work of the Son of God, who became a man to save us from our sins.

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! (Romans 5:8-9).

Though we deserved rejection and condemnation, his great love for us, demonstrated by his passion, death, and resurrection, confirms that sacred value for all mankind.

For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (Romans 5:10).

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