

“A Human Being”

Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 139:13-16

January 22, 2006

Dr. Jerry Nelson

This is “Sanctity of Human Life” Sunday in America.

I have on other occasions spoken more broadly on the subject of abortion than I will today.

An earlier and fuller message on that subject is available in print at the bookstore or on CD by order at the information booth (January 19, 2003).

But even as I speak more narrowly on this sensitive issue I am particularly concerned for those who have already had or have encouraged an abortion.

The Bible says that God forgives.

The grace of God is so great as to include all of us who confess and turn away from our sin.

The Bible speaks of the forgiveness of all kinds of sins, even the worst (consider the experience of the Apostle Paul).

God can forgive any one and any sin.

Many women and men have been party to abortions in the past and have already or even now seek God’s forgiveness.

We believe God will definitely forgive and restore.

This sermon must be understood in the light of that grace.

My message today is not about abortion it is about begin human or human **being**.

Genesis 1:26-27

“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.”

Psalm 139:13-16 “For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.

When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

16 your eyes saw my unformed body.

All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

On January 22, 1973 the Supreme Court of the United States issued the now infamous Roe v. Wade decision outlawing most state laws against abortion as a violation of a newly found constitutional right to privacy.

It was and is one of the most controversial decisions in Supreme Court history.

That was 33 years ago which means that virtually all who are under 50 years of age have never known any other context.

As with many other events, at the time, few of us had any idea of the far-reaching consequences of such a decision.

In November of 1973 evangelicals from Carl F.H. Henry to Jim Wallis met in Chicago to issue the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern and there is **not even a mention of abortion** amidst the injustices of racism, poverty and discrimination against women.

In spite of the lack of concern, or maybe because of it, since 1973 over 46,000,000 unborn children have been aborted and we continue at a rate of well over 1,000,000 per year.

That decision, which found a “right to privacy” in the Constitution, was made by a 7 to 2 majority with, the now late, Chief Justice Rehnquist and our own Colorado Byron White dissenting.

19 years later in the 1992 “Planned Parenthood v. Casey” decision the margin of votes was reduced to 5 to 4 but still upheld the “Roe v. Wade” right to an abortion.

With the death of Chief Justice Rehnquist and the resignation of Justice O’Connor (who upheld Roe in the 5 to 4 1992 decision) and their replacements in the persons of Roberts and likely Alito the abortion rulings are anything but settled.

It is no wonder that people are concerned about judge Alito’s nomination.

It must be noted however that if the Supreme Court were to overturn the previous rulings, the most likely result would be that each state would be required to re-write its own laws on the subject and the debate would continue to rage, but then at the state level.

Abortion is not the only assault on the idea of the sanctity or sacredness of human life.

I suspect many of you were as disappointed as I was that just this past Monday the Supreme Court of our land refused to strike down Oregon’s assisted suicide law.

Extreme pain and immanency of death are often cited as legitimate reasons for ending a life whether by suicide, assisted suicide or that strangely used word, “euthanasia.”

The same is true in abortion. We cite extreme mental suffering, financial deprivation of the family, or physical or mental disabilities as reasons for abortion.

But do we truly mean that suffering, finances or disability are legitimate reasons to end a life?

Is life really only about such pragmatic issues as these?

Is human life really not unique; is it simply on the same continuum with all other life (plant or animal)?

One man has written, “We can no longer base our ethics on the idea that human beings are a special form of creation made in the image of God, singled out from all other animals and alone possessing an

immortal soul. Once this religious mumbo-jumbo has been stripped away, we may continue to see normal members of our species as possessing greater capacities of rationality, self-consciousness, communication, etc. than members of other species but we will not regard as sacrosanct (inviolable) the life of each and every member of our species.” (Malcolm Potts quoted in In Ryken, Exodus, 619)

But that is not what God has said!

Humanity is not just king of the jungle; we are made in the image of God.

Genesis 2:7 “The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a **living being**.”

The “inbreathing” of God into man speaks of mankind’s uniqueness. He was not yet a living thing until God breathed into him and when God did so, Adam, though he had many similarities to the animals, was truly unique.

In the way God created mankind he gave humanity the ability (unique in creation) to reflect the personal character of God.

Other created things might reflect the presence and power of God.

For example we find in Romans 1:20 “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made...).

But only humanity can reflect the moral character of God; only human being are made in the image of God.

Certainly that ability to mirror the character of God was distorted when sin stained the human race in Adam and Eve but while we have lost our ability for moral perfection, we have not lost that which makes us human – our capacity to reflect our God. (Sproul, Abortion: A Rational Look at an Emotional Issue, 31)

The Bible says there is something special, something unique, something qualitatively superior about human life – personhood.

Trees are not persons.

Chimpanzees are not persons.

God is person and he has created humanity in his image as persons.

But that's the question isn't it?

Are unborn humans actually persons?

No one argues that the fetus or even the earlier embryo is not alive.

But to say it is alive is to say nothing more than you might say about a daffodil or a mosquito.

No one argues that the fetus is not human.

After all it is not tree or horse.

The question is, is it a living human person.

Not that long ago, Virginia Abernethy, of the Vanderbilt School of Medicine said, "I don't think an abortion is ever wrong. As long as an individual is completely dependent upon the mother, it is not a person."

Listen to the words of Kathline Ragsdale, Episcopal priest and chair of the board of religious coalition for reproductive rights in Washington D.C.:

"I do not think a third-trimester fetus (those are the last three months before birth) has the attributes of personhood, but it is getting closer to viability.

She was then asked: " In other words is it like a sliding scale or a gradual chart that, as the fetus gets older, there needs to be a more important reason to have an abortion?

To which Ragsdale replied: "Yes, I could go with that.

"...life does NOT begin at conception." (March/April 95 THE DOOR)

In 1973 Justice Douglas of our Supreme Court wrote that the unborn has no "right" to life.

BUT in 1972, one year before Roe v Wade he wrote in a Sierra

Club lawsuit that valleys, lakes, rivers, beaches, etc have rights - the "voice of the inanimate objects (trees, valleys, etc) should not be stilled."

Unborn children have no rights but lakes and valleys do?
p29 of Beckwith Politically Correct Death.

Our Supreme Court decided in 1973 that the fetus **wasn't protected as a person** and for the past 30 years Americans have been trying to convince themselves that is true.

But when we speak of the sanctity or sacredness of human life, we anchor such words in a belief in God and his word as revealed in the Bible.

To unlawfully take the life of a person, a human being, is an offense against the person of God in whose image humans are made!

Genesis 9:5-6 "From each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.

"Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made man.

Contrary to the way many talk about unborn infants or even very sick old people, humanness is not defined by viability or by quality of life, it is defined by the image of God.

Now back to the question: Is the human fetus a human being, a person, as much as you and me?

I know that Psalm 139 is not a proof-text speaking directly to the issue of abortion BUT it does speak of the unborn as a person.

Psalm 139:13-16 "For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

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your works are wonderful,
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A few years ago a Maryland court heard expert testimony from Dr Jerome Lejeune a medical doctor and Ph.D. geneticist who graduated from the University of Paris and had been, for over 10 years, a researcher on the Faculty of Medicine in Paris.

www.sedin.org/propeng/embryos.htm

Dr. Lejeune is the one who made the discovery of the chromosome link to Down's Syndrome.

In court the doctor gave some remarkable testimony.

I am going to quote from him rather extensively and I want you to consider it in light of Psalm 139.

Dr Lejeune, speaking in sometimes-awkward English, began by saying, "I would say that life has a very long history, but each of us has a unique beginning, the moment of conception. All geneticists and zoologists tell us there is a link between the parents and the children. And this link is made (by) a long molecule that we can dissect; it is the DNA molecule, which is transmitting information from parents to children through generations and generations.

"As soon as the 23 chromosomes carried by the sperm encounter the twenty-three chromosomes carried by the ovum, the whole information necessary and sufficient to spell out all the characteristics of the new being is gathered."

"Inside the chromosomes is written the program and all the definitions. In fact, chromosomes are, so to speak, the table of the law of life... There exist a lot of minute differences in the message given by father and the one given by mother" and every sperm and every egg carry different information.

"The minuteness (the smallness) of the language is bewildering because if I (brought into) the Court all the (DNA strands) which make up every one of the five billions of human beings that will replace

ourselves on this planet, the amount of matter would be (the size of) roughly two aspirin tablets.”

When the sperm and the egg join they form one new cell.

This is before any multiplication of cells, before any implantation into the uterine wall.

This is simply one cell – called a zygote.

Dr. Lejeune goes on to say, “The amount of information which is inside the zygote, which would if spelled out and put in a computer tell the computer how to calculate what will happen next, this amount of information is (so) big that nobody can measure it.

“But what I saying is that the information which is inside this first cell, obviously to tell this cell all the tricks of the trade to build herself as the individual, this cell” (already has). And it is not information “to build a theoretical person, but to build that particular human person we will call later Margaret or Paul or Peter, it's already there, but it's so small that we cannot see it.

“It's what is life, the formula is there; if you allow this formula to be expanded by itself, **just giving shelter and nurture**, then you have the development of the full person.

“Now, I was very surprised two years ago that some of our British colleagues invented the term of **pre-embryo**. That does not exist; it has never existed.

Q.: Dr. Lejeune, let me make sure I understand what you are telling us, that **the zygote (the first cell)** should be treated with the same respect as an adult human being?

A.: I'm not telling you that because I'm not in a position of knowing (about respect or rights). **I'm** telling you, **he is a human being**, and then it is a Justice who will tell whether this human being has the same rights as the others. (But) if you make difference between human beings, (you are) on your own to prove the reasons why you make that difference. But as a geneticist you ask me whether this human being is a human, and I would tell you that because he is a being and being human, he is a human being... As a geneticist, I

would say... **as soon as he has been conceived**, a man is a man.

“At three weeks, the cardiac tubes will begin to beat, so that the heart is beginning to beat three weeks after fertilization. And progressively you will reach the end of the embryonic period at two months after fertilization. At that moment the little fellow will be just size of my thumb.

“Well, after (he) is visible at two months of age, (he is) two centimeters and a half from the crown (of his head) to his rump, and... you would see the tiny man with hands, with fingers, with toes. Everything is there; the brain is there and will continue to grow.

“It's from that moment which is two months after fertilization, that we don't any longer call them embryos; we call them fetuses. And that is very right to change the name because it tells us what is plainly evident: Nobody in the world looking for the first time at...an embryo of a two months old chimpanzee, or gorilla, or orangutan, or of a human being - nobody in the world would make a mistake by just looking at him. It's obvious this one is a chimpanzee, this one is an orangutan, this one is gorilla, and this one is a man.

“The reason why we change the name, and we call it a fetus, (is) because the full **form** is already present. But the man was there before (when it was only one cell) and everybody could tell the difference from a chimp. For example, if we were to take that one cell... of a chimpanzee embryo, of a human embryo, or of a gorilla embryo and give it to one of my students in the Certificate of Cytogenetics in Paris, and if he cannot tell you this one is a human being, this one is a chimpanzee, this one is a gorilla, he would fail his exam; it's as simple as that.

From the second of conception the human is as fully a human being as at any other stage of life.

All it needs is nurture and protection.

Come to think of it that is what a two-year old needs and what a one-hundred-and-two year old needs.

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What mothers have known intuitively throughout history, science corroborates: we are fully human beings from the very moment of conception.

And from the Bible I know the unborn child is a person made in the image of God.

And human life is sacred; it is given by God.

But please remember, it is not the **concept** of human life that is sacred.

I'm troubled when I see and hear people shouting, degrading others and even murdering in the name of “life.”

It is not the **concept** of human life that is sacred but each **real life** – your life - you, my life, the life of that suffering older person in Oregon, and the life of that deformed or simply inconvenient unborn human being – they are sacred, made in the image of God.

Neither God nor we are just anti-abortion, we are called to be pro-life – “pro”- you, “pro”- that particular unborn child, “pro”- that particular sick and elderly person, “pro”- that particular woman who obtains an abortion, and even “pro” that particular person who performs the abortion.

They are human beings, persons, made in the image of God.

I encourage you now to experience this idea as you watch a 6 minute presentation called “Life is Sacred.” (see “Life is Sacred” on-line video at <http://www.heartlink.org/beavoice/index.cfm?beavoice=hpfamily>)

Notes:

The full 32-page version of the testimony of Dr. Lejeune is available at www.sedin.org/propeng/embryos.htm