

## **For the Love of God**

Christ and Children in a Culture of Death

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## **CHRIST AND CHILDREN IN A CULTURE OF DEATH** **Matthew 19:13-15**

If you have His Word, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Matthew 19. Let me also invite you to pull out the worship guide that you received when you came in tonight that will have a guide for our time together in the Word. You'll notice as you look down those notes that we're going to be talking a good bit about abortion tonight. I just want to give you a heads up: there's nothing we're diving into that would be inappropriate for any age, but if you don't want to have certain conversations about this topic, this would be a natural time to exit and to take the children to the children's ministry area.

I don't believe it's coincidence that as we're reading through the Bible as a church, today we come in our Bible reading to Matthew 19 on what is known as "Sanctity of Human Life Sunday." It was over 40 years ago this week—January 22, 1973—that the Supreme Court of our country ruled by a 7-2 vote that the right to privacy under the due process clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment extended to a woman's decision to have an abortion. Subsequently, in the 40 years since that day, over 50 million children have been aborted in the United States of America.

So I want to bring the Word to bear upon us as the church in our culture in this country. I want to be wise in the way I do that. I want to say from the start that I know there are women who are here in this room who have had abortions, and I talked with some of them this morning. I cannot presume to know what takes place in your mind and in your heart as we address this topic. Abortion has been called a secret killer, not just of babies, but of moms ... whose abortions leave deep wounds and difficult scars. I want to be very sensitive to you and your heart.

Likewise, there are men here tonight who have encouraged wives and girlfriends to have abortions. There are family members and friends who have counseled women to do the same. And many of you—women, men, family, friends—have repented of that, and my goal tonight is in no way to uncover old wounds that Christ in His mercy has healed.

At the same time, I'm sure that in many such hearts there's still healing that needs to be had. Some of you have had or been involved in abortions and no one else even knows about it. So if any of this is you—if you have had an abortion or been involved in an abortion—my hope is that as we talk about the seriousness of abortion before God, that in the end you will be overwhelmed by the love of God toward you in the gospel. That's where all of this is headed. So if that's you, please just hang with me to the end.

At the same time, this word is not just for women who might have had or might have considered abortions, or family or friends around such women. This word is for all of us, and I am convinced it needs to be heard by all of us. I've titled this message—not popularly—"Christ and Children in a Culture of Death."

I don't use that terminology lightly. You say, "What do you mean 'a culture of death'? Is this some kind of political speech?" No, not at all. I have no desire to give a political speech.

This is a biblical sermon based (I hope) purely upon the Word of God. So let me read from God's Holy Word, and then explain what I mean by "Christ and Children in a Culture of Death."

In Matthew 19:13-15 in our Bible reading today, we come across these words:

*Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." And he laid his hands on them and went away.*

## **The Simple Reality**

The simple reality of this passage is clear: Christ cherishes children. He loves them. He receives them. When the disciples around Jesus saw children as a nuisance to be avoided, Christ saw a treasure to be welcomed. He lays His hands on them. You can only imagine Jesus playing with them, as He prays for them. The simple reality of Matthew 19:13-15 is clear: Christ cherishes children.

## **The Devastating Realization**

On the other hand, the devastating realization in our day is that where Christ cherishes children, our culture and our country murders children. A strong word, I know, but think about this with me. Every day, over 3,000 babies are aborted in our country. Every day. That means every 20-25 seconds a woman lies down before a doctor who takes a beating heart from a mother's womb and intentionally brings it to an end.

We think women don't realize what they're doing in these situations. If only they could see an ultrasound picture of that child. If only we could convince them ... this is not just a clump of cells, but a person. If only they knew this was a human life, they would not do this. And that may be the case among many women, but I want you to hear words from pro-choice, pro-abortion supporters in our day. I want you to listen closely to the way they talk about it.

Merle Hoffman, a major voice in the abortion rights movement and founder of Choices, a major center for abortions in New York City, wrote a memoir called *Intimate Wars*, in which she wrote, "Many pro-choice advocates claimed that the fetus was not alive, and that abortion was not the act of terminating it. They chose to depersonalize the fetus, to see it as amorphous residue, to say that it was only 'blood and tissue.'" But then Hoffman goes on to say this is not right—that, indeed, women do know what an abortion is. She writes about her patients and says that they knew they were terminating a life. She says, "They knew it, but my patients who made the choice to have an abortion also knew they were making the right one, a decision so vital it was worth stopping that heart." (Story and quotes taken from Albert Mohler, "Abortion is as American as Apple Pie," accessed on April 1, 2014 <http://www.albertmohler.com/2012/01/20/abortion-is-as-american-as-apple-pie-the-culture-of-death-finds-a-voice/>)

Did you hear that? It's chilling to hear abortion described as a decision so vital it's worth stopping a heart. Similarly, pro-choice, pro-abortion advocate, Mary Elizabeth Williams of

salon.com agrees with pro-life advocates that this is a child in the womb—that this is an unborn human life. Talking to other pro-choice advocates, she says,

“When we on the pro-choice side get cagey around the life question, it makes us illogically contradictory. I have friends who refer to their abortions in terms of ‘scraping out a bunch of cells’ and then a few years later we’re exultant over the pregnancies that they unhesitatingly described in terms of “the baby” and “this kid.” I know women who have been relieved at their abortions and grieved over their miscarriages. Why can’t we agree that how they felt about their pregnancies was vastly different, but that it’s pretty silly to pretend that what was growing inside of them wasn’t the same? Fetuses aren’t selective like that. They don’t qualify as human life only if they’re intended to be born.”

So she’s saying, “This is a life.” It sounds like she’s arguing a pro-life cause, but then she turns it around and she writes,

“ ... All life is not equal. ... a fetus can be a human life without having the same rights as the woman in whose body it resides. She’s the boss. Her life and what is right for her circumstances and her health should automatically trump the rights of the non-autonomous entity inside of her. Always.” (Mary Elizabeth Williams, “So what if abortion ends a life?” accessed on April 1, 2014

[http://www.salon.com/2013/01/23/so\\_what\\_if\\_abortion\\_ends\\_life/](http://www.salon.com/2013/01/23/so_what_if_abortion_ends_life/))

She concludes that an unborn child in cases of abortion is, and I quote, “A life worth sacrificing.” One article in *Glamour Magazine* chronicled a group of abortion clinics that would encourage women to express their feelings by writing down on a pink, heart-shaped sheet of paper what they would say to their child. So hear the words of two moms in particular.

One writes:

For My Little Angel,

Although I say goodbye to you today, you will always be in my mind, heart and soul. Please understand that this wasn’t your time, because you were better off in the hands of God than mine at this moment. My own creation, you are and forever will be beautiful and pure. I smile when I think of you. Even if I cry, you’ve given me reason to be strong and wise and responsible. You will always be my baby. I will see you in heaven, sweetheart.

I love you always and unconditionally,  
Your Mommy

Another writes:

I didn’t let your dad know about you simply because I’m ashamed. In my heart, I will miss you, but physically I don’t have the means to take care of you and your older sister. I will never label you a mistake, because God obviously thought you should’ve been here even though I beg to differ.

This is what I mean by a culture of death. We live in a culture where we are choosing every single day to differ with God and to take away the lives of children. We live in a country where as many as one in three women will have at least one abortion. This is our culture. This isn't far off. This is our country. I emphasize "our" there, because this is something which we in this room are a part of. We, with our taxes, support an organization that did a record number of abortion procedures—over 300,000 this last year—called Planned Parenthood. We have health care laws that subsidize plans to cover abortions. Every year, millions of babies in our culture, in our country, are being murdered.

I do not believe it is an overstatement to call abortion a modern holocaust. I believe that's an understatement when you look at the sheer numbers. And just as German Christians did not need to hide from the reality of what was happening in concentration camps, we in this room cannot, must not, hide from the reality of what is happening in abortion clinics all across our country.

Now, I know I've made some strong statements already—maybe even some uncomfortable statements for some. But I want to show you why this is a biblical issue before it's a political issue. This is definitively not a Republican or a Democratic speech. This is a Christian sermon that applies to all Christians regardless of your political persuasions. This is what we do as the church. We come together around God's Word and we ask, "In our culture, what has God said about this or that?" So what has God said about abortion?

## **God and a Culture of Death**

With Matthew 19 before us, now turn back into the Old Testament to Psalm 139. We're not going to have time to turn to every one of the Scriptures I've put below, but I want to show you how all of Scripture comes to bear on this issue. And I want you to be equipped to think biblically about abortion, to speak biblically about abortion, and to be equipped to stand boldly against abortion. Not just if you're of this political stripe or that one, but as a follower of Christ I want you to be equipped to speak biblically about it and stand boldly against it. So let's start with God and a culture of death.

What does God say amidst a culture of death where we are choosing to end children's lives? Hear the Word of the Lord in Psalm 139, and we'll start in verse 13. David, the psalmist, prays,

*For you formed my inward parts;  
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
my soul knows it very well.  
My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;  
in your book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me,  
when as yet there was none of them. (Psalm 139:13-16)*

### **Abortion is an affront to God's sovereign authority as Creator.**

Here are four verses with three truths just bubbling over out of them—verses that are echoed throughout the rest of Scripture. Number one: abortion is an affront to God's sovereign authority as Creator.

*"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb."* (Psalm 139:13) So God did this. God is Creator. Isaiah 40:28—He's the Creator of the ends of the earth. God is the giver of life. Job 12:9-10: *"Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind."* In His hand. Job 33:4: *"... [T]he breath of the Almighty gives me life."* God alone has the power and the authority to give life. A man and a woman can come together in an attempt to reproduce life, but only God can produce life. Only God. He's the giver of life, and He's the taker of life.

Deuteronomy 32:39: *"See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive."* I choose when people live and when they die. Job 1:21, when Job's children die, says, *"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away."* It is God's prerogative and God's authority alone to give and take away life. Consequently, abortion is clearly an affront to God's sovereign authority as Creator. Abortion says, "We're in control of life—who lives, who dies. We decide when a child lives, and we decide when a child dies." No, God, our Creator, alone makes these calls.

### **Abortion is an assault on God's glorious work in creation.**

Second, abortion is an assault on God's glorious work in creation. See not just the reality of God's authority as Creator, but the glory of God's work in creation. Right after David confesses God's work in creation, he says, *"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works"* (Psalm 139:13-14). That's echoed all across Psalm 104.

So follow this: the way God creates people compels praise. The way God creates people compels praise. David says, "When you formed my inward parts, when you knitted me together in my mother's womb, this work of creation evokes awe and amazement." And it does! David says this, and he didn't even know what we know now. God takes a little egg and sperm and brings them together; now two weeks later, a human heart is beating, circulating its own blood. In two weeks, you have a heartbeat. Then a few more weeks and fingers are forming on hands; brainwaves are detectable. After just six and a half weeks, these inward parts are moving. Two weeks later, there are discernable fingerprints; there's discernable sexuality. Kidneys are forming and functioning; then a gall bladder. By the twelfth week, all the organs of a baby's body are functional, and the baby begins to cry. All of this within three months. During the first trimester you have heart, organs, brain, sexuality, movement, reaction ... and God on high is doing every detail of this. Doesn't this evoke awe? Amazement? Worship? Wonder? So then to imagine that in this creative process God is doing ... abortion involves inserting the tool, taking the pill, or undergoing an operation that takes the life God is designing and destroys it. This is without question an assault on God's glorious work in creation. There is no way around this.

Most abortions take place between 10-14 weeks of gestation—what they call the optimal time for dismemberment and removal. The beauty of what God is doing, the intricacy of the person God is forming, is ripped apart. Now, this is in large part the crux of any debate concerning abortion. Some, maybe many, would take great contention with me calling abortion murder. But any debate or argument along these lines would revolve around what's going on in the womb of a woman. So what's going on in the womb? The Bible is crystal clear. According to the Word of God, the womb contains a person formed in the

image of God. According to Scripture, whether it's Psalm 139 or Genesis 1, in the womb, God is forming a person uniquely in His image. He's knitting together a human being.

People have argued and will argue what full personhood is. When does an embryo or a fetus become a person? This is the most important question. Virtually every argument in the abortion controversy comes back to this one question: What is the unborn? What or who is in the womb? Because once this question is answered, every other question comes into perspective.

Think about it: if the unborn is not human, then no justification for abortion is necessary. Some people say the unborn are not human persons; it's just a nonviable tissue mass. It's merely a part of a woman's body. Others say it's a potential human, or a human that's not yet a person, whatever that is. The reality is, if that's true then the argument's over. Have the abortion. It's like any other surgery. No justification for abortion would be necessary if the unborn isn't human.

On the other hand, if the unborn is human, no justification for abortion is adequate. None. This is where I remain indebted to Gregory Koukl, a man who wrote a great little booklet called, *Precious Unborn Human Persons*. It's a great little resource that unpacks this issue.

People say, "Abortion is such a complex issue. There's just no easy answers when it comes to abortion." But if that which is in the womb is a person, this issue is not complex at all. Now, I know for some, for many in our culture and some in this room, this is a big "if"—if what's in the womb is a person. But let's assume for a second that what is in the womb *is* a person. If that's the case, then every single justification for abortion falls apart—outside of situations where you have a tubal pregnancy, where the life of the mom and the child is in danger. Aside from that, every single justification for abortion falls apart.

People say, "But women have a right to privacy with their doctors." Well, certainly we all have a right to a measure of privacy, but no privacy argument is ever a cover for doing serious harm to another innocent human being. We have all kinds of laws that invade our privacy when we start harming another human's welfare. Privacy is not the primary issue here.

Others say, "But women should have the freedom to choose." Well, some things for sure, but not all things. Yes, we have freedom to choose—whether we have children or not. But we don't have the freedom to simply eliminate toddlers, or teenagers for that matter, who are inconvenient to us. No woman has the freedom to kill her child if it's a child, right? "But making abortions illegal forces women into back alleys with coat hangers." Well, if it's dangerous to kill a person, should we make it easier for them? If it's dangerous to rob a bank, do we make it more convenient for bank robbers? "But more children will create a drain on the economy." When human beings get expensive, shall we kill them? Koukl mentions a little girl named Rachel, the daughter of family friends of his. He describes her this way:

Rachel is two months old, but she is still six weeks away from being a full-term baby. She was born prematurely at 24 weeks, in the middle of her mother's second trimester. On the day of her birth, Rachel weighed one pound, nine ounces, but dropped to just under a pound soon after. She was so small she could rest in the palm of her daddy's hand. She was a tiny, living human person. Heroic measures were taken to save this child's life. Why? Because we have an obligation to protect, nurture and care for other humans who would die without our help, especially little children. Rachel was a

vulnerable, invaluable human being. But get this [Kugel writes], if a doctor came into the hospital room and, instead of caring for Rachel, took the life of this little girl as she lay quietly nursing at her mother's breast, that would be homicide. However, if this same little girl—the very same Rachel—was inches away, resting inside her mother's womb, she could be legally killed by abortion.

This makes no sense. It's utterly ludicrous! If this is a person, if this is a child in the womb, everything revolves around what's happening in the womb. And Scripture is clear: the womb contains a person formed in the image of God. You cannot believe God's Word and deny this. And once this is realized, there is absolutely no adequate justification for abortion. That's why abortion is murder, because it's willfully taking the life of an innocent human being.

Don't miss this. See this. Know that while the unborn is visibly hidden from man, he or she is never hidden from God. Job says, "*Your hands fashioned and made me ... You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews*" (Job 10:8a, 11b) So see what God sees in the womb—how God is working in the womb. How He's forming and knitting and creating and nurturing and shaping and crafting in a way that evokes praise and awe. And see how abortion is an assault on that glorious work of God. The way God creates people compels praise. All of God's works are wonderful according to Psalm 139:14. This, too, is critical, because part of, and, in a sense, much of the contemporary defense for abortion involves denying this reality.

Abortions happen here, and around the world for that matter, because people see childbearing in certain situations as inconvenient or costly. It's too much for a woman in a certain situation to handle. It's inadvisable for a woman in a certain situation to undertake. (That's what we're told) Consider the advancement of medical technology: we now have the ability to detect sexuality, which is huge in some countries around the world. I think about China and its "one child" policy. If you have one child, it's advantageous to have a boy, so girls are aborted. Or think about India, where it's more expensive to have a girl because you lose money on dowry, so girls are aborted.

Detecting disability is an issue too—we know it's possible to determine whether or not a baby in the womb has Down's Syndrome or has some particular debilitating disease that will affect their life. So should abortion be permissible in such circumstances? Not if you believe Psalm 139:14. Not if you believe that all of God's works are wonderful, because when you believe this, when you know this, then you know that God's work is wonderful, even, or especially, in the case of disability.

This truth is all over Scripture, like John 9 with the man born blind. The crowds ask, "Whose fault is this? This guy's born blind." And Jesus answers, "This is not his fault or his parents' fault. This happened so that the wonderful works of God might be displayed in him." God did this so that, one day, this man would see and declare and delight in His glory.

Now, I don't presume to know all the difficulties that are involved with disabilities. I know for Heather and me it did not take long in a special needs adoption process to have our eyes opened to the severe plight of orphans with disabilities all around the world. Yet, to think that many children, because of their disabilities, were killed before they were even born. One article on ABC News from a pediatric geneticist at a children's hospital in Boston said an estimated 92% of all women who receive a prenatal diagnosis of Down's Syndrome choose to terminate their pregnancies. Ninety-two percent. Do not deny the wonderful work of God, even, or especially, in disability. God has a design and a desire to use everything for the

good of His people and the glory of His name, and it is wrong to play God in such situations by saying, "We know what is better than Him. We beg to differ." Don't say to God, "I beg to differ."

God's works are wonderful, even, or especially, in the case of disability, and even, or especially, in the midst of difficulty. This is Genesis 50:20. God delights in taking difficult circumstances, even evil circumstances, and turning them into good. He takes all things, even what seem to be tragic things, and works them together for good (Romans 8:28). This is who our God is.

Now, it's at this point some people ask, "Well, what about cases of incest or rape? Is abortion justifiable then?" And again, I cannot presume to know what it is like to be in such a situation. I shudder at the horror of that thought for my wife or any other woman for that matter. I will not presume to know the physical and emotional toll this brings, not only on a woman, but her family. But come back to the fundamental question: Is the baby in the womb a person? If so, then everything changes. Would you murder a child who is outside of the womb because they were conceived by rape? Of course you wouldn't! Then why would you murder a child inside the womb because they were conceived by rape? Why should a child pay for his father's crime? (Deuteronomy 24:16) How ought we to treat a child, an innocent child, who reminds us of a terrible experience? With love and mercy, right? People say, "Well, what about the emotional toll on the woman?" Think about it: if the rapist was caught, would we allow the woman to murder the rapist in order to have emotional relief? Absolutely not. Then why would we allow her to murder her innocent child to have emotional relief? I'm not saying this is easy. I'm not saying it's easy at all. I'm not saying this is popular. Even the most staunch pro-life politician today always has to give a disclaimer: "Except for cases of incest or rape." To go the step further and say, "No abortion with the exception of a mother's physical health," would lead to total political fallout. You'll never have a political position.

But this is the Word of God. This is Scripture reminding us that our God has a record of taking evil things and turning them for good. Our God! This is the gospel, right? Our God has taken the worst act of evil in all of history—the murder of His own Son—and He's turned it into the means of our salvation. God is in the business of taking difficulty and turning it into good for glory. It's what Romans 8 is all about. We can trust God. Even when we can't understand His ways, we can trust His works. Even the ones we least understand in the end will show themselves wonderful.

### **Abortion is an attack on God's intimate relationship with the unborn.**

Abortion is an affront to God's sovereign authority as Creator and an assault on God's glorious work in creation, and abortion is an attack on God's intimate relationship with the unborn. This reality just flows from all we've seen. We see it here in Psalm 139 and in the rest of Scripture. See the intimacy of Psalm 139:15:

*My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;  
in your book were written, every one of them,  
the days that were formed for me,  
when as yet there was none of them.*

God is clearly not relating here to an embryo, but to a person, and His relationship with that person from conception, from the forming of inward parts, is astoundingly intimate. And



then you look at the rest of Scripture, and you see different places where God is described as relating to the unborn. He fashions them (Job 31:15) and values them, so that to hurt a woman who is pregnant and to hurt that child inside the womb is serious before God (Exodus 21:22-25). He knows them (Jeremiah 1:5) and relates to them (Psalm 22:9-10). God says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (Jeremiah 1:5). He calls them (Galatians 1:15); He names them (Isaiah 49:1); He anoints them (Luke 1:15, 44). These are all pictures that we have in Scripture of God's relationship with unborn babies. Do you see the intimacy here? Do you realize how serious this is?

Abortion is definitively *not* a primarily political issue or a social issue or a women's issue or a children's issue or a health issue. Primarily, abortion is a God issue. It's an affront to the character of God. It's an assault on the work of God, and it's an attack on the relationship that God has with precious babies He creates.

## **The Gospel in a Culture of Death**

That leads us, then, to the gospel in a culture of death. So how does God respond to this blatant, horrifying sin among us? To our culture, our country—how does God respond? See His character in two primary ways.

### **God is the Judge of sinners.**

One: God is the judge of sinners. God is a righteous judge (Genesis 18:25). God will give to each person according to what He has done (Romans 2:6-11). Ladies and gentlemen, God is going to judge us. We're going to be judged for this. He hates the taking of innocent life, and He judges those who are involved in taking innocent life.

You say, "God's going to judge us—who's the 'us'?" I would propose that this includes mothers who have aborted babies, fathers who have encouraged abortion, grandparents who have supported abortion, and friends who have recommended abortion. This 'us' includes doctors who have performed abortions; doctors who have carried this out. This includes leaders who have permitted abortion—those with leadership and influence in others' lives. This would include pastors who have ever counseled people to have abortions. This certainly includes legislators and others who have worked to make abortion possible. This obviously includes the current President of the United States—whom I respect, whom I pray for and whom I was provoked to particularly pray for this morning—who is proactively, aggressively working to keep the murder of innocent children legal. He'll stand before God as judge.

I mentioned already, my desire is not to give a political speech. It's to preach the Word and to proclaim what God said. But even here, when it comes to government, God has spoken. We don't have time to turn to Romans 13, but this is where the Bible addresses the role of civil authorities and our responsibility to those authorities. So let me read it to you. Listen to the Word of God:

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's*

*servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.*

Now, there's so much there to unpack. But when it comes down to it, there's a simple and clear truth that's missed in political discussions, even among Christians in the church on issues like this. The Bible teaches that government is given by God for the good of people. So government is given by God. It exists under the authority of God. It's instituted by God to be a terror to bad conduct. Those who do what is good are approved by the government, and those who do what is bad are not. That's God's design. Under God, the primary purpose of government is to protect and promote the good of its people.

The government does this by making and enforcing laws, which leads to the second part—that government is given by God for the legislation of morality. Governments are given by God to affirm the good and condemn the bad. That's what Romans 13:3 is all about—to ensure justice and promote good for people. This is foundational, yet many people say—even in the church—“Well, it's not the State's job, the job of the government, to legislate morality.” But that's a sham argument, and we all know it. The State does have the responsibility of legislating morality, saying that stealing is wrong, lying is wrong, murder is wrong, and a host of other things are wrong.

When it comes to the issue of abortion, people immediately say—even in the church—“Well, we shouldn't take away someone's right to choose.” But the government exists to take away people's right to choose all the time. You cannot choose to steal. If you do, there will be consequences. You cannot choose to do a whole host of things for which there are laws against, and it's good that government says these things. If everyone chose to do whatever they wanted to do, the inevitable result would always be anarchy—we're all free to do whatever we want.

That's not good, and it's the basis by which many—even in the church—might say, “Well, I wouldn't have an abortion, but I don't think we should take someone else's right to choose away from them.” But we take people's right to choose evil away from them every day as a society, and this is a really good thing for all of us. It's good for us to say, “No one has the right to do evil.” And it's absolute moral silliness—even cultural suicide—for us to say that everyone should have the right to choose whatever they want to do.

This is where I want to call you, Christian, out of a muddled, middle road that says, “Well, I don't think we should impose morality on someone else.” I want to call you to realize that we impose morality on others every day, and it's a good thing for us all. When it comes to evil, it is right for us to oppose it—to wisely, graciously, firmly, humbly, boldly oppose it. The whole idea of pro-choice begs the question: Pro-choice about what? Whether you have Mexican or Chinese food, where you live, what kind of car you drive?—of course you are pro-choice. But you are not pro-choice about rape, and you are not pro-choice about burglary, and you are not pro-choice about kidnapping. So why are you pro-choice about killing children?

Brothers and sisters, moral and political neutrality here is not an option for those who believe the Bible. It's not an option. It's a lot safer and more comfortable to be neutral, but it's unbiblical in this culture. This leads me to include here that when I proclaim from the Word that God is the judge of us, I would include the reality that He is the judge of Christians who have done nothing about abortion. Until very recently, this included me. So this is an issue about which, for far too long in my life and in my ministry even, I was shamefully passive.

This is a battle raging in our culture. And if I, if you, sit idly by while millions of children—individuals, people, images of God around us—are dismembered and destroyed, then we are directly disobeying God's command to speak and to work on behalf of the weak, oppressed, and innocent among us. Doing nothing is disobedience here.

Randy Alcorn put it best when he said, "To endorse or even to be neutral about killing innocent children created in God's image is unthinkable in the Scriptures, was unthinkable to Christians in church history, and should be unthinkable to Christians today" (Randy Alcorn, *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, 293). We will stand before God as judge. He is the judge of sinners.

### **God is the Savior of sinners.**

Thankfully, that is not all God is. Ladies and gentlemen, God is also the Savior of sinners. So please hear this: to anyone and everyone in this room who has aborted a child, encouraged abortion, supported abortion, performed abortion, permitted abortion, or done nothing about abortion—done nothing about the murder of children in our culture and our country—God, the God whose authority we have rebelled against, whose work we have ripped apart, or done nothing about it being ripped apart, this same God has sent His Son to save us from our sin.

In His mercy, Jesus was born to save us from ourselves (Titus 3). He was born. God Himself has come to us, born a baby from the womb as a boy, so that, as a man, He might live the life none of us have lived—a life of perfect, total obedience to God the Father. He never turned aside from the Father's way to His own way. He never begged to differ with God as we do in thousands of ways across this room. When you hear a woman having an abortion say, "I'm begging to differ with God," see in her words a reflection of every single one of our hearts. We've all turned aside from His way to our ways. We've said, "Our way is better, and I don't agree with that."

We've all done this, but Jesus never did. He lived the life that we have not lived, and then He died. He was murdered. He gave His life on a cross in our place, to pay the price for our sin. Think of it: God made Him Who had no sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). God put the sin of those who have murdered babies, those who have permitted that, who have performed that, who have supported that... He put that sin upon Christ on the cross. Christ has taken it in our place—the penalty for our sin. He's paid the price for our sin. He's died so that we might have life—so that you and I can be forgiven of all of our sin before God and healed in our souls by God.

Hear this unfathomable, indescribable, glorious, wonderful gospel! For everyone who puts their trust in Jesus as the Savior of sinners and the Lord of creation, hear this: He forgives you entirely, and He heals you deeply. God forgives entirely. And by entirely, I mean entirely.

*"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103). "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (Isaiah 43). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1).*

Oh, to every woman in this room who has had an abortion, hear this: Christ has paid the price for your abortion. He's endured the penalty for your abortion. He forgives you entirely, and He does not desire for you to live your life in pain and regret, but in peace and in joy.

Yes, hate the sin of your past. That's a good thing in any area of sin. The pain of sin from the past is oftentimes a powerful deterrent to sin in the future, but it cannot rob you of the peace that God has designed for you in the present. Remember what Jesus said to a woman who lived the immoral lifestyle in Luke 7? *"Your sins are forgiven. ... Your faith has saved you; go in peace."* (Luke 7:48, 50). God desires His peace to be your possession. He forgives entirely; He heals deeply; He restores completely; He redeems fully. Romans 8:1 *"There is therefore now no condemnation..."* There's no condemnation. There's no, no, no condemnation for you in Christ. Trust in Christ. You're not guilty anymore. There's no condemnation for you. You do not walk around with a scarlet "A" on your chest. You're forgiven. And God does not look at you—hear this—God does not look at you and see the guilt of abortion. God looks at you and sees the righteousness of His Son. He remembers your sin no more.

This is true for you if you had one abortion or five abortions. This is true for you if you've medically performed thousands of abortions or legally permitted millions of abortions. God forgives; God heals; God restores; and God redeems. He redeems. This is so mysterious—how God works all things together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). All things. It's mysterious how God takes even the worst things in any one of our past, and He redeems and uses them for good.

I think about women in this faith family, precious sisters in this faith family, who I know have had abortions, who have shared their hurt of that and who now are ministering to other women out of the overflow of the healing God brings. These women are serving in different capacities all across this church out of the overflow of God's mercy in them. They're not doing this as some kind of sick penance to try to make up for what they did. They're doing it because their hearts have been renewed; the peace of God has become their possession. God is using that which is in the past to serve others in the present. He redeems fully.

Here's what I want to do before we get to this last section. I think it would be appropriate for us to pause at this point and spend any time in needed confession in this room. So you look at that list (in your Message Notes): mothers, fathers, grandparents, friends, doctors, leaders, and Christians who have done nothing about abortion. Let me just ask you to bow your head where you are and, all across this room, for you to go before God. I'm going to ask Matt just to play in the background. Would you take just a moment in the quietness of this room to confess any conviction from your heart and your life, and to know that you're confessing to a God who loves you. He loves you; He loves you; He loves you. And when you confess your sins, *"He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9)

## **Our Lives in a Culture of Death**

I wanted to pause after the previous point and then pick back up for a reason. I don't want us to think, even in this gathering, "Okay, we've celebrated the gospel, we've had confession, we've talked about grace. Oh, that was good. All right, now let's move on. What's for dinner? What do we have going on this week?" To use language from the book of Acts, what does it look like to show repentance with our deeds? (Acts 26:20) So what is God now calling us to do? What are you going to do based on this Word we've looked at tonight? Right where you're sitting, what are we and what are you going to do?

According to James 1, we're fools if we look at the Word and then do nothing about it. It's like looking into a mirror and forgetting what you look like when you leave (James 1:22-24). The Bible says we're fools if we do that. So, God, deliver us every week—deliver us from a spectator mentality in this room that is content to look at the Word and then just kind of move on with life as normal. We can't just move on. This is the Word of God that He has spoken to us. We're in this culture, so what are we going to do?

This is where I want to help you. We're going to fly through this pretty quick, and I want to just put some ideas out there—some thoughts out there to get you thinking. It's not that you have to do one of these things, but this is to get you thinking about things that you need to do—that God might be leading you to do—based upon His Word. Now, how does that look in practice?

I put Ephesians 5:7-11 there in your notes. Ephesians 5: *"Therefore, do not become partners with them."* So don't participate with them in doing this. *"For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ... and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them."*

So we realize what that means: we're not only supposed to avoid works of darkness—we're supposed to work against works of darkness. This is not just holiness defined by what we avoid in this world—"I'm holy because I don't this and I don't do this and I don't do this ... I'm holy so as long as I'm keeping my distance from that ..." That's not holiness. Holiness is active engagement in the world for the glory of God in Christ.

What I want to call you to tonight based on the Word of God is active engagement in this world for the glory of God in Christ when it comes to what we've seen in the Word. I hope we've seen that moral neutrality is a dangerous myth when it comes to this issue of abortion. So what does this look like for me? What does this look like for you?

### **Look around ...**

Here are some things to get you thinking. One: look around. Look around and learn the facts about abortion. Let tonight be a start, but we need to know what's going on. See the pictures of abortion. I've not shown pictures or video tonight, but I do believe that we need to know, to see and to feel the horror of abortion—just as people did not need to hide from images in concentration camps in Nazi Germany because it was just too painful for them to watch. They needed to see. They didn't need to pretend like it wasn't there. They needed to see it. We don't need to hide from images. We need to feel the weight of an unborn child's humanity—to experience the horror of what's happening in 3,000 other lives every single day.

If it's been a while since you saw or watched, then see and watch. Learn, see, and listen to the victims of abortion. Walk with one another in the church in such closeness that your brothers and sisters find in you an open ear to talk about what's most often hidden way below the surface. This is where you go beyond just superficial, casual "Hey, how's it going?" to sharing life with each other.

One estimate is that 95% of people in the church who've had an abortion have never really come to terms with it. I don't know exactly how you measure a stat like that, but if it's anywhere near true, that makes me concerned as a pastor. I'm assuming there are a number of people hearing this message tonight who've never told a single person they had an abortion. And you are walking this road, suffering in silence.

### **Step forward ...**

So Christians, I want to call you. Church, I want to call you to listen, to be in relationship with brothers and sisters along these lines. And then I want to call those of you who've had abortions to step forward and share your burdens from the past with brothers and/or sisters. These burdens are not intended for you to carry alone. Find a brother or a sister who you can share with, pray with, walk alongside.

We have had numerous small groups made up of women who have walked through this journey together, and in the providence of God—not knowing what we were going to be diving into tonight—one of those groups is set to start a couple weeks from now in February. You can find information about that in the Access Corner of the church. I think there's some cards in the women's restrooms, too, or you can call or email the church office. Let me urge you to do that if you've not already walked this journey alongside someone. I mentioned that God forgives entirely, and He heals deeply. The reality is that while forgiveness happens at a point in time, this healing deeply is most often a process over time, so I want to invite you to walk the process over time with others.

Share your struggles in the present with your brothers and sisters. What I mean by that is ... if at any point now or in the future you contemplate abortion—whether you've come in here tonight contemplating abortion or at some point in the future you contemplate abortion—don't think, "That was so strongly communicated against at Brook Hills, I just don't think I could ever share that I've had that thought with somebody." Don't think that. Share that thought with other brothers and sisters who can walk alongside you with the Word and can be strength for you when you find yourself weakening when it comes to temptation. So step forward.

### **Speak up ...**

Then to all of us, speak up. Speak up two ways before God in prayer. This is a battle that's intense in our culture—even the church—and it requires prayer and fasting. Look at the other prayer page in your worship guide for this week and you'll see a section titled "Pray for Our City," and all six days there deal with ways to pray according to this issue.

So let me encourage you: Let this be kind of a launching pad for you this week. Remember what we talked about last week—praying intentionally for different things on different days. Maybe plan to pray for the oppressed, and this would be a part of praying for the oppressed. So be intentional. We need to pray. We need to pray in this battle. Speak up before God, and speak up before the government.

So I don't know what exactly this needs to look like in your life, but I want to challenge you. You have democratic privileges of free speech and representation and demonstration to press for legal protection of the unborn. And this is happening. More abortion restrictions were enacted at the state level from 2011-2013 than the entire previous decade. States passed 205 abortion restrictions between 2011-2013 with nearly half those laws (45%) falling into three categories: targeted regulations of abortion providers, bans on abortions after 20 weeks, and restrictions on medical abortions. Things are progressing there, so work to continue that progression. You've got a gift here of free speech, representation and demonstration, so how are you going to steward that in this culture? Speak up before the government.

### **Reach out ...**

Finally, reach out. I've just listed some different ways that you might think about reaching out. Reach out through giving to pro-life causes and ministries. If you look on that prayer sheet, you'll see several of these ministries: Save a Life (Vestavia), Her Choice (Shelby),

Alabama Positions for Life, Catholic Family Services, United for Life Foundation. These are different folks we are pointing you to who are working along these lines in the city. Give and work alongside them.

Someone came up to me after one of the gatherings this morning and shared with me that currently, for the first time in like 30 or 40 years, there is not an operating abortion clinic in the city of Birmingham. So we give glory to God for that. At the same time, the next service somebody came up to me and said, "That's because the one that is not operating is remodeling, because they've gotten a big donation to do more remodeling and to open back up." I don't know all the details. I haven't even done any research on that, so I'm just putting it out there, but we need to work at this.

Even as I say that, we need to remember that the United States of America doesn't all look like Birmingham, Alabama. So there's a place here for giving and serving alongside pro-life causes and ministries and through serving unwed and underage mothers. I think about ministries that we support, like Lifeline Children's Ministry and Alabama Baptist Children's Home. You hear these words from moms having abortions, and you feel the hurt and the confusion and the questions. So to come alongside of unwed and underage mothers particularly and to say, "We want to walk alongside you in this. We want to explore alternatives with you."

We can serve through volunteering at pregnancy centers, through supporting abortion alternatives (explore creatively how you can do that), and through adopting unwanted children. So Brook Hills, let this be one more call to a deeper culture of adoption and foster care in this church and in this community. In a culture that sees children increasingly as unwanted liabilities, let's show this culture that every child is wanted and every child is loved by God.

Just so you know, I'm processing through this same thing. I want to ask you to pray for me. I'm in the process of working on a book project to show how the gospel compels action on this issue and some other social issues. I look at the opportunity God's entrusted to me— influence, potentially, that God's given to me—and I want to steward that for His glory on this issue. I've just been really convicted about that. Earlier—late last year in November and December—there were a few weeks in a row I wasn't preaching. It's because during the week I was working specifically on that book. That will happen again in the Spring. So I'd ask you to pray for me. I share that simply to communicate that this one way I want to look at my own life. As in, what can I do?

So now look at your life. What are you going to do? Don't just hear this word and walk away doing nothing. You'll be deceived. Do what it says. Do what it says.

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