

The Sanctity of Life in Biblical Perspective

“Culture of Life or Culture of Death?”

Deuteronomy 30:11–20

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January 20, 2013 – Morning Sermon

We have an Old Testament text in this study of the culture of life or the culture of death. This is God’s Word, the Truth, inspired, inerrant and infallibles. Deuteronomy 30:11–14 says [11] *“For this commandment that I (Moses) command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. [12] It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ [13] Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ [14] But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached to you.

This is our sanctity of life Sunday. It’s based on the infamous Roe v Wade decision. It is the 40th anniversary of it so using this text of Scripture I want to talk to you about the culture of life and the culture of death. What does it mean to choose life now? This text in Deuteronomy, inspired by the Holy Spirit, written under the authorship of Moses, is basically his concluding sermon before he dies. If I could put it in context, Moses has written five books – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy – the fifth concluding book of the Pentateuch. The people whom God has delivered from bondage are now to go into the Promised Land. Moses delivers them this message of God’s covenant grace and for thirty chapters he lays out God’s blessings, God’s cursings and choose the blessings of God by choosing life. His hope is that they would choose life. The word life has run throughout the entire book of Deuteronomy.

That stands in stark contrast because the people of Israel exist surrounded by cultures of death and despair. All you have to do is to look back at Egypt from where they were delivered from. As God’s hand was bringing them out and forward, what had happened? Pharaoh had given an edict of death upon the children. The children of the Hebrews were to be put to death by the midwives and of course Moses, who is anticipating Christ, a type of Christ, when Christ comes there will be another ruler by the name of Herod. Herod will give the edict to destroy the children. It says in the New Testament that Satan is a deceiver, a liar and wherever he goes is a murderer. When cultures listen to the spirit of the age the result will be a culture of death and despair.

There will always be the culture of the death and despair. There it was in Egypt. There it was in Rome in the days when Jesus was born. There it was in the surrounding nations, all around them. We begin to see it and look at it and our hearts are repelled and there’s a revulsion within us when we see it. Yet do we really need to look very far? We like those pagan cultures that are turning from the influence of the salt and light of the Kingdom of God in this culture, are now drowning in a culture of death and despair. We look for Band-Aids when in fact a deep surgery is needed.

How rightly should we have been horrified when the message came on December 14, 2012 from Newtown, Connecticut? Twenty children and six adults were killed. It was a massacre, an onslaught of death and in all places, a school. On that same day in

Connecticut, where you find Newtown, seventy children, in what ought to be the safest place in all of God's creation, the womb, were assaulted and were put to death. On December 15, 2012, seventy more were put to death and on December 16, 2012, seventy more in the same state. As I'm looking at this trying to grasp some rationality, I see elected leaders weeping over those twenty students and rightly so, while applauding, cheering and seeking the funding to put to death the other seventy.

On 9/11 (2001), three thousand Americans lost their lives. We all know the story of the airplanes that went into the Trade Center Buildings. On 9/12/01, three thousand plus Americans came under the assault of the abortionist's needle or knife. On September 13 and September 14 and since Roe v Wade for 40 years, sixty million have been aborted. I look at a culture that exalts itself and its autonomy against the law of God and then searches around for answers that are so superficial and illogical. So I know what we'll do. We'll build barricades in our schools. We'll put barbed wire and locked doors.

This has nothing to do with the sermon, it's just a blessing in my heart but there are so many of you that teach or are administrators in some of our public schools here and I count you as missionaries. One of you this last week opened the door for me to go in and talk up front about Christian leadership in a class of about 50 to 60 students. What struck me was as I walked up to the school, I had to get inspected, basically frisked, they looked at my identity, had to get a badge and then I could go in. What happened to the time when a 7 year old boy, would get up in the morning late, because his mother and father had overslept? This is going to sound like a biography because it is. Some mornings the mother had overslept so much that it was a mile and a half to school that she'd say "Here eat this sugar sandwich you need to get to school." What a breakfast, the breakfast of champions. I would walk to school and into the classroom with no armed guards, no gates and no locked doors. I'd just walk to school and walked back home. Then I'd walk another five blocks to play baseball all afternoon and then I'd walk home.

Why is it that somebody in the leadership of this country can sit down and say "Oh my goodness, fifty years ago people could walk to school?" How many of us will send our children to walk to school today? Back then they didn't have to be protected by armed guards and they could walk home. Now what has happened that we have to guard them, enclose them, put them in school prisons to protect them in the culture? Have guns all of a sudden become aggressive? They did have guns back then. This is not a second amendment issue with me or a political issue with me but this is just a matter of thinking. What has happened? I'll tell you what, it's the gun. I don't mean to be funny on this but that's like saying obesity kills so let's outlaw spoons. There is something wrong. There is something happening in the culture.

It is a death drenched culture and we need to ask ourselves "How did it get there?" I would suggest to you that it got there with two water shed events. One is the unchallenged atheistic Darwinian view of humanity that we are nothing more than a chance explosion of molecules and atoms and somehow this came into existence. The whole point of life is survival of the fittest. That leads to the most unfit and vulnerable as targets if they're not convenient – children.

Secondly, is what Dr. Shaeffer warned us about years ago with that marvelous presentation "Whatever happened to the human race?" Roe v Wade introduced state approved, now state funded, state cheered abortion. Political parties absolutely cheer

this, seek ways to fund it and do you ever hear anymore “Let’s keep abortion safe and rare”? First of all that’s a very nonsensical thing because if in fact that which is in the womb is nothing more than a piece of tissue, you don’t keep tonsillectomies safe and rare, but you see deep down we know that’s why this issue won’t go away after 40 years. Deep down we all know what is in that womb is a life. That’s why we almost always used to say “Look here’s my wife, she’s with child” because that’s what we know. We know that is what it is.

Therefore we then decided to pass a law that has led this country and the country of Canada, the only two countries in western culture that have no laws to protect a child in the womb yet until 1973 that same child could inherit property, be protected and could actually sue and be sued because it’s a person. Roe v Wade is just as imbecilic, not only in terms of the constitution but in terms of logic as the very cases to uphold slavery that declared African Americans as three fifths of a person. We know that this is life and we know that we need to deal with this. We cannot keep silent on it and yet according to the latest survey 76 percent of the members of Protestant churches believe Roe v Wade should not be touched. 64 percent of Roman Catholics believe by survey that Roe v Wade should not be touched. The only religious movement that has a majority that says something should be done about Roe v Wade is the Evangelical church and it is a bare majority of 54 percent.

I would suggest that part of the issue is our disregard of the issue and part of the issue comes from pulpits. My dear friends, I cannot be silent on this issue. It may cost attendance, applause and other things but I just cannot be silent on it. I can’t help but think if my forbearers had spoken to the unbiblical practice of chattel slavery of man stealing from the pulpits with Biblical clarity, we might have saved 700,000 lives and a thing called the Civil War. To be silent is just not an option. If we choose to be silent then we have chosen the engagement and embracing of death and our people are not being equipped so that these surveys reflect silent pulpits and silent leadership.

I read recently some of the journals of repentance of the some of the confessing evangelical churches in Germany after the war. The German pastors with broken hearts acknowledged “We saw them taking the Jewish people to slaughter and we closed our eyes.” It was even worse than that. One man said “The railroad carrying them ran by and behind my church. The cars were filled with Jewish prisoners crying for help on our Sunday worship services and we just cranked up the organ louder. That’s all we did.” We have to think through this Biblically. We have to deal with it appropriately, compassionately, but courageously and if we don’t address it then we have chosen death and not life.

Let’s look at this text in Deuteronomy. You and I live in a culture where this year 35 and 40 percent of all the children who are conceived, those children in a mother’s womb, will come under the abortionist’s knife or needle. That is cascading into infanticide. One out of every three deaths of five year olds and younger who are murdered are murdered by their parents. With increasing regularity now into the hundreds, children with defects are born and put into nurseries with this sign – Do Not Feed. Infanticide and active euthanasia, the culture of death is drowning us. As grateful as I am that people are horrified with massacres like Newtown and Aurora, Colorado and others, the reality is we ought to be thinking “Why is it that we have a gothic culture and that movie after movie is consumed with death and destruction as the big sellers? Why is

it that our video games actually teach people to cheer and keep score at senseless slaughter? Why is this happening?"

I would suggest that it is because of a wrong view of creation which we are not speaking to and secondly, is Roe v Wade in its affirmation, funding and applauding of the death of the most defenseless has created a culture of death that even leads to the culture of death entertainment, but God's people can choose life. God's people can speak for life. That is what Moses said to them after laying out the covenant. Let's go back and look at this text.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 says [11] *"For this commandment that I (Moses) command (covenant of life) you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. (Why is it not hard or far off?) [12] It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' (You don't have to go to heaven to get this Word of life. Heaven has brought it to you.) [13] Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' (You don't have to go over the sea to get it because God brought you through the sea to it. God has overcome everything including the sea to bring it to you and to bring it to you. This next verse is key.) [14] But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.*

Up until then you bring this Word of life to me and I'm dead, but God not only brought the Word of Life to you but He has brought you to the Word of Life. He put it in your heart so that not only do you have it near you and before you but you now have it in you so you can choose it. It's not choose life so that you live but it's God brought you to life by His grace, now that He has delivered you and given you life, now in obedience out of love to Him, choose life and that's what He says in the next verse.

Deuteronomy 30:15-16 says [15] *"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. [16] If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. He says you will be a blessing in the land if choose life. Do not choose death. He is not saying choose life by doing this and then I will give you life. I have brought you to life. God's redeeming grace has delivered you. I have parted seas and sent the Word from heaven, not only to you but I have put it in you. I have put it in your mouth and your heart, now you can choose life, not to get life but because you're alive. You can choose life. You can choose to obey Me because you love Me and I have given you life. If you love Me and you choose life and you choose to live by the Word of Life then I will not only bless your life but through you I will bless the lives of others in the land that you occupy.*

Deuteronomy 30:17-18 says [17] *But if your heart turns away, (even believers can do this) and you will not hear, but **are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them,** [18] I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. Ultimately this matter of obedience is really an issue of worship. Do you worship the Lord with your life who has saved you so that you will obey Him and choose the Word of Life? If not the spirit of the age and the deceit of Satan can cause you to turn toward him. You will worship but when you worship the gods of this world then that will bring death and despair. So do*

not choose death and despair. Even for believers when you choose that which is death and sin there are consequences. Yes you're forgiven but there are still consequences. David chose to worship other gods with his sexual immorality. Was he forgiven? Yes but he lost a child and became a liability to a nation. We are called as believers forgiven of the Lord by grace not to turn away and worship the gods of this world but worship the God of glory and choose life.

Deuteronomy 30:19 says [19] *I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore **choose life**, that you and your offspring may live...* I would suggest that the opposite is true also, if you choose death then children will become the targets of the death. Choose life and there is blessing from covenant generation to covenant generation. Your choice of life to honor Me because you love Me who brought the Word to your heart that not only brings life to you but it brings life to your children. If you worship the gods of this age and you choose death that brings death, destruction, despair and it goes to your children. What does it mean to live?

Deuteronomy 30:20 says [20] *loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for **he is your life and length of days**, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.* Here is this glorious thing. He tells you what it means to choose life. What does it mean to choose life? It means to choose God. That's life. It's not I'm not going to choose sin and death, oh I'm going to choose to do better and get life. No, it's saying 'no' to self, sin and death and saying 'yes' to God to worship Him and that brings you to the choice of life. It is the Lord who is your life when you choose life. Because you love Him you embrace His Word and make life decisions, instead of death decisions.

If I can put it this way, in the language of most of us and the way we were raised, Moses was finishing his sermon right here and basically he gives an altar call. He says "The day of decision is here. Choose God and life." There are only two choices. Choose God and His grace and mercy that has come to you and that's life. When you worship Him then you bring life wherever you go. If you choose death then death has its consequences as well. You don't need to go up to heaven to get it. Heaven has come down for you. You don't need to cross seas to get it. God has parted seas to get to you. He has come to you, to your heart and mouth and life that you may have life.

I want to give you three thoughts, three takeaways on what it means to choose life. Here is the first thing. When you choose life it means to choose God, His saving grace and that you will worship Him. If we worship Him, not only when we gather but with our lives, what would happen in the culture of death out of God's covenant people in this surrounding, drowning culture of death if there was a culture of life? Our marriages aren't dying but they would begin to prosper in Jesus Christ because husbands out of worship to God will love their wives. Wives out of worship to God will complete, respect, and come alongside their husbands. If parents would worship God by raising their children in the Lord, not worship or kill or make idols of their children. This life entrusted to me is sacred. God says "I'll be gracious to you and your children after you." So I want to raise these children to worship the Lord, in the Lord, in the nurture and admonish of the Lord.

What would happen when there are a people whose children are seen as a burden unless they come perfect and at the right time, but we see children as a gift of the Lord, a

heritage that we don't worship nor kill, but raise them in worship to the Lord? What would happen if there was a surrounding culture like that? If in God's providence we don't have any, give us yours. Don't kill them but give us yours. We will bring them into our foster homes. We'll adopt them into our homes because we desire to worship the Lord with our marriages, relationships and here's a covenant community where life flourishes. God has been chosen. God is now being worshipped because God's grace has set us free. When God's grace has set us free now something different begins to happen. Now in this covenant community there is courage and compassion.

I know here decisions were made with the deceits of Satan and men and women have the pains of abortion upon you, but I want you to know today, choose life. There is a Redeemer who will forgive you and turn ashes into roses. Come to Him. Don't play behavior modification, denial or any of that. Say "Lord, I have sinned but I have a Savior. Forgive me. Renew me. Refresh me. I'm Yours." Those of us who haven't worshipped God enough to be able to speak to the issue, minister to the issue, Lord, we choose You and life and this brings me to takeaway number two.

Takeaway number two is to choose life is not only to worship God and that is to be seen in the way we live our life but secondly, Moses said "I have set before you life." We need to set before this culture life. The way to do it is to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to lost men and women who have fallen under the sway of the father of lies and who was a murderer from the beginning. If we will bring the Gospel of saving grace and life that Jesus Christ saves sinners, disciple people so that they develop a lifestyle from a life love, a life view where they see all of life in Christ and for Christ, then we are setting before the world life with compassion, humility, courage and conviction. We set before this world this life of ministry, with intentional evangelism and disciple making so that Christ centered, Gospel saturated and Spirit filled Christians are able to do life, speak life and lead others to the Word that is near them, the Word of Life, Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, we have to engage the culture. What is the first step in engaging the culture? Here it is. We have to pray. The battle is the Lord's. He'll use us. We have got to lay hold of heaven. The culture of death is rooted in the industry of our economy. You are going after the gods of mammon, self-absorption and self-autonomy. Only God can do this. He'll do it through you and say only pray but pray. Prayer is where we start. Engage in evangelism and discipleship. Engage in these issues of the day. I'm so grateful for all of these opportunities. Perhaps I can engage at the point of legislation to restrain the death spiral or engage with these women in crisis situations with Save-A-Life or we can open up our home to foster care or adoption. Don't kill the child. We'll take a child. We'll be glad to take the child. Perhaps it's that single mom who chose life, here's some help. Here's our home, our fellowship, the way we want to help you. All those avenues are there that we can investigate, look at and see how the Lord might use us. There are ministries of the Word and of deed that point back to the Word. We need to engage in the public square.

I have won debates on these issues time and time again and I'm not the brightest bulb in the chandelier but it is not hard. Life makes sense. It only doesn't make sense when the insensibility and insanity of sin takes over. So engage humbly, but confidently in the public square, in the lives of people that we speak with them. The reason the assault on children has gone to the school is because the assault began in the womb, it went to the nursery, it will go to the homes and it will go all over. It is my generation

that is mostly responsible for it. It is my generation and the church that has just cranked up the organ so that we don't have to hear it. We may not be able to grow the church if we talk about this. I think the world even in its lost-ness is wondering "Do you all really believe anything?" Now, believe it graciously, but do you really believe it? So engage.

You might be thinking "Pastor, I'm not just all that great of a person and I can't really make a difference." You don't have the slightest idea. I could point to many here. We have hundreds working with Save-A-Life. I could point to those involved with all kinds of tutoring programs. It's amazing who God will use if they're saved. One preacher said "Hopefully they are saying I'm FAT – faithful, available and teachable." Here I am Lord. I'm not going to be silent. I'm going to choose life out of worship to You who brought life to me. Please bring us a culture of life in this church with marriages and families that spill over as we intentionally engage in evangelism, discipleship, in the public square and in ministries of mercy. God loves to take ordinary people and do extraordinary things.

His name was Telemachus. He was a fourth century, pastor/monk. He had gotten to the end of his life and knew he didn't have much so he wanted to make a pilgrimage to Rome in his last days. He asked the Lord to keep him alive long enough to get there so He did. As he got to Rome he was swept up with the crowd into the Coliseum. All of a sudden in front of his eyes is what he had heard about but dared not to believe it was true. There were muscled, trained men for the entertainment of others who were engaged in combat to the death, known as the gladiators. With horror Telemachus watched them kill each other seeing people use thumbs up and thumbs down with cries, cheers and laughter from the crowd and he chose life.

From his seat he said "In the name of Christ, stop! In the name of Christ, stop!" Not hearing him he went down to the edge of the wall of the Coliseum and stood on the wall and said "In the name of Christ, stop! In the name of Christ, forbear." No one paid much attention except some nearby who mocked him and jeered him. So still not content he jumped into the arena. He went up between the gladiators and said "In the name of Christ, stop!" One pushed him aside and he stood back up. Then Telemachus went right between the gladiators and their weapons and holding his hands before them said "In the name of Christ, the crowds won't stop but please you in the name of Christ, stop!" A gladiator now annoyed and irritated with him took his weapon and ran it through Telemachus. He lifted him up and impaled him on the ground as the life blood of Telemachus oozed out. In his last breath Telemachus said "In the name of Christ, stop." The gladiator who killed him and the others looked at each other and laid down their weapons. The other gladiators looking on who were so used to death but at this moment paused and laid down their weapons. It was almost as if someone had given a signal and they turned and began to walk out of the Coliseum. The crowd that had been jeering, laughing and cheering became utterly silent and walked out of the Coliseum. The governmental pacifier of the culture of death on that day stopped. After that day there was never another gladiator battle in the Roman Coliseum.

Telemachus, I don't know how God will lead you, but like him choose life. To our culture, in the name of Christ, stop!" Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. I'm so grateful that You allow us the freedom to address this but even if it wasn't, we would address it and we will not be chained into silence. We would live life, speak life and choose life because we're a people whom You have chosen to give life. We don't just have the Word near us but we have it in our mouth. We don't just have the Word of Life before us, we have the Word of Life, Jesus in our hearts so we can choose life. Help us to say 'no' to the worship of the gods of this age that would lead us to the choice of sin, self and death. Allow us to choose life. Lead Your people. O how I thank You for these people. I thank You for the life You have given them. Now O God, use them in this drowning culture of death as a river of life, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.