

Living As A Christian In A Brave New World

Do your eyes glaze over when you see a news report or read an article about cloning or stem cells? Do you tend to zone out when it gets to debates over moral quandaries, federal funding, and legislative decisions about regulation.

I have to admit, I've been a bit like that too. The subject is confusing, often very technical, and can be extremely difficult to understand. We're quick to shut down and go on to things that make more sense to us. But I want to challenge you this morning with this thought. The debates and technical articles are far more crucial than most of us realize. What it's come down to is the very identity of people. The worth of a human life. The definition of what it really means to be human.

It's very likely that sometime in the future your life could be the one that's hanging in the balance. In fact, I honestly believe that the foundation for the future of humanity and whether we view people as uniquely special or just commodities to be manipulated is being decided right now.

So at the risk of glazing eyes and wandering brains, I'd like to ask this question,... how are we as Christians going to play a part in setting the course for humanity in the not-to distant future? Is there a clear set of Christian ethics for a brave new world? I believe there is.

This week will mark the 37th anniversary of a Supreme Court decision that radically changed the moral landscape of our nation. That decision was actually solidified in two cases; *Roe V Wade* and *Doe v Balton*.

In those two legal rulings the groundwork was firmly laid for the debates we're having to day over everything from in vitro fertilization techniques to euthanasia.

You say, "Wait a minute, those cases just dealt with abortion." They did deal specifically with abortion. In fact, between the two they effectively legalized abortion through all 9 months of pregnancy.

But in those rulings the Supreme Court of the United States declared the unborn to be non-persons. Pre-born individuals have no personhood and therefore don't enjoy equal protection under the law.

Now I happen to believe that in a lot of ways our of system of government is the greatest on earth. But that doesn't mean that every decision the government makes is correct.

In 1857 a slave named Dred Scott sued for his freedom. His master had moved to a state where slavery was illegal. The case made it's way all the way to the Supreme Court. In a 7 to 2 ruling the court said no person of African descent could be a citizen of the United States.

In effect, the Court ruled that slaves had no claim to freedom. They were property and not citizens, and could not bring suit in federal court.

The court ruled that since Scott was considered private property, he was subject to the Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution which prohibits taking property from its owner "without due process".

That ruling was one of the worst in the history of jurisprudence. I believe that Roe v Wade has now taken it's place with the Dred Scott decision as absolutely abhorrent.

The court had no right to declare people of a certain ethnic background non-persons. In the same way, the court had no right to declare people in a certain stage of life non-persons without the right to life.

You might be wondering why it sounds like we're talking politics in church today. That's not something we normally do here.

Well, I'd like you to think about this. When a moral issue becomes politicized does it stop being a moral issue? When the Bible speaks with absolute clarity to a subject do we stop being concerned because now the subject has been pulled into the political realm?

Should all the Christians who saw the issue as a moral one just kept their mouth shut in 1857 when the court ruled that a person made in the image of God wasn't a person?

If it wasn't right then, it isn't right now.

So today we're not going to talk politics. This isn't a partisan issue. This is a moral issue that is becoming more relevant with ever scientific advancement. Let's begin this morning by reinforcing a foundational biblical truth.

I. Human Beings Are Uniquely Made In The Image Of God

Turn to the classic biblical passage **Genesis 1 First book of the Bible, first page**

On the 6th day of creation, after everything else had been made, God crowned His creation with one final act.

Read verse 27

God spoke and created the earth and a vast array of animals. The creation was absolutely staggering and beautiful and breathtaking. But as stunning as all of that was it was just the preliminaries. In His greatest creative act of all God created people in His image. No animal or sea creature was made in the image of God. Only human beings.

The Imago Dei, the image of God, does not mean that God is in human form. It means that humans are in the image of God in their moral, spiritual, and intellectual nature. So, humans mirror God's divinity in their ability to create, rationalize, worship, deliberate, and decide.

Later God will command humans to care for the rest of creation. Christians ought to at the forefront of legitimate environmental issues. But no other created thing has the worth of a person.

We just had a devastating earthquake in Haiti. The destruction is so extensive it will take months of aid to get the people back on their feet.

The elder's decided to give \$5000 from our general fund for the relief effort.

We partner with Samaritan's Purse for Operation Christmas Child as well as relief efforts and so we're giving through their organization. They have people on the ground there now and are well equipped to help.

Why would we care? Why is this the big story on every news outlet? Why does a number of people being killed, injured, and left homeless matter? Because we know intuitively how special every one of those individuals are.

Everybody knows it. The religious, the non-religious, the agnostic, the atheist, everyone of us knows the value of a human life.

But not everyone knows the value of a human life at all stages of development.

When a husband and wife find out that they're pregnant what do they say? They say,

“We’re going to have a baby.” Parties are called baby showers. The sonogram tells us the size of the baby. Everybody knows the reality.

But now if you look on the web site for the Gynecare Center abortion clinic in Severna Park you never read the word “baby.” I looked. I couldn’t find it.

Why is that? Because they want to do everything they can to avoid that word. They want women in crisis situations to look to them for the solution to their crisis so that they can sell their services.

They’re there to make money and the last thing they want to do is use an emotionally charged word like “baby.”

We believe that it would be unconscionable not to give women in crisis situations other options. They need to know that abortion isn’t the only way.

I. Human Beings Are Uniquely Made In The Image Of God

II. Human Uniqueness doesn’t Depend on Viability

Years ago my mother was in rough shape physically and ended up on a respirator. She had to have a machine do her breathing for her. Things were touch and go for a while but she eventually recovered and lived many more years in her own home.

No one argued that while she was on a respirator she was anything less than human. The fact that she would have immediately perished if she was removed from that machine didn’t determine her status as a human being.

Our uniqueness doesn’t depend on viability.

The Bible teaches that God superintends fetal development.

Turn to Psalm 139 page 555

Psalm 139 is about the omnipresence of God. He’s everywhere. He’s even active in fetal development.

Read verses 13-14

Remember, this was written long before sonogram so the Psalmist says...

Read verses 15-16

I was made in secret. No one could see. It was like I was in the lowest parts of the earth. Hidden. But God was there He was active. It was me even though my substance was yet unformed.

Job said, *Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?* (Job 31:15)

When Mary the mother of Jesus visited Elizabeth, who was pregnant at the time, the Bible says, *When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the babe leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.* (Luke 1:41)

The word translated "baby" is *brephos*. It's the same word used in II Timothy 3 to describe a child who is old enough to start learning the Bible.

The Bible doesn't make a distinction between the child before birth and the child after.

I want you to watch a video clip with Kathy Ireland. I know that most of us associate her with super model status but she's speaking out on life issues now.

Kathy Ireland on Huckabee (2 minutes)

I just think that is so simple and clear and straightforward.

Joni Eareckson Tada was paralyzed from the neck down in a diving accident when she was just a teenager. She has gone on to become an outspoken advocate for the disabled and for life issues.

Speaking of a zygote some one said to her, "That doesn't even look like a human being." Her response? "That's exactly what you looked like at that stage in your development."

We have made some amazing advancements in science in the past few decades. It was just 30 years ago that Louise Joy Brown, the world's first successful in vitro fertilized baby was born. That was front page news 30 years ago. Since then hundreds of thousands of children have been born to couples who would otherwise be childless.

That's a good thing. That's something to celebrate. But how many of those couples were really given all the facts when they went through the process?

If their doctor believed that life begins at conception then he or she would counsel the

couple to fertilize a minimum number of eggs and implant them all.

That's assisted reproductive technology that is governed by a respect for human life.

But that's not the most economical way of doing things. Many doctors with a different view of when life begins encourage the couple to create multiple embryos so that some can be discarded and others implanted.

Still others implant multiple embryos and if several take then the couple is encouraged to abort some. It's called selective reduction.

Without being given all the facts, couples are unwitting led into a situation where human life is treated as a commodity to be disposed of if it's inconvenient.

Now we're on the threshold of a whole new technology. We can now not only create embryos in the lab but with preimplantation genetic screening we can determine some very specific things.

In 1990 the NIH started work the Human Genome Project. Project goals were to:

- * identify all the approximately 20,000-25,000 genes in human DNA,
- * determine the sequences of the 3 billion chemical base pairs that make up human DNA,
- * store this information in databases.

So far genes have been isolated for a number of diseases: Lou Gehrig's disease, cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy, Hunting's disease, retinitis pigmentosa, and breast cancer, just to name a few.

Now here's where things get really dicey. Not only can we create tiny human beings in the lab but we can screen them for diseases like Huntington's which won't show up until they're 40 or 50 years old.

We can determine that they carry the genes for breast cancer but we can't say whether or not they'll get the disease later in life.

Now what? Now do we use this amazing technology to purify humanity by killing off it's most fragile and helpless members because they might get sick someday?

Kilner and Mitchell in their book "Does God Need Our Help" write, "Our laudable goal of treating human disease and relieving human suffering must not be allowed to become a tool for eliminating the persons who are suffering. To do so would be to use the good

gift of genetic knowledge for evil ends.”

But wait, there’s more. This is from CBS News. “Imagine if you could choose your baby the same way you pick out a new outfit from a catalogue.

Perhaps some blue eyes, a bit of curly hair, and why not make her tall, lean and smart? One fertility doctor now says that he may be able to deliver.

Couples could pick their baby's traits with pre-implantation genetic diagnosis. Dr. Jeffrey Steinberg has already helped thousands of couples choose their child's gender at his fertility institutes in Manhattan and Los Angeles. Within six months, he says, the clinic will offer a new service: allowing couples to select the physical traits of their babies.”

Think about what’s happening. If no one raises a moral voice in protest, the mystery and wonder of the birth of a child will be reduced to designing a commodity.

In a 1993 preimplantation genetic screening wasn’t perfected like it is now. A March of Dimes poll found that 11% of parents said they would abort their unborn child if their genome was predisposed to obesity. 80% would abort if they knew their child would have a disability. 43% said they would use genetic engineering if available to enhance their child’s appearance.

In 1980 the US Supreme Court voted to allow companies to patent human genes. There has been patents issued for genetically altered mice and dogs.

Today we have The Weldon amendment to prevent the patent office from issuing patents on human organisms. But as Nigel Cameron writes in “How To Be A Christian In A Brave New World,” The dividing line between people and property is getting blurred, and as the financial rewards from these technologies grow, the pressure is on to defend human life from being turned into a commodity.”

We’re on the fast track to repeat the mistakes of the past, just in a new improved way. In the 1920’s and 30’s fitter family contests were held all across the US. Fitter families were those with fewer incidences of physical or mental disability. They were also those who were ethnically pure. That was code language for “white.”

The movement was called eugenics and it tried to “create better humans through breeding.” It also tried to prevent undesirables from reproducing. By the 1930’s most states had mandatory sterilization laws. In 1935 over 22,000 people were involuntarily sterilized. They were deemed feeble-minded, indolent (lazy), or licentious.

Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood was a major proponent of eugenics. She wrote "The most merciful thing that a large family does to one of its infant members is to kill it." *Women and the New Race* (Eugenics Publ. Co., 1920, 1923)

Her solution to the handicapped, the mentally ill, and racial minorities: "More children from the fit, less from the unfit -- that is the chief aim of birth control." *Birth Control Review*, May 1919, p. 12

God forbid that we head down the road of designer babies and the sacrifice of the weak for the benefit of the strong.

God says, *You must support the weak.* (Acts 20:35)

I Thessalonians 5:14 *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.*

Added to all this confusion has been the ongoing debate about stem cell research. Michael J. Fox and Christopher Reves appeared before congress to lobby for fetal stem cell research.

It's impossible not to feel compassion for those who are suffering for debilitating diseases and injuries. All of us want to see technology used to help them. But not at the expense of our humanity.

If life begins at conception then for us to create embryos to cannibalize for body parts is an affront to Almighty God who is the creator and designer of life.

Joni Eareckson would love nothing more than to be cured of her paralysis. She testified before congress saying, "That's what I want, but not at the expense of another human life."

Here's news that seems to get buried on the back page.

While we have had no success using fetal stem cells we have had multiple successes using adult stem cells.

We've seen improvement in people with spinal cord injuries, blindness, ms heart disease, burns, skin grafts, liver disease.

This is from just a couple of months ago. "Doctors in Southampton are using the pioneering technique, where a patient's damaged bones are repaired using their own

stem cells. Patients hailed the treatment, after many found they could walk normally again without any pain and without the need for hip replacement surgery.”

I want you to watch this next clip. it's a bit hard to watch because Michael J. Fox's Parkinson's is just ravaging him, but listen to what's being said.

Dr. Oz is Professor of Cardiac Surgery at Columbia University.

Dr Oz on Opra clip (1:40 min)

Here's the facts. We can help people without destroying other people.

Joni Eareckson writes, “Our society has nothing but contempt for anything that makes life hard or unpleasant. When it comes to treating people like things it's only a short philosophical hop, skip, and jump to where contempt extends to people who suffer. People who strain Medicare or drain the grandkids' college fund. People who produce nothing and contribute nothing more to society than bills and increased medical costs. People like preborn or even newborn infants with disabilities who might encroach on a family's economic security and who seem to have no potential for a good quality of life. “

What started with Roe v Wade as a disregard for human life has played right into the hands of those who want to define life their way. And we haven't even touched on end of life issues.

In 2005 we were bombarded with all kinds of opinions on the Terri Schiavo case. Schiavo collapsed in her home and experienced respiratory and cardiac arrest on February 25, 1990, resulting in extensive brain damage, a diagnosis of persistent vegetative state (PVS) and 15 years of institutionalization.

Her parents said she was conscious and aware of her surroundings. Her husband said she wasn't and after years of battling in the courts won the right to have her starved to death.

A few months ago a Belgian man, who was diagnosed as being in a vegetative coma for 23 years came out and remembers everything that was said around him during those years. He was conscious but trapped in a body that didn't work.

Only eternity will tell if Terri Schiavo was really conscious or not. My question is, where have we come as a society that we starve unresponsive people to death?

I. Human Beings Are Uniquely Made In The Image Of God

II. Human Uniqueness doesn't Depend on Viability

III. God Calls Us To Speak Up For Those Who Can't Defend Themselves

Turn to proverbs 24 page 580 Read verses 11-12

The Contemporary English Version says, *Don't fail to rescue those who are doomed to die. Don't say, "I didn't know it!" God can read your mind. He watches each of us and knows our thoughts. And God will pay us back for what we do.*

So what can we do to make a difference?

1.) This church has been actively involved with the Bowie Crofton Crisis Pregnancy Center. That's important. We need to be concerned about women who are being pressured into thinking that abortion is their only option. The center provides care for women after their baby is born as well as during their pregnancy.

There's baby bottles out in the foyer. Take one along and over the next few weeks fill it with spare change. Pray for the women who come into the center that they would make informed choices. Pray that they would choose life.

The more we support life at all stages the more we influence those around us to think.

2.) We need to be informed before we get thrust into a place where we're asked to make a decision about an issue. Some will have to decide about in vitro fertilization. Most of us will be asked to make decisions about continuing medical care for someone who is very ill.

I've had to face those decisions several times in my own family. We need to have a grasp of the issues before we're in an emotionally charged situation.

3.) We need to be politically aware. I'm not talking about voting down party lines. I'm talking about reading and listening to candidates to see who supports life issues.

4.) Last but not least, we need to humble ourselves and pray that God would heal our land. There's some amazing things happening in science and technology today. Those things are either going to be used for good or for evil. We need to call upon God and seek His face. We desperately need His wisdom and understanding to navigate through the evergrowing maze of complex life issues.