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We Believe in Human Life As Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

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We Believe in

Human Life as Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

by Dennis M. Sullivan



Is human life a random accident, or is it a gift from Almighty God?

This profound question offers a stark contrast between two extremes. It is the question I ask of my students at Cedarville every semester. If we are the result of chance physical phenomena, we are just meaningless bits of protoplasm swimming pointlessly through a dark and impersonal universe. There is no point to our existence, no purpose, no nobility. This may all seem pretty bleak, but if you question such secular dogma, evolutionist Richard Dawkins will call you “scientifically illiterate.”

SCRIPTURAL PERSPECTIVE

There is, however, another way of thinking, one that makes sense of our built-in feelings of awe, wonder, and mystery. It answers the question posed by the psalmist as he gazed up into the heavens, “What is man that you are mindful of him?” (Ps. 8:4). David goes on to explain that “You have made him a little lower than the angels, And you have crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5). Biblical scholars point out that the Hebrew word here translated ‘angels’ is actually *Elohim*, the word for Creator-God. So, although the early translators may have been afraid of the implications of this, David was really saying that human beings were created only a little lower than God Himself.

This is implied in the great truth we find in Genesis 1, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him” (v. 27) and affirmed elsewhere in Scripture, such as 1 Corinthians 6:3a, “Do you not know that we are to judge angels?” and Hebrews 1:14, “Are [angels] not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?”

The rest of Psalm 8:5–6 makes this even stronger: “And you have crowned [man] with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; You have put all *things* under his feet . . .”

What a glorious truth! Our Creator has made us in His image, just a little lower than His own nature. Furthermore, He has given us wonderful dignity and purpose, as stewards over the rest of His awesome creation. We have done nothing to merit this — our life, our human nature, is a *gift* from our loving Father.

DIVINE VIEWPOINT

So when does all this *begin*? At what point in our earthly journey does God begin to care for us? Specifically, do unborn babies have the same value and worth as those of us who walk around and interact with others?

Once again, there are two possible viewpoints on this question. The secular, materialistic approach is called *empirical functionalism*. This view says our value as human beings comes by virtue of something measurable or verifiable through empirical science. For functionalists, human value is all about brain activity, in particular, the cerebral cortex: the conscious, thinking, reasoning part of our nervous system.

One proponent of this approach is the atheist Princeton philosopher Peter Singer. Dr. Singer believes that personhood, that is, membership in the moral community, comes when we are self-aware. In his view, the killing of newborn babies is perfectly ethical (if the babies are not wanted), since self-awareness in an infant does not occur until about one month of age.

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In contrast to this hideous idea is the approach of *ontological personalism*. This philosophy states that we are persons and have moral worth simply by being human, and this value extends from the earliest moment of our lives at conception in the womb and to every moment after that.

Scripture is full of examples of this truth. I sometimes refer to Psalm 139:13–16 as the “national anthem of the pro-life movement” because it so beautifully portrays the intimate, loving Creator as He formed us in the womb:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

The Hebrew words have a different connotation from Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The Hebrew word for “created”

means to make from nothing (creation *ex nihilo*). By contrast, the words translated “knit” and “woven” in Psalm 139 imply an intimate, loving fashioning from existing parts, perhaps as a carpenter makes a beautiful object by working and honing it over time. Clearly, the Creator personally knows us as He fashions us in the womb. He knows our name and our destiny.

UNCHANGING VIEWPOINT

And this essential value is the same, regardless of my physical limitations or my length of life. The unique person I am today began when sperm and egg united to make me in the first place. This idea also means that we have continuity over time: I have the same essential personhood now as I had when I was five years old,

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even though all of my component chemicals and constituent parts have changed during that time. This process extends even into the womb and will extend into eternity. I am not defined by my functionality, age, or any other earthly measure of worth. I am valuable by divine fiat.

There are many other scriptural examples of the value of human persons in the womb, but I will refer to one more, in Luke 1. This is the marvelous story of Elizabeth and Zacharias, the parents of John the Baptist, along with Mary, the mother of Jesus. Both Zacharias and Mary had an encounter with the angel Gabriel, who foretold wonderful events that would soon unfold. Luke 1:39–44 tells the story of Mary, who after her visit with the angel, traveled in haste to see her cousin Elizabeth. Upon entering the house, John leapt for joy within Elizabeth in the presence of the Lord Jesus, who at that moment was a tiny embryo only a week or two old in His mother’s womb. Such a dramatic moment affirms the full value of these tiny players upon the stage of creation.

STRONG CONVICTION

Scripture affirms that life is sacred and that it is a gift from a loving God. So how do we communicate this to our students at Cedarville University? From political science to English, from chemistry to business administration, from Bible to pharmacy, and every other discipline on this campus, there is not an academic major or field of study that is not deeply impacted by our commitment to the sanctity of human life. People are valuable and have intrinsic human dignity, from the womb to the grave and at every moment in between. This truth has tremendous implications for the way our students view themselves, the purpose of their work and their lives, and the innate value of every human soul they meet — on the job, in church, or in their neighborhoods. In the midst of a society devaluing life at every turn, Cedarville is developing students who value each person from the perspective of the sixth day of Creation to the third day after the Cross. All mankind is fearfully and wonderfully made and is offered a salvation fearfully and wonderfully wrought by the same Sovereign Lord and King.

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