



PROTECT AND SERVE

God created humanity in His image, giving human life sacred value.

GENESIS 1:27; 9:1-7; MATTHEW 5:21-22

Because God created humans in His image, every life has value, regardless of age, gender, race, or nationality. Being made in God's image, we are to affirm the value of every person and protect all human life—including those in their mother's womb. Truly, being created in God's image is more than a privilege; it is a responsibility. Maintaining that image in our lives and helping others maintain that image is a difficult, lifelong process.

How is life a gift? How is life a responsibility? What makes life valuable?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

GENESIS 1:27; 9:1-7; MATTHEW 5:21-22

Using passages from Genesis and the Gospel of Matthew, this week’s study explores the sanctity of human life and the role believers are to play in protecting life’s sacredness. Genesis 1 teaches us that God, the divine Creator, spoke the world into existence, breathing the breath of life into all humanity. He created people “in the image of God.” With the addition of humanity, God made a final survey of His creation and pronounced it “very good” (Gen.1:31).

Sin entered human existence and God judged humanity by flooding the earth (6:5–7:24). Only Noah and his family survived the deluge. After leaving the ark, God made a covenant with Noah (9:8-17). However, before entering into this covenant relationship, God addressed the sacredness of human life (9:1-7). On one hand, He commanded the survivors of the flood to reproduce and repopulate the earth. On the other hand, He warned against murder. Taking another person’s life entailed serious consequences, including the forfeiture of the killer’s own life. This harsh price sought to protect all human life.

Matthew 5 is part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, in which He outlined practical principles for living the Christian life. Teaching how we should treat others, Jesus warned against murder and anger, equating what we think with what we do. Attitudes are important, because no matter how hard we might suppress them, they eventually reveal themselves in the way we act.

All human life is sacred. Anything that devalues the sacredness of human life has no place in the hearts, minds, and lives of believers. Being like Jesus means more than just possessing salvation; it includes valuing life like God does.

Note the commands given by God in Genesis 1:27, Genesis 9:6, and Matthew 5:22. What do these commands reveal about God’s view of humanity?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

IN HIS IMAGE (GEN. 1:27)

27 So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.

VERSE 27

With just the sound of His voice, **God created** the universe, the earth, and all creatures, including humanity. Seeing all that He had made, God declared that everything was perfect (Gen. 1:31). The pinnacle of His creation was humanity, making us after **his own image**. No other creature carries that distinction.

What is **the image of God**? The precise sense of this distinction is widely debated. One theory says people are like God in that both are persons. God is not an abstract conception. He is a personal being who possesses the attributes of personality. These attributes include capability of intelligence and thought, emotion, and decisions of the will. Others propose that *the image of God* points to human individual's capacity to discern between good and evil. People are moral agents who decide which choice to make.

Whatever the specific meaning, *the image of God* distinguishes human beings as being created to relate personally to God. Both **male and female** share in this divine creation relationship.

This is why we must oppose oppression and prejudice of all kinds—we are equally made in God's image, and we all have equal worth.

As believers, we are to affirm the value of every person as being created in God's image. This is why we must oppose oppression and prejudice of all kinds—we are equally made in God's image, and we all have equal worth. This eliminates racism and other forms of hatred as acceptable conduct for God's people.

How does the idea of all humans being created in God's image run contrary to attitudes sometimes seen in today's society? What evidence might a person point to as proof that they value all people?



TO BE PROTECTED (GEN. 9:1-7)

¹ God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. ² The fear and terror of you will be in every living creature on the earth, every bird of the sky, every creature that crawls on the ground, and all the fish of the sea. They are placed under your authority. ³ Every creature that lives and moves will be food for you; as I gave the green plants, I have given you everything. ⁴ However, you must not eat meat with its lifeblood in it. ⁵ And I will require a penalty for your lifeblood; I will require it from any animal and from any human; if someone murders a fellow human, I will require that person’s life. ⁶ Whoever sheds human blood, by humans his blood will be shed, for God made humans in his image. ⁷ But you, be fruitful and multiply; spread out over the earth and multiply on it.”

VERSES 1-4

God gave Noah and his family the same command He originally gave Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:28), ***Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.*** Destroyed by a worldwide flood because of sin, the earth’s population now consisted of eight people. God purposely designed the earth so it would be inhabited by people. While sin corrupted God’s design, God reaffirmed His purpose through Noah.

God’s initial instructions for people to subdue creation and rule over the animal kingdom (Gen. 1:28) were not totally omitted in the Noahic covenant. But they differed significantly. Whatever the relationship had been between people and animals before the flood, hereafter fear and terror would characterize it: ***fear and terror of you will be in every living creature.*** Before the flood, the animals entered the ark with no apparent fear of Noah (Gen. 7:2,14), but after the flood the harmonious connection was severed.

God affirmed to Noah that humans would have ***authority*** over the animal world. That is, man would be responsible for the management and welfare of animals.

Next, God instructed Noah that humanity would become meat-eaters: ***Every creature that lives and moves will be food for you.*** Before the flood, people seem to have been vegetarians, eating fruits and ***green plants*** (Gen. 1:29-30). God’s instructions to Adam and Eve did not expressly prohibit eating meat. Rather, He stated that

their primary food source was green plants. From the time of Noah, everyone could eat meat as well as other food as God's gifts.

However, God specifically forbade eating ***meat with its lifeblood in it***. Because the blood represented life, it was drained from the meat before consuming it, as reaffirmed repeatedly by the Mosaic law (Lev. 17:11-14).

By commanding this prohibition, God painted a beautiful picture of atonement for sins. When an animal sacrifice was made, its lifeblood would saturate the altar, representing the covering of sins. Even more precious for believers is the precious blood of Jesus that cleanses, forgives, and saves. Long before the arrival of Jesus, God set in motion a plan of redemption that would require the blood of His one and only Son for the covering of our sins and the giving of new life.

VERSES 5-7

Life is God's gift, and He is the great defender and preserver of life. The covenant He established with Noah included the protection of human life by requiring the life of any creature, both human and nonhuman, who ***murders a fellow human***. Verse 6 emphasizes the protection of human life based on the fact that ***God made humans in his image***.

Christians are divided regarding the issue of capital punishment. Some appeal to Genesis 9 in support for capital punishment. Because this issue precedes the Mosaic Law and reaffirms humanity's image-bearing status, some Christians believe capital punishment should still be applied today. To uphold the value the Bible places on human life, a murderer should face the most severe of punishments. Other Christians have reservations about capital punishment or reject it due to the way it can be unfairly implemented. Both sides appeal to the image of God in humanity to make their case.

God calls His people to engage in protecting life, being advocates for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Although the image of God was marred by the fall of Adam and Eve and by every individual's sin, the image remained, and is still valuable in God's sight. The covenant with Noah stresses the value and importance of human life. God calls His people to engage in protecting life, being advocates for those who cannot speak



for themselves. Our efforts should be centered on affirming the value of life by being evangelistic and mission-minded, caring for the welfare of others, speaking for the unborn, stopping abuse and enslavement, standing up for the persecuted, and treating life as precious wherever it is found.

How do the commands given to Noah affirm the sacred value of human life?

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Christian and Social Order*

We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death (Matt. 5:13-16).

IN ACTION AND ATTITUDE (MATT. 5:21-22)

²¹ **“You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. ²² But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister, will be subject to the court. Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire.**

VERSES 21-22

Beginning in Matthew 5:21, Jesus addressed six critical issues in the Sermon on the Mount: murder (vv. 21-22), adultery (vv. 27-30), divorce (vv. 31-32), integrity (vv. 33-37), retaliation (vv. 38-42), and love (vv. 43-48). Using repetitive language, Jesus told His audience, ***You have heard ... But I tell you***, explaining what they had learned from the Pharisees was inadequate for true kingdom living. Jesus had no problem with the Law. His conflict was with man-made traditions and interpretations of God’s Law.

Jesus emphasized that while the law prohibited murder, He expects His followers to go further—to show attitudes and actions that value other people. Attitudes ultimately result in actions. The

Pharisees believed only the physical act of murder was worthy of judgment, missing the full intent of God's instruction. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were concerned only with outward behavior, while Jesus was concerned with both their acts and their hearts.

Jesus spoke with authority. The pronoun **I** is emphatic and forceful: *But I tell you*. What follows are three attitudes, emotions, and words that lead to murder.

Jesus first mentioned anger: being **angry with** your **brother or sister**. Not all anger is sinful. Anger is a valid human emotion, especially when it is the result of some offense against God or His Word. Jesus Himself became angry on occasion (Mark 3:5). Elsewhere, the New Testament allows anger but warns not to permit it to persist inside us (Eph. 4:26-27). The anger Jesus talked about was an unholy anger against people, not a holy anger against sin.

Next, Jesus mentioned insulting a **brother or sister**. The word He used to denote the insult (*raca*) was a derogatory quasi-swear word. It was equivalent to calling someone "stupid!" **You fool** also was a verbal slur. The English word for "moron" is a derivative of Greek word for *fool*.

Allowing pride and prejudice to color one's appraisal of other people is sinful. Vanity, whether based on ethnicity, social status, intellect, or any other mortal quantity, erroneously denies the fundamental principle that all people are created in God's image.

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In what ways are murder and anger connected? What is the relationship between attitude and actions?

The consequence for each of the three crimes appears to be progressively worse. **Subject to judgment** simply means a guilty person will be punished. **Subject to the court** refers to the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court. **Subject to hellfire** denotes eternal punishment. However, Jesus may have employed the synonymous



parallelism of Hebrew poetry. This literary device repeats a single idea using synonyms or alternative statements. Thus all three of the phrases have essentially the same meaning. All three point to the danger of eternal judgment.

The law prohibited murder. Jesus expects His followers to go further—to show actions and attitudes that value other people’s lives. Believers are to demonstrate that they value everyone by showing respect to all people.

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In what way do Jesus’ words demand changes in your own attitudes toward other people? What actions do you need to take in order to bring about these changes?

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BIBLE SKILL: Use multiple Scripture passages to understand an important doctrine.

Review the Key Doctrine statement on page 78 and the following verses: Psalm 101:5; Matthew 25:35; 1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1; and James 2:8. What insights do they give to the sanctity of human life from these verses?

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IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers are to affirm the value of every person as being created in God’s image.
- Believers are to protect human life, being advocates for those who cannot speak for themselves.
- Believers are to demonstrate that they value everyone by showing respect to all people.

Reflect on Genesis 1:27. As you go through the week, mentally place the name of each person you encounter in the statement “God made _____ in His image.” How did doing so change how you treated others this week?

How can your group be advocates for those who cannot speak for themselves? Identify actions the group can take this week.

List your neighbors and coworkers. What tangible ways can you demonstrate to the people you listed that you value them this week?

Prayer Needs

