

## **God is Lord over Life and Death**

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In the beginning there was nothing and no one but God. Thus the Holy Bible begins with the words: "In the beginning God." Everything that is has originated with Him. As John says, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." God made all things by the power of His Word (John 1:3).

We cannot see God with our eyes. We cannot understand Him with our thoughts. He is a hidden God who reveals himself in His Word, in His creation, and in our lives. When we look about us, we see His work everywhere and when we truly see it, we recognize that we are small and weak and God is almighty and loving. When David looked at himself and considered his life, he said: "...thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Ps. 139:13-16).

In His Word, God has revealed himself to be a loving Father who is good to all, who has mercy on all His creation and gives all their food in due season. He is righteous in all His ways, holy in all His works, and near all those that call upon Him in truth (Psa. 145:9, 15-18). He is both the source and sustainer of all life.

For man, who is not able to create anything from nothing, let alone the miracle that is life, the power of God is beyond comprehension.

### **Man, the Image of God**

Man is God's special creation. He is unique and fundamentally different from other creatures. He is the image of God. Moses writes, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen.

1:27). Thus God endowed man with knowledge of His Creator, with righteousness and holiness, and with immortality (Col. 3:10, Eph. 4:24, Gen. 2:17). Death did not become man's lot until Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. At that moment, the sentence of death, both bodily and eternal, fell upon them.

Death meant the end of life. It meant that man's body must return to the dust from which it has been made. God determines the moment of man's death. Job testifies, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not...his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass"(Job 14:1, 2, 5). Death, like life, is under God's sovereign province (Psa. 68:20). He has not given man authority to intervene.

God did not leave man the prisoner of eternal death. He redeemed him. He purchased man's release from eternal death. The price was steep, much greater than gold, much greater than silver, for God purchased our freedom with the precious blood of His own Son (1Pet. 1:18-20).

Recognition that God is the sole giver of life, that He has made us in His image, and that He has paid a great price for our redemption kindles respect for life and the sanctity of life.

## **The Increase of Knowledge**

Knowledge has increased in the course of history and especially in the last century, just as the Prophet Daniel was told it would (Dan. 12:4). Science and technology in particular have advanced at a rapid and accelerating pace. Advances in the fields of medicine and biotechnology bring new treatments, new therapies, and new possibilities. Advances in these fields in particular also bring us face to face with new and sometimes difficult moral and ethical questions. Science and technology however do not provide the moral framework or the values required to guide their use.

In the modern world, many have rejected or perhaps simply drifted away from the Bible's teaching that God is Creator, Lord of life and death, and that man is His image. Respect for life and the sanctity of life has diminished as a result. This has led to widespread use of birth control, the legalization and use of abortion and, in some societies, euthanasia.

## **Birth Control**

The prevention of conception, or birth control, is contrary to God's Word and good conscience. It contradicts the teachings of God's Word with regard to both creation and marriage.

The biblical doctrine of creation is crystallized in the First Article of the Creed: “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” Luther explains the meaning of this article thusly: “I believe that God has made me and all other creatures; that He has given and still preserves to me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses,” and so on (Luther’s Small Catechism).

Thus while science sees man as the product of evolution, faith sees him as God’s creation. While science sees the conception of life, and the unique individual that it gives birth to, as the random and arbitrary outcome that occurs when the seed of man and woman are joined in the mother’s womb, faith sees conception as the continuation of God’s creation work. It is His plan and His work. The Old Testament examples of Rachel, Hannah, and Ruth all show that it is God who gives conception and the fruit of the womb (Gen. 29:30–30:2, 6; 1 Sam. 1:5, 19, 20). Of Ruth is said, “So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son” (Ruth 4:13).

One of the primary purposes of marriage is procreation. God created man, male and female, and then commanded them to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Gen. 1:27, 28). Luther says that this is “more than a command, namely a divine ordinance which it is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore.”

Despite God’s command or ordinance, birth control is widely practiced. People defend their disobedience with a variety of reasons including the psychological and physical burdens of raising children, economics, pursuit of an education or a career, concerns about overpopulation, etc. These arguments are rooted in unbelief and selfishness. Believing husbands and wives know these arguments well. The threefold enemy frequently tempts us with them. We wish, however, to cast aside these arguments as well “and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,” and bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

## **Abstinence & Birth Control**

Marriage has a purpose in addition to procreation, namely, the avoidance of fornication. The desire that resides in us as a result of God’s creation work and the command to be fruitful and multiply is strong and few are able to resist it. Thus the Apostle Paul writes, “Nevertheless, *to avoid* fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” (1Cor. 7:2).

In the same context Paul, while permitting abstinence in marriage for the purpose of prayer and fasting, warns that it must be only by mutual consent and only for a short time in order to avoid sin. Paul warns both husband and wife not to defraud one another of the “benevolence” each is due. Sexual life is also an expression of love intended to strengthen the psychological and emotional bonds that are a part of two becoming one flesh. Paul while cautiously allowing abstinence does not here either

encourage or give license to use abstinence as means to limit the number of our children or otherwise practice family planning.

## **Difficult Situations and Abortion**

Pregnancy and childbirth always entail some degree of risk for a mother. On occasion there are also health and medical issues that may substantially increase those risks. In such circumstances a couple may face painfully difficult questions caused by the conflict between God's command to be fruitful and multiply and their own concern for the mother's life. Her life too is God's gift and undeniably precious. In the face of such difficult issues, we feel our smallness and inadequacy.

Even in difficult situations, however, God's children do not wish to abandon the perspective of faith for the perspective of science and reason. It does not mean that believing fathers and mothers, do not take medical information and advice into account, but rather that they strive to consider it in the light of God's Word, faith, and conscience so that they might hold "the mystery of faith in a pure conscience" (1 Tim. 3:9).

God's Word teaches us that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:1). Thus faced with these kinds of difficult questions, we humbly pray for God's guidance, turn to His Word, and seek counsel and support from God's congregation, which Paul calls the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). In the end, however, each must decide according to his own or her own conscience. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, writing about matters of conscience, teaches that a he who acts contrary to his conscience and doubts is damned, "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Luther too said, "It is neither safe nor right to act against conscience."

Once life has been conceived, we wish to do all that we can to protect it. Thus abortion, which is the destruction of a life that God has created and which is His image, is not an option. It is sin. If the life of a mother is threatened by illness or injury during pregnancy, we want to see to it that everything that is medically possible is done to save the life of both mother and child. God has given both lives. Both lives are precious and both lives are in the hands of He who is Lord over life and death.

Birth control and abortion further the decay of marriage and sexual morality in our society as well. These have significant consequences, not only with regard to eternal life, but also for temporal life and especially for children.

## **Euthanasia**

The word euthanasia comes from the Greek word *euthanatos*, which means good death. Active euthanasia or "mercy killing" is the use of lethal substances or forces

with the intention of ending a life, usually in order to relieve unrelenting pain. Passive euthanasia is the cessation of care that may extend life but does not decisively improve quality of life. Generally speaking, the term euthanasia is most often used to refer to active euthanasia.

It is not easy to watch another person suffer great pain. It is especially difficult to watch in the case of a loved one. We understand the desire to end suffering, but to end a life, whether one's own or the life of another, by active means is contrary to God's Word and Christian ethics (Ex. 20:13). It is also contrary to medical ethics.

Passive euthanasia is another issue. Here I will borrow the words of our brother and longtime hospital chaplain Niilo Rauhala: "Cessation of care is not active assisted death, rather therein is granted space for natural death, which comes in its own time. This so-called passive euthanasia is not contrary to Christian faith or ethics because no human action affects the patient's death. The moment of death is left to the hand of the Creator, the Lord of life and death."

## **Conclusion**

Before life and death, we find ourselves before the will and great power of God. To observe the birth of a child is a humbling experience. To observe death, whether it be the life of a child still in the shelter of his or her mother's womb or at childbirth, or then at the end of a long life is an even more humbling experience. To see the marvel of God's creation around us is a humbling experience. Do we not say with the psalmist, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Ps. 8: 3, 4).

God has truly visited us, for the Word, by which all was made, was also made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). It is God's love and the promise and perspective of everlasting life that carries God's children through difficult trials.

God has promised to be with us in times of trial and temptation, when we pass through the waters and when we pass through the fires (Isa. 43:2). He is our faithful help and support. Paul says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1Cor. 10:13).

The last trial, the last temptation, the last enemy is death. It tries our faith. Job saw the coming destruction and decay of his body, but clung to his resurrection faith: "Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were printed in a book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know that my

redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me” (Job 19:23–27).

Job’s confidence rested upon God’s power and love. He said, “If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands” (Job 14:14, 15)

If we live life with its trials and difficulties trusting solely in the wisdom and strength of men, we have limited help and possibilities. If we die trusting solely in the wisdom and strength of men, we have no hope. Now we see but darkly. If we live our lives and die putting our hope in God, He will call and we shall answer, and then we shall see our Father as He is, face to face (1 Cor. 13:12).

### **Sources**

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