

## Lecture #18: Medical Ethics - Preliminaries (Detailed Notes)

*"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"*  
(Psalm 139:14)

*"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.'"*  
(Gen 1:26-27)

### ***Purpose of this Lecture: To Discuss the Uniqueness of man, made in God's image, and define Biblically when physical life begins and ends***

- o What is ethics?
- o What does the Bible say about human life?
- o What is unique about human life?
- o How do you define when human life begins?
- o How do you define when human physical life ends?

### ***1. This study lays the foundation for addressing issues such as abortion, euthanasia and related topics***

- a. Why is this important?
  - o Many people have bought into the utilitarian view of life (is it worth living, quality of life, etc.)
  - o Without a proper view of life from God's perspective, any number of abuses of it can be justified (without a standard - anything is possible)
  - o Medical technology has created difficult conditions and consequences that did not exist during Biblical times, forcing hard life and death decisions to be made
- "Hard cases make bad laws"**
- o Must start from a firm foundation (Bible) then apply
- o There can be disagreement amongst sincere believers and many specifics - we must remain humble towards each other, merciful, and seek God's wisdom and leading
- b. Ethics: "The study of standards of conduct and moral judgment" (Medical ethics...)
- c. Basic principles addressed here are:
  - o The sufficiency of scripture to show us the proper view and understanding of life
  - o The marvel of our own created physical existence and how we differ from animals
  - o Our time on earth is marked out and limited
  - o Human life has a sanctity about it that is fundamentally different from the rest of creation
  - o Then we can address the harder issues relating to medical situations, moral dilemmas, and conflicting priorities

### ***2. Biblically we are unique in all the creation, made in God's image with a dignity and sanctity unlike any other created things***

- a. Scripture is the only source that provides commands, principles, and truth with which to address medical ethics issues (assess the situation; the standard to use; the person involved)
  - o God *equips* His people to perform every good work, this includes making life and death decisions concerning other people and reaching God-honoring decisions (**2 Tim 3:16-17**)
  - o God provides *means* to address a given situation in a manner that is pleasing and honoring to Him (**1 Cor 10:13**)
  - o God provides *understanding* to address the difficult decisions of life, including those we face in this technologically advanced age (**Prov 3:5-6**; interesting aside that following verses **Prov 3:7-8** address health!)
  - o God provides the *wisdom* necessary to make decisions that are honoring to Him and consistent with His revealed will (**James 1:5-8; Prov 2:6**)
  - o God does not promise that all decisions we face will be easy ones, or that they will be without difficulty. In fact, seeking God's will may entail a much greater struggle than secular and

- worldly wisdom would entail (**Prov 14:12**)
- b. We are "Fearfully and wonderfully" made
- o **"Men go abroad to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering"** - Saint Augustine
  - o God fashioned us in the womb: "Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?" (**Job 31:15; Psalm 119:73**)
  - o "Fearfully" made (*Vertical view*)
    - o Everything about us is so marvelously made (body; mind; soul) that it must be the work of a creator with infinite power, genius, and wonder (**Eccl 11:5**)
    - o As pottery belongs to the potter, so we belong to our Maker - we are accountable to Him and live only according to His good will and pleasure
    - o God is the One that holds our very lives in His hands, to Him we are to be fearful ("awe-struck"; humble; know our destiny is in His hands)
    - o God is the One that has called us into existence, and sustains our very existence just as He does the rest of the universe (**Heb 1:3; 11:3**)
    - o We ignore our relationship to and ownership by God at our own peril
  - o "Wonderfully" made (*Horizontal view*)
    - o Our bodies are incredibly complex, defying any statistics or probabilities of coming into existence from chance
    - o Even in fallen world, beauty/functional perfection of bodies beyond comprehension
    - o We have a mind beyond understanding or replication (**Eccl 3:11**)
    - o We, just like the rest of creation, are beyond understanding - the created order is proof of God's wisdom, power, and might (**Job 38:1-42:6; Rom 1:20**)
- c. Our Days on Earth are Numbered by the Lord (**Psalm 139:14**)
- o God has ordained our time on earth
    - o **Job 14:5**; "Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed"
    - o **Heb 1:3**; "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." (His will keeps us existing!)
    - o **Eccl 8:15**; "So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun"
    - o **Acts 17: 26**; "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."
  - o We cannot change the length of our stay
    - o **Matt 6:27**; "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"
    - o God gives life, and He takes it away (**Deut 30:19-20**),
  - o When our lives have finished their tasks, God will take us home (**Phil 1:6**)
 

**"There is no such thing as an 'untimely' death"**
- d. There is a sanctity (holiness; sacredness) to our life (**Gen 1:26-27**)
- o In all creation, man uniquely reflects the image of God (**Gen 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; James 3:9**)  
He is not an animal!
    - o The entire man is created in God's image, not just one aspect of him!
    - o God created us - final touch on His creation (we're the way He wanted us to be)
    - o Prior acts of creation rendered "Let the land...;" which is the impersonal third person; but for man God says "Let us...", the first person - a special relationship
    - o Man is the crown of God's creation ("image" implies concrete similarities, while "likeness" implies similarity in the abstract or ideal)
    - o Both male and female reflect these likenesses - this distinction was not present with the creation of the rest of the universe (e.g. animals)
  - o God has uniquely created us with characteristics that reflect His glory
    - o Man uniquely has dominion over the creation just as God is sovereign over the entire universe (**Gen 1:28**)
    - o Man uniquely possesses qualities/characteristics that reflect God. He is:  
self conscience; he is a free moral agent in that he can make his own decisions (moral

agency; he possesses life; he can reason; he can appreciate beauty; he can create within the bounds of his existence; man is immortal and possess a soul; man can discern good and evil

**(However, must be careful, since scripture does not specifically define what this "image" and "likeness" are comprised of!)**

**(Note: animals can possess some of these characteristics to a limited extent, but not full comprehensive manner that is uniquely given to man)**

o Man is not an animal, but possesses a unique relationship to God, and as such is uniquely precious to God (Some external differences between man and animal: speech; man's countenance looks upwards; man has facial expressions; man has a sense of shame expressing itself in a blush)

**(Note: Soul is applied to animals in the O.T. as well as to man. However, it does not appear to be used in the same sense. Christ did not come as an animal to die for animals - their eternal state is unknown. Also, read Eccl 3:21 for some implications)**

o Man is created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (**Eph 4:24**)

o Man's form is the perfect representation of God in the creation - Jesus Christ is the perfect representation of God in human form!

o Man is uniquely crowned with honor and glory, with everything placed under his feet (**Psalm 8:4-6**)(this Psalm is applied to Christ in **Heb 2:6-8** - again indicating our special place in creation)

o Therefore; man is to deal with man in a way different from the animals - life is accounted differently, the life of man has a different dignity from the life of an animal or plant; we carry God's image with us - animals do not (**Matt 6:25-26**)

o Man's death (as in murder) uniquely defiles the land (**Gen 4:10**), as does man's sin (**Lev 18:1-25**); man's life is specially protected (**Ex 20:13**), and can only be taken by God Himself, or by use of His chosen means (man as God's instrument of judgment **Rom 13:1-7**)

o Man's form is the perfect representation of God in creation, with Jesus Christ the perfect representation of God in human form (**Gen 1:27; Phil 2:6-7**)

o In redemption, we are being re-created into God's image (**Col 3:10**), removing the corruption that sin has brought to our nature

o We are precious in God's sight - so much so that He paid an infinite price for our lives through His Son on the cross (**2 Cor 8:9**)

o Our life, and by extension, all mankind, is precious to God

o God's common grace to all mankind demonstrates His mercy to it, even though man does not deserve it

o Christ didn't come to save angels, they marvel at us (**1 Peter 1:12b; Heb 2:16**)

### ***3. Summary Conclusions: Man's life is to be honored and protected with the dignity God has granted to it***

o Man (in all of creation) uniquely reflects the image of God, and as such has a unique dignity, sanctity, and worth (Christ came as a man, not as an animal!)

o Our very existence is only by God's will to bring us into, and sustain our existence. He is the ultimate determiner of our beginning and end on this earth. Our days are numbered by the Lord before any of them have come into being

o Man's life is to be protected and not taken, unless clearly indicated as allowed by His word

o Our hope is not in the perfecting of life extension techniques in this world

o Our hope is in the crucified, buried and resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

o Thru Him we have eternal life, without doctors (He is the Great Physician); without hospitals (it is a mansion); without the pain of death and suffering (we will have glorified bodies)

o For us, life is not an idol, it is a gift to be used by God for His glory

### ***4. Discussion of Two Questions: When does Human Life Begin? How Would You Define When Physical Death has Occurred?***

o See **Handout: Medical Ethics - What is Life and Death?**

o List definitions offered up and discuss

o Critical items to define in any discussion:

o Soul (what it is and when does it come into existence)

- o What is personhood?
- o What is a person?
- o What is life?
- o What is the physical body?
- o Others?

**References:**

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4. *"Matters of Life and Death," Francis J. Beckwith and Norman L. Geisler, 1991*
5. *"Medical Ethics - Principles, Persons, and Problems," John M. Frame, 1988*
6. *"The New Medicine," Nigel M. de S. Cameron, 1991*