

CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

No matter who we are, our perspectives on abortion and euthanasia are dictated by our value systems which express who we think is in control, how we think the world works and what value is therefore placed on any one individual's existence. As Christians we aim to see our world, and ourselves, in relation to God.

To know where we stand as Christians on issues such as abortion we therefore need to look at *who* has created us, *who we are* in the eyes of our creator and what *value* our creator has placed on us – we need to understand who we are in relation to God.

Who has created us?

The story of creation is told in Genesis 1 and 2. God is the creator of all things and was before all things. He is sovereign.

Psalm 24 is a great illustration of his sovereignty for it begins:

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it, for He founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.

That includes us! We are no cosmic accident, but were deliberately created and given life by the author of life himself. It is not that God created 'life' and that this now 'reproduces' of it's own accord, rather every single thing that exists has been deliberately and minutely created by God himself.

Who are we in the eyes of our creator?

God has created us, but more specifically he has created us in his image.

'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.' Genesis 1:27.

Being created in his image is pretty awesome when we look at who God is. The Bible is full of his character: just read through the Psalms and you see God described as righteous, merciful, loving, wise, joyful, majestic, trustworthy, radiant, pure, saviour, judge, refuge, sustainer, father, compassionate, counsellor... and on go many more attributes of God. **Psalm 19** is one of my favourites, as it illustrates the power of the almighty Creator, the reality of being created in his image and the consequence of being in relationship with him.

We are created in the image of God, therefore we bear something of his character – something of his majesty, his mercy, his wisdom, his righteousness - we are not perfect in all these characteristics, but we are still masterpieces created in God's image even though the image of God in us is flawed by sin [Genesis 3]. A masterpiece may age and decay, crack and be defaced, yet through all the imperfection you still perceive the masterpiece and it still holds its value as a masterpiece.

God sees us as his masterpiece! We are reflections of him and he loves us, we are his meticulous and loving design, as the psalmist says in Psalm 139.

Our value, being created in his image.

Despite our sin and disobedience we are valuable to God. We are created in his image and as such our value is not in what we do, but rather who we are – people created and loved by God. We see clearly just how much God loves us when we look at the cross and understand that God sent his son to repair us as his masterpiece -to deal with the sin that mars the image of God in us and enable us to know him and relate to him as we ought.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

In **Psalm 8** it is the greatness of God that assures the worth of mankind, not mankind that assures its own worth. Our all-powerful creator cares for his most precious creation.

So, our value is not in the functional assessment of our capabilities, our contribution or burden to society, as believed by philosophers such as Singer, Harris, Beauchamp and Childress of whom we are taught so much about at university (see fig.1 below).

Peter Singer's Social Hierarchy is one of the extreme examples:

1. Prize specimens e.g.: Olympic athletes, Nobel Prize winners
 2. The ordinary healthy adult
 3. The less healthy adult- recognises their existence
 4. Non-persons- Babies, those with brain damage, the mentally handicapped, and those with Alzheimer's or Dementia
- (Singer, P 1993)

Fig. 1

Rather, it lies in the fact that God has created us to be his representatives and stewards – that's what it means to bear his image, we are the visible representation of the almighty God.

Psalm 139 is well known as a wonderful account of how every one of us is of intimate value to him, and tells clearly how each of us – regardless of functional ability – is personally created, designed and known by God. John Stott, in 'Issues facing Christians Today', uses Psalm 139 to understand God's value system, particularly relating to the unborn child. He looks at what the psalm says about being created by God, about God's covenant with us and about our continuity with God from conception through to our future.

- **Creation:** (Verses 13-16)

God's individually and minutely detailed creative activity within the womb. Our value lies in the fact that we are individually created by Him.

- **Covenant:** (Verses 1-12)

God expresses an unconditional commitment to us - his covenant. A covenant based on grace, that God initiates and that God maintains. Our value lies in the fact that we are called into such a relationship with him.

- **Continuity**

The Psalmist meditates on his own personal history:

In the past God searched me (1).

In the present God knows when I sit and when I rise (2).

In the future God's hand will guide me; his right hand will hold me fast (10).

We are the same valued person, created in God's image, from conception, to the present, to our future. We, the adult, are in direct continuity with the foetus we were (16).

No matter what stage of life we are at we are the same person of the same value created in God's image.

(Other references are: *Job 31:15* and *Isaiah 49:5*)

God knows us intimately and has a destiny for every one of us, a plan to prosper us and not to harm us, to give us hope and a future. (*Jeremiah 29: 11-14*)

How then should we see others?

As God sees every one of us! Created in his Image, loved by him through his grace.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made, your works are wonderful, I know that full well [Psalm 139:14]

Rich and poor have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all [Proverbs 22:2]

This includes the unborn child, who as we have seen has value to God, however little valued by humans. The fact that we do not show the same relational commitment to them as God does, and think we can destroy them because we don't want them reflects our depravity, but does not alter the fact that God relates to them, and God wants them. The fact that we do not show the same concern for them because they are not perfect and want to destroy them rather than nurture them reflects our depravity, but does not alter the fact that God created them with all their so called flaws and imperfections, and he loves them and values them just as they are.

How should we treat others?

1. Wonder - *Psalm 139: 14*
2. Respect - *Proverbs 14: 31*
3. Empathy – sharing joys and sorrows
4. Protection – *Genesis 9: 6*, each life sacrosanct (Wyatt, John 2000)

Every person is equally created in God's image and so we should value every person as such. There is no hierarchy in God's value system and no life is cheaply disposable. Our value is in God, whose image we bear, and not in anything we could ever be ourselves. We are dependant upon God and who we are in him. When we try to be autonomous, independent of God that is when we fail and the world gets a distorted view of the value of humanity, as seen in fig.1 of Singer's hierarchy.

In particular God calls us to care for the vulnerable. This is in direct contrast to the governing principles of the world today which values autonomy and the survival of the fittest. The idea that we should put ourselves out to protect the vulnerable is quite a strange one today, and something that we don't really know how to do.

Who are the vulnerable?

Deuteronomy 10: 18 – Fatherless, widow, alien

Jeremiah 22: 16 – poor and needy

James 1: 27 – orphans, widows and those in distress

In our society the vulnerable could be the suffering, the disabled, the incapacitated, the unborn child, the dependant, the single unsupported parent or pregnant teenager etc. The dictionary definition is: able to be hurt or injured, exposed to danger or criticism, at risk, exposed, defenceless, unprotected, weak, unguarded. God has commanded that we care for one another, particularly the vulnerable; that we should follow the example of Jesus, and see every person and foetus as God's masterpiece, created in his image, someone whom he loves by his grace and *for* whom no sacrifice is too great, not *of* whom is to be made a great sacrifice.

What does this mean practically for us?

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world James 1: 27

James is speaking about hypocritical practices and right Christian behaviour, listening to the word of God and doing what it says. We mustn't shower ourselves with guilt, but we must be prepared to face up to the reality of the Christian life – to talk like a Christian and to walk like a Christian, and not just to blend into the back ground.

In lectures: We need to stand firm on the gospel. Stand up for what we believe, boldly proclaiming Christian values. That might mean defending the vulnerable on issues such as abortion and euthanasia. Articulating the unpopular view that the unborn child has value out side that which the mother chooses to bestow upon it; that it is not a disposable inconvenience, but a person deliberately created by God, known and loved by God, chosen to bear the image of God. Articulating the unpopular opinion that either there is or there isn't a God. That if he truly exists then you can ignore him, but if he doesn't ignore the unborn foetus whom we treat as so much disposable tissue, then you can be sure that he won't ignore us either. He knows what we think of him when we destroy that which he loves and created and he will respond.

Of course it is not quite so easy as it sounds when you are the only Christian in a class where your fellow students and lecturers are critical of the Christian faith. But we need to remember that our God is almighty, it is in His strength and by His power and wisdom that we stand. Our hope is in Christ Jesus, firm and secure. Hebrews is full of encouragement: 'Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who has promised is faithful... He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward (speaking of Moses).' Vs' 10: 23 and 11: 26 We

need to remember like Moses that God is faithful, powerful and has a heavenly reward waiting for us, and that this is worth any amount of persecution for our beliefs.

Presented with God vs Singer do we think people would rather find their value in a God of unconditional love, grace and mercy or a person who reduces us to a hierarchical system? Value in God's image vs Value in human failings.

Placements and in practice: We need to be consciously reflecting the character of God in all we do and in every relationship - with patients and staff; with their relatives and friends. Treating them all with grace and dignity, with the value they have in being created in the image of God and loved by God and remembering that the woman who wants an abortion has as much value in the eyes of God as her unborn child. God loves them both. Christ died for them both. We need to learn how to share the hope we have in Christ Jesus, and how to articulate the enormous love and value that God places on every single one of us. This won't necessarily come naturally. We need to train ourselves how to show the love of Christ, we need to prepare for the tough situations that will challenge our ability to proclaim Christ's love and values, and we need to ask for God's forgiveness and help - for ourselves and for our patients - as we seek to help them find the love that is so freely and wonderfully offered to all mankind by our creator.

Since God chose you to be the holy people whom He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use His words to teach and counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Colossians 3: 12- 17

