The Sanctity of Life

Lesson 6: The Shedding of Innocent Blood: The Question of Abortion -- Proverbs 6:16–19

Some lessons we approach with our notebooks open and our hearts at a safe distance. This is not one of them. The subject before us touches some of the deepest wounds a person can carry, and it is likely that someone reading these words has a story they have never told anyone, a grief they have buried, a guilt they have learned to live around. Before we say anything else, we want to say this: the God we are about to meet in Scripture is not waiting to crush you. He is rich in mercy, and there is no sin so great that His grace cannot reach it.

And yet love does not lie, even gently. The same Scripture that overflows with mercy speaks with sober clarity about the worth of human life and the sin of shedding innocent blood. Proverbs tells us there are things the Lord hates, things that are an abomination to Him, and among them are “hands that shed innocent blood.” This is not the language of politics or of slogans. It is the language of a God who treasures the defenseless and grieves when the helpless are harmed. To care about what God hates is simply to love what God loves: human life made in His image.

We have already laid the foundation in the lessons before this one. Every human being bears the image of God. God Himself forms the child in the womb and knows that child before birth. The unborn John leaped for joy, and the unborn Christ was already the Lord. When we come now to the question of abortion, we are not entering new territory so much as following these truths to their honest conclusion. The life in the womb is a human life, and the deliberate taking of innocent human life is a grave matter before God.

So we will try to do two things at once, and hold them together without letting go of either. We will tell the truth about the sanctity of unborn life, plainly and without flinching. And we will hold out the gospel of forgiveness just as plainly, so that no one who has been touched by this sorrow is left in despair. Truth and grace are not rivals. They met at the cross, where the innocent blood of Christ was shed so that the guilty might be washed clean. Come to this lesson, then, with an honest heart and an open Bible, and let both the truth and the grace of God do their work.

Group Discussion: Why is it so important, when speaking about a subject like this one, to hold together both the truth about the worth of unborn life and the depth of God’s mercy? What happens to a church that keeps one of these without the other?

Personal Reflection: As you come to this lesson, what is the posture of your own heart, defensiveness, grief, guilt, anger, indifference, compassion? What would it look like to bring that honest heart before the God who is both perfectly truthful and full of grace?

Read Proverbs 6:16–19

Study Questions

1. Read Proverbs 6:16–19. Among the things the Lord hates are “hands that shed innocent blood.” What does it tell us about God’s heart that the shedding of innocent blood is named among the things He most detests, and how does this reveal His regard for the defenseless?
2. It is easy to read a list of sins God hates and quietly exempt ourselves. As you consider this passage, where do you sense God inviting you to honesty rather than self-justification about your own attitudes toward the vulnerable and the unborn?
3. Read Exodus 21:22–25. The law attaches serious consequences to harm done to a pregnant woman and her unborn child. How does this passage show that God’s law regarded the life in the womb as a life to be protected, not as a thing of no account?
4. Whatever your own history with these questions, the gospel speaks first of grace. If you carry guilt or grief connected to this subject, how does it affect you to hear that there is full forgiveness and cleansing in Christ for every sin brought to Him in repentance?
5. Read Psalm 106:37–38, which laments the shedding of “innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters.” How does Scripture’s grief over the sacrifice of children illumine the seriousness of taking innocent unborn life today?
6. Our culture often frames this issue in terms of rights and politics. How might God be calling you to think and speak about it instead in terms of Scripture, conscience, and compassion, with both conviction and gentleness?
7. The same God who hates the shedding of innocent blood is rich in mercy to the penitent. Why is it essential that we hold together both the seriousness of this sin and the fullness of God’s forgiveness, and what goes wrong when we lose either one?
8. Think of the women and men in any congregation who may carry private wounds connected to abortion. How is God calling you to be an agent of His grace and truth toward them, rather than a source of further condemnation?
9. Trace the biblical case for the protection of unborn life: the image of God (Genesis 1), God’s forming and knowing of the child in the womb (Psalm 139), the personhood of the unborn (Luke 1), and the Lord’s hatred of shedding innocent blood (Proverbs 6). What does this teaching, taken together, lead us to conclude about the taking of innocent unborn life, and how do we hold this conviction together with the gospel of full forgiveness for the penitent?
10. Look back over this lesson. Name one specific way God is shaping your heart toward both the truth about the sanctity of unborn life and the grace of the gospel, and one concrete step you will take this week to live and speak in a way that reflects both truth and grace.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 1:27, God created man in His own image; Psalm 139:13–16, you knitted me together in my mother's womb; Proverbs 24:11–12, rescue those who are being taken away to death; Isaiah 1:18, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; 1 John 1:7–9, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

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