

How are we? Excellent. If you have your Bibles, let's go to 1 Timothy, chapter 1. Before we really dig in here, I need to put some lenses on us. I need to put some filters in our ears so that really the difficult subject we need to address today will be heard rightly. The God of the universe goes to great lengths in regard to revelation to get you to understand and grasp the truth that fundamentally is difficult for us as humans to grasp. I want to try to put some lenses on you before we get going, and I think 1 Timothy, chapter 1, starting in verse 12, is going to help us out with that. So let's look at it.

"I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."

Now that's a spectacular statement that, "I am the foremost. Mercy was given to me. Forgiveness was granted to me. God counted me worthy to his service, to serve him, to make much of him, to decry his glory and might, that he counted me worthy, even though I was an insolent, violent opponent of his." He is going to say why in the next line. **"But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."**

Now Paul just said in his letter to Timothy, one of his disciples, that the reason God saved him, the reason God rescued him, the reason God called him to himself was so you and I would be without the excuse of self-pity, would be without the excuse of, *I've gone too far. God certainly can't forgive me. The mercy afforded to so many others cannot be granted to me because I have sinned in ways that surely the Lord won't forgive.* Yet so much of the Bible is built out to make that thought in you a lie.

Moses killed a man with his bare hands. He didn't shoot him from a few hundred yards away. He murdered him with his bare hands, and yet who does God select, empower, and choose to lead his people out of slavery? The murderer. David, a man after God's own heart, takes advantage of a woman who is in the process of ceremonially cleansing herself, gets her pregnant, and then has her husband murdered. The Bible calls David a man after God's own heart.

You see, the Bible wants to consistently and constantly assault this idea and assault that little thing in our head that says, *Not me! Not me! I've gone too far. I've done too much.* It's imperative for where we're going today for us to let that kind of fill in all the crevices and all the little cracks of our souls and for us to marinate a bit in that before we proceed. So let me pray for us to that end, and then we'll get started.

Holy Spirit, I just ask today that you would do what I cannot, that you would work in ways I cannot. I pray you would make me bold and, God, that you would, by your Holy Spirit's power, persuade our hearts and our minds, and we might find ourselves in the middle of your heart around this issue. Help us, Jesus. It's for your beautiful name. Amen.

If you have your Bibles, let's go to Genesis, chapter 1. Several years ago, I went off script, I went off of my notes, and I just pointed out I believed a lot of how we treat our pets is silly. I mean, I just talked about the fact that they're members of our family, and some of you have even bought clothes and shoes for your pets! So I just commented I thought that was ridiculous. It was a rabbit trail. It was not a bulk of the sermon, but there are few things in my decade here that elicited the type of response I got from that little rabbit trail.

So one belief and one action arose out of that very quick, two-minute statement. One, apparently because I made that statement, I hate animals. Okay, that's not true. I love animals that aren't at my house. Love them! Your little puppy, Bootsie, love that dog. I just don't want him defiling my backyard. Love animals. I just have three kids. There's enough mess to clean up. I'm not looking to add to bills or to messes that need to be addressed. I'm not looking to train anything else right now. All right? I love that you love your dog.

Then the second thing that occurred was what I perceived to be your love for me led many of you to email me and send me pictures of your dog dressed up for Christmas, in your family photo, with their Halloween costume on. This is straight. I even got a calendar of dogs dressed up as biblical characters. Really, my point in even bringing that up that day was there appears to be, although it cannot be clearly articulated, a homogenization of all mammals as kind of being on the same kind of equal turf.

If you look at the shows we like, everything from *The Dog Whisperer*, which is legit... I've tried that *tssst* on my kids. From *The Dog Whisperer* to *Whale Wars* to *animal psychics*, I mean, we are into these other mammals. We want to protect them, take care of them, fight for their rights. I mean, we're in right now on the puppy/kitty love. I want to set out to answer a really simple question we know the answer to, but I believe we need to address it. The question is simple. I'll ask it in two ways: *Are all mammals equal, or is there something special about us?*

That takes us to Genesis, chapter 1. This is verse 26: **"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."**

All right? Now what's happening in this text is the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, the image of God, is being built out. What this text is communicating to us is that humankind, mankind alone, in all of creation has been created in the image of God. That is that mankind, unlike all other mammals, has an emotional or a spiritual, intellectual, and moral component the rest of creation lacks. Now the rest of creation might have *one* of those components, but it's only mankind that has all three of those components. It's only mankind who can live in, explain, and enjoy the fullness of what God is doing in reconciling all things unto himself. We are spectacularly different than the rest of creation.

No matter how smart the dog and how dumb the human, a dog will never own a human as a pet. No matter how ignorant the human and how brilliant the gorilla, the gorillas never get together and go, "Look at how he likes bananas! That's crazy! Look! We've taught him to beat his chest." All right? That's never happened. The reason is we are *other than*. We have been made in the image of God, in the *imago Dei*. It sets us apart from the rest of creation.

Now hear me. The Bible clearly teaches creation care. So any type of brutality towards animals because of our position would be wicked. I'm not talking about hunting. I'm not talking about those kind of things. Everybody breathe out. Keep your camo and your .30-06 loaded. I'm saying simply that brutality for the sake of brutality is sinful, even if exacted upon an animal that is, according to the Scriptures, underneath our position in the creative order. You and I, made in the image of God, are wholly different than anything else in all of creation.

So we know that Adam is made in the image of God. It's clear. It can't be argued. So the question then becomes is that some kind of special deal for Adam, or are we also sons of Adam, daughters of Adam? Well, flip over to Genesis, chapter 5. We'll look at verse 3. **"When Adam had lived 130 years..."** Can I just tell you for free, I'm not interested in that? **"When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son..."** Listen to this language. **"...in his own likeness..."** So he looks like his daddy. **"...after his..."** What's the word? **"...image, and named him Seth."**

So what we see happening in Genesis, chapter 5, is the idea that not only does Adam pass down his likeness to his sons and daughters, but he also... That image of God that was created in Adam (Adam was

created in the image of God) is passed down to the sons and daughters of Adam through his line so if we trace from Adam to us, we see you and I are also made in the image of God as mankind as it's been passed down from generation to generation to generation, which means we also reflect to creation and back to God the God-ness of God in his power, that moral, spiritual, and intellectual capacity the rest of creation lacks.

Now not only does the image of God get imparted to us through our fathers, but the brokenness and sinfulness of our fathers also is imparted to us. Let me show you this. So it's not just the image, not just the *imago Dei* that we get, but it's also the brokenness and sinfulness of the world. Psalms 58:3: **"The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies."** Job 14:4: **"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one."**

All right, that doesn't work. You can't bring something clean out of something that is unclean. Since Adam sinned and passed down to his sons sin and they passed down to their sons sin, and since we have discussed at length here that sin isn't just an external action but an internal state of the heart that leads to action, that comes via our father's line into our souls. We come out of the womb with iniquity. In fact, according to this text it was actually in the womb also.

Let's keep going. Job's friend agrees with him in Job 15:14: **"What is man, that he can be pure? Or he who is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?"** So if the Bible is saying that in the womb not only is the *imago Dei* present but also the iniquity and sinfulness of mankind is present, then you have a moral, spiritual, and intellectual crisis in the womb, that the components of personhood are present in the womb.

Now the next question we have to answer (this gets progressively more difficult in lieu of our culture) is...*If the image of God and the brokenness of mankind and all our personhood is present in the womb, at what point in the womb are those things present?* So the Bible is not silent. In Psalms 51, verse 5, the Bible says this. David says, **"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."** When I read that, I don't know where your mind went. Can I tell you where my mind went? Scandalous. Jesse's wife, playing around. Then *Jessie's Girl* popped into my head, and I had to shake that out.

In the middle of all of this, I'm going, *Okay, I need to go back and look because David just said, "At my conception, I was conceived in sin."* My thought was, *Jesse's girl was playing around.* Here's the thing you gotta love and respect about the Bible. The Scriptures do not protect the sins of the heroes of the Bible. They lay it all out for you to see their failures, their shortcomings, their rebellion. When they really blow it, it's right there on the page. The Bible does not try to make men and women in the Bible look lovelier than they are.

It's a very refreshing part of the Scriptures. It's one of those things that draws us to, *Okay, this will work for me. God can save me. God can do this work in me.* If we go back and look at the story of Jesse and his sons, there is not a hint of immorality. There is nothing shady going on here, but what David is getting across to you and me is that moral and that spiritual and that intellectual component is there at conception. All that he would be and all that God had for him was there at conception. So when the sperm hits the egg and two cells become four cells become eight cells become 16 cells (I'm not going any higher than that for math's sake), we are persons, we are people, at conception.

Now the implications of this biblical truth are massive. Let me give you just two. The first implication is God is intimately aware of you and of me. Psalms 139 says he knit us together in our mother's womb. Now I think the weight of that text is missed on us a bit. I'll tell you why. There are not a lot of knitters anymore. There are not. I mean, I think some of the hipsters (Thank you, Denton) are probably trying to bring it back since it was old. *We knit our own stuff.* Right? But ultimately in our culture, there are not a ton of people knitting anymore.

So when we read a text like that, really the forethought involved and the planning involved and the end in mind involved in such a project as knitting something is completely lost on us. So a woman at the church knitted my wife a really beautiful scarf. That didn't accidentally happen. She didn't pick up it up and was like, *Oh, it's a scarf.* She thought, *I'm going to make a scarf. This is the color I want the scarf to be. This is the pattern and the design of the yarn and how I put it all together.* With great forethought, with the end in mind, she began to knit and put together.

So in Psalms 139, when it says you were knitted together in your mother's womb, it's this God is aware of you. God is into the details of how you've been wired, how you've been put together. We could also look at Acts 17 where the Scripture says the times and boundaries of your habitation were set by God before you were, which means there are no accidents in this room! You might have freaked out mom and dad, but you never freaked out God!

So Mom and Dad might have gone, "Oh man! You really weren't planned," but there's never been an argument in the Trinity about you. The triune God of the universe has never gone, "Spirit? What in the world? I had that kid pegged to go out in '86, and you sent them down in '74? It ruined my whole plan. You and I need to sync up." That's not how it works! That's not what happened.

So we like to think of God at 40,000 feet. That's one of the reasons we've been robbed of deep intimacy and worship for God because we love God at 40,000 feet. We love kind of big banner truths, but we don't like to let those truths really kind of sink into our hearts that God is aware intimately of you. Those kind of intrinsic gifts you have, that's a delight to your father who wove those into you. So thinking back on life and

looking at things you were naturally drawn to and gifts you have that begin to work themselves out in a way that you see the kingdom of God pushing out and moving forward, those are spectacular moments.

I'm loud. I have always been loud. There has never been a time in my life where I'm not. My wife in restaurants has gone, "Hey, it's just us. It's just us!" I have a voice that carries, all right? That's what it's called. Now I'm not *this* loud always. Like if we were to talk in the foyer, I wouldn't be like, "Hey! How are you?" It's not like that, but I am loud. I do project. My understanding from Scripture is God, with the end in mind, knowing he was going to call me, save me, and flame me for his name and his renown, said, "We need to give him some more folds. We need to build it out so he can do it a lot without those things fading on him."

God, with the end in mind, your life, my life, is intimately involved in the details. If we could just sit in that and marvel at God's delight in how you are wired, how you're gifted, how you function. I wonder how much more we could get the rest of that text and really grasp we're fearfully and wonderfully made? That implication alone is massive, but here's the second implication. The second implication of us believing that the Word of God teaches that men and women were created by God in the image of God and that our moral, intellectual, and spiritual components are present at conception, the implication of that belief because we are in glad submission to the Word of God... Are you tracking with me?

Now in a day of blogs and op-ed pieces, it's harder to kind of get that across. We are people of the Word, and the church is a creature of the Word, which means we let the Scriptures define for us how life should be. We don't let the temperature of our culture tell us what's right and wrong. We let the Word of God tell us what's right and wrong. We don't let our own opinions be absolute for us. We let the Word of God be absolute for us, because there's a way that seems right to us, and in the end, it leads to death.

There isn't anyone in any of these rooms who would for a second try to point back at their pasts and say there has never been a time they were sure they were right that they didn't later go, *Oh, what an idiot!* We've all been guilty of that. What saves us from that is the Word of God that leads us into paths of righteousness. Since that is true, the believer in Jesus Christ is not indifferent or neutral when it comes to the cultural sociological arguments around life and abortion. We are not neutral.

Now in trying to understand this, I just tried to look at the arguments. I just wanted to look at the arguments for this, and I found a kind of schizophrenia that blew my mind. I'll tell you why. Because I spend a lot of time with unbelievers, I enjoy that, love that. It sharpens me. I love the questions. What I have found when I'm around truly secular people who are thinkers, what they tend to bring up are really scientific issues. They will say, "Well, Matt, the Bible would say the world is only this many years old, but science has shown us the world is this many. How do you reconcile science and faith?"

I mean, those are the kind of questions I end up responding to and answering of how science really kind of assaults the Word of God. So I have to kind of deconstruct that and go, "Well, not really. Let's look at this, and let's look at what science has claimed historically. Let's not try to call faith this and science this. I just don't know that's true historically or even in present reality." The only issue I have ever come across where the secular humanists of our day do not want the evidence of science to bear weight on the issue is the issue of abortion.

At eight weeks in the womb, it is scientific fact that the baby has brain waves, a heartbeat, a functioning liver, functioning kidneys, a fingerprint, and recoils from a prick. Yet the argument is, "That's not a human life. That's a woman's body, and a woman should be able to do with her body anything she wants to do with her body." Now here's what I mean by schizophrenia. That's completely untrue in the rest of our laws. If you don't believe me, take off your clothes; run through the street. Do you know where you're going? Jail.

Try to sell your body for sex. Try to do that. You get busted. Do you know where you're going? Jail...along with the guy who tried to buy it. So this idea that self-autonomy rules and reigns is not true in any other domain except around this one. On top of that, the laws are so backwards. Hear me. If a man were to assault a pregnant woman and the baby were to die in her womb, he'd be tried for manslaughter. Yet the same woman can go to a clinic, and for a small price (maybe even subsidized by the government), can have the baby inside of her killed, the baby who does not have her genetic code who cannot have her blood type who does not have her fingerprints.

Of the one million plus abortions that occurred in the United States of America last year, the majority of them occurred after eight weeks, which means there's a heartbeat, brain waves, and functioning organs. But our position is, "That's not human. That's not a soul. That's not a person." In fact, we know you can sustain a baby's life after 23-24 weeks if they're born early, if they're born prematurely. But it's still legally viable to kill that baby in the womb post-24 weeks.

If we step away from the life issue and just look at it on the surface, how can you logically buy into this unless you're willing to suppress truth, which is Romans 1 in action? I read a lot of history. I don't know. I just love it. There are times specifically around the slave trade and genocide that when I'm reading history, I'm just going, *What were they thinking?* Not *persons*, because I completely understand how persons can stumble into dark things. I completely get that. I am a person.

My question when I read history isn't about persons; it's about people. Like when I read about the slave trade and when I read specifically about coming out of England that the slave trade was about sugar... They were stealing Africans and taking them to the Caribbean to harvest sugar because they tried to use

the Irish, and the sun crisped them up. Literally hundreds of thousands of Africans were brutally killed for sugar, for sweet tea and biscuits. I mean, so I'm thinking, *What were they thinking? What were they doing? Where were the people who were going, "Hey, this is crazy"?*

What you find in history is that really underneath and subversively witting away at the foundation of that nonsense were faithful men and women, but the culture by and large was passive and ignored it. I earnestly believe that over the next few years, science itself will help overturn some of the ridiculousness we see in our culture. I think our children's children will look at us and go, *What in the world? Where were you? What were you doing? Why didn't you see this? Why didn't you sense this? I mean, if you're going to say that biblically you believe this is a life, how could you not do anything as millions were killed every year, the most helpless of helpless, the weakest of the weak, yet you did nothing?*

My hope in talking about this subject today, knowing it will be costly... What I mean is it's not going to be *costly*costly. Here's what I mean. Some of you aren't coming back. I mean, you wanted to hear fairy Jesus sprinkling you with blessings. That's not where we went today. Let me be straight. I don't have any political affiliations here. I'm the kingdom of God party. We already have our Guy, so I'm not stumping here. Okay? In light of the darkness our culture is walking in around this issue, let me tell you some things I think we need to do.

Let's look over at Ephesians, chapter 5. We're just going to look at verse 11. I'll wait 'til you get there. I want you to see this. Ephesians, chapter 5. We're going to look at verse 11. **"Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness..."** So let me just stop. If we're saying here, which we are, that life begins at conception, then the taking of a life post-conception is murder and must be filed under the unfruitful works of darkness. Is that fair?

If life begins at conception... The Word of God weighs in it does; science would say it does. You have to be careful playing this little game of, *Well, I define life as this amount of brainwaves*. If that's true, we have to pull the plug on a lot of people in a lot of hospitals. Our definition of personhood is another piece of that kind of schizophrenic, "it's what I want to do" type of ethic that's driving this industry, because if we were to say, "Well, it's only a human when it's breathing on its own," then we have a lot of people in ICU who need to go out, don't we? We need to start pulling some plugs. We need to get rid of our dialysis machines. We need to get rid of our respirators.

See, it's so logically insane that I've found myself provoked, if you're not picking up on that. So in this text, he says, **"Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness..."** Now what I've found is most believers in Christ don't have a problem with this. *I don't have a problem with this. That isn't a problem. I'm not going to have an abortion!* Now some of you have, and I started with 1 Timothy on purpose.

You have not gone beyond the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. In fact, we have a very good-sized ministry here called Grace Abounds that's there for men and women who are dealing with the post-abortion stress, guilt, loss, and sorrow. So I point you in that way if it's hitting you. There is no condemnation for you, no judgment on you. This is the Word of God defining what life is for us. The Scriptures say, "Have no part of these things."

I believe that most evangelicals will go, *Yeah, no problem. No problem!* But the text doesn't stop there. Look at the next line. **"Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead..."** What? So not only are we as believers in Christ to not participate, but we are also as believers in Christ to work to expose. So what does it look like to work to expose? Well, let me just float some of many options. I think there is a political component to this. I mean, there just is. So if you're politically involved, I think this has to be an issue for the Christian conscience.

There are advocacy and pregnancy centers all over the Metroplex, one in Denton, one in Lewisville, several down in Dallas, a brand new one up in Keller. Their sole purpose is to walk young women, support young women, care for young women who are pregnant and don't know what to do. We can volunteer our time. We can give up our resources. It's my hope that hundreds of you would be on the phone come Monday going, "What can we do? How can I help? How can we serve?"

I think everything from being willing to look at adoption to... I'll tell you a great source of information. The boys at Way of the Master produced a 33-minute documentary that's online for free. You can look at it YouTube. You can also watch it at www.180movie.com. It's just a 33-minute documentary on this issue. I want to give you a word of warning and then expose yet another piece of hypocrisy. The documentary is graphic, but here's what I've found to be somewhat interesting in reading the comments. Usually I have a general rule that I don't read the comments on YouTube stuff, but I read it.

Here's what I found. The graphic scenes in *180 the Movie* are touted as manipulative. "That's emotive, manipulation, not based on fact." Now here's the irony of that. I don't remember the last time I've watched television... I'm not a huge television watcher, but I can't remember the last time I watched television where I didn't hear Sarah McLachlan singing a song with a puppy that was all jacked up. So here's what I keep trying to point out. Nobody is going to say this is the same, that this puppy has more rights and requires more care than this human. Nobody is going to say it, but you fight for the rights of the unborn, and you're manipulative, but if you want to give Bootsie a new home, that's worthwhile.

I mean, I feel like I'm taking crazy pills. I mean, do you see this weird stretch of things? I think watching *180 the Movie* would be extremely helpful as you watch those boys at Way of the Master kind of dissect

this issue. Oh, that God might put a fire in our bones around this! Might we never get so loud on the issue that we forget the souls like our boy Paul who in ignorance and unbelief walked in things that they did not understand and into decisions they didn't fully grasp. May we not be so passionate around this issue that we forget about the souls that are actually caught up in it. Might we be known as a place that loves and extends grace to the culture that we were called to be as the church of Jesus Christ, the conscious in.

We will find ourselves in this issue and on many other issues being against the world for the world. You don't have to be an expert in Scripture to wonder God's opinion on the murder of over a million little boys and little girls every year in the U.S. So it's my hope that if God gives me great-grandchildren, this issue has been settled, that I be able to say, *No, no, we've fought. It was crazy, but we fought. We prayed. We pled. We engaged at every level we knew to engage to intervene against this injustice on the weakest of weak and the most helpless in our society.*

Join us this Wednesday night. We're just going to pray. We're going to pray for our president. We're going to pray for Congress. We're going to pray for the advocacy and pregnancy centers. We're going to pray the Spirit of God would move in such a way in the hearts and minds of Americans that we might see God do something spectacular in our day and age around this horrific reality. God be merciful to us. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, I know there is a thickness to this subject. I pray for my brothers and sisters in this room who, without knowledge or understanding, or maybe even *with* knowledge and understanding, have sinned against you and against the life of a child. I pray that in this moment you would, in just the way you and you alone can, might massage into our spirits your love and forgiveness, the grace afforded to us in Christ.

For those of us who have erred on the side of passivity, where we have let this be somebody else's issue, some other thing where we have not, as you have clearly articulated in the Scriptures, fought against injustice and worked to expose the darkness, I pray we would work at pushing back the darkness in this place at this time and that you would grant us wisdom on how to proceed. I pray that in our passion we would not sin against others and we would not judge harshly others, that we would have great care and compassion for persons and a desire to see you work among peoples. Help us, Holy Spirit. We need you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Love you guys.