

Life

"Proof? Positive!" Series, May 4 & 5, 2024 | Genesis 9:1-17

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Christianity has made the world a better place.

Thinkers like Richard Dawkins might disagree.

Richard Dawkins is one of a group of thinkers known as "New Atheists."

He, like some, wish Christianity would go away. Dawkins wrote: "Faith is one of the world's great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate." – Richard Dawkins¹

These people believe that faith—specifically Christianity—has made the world a worse place.

Instead, many thinkers who reject Christianity cling to the hope of "self-evident" truths.

"Self-evident" may be a phrase you recognize from American history. Thomas Jefferson wrote it in the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident ..."

The founders appealed to natural law. Natural law usually teaches that there are certain universal moral rules that go deeper than governments and laws.

It assumes that most people want to live basically good lives, and they want everyone else to be able to live basically good lives as well.

Most natural law assumes that everyone agrees that killing is inherently wrong.²

Many atheist thinkers assume that, in the absence of faith, innate human goodness and morality will take over and produce a new, post-faith, humanist consensus. They're wrong.

Even Richard Dawkins recognizes that these truths are not "self-evident".

He recently declared himself a "cultural Christian." That's a strange thing for him to say.

However, it's also nothing new. By "cultural Christian," Dawkins means that he likes certain fixtures of living in a Christian society, like Christmas carols and pretty church buildings.

He also means that he prefers a society built on Christian theology and ethics to societies built on just about any other world religion or philosophy.

Why? Because Dawkins and others are noticing that life built on humanism without Christianity is not working. The world is not okay on its own. These truths are not "self-evident".

Christianity has made the world a better place.

By Christianity, I mean the faith that teaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ and those who live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christianity has obviously been imperfect in its application of the Gospel.

Christians have made terrible mistakes in history.

¹ "Is Science a Religion?". Humanist, www.skeptical-science.com. January/February 1997.

² <https://www.thoughtco.com/natural-law-definition-4776056>

However, Christianity has shaped Western society and worldwide culture in deep ways and has made the world a much better place. The way we value life is one example.

The value of human life is not “self-evident.”

The Fall introduced death into creation.

The value of life was built into creation when God made it and called it “good.”

However, when we sinned, we introduced death into creation.

Now everything dies. Everyone dies. Everything gets sick. Everything suffers.

Plus, sin began to spread like wildfire on the face of earth. So did death. And violence.

God looked at the earth and saw the sorry condition of it all. **Genesis 6:5** says:

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

God decided to do something about it.

God determined to send a flood to wipe out the sin, death, and decay that were rampant.

God saw a righteous man, Noah, and decided to save him, his family, and representatives of all the creatures on earth. He had Noah build an ark to survive the flood.

Then it rained for forty days and forty nights. Every living thing on land not in the ark died.

After the waters receded, the damage was still present. Sin had survived. Death had survived.

God said that he would never do it again. Why? In **Genesis 8:21** God tells us,

“... for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. ...”

The Flood showed that nothing could stop the spread of sin and death.

The value of life is no longer “self-evident” in creation.

Instead, history tells us that sin, death, violence, and evil have been the norm.

The ancient Romans showed the general non-Christian disregard for life in their treatment of children.

The Romans discarded children anytime they liked.

Roman women were frequently involved in extramarital affairs they wished to keep hidden, and the Romans wanted small families, so potion-induced abortions were common.

Unwanted children would also sometimes just be abandoned. They would be left in the wilderness, thrown into the sewer, or tossed into the river.

Infanticide was common. If any baby was born with a physical deformity, it would hold back the state and family. It was killed, frequently by being drowned.

The Romans had little regard for human life. Their behavior was no different from that of most ancient cultures, though. It continued in many places, even in Europe, well into the Middle Ages.³

Some people today show the same disregard for life.

³ Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*, Chapter 2, “The Sanctification of Human Life.”

In 2017 Richard Dawkins tweeted that if a fetus were diagnosed with Down syndrome, then it should be aborted. His statement came from an ethic based on happiness. The child would be happier never to be born, and the family would be happier if the child were never born.⁴

Thankfully, the outcry against him was loud. People shared stories of family members with Down syndrome who are very happy. They shared stories of how their own lives had been made better by people with Down syndrome.

But those arguments buy into Dawkins' argument and miss the bigger issue.

Life's value isn't found in the happiness it produces or doesn't produce.

Life's value comes from elsewhere.

God declares human life valuable.

God extended humanity's dominion over creation in Genesis 9:1-3.

God gave human beings the responsibility for multiplying and filling the earth in Genesis 1.

That came with a command to have dominion or rule over creation. Human beings were meant to be God's representatives on earth and rule over creation in his place as he would.

God still gives humanity dominion over creation, but there is a recognition that this rule will not be like his rule. In a fallen world, human beings will dominate.

In **Genesis 9:2** God says:

"The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered."

Creation should fear us as we fear God; that's respect. However, creation will now also dread us because we are a threat. That's the reality of living under fallen human beings.

However, God decreed responsibility for life in Genesis 9:4-5.

First, God linked life and blood.

Then, God demands an accounting from every living being for how it spends its life.

As human beings, we are responsible for our own life, but we are also responsible for the lifeblood of those around us. We are responsible for life itself.

God reaffirmed the value of human life in Genesis 9:6-7.

In Genesis 9:6, God said that we are guilty when we shed blood:

***"Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed,
for God made man in his own image."***

God is telling us two things. First, we are accountable if we kill another human being.

Second, God is telling us why. Human beings—all of us—are made in God's image. God created us in his image in the first place. That image is marred by sin but still in us.

⁴ <https://www.thedailybeast.com/richard-dawkins-would-fail-philosophy-101>

And God said this over every single human being on earth saying, "You are made in my image. You carry my image. You are precious. You are valuable. Your life has value." God declares it.

God made the rainbow the sign of this promise in Genesis 9:8-16.

God makes this covenant with all of creation.

He says that he will never send another flood on earth.

The rainbow is a sign of that covenant promise. God deems life precious.

This truth is everywhere in the Bible.

Life is a gift from God. It is God's to give and take. Not ours.

It's a Gospel truth! It's something we as Christians are commanded to live out.

The Gospel has made the world a better place.

Christians outlawed infanticide and abortion on demand.

It obviously didn't happen when Christians were the minority in the Roman Empire.

However, it's important to know that Christians did not practice infanticide or abortion. They didn't abandon children. Instead, they took in abandoned children and made a home for them.

Consequently, the population of Christians grew and grew.

Gradually, Christians became the majority. Practices changed. Then the laws changed.

As Christianity spread throughout Europe, practices changed slowly. Not everyone was Christian, nor did every Christian do what the Bible said.

And not every culture on earth today has stopped practicing infanticide, abortion on demand, and child abandonment. All three still happen in places today.

But Christians have consistently championed the value of life from conception forward.

Christians outlawed gladiatorial combat and senseless violence.

The Romans held gladiatorial combats in amphitheaters around the Empire.

The Gladiators were usually slaves, criminals, or prisoners of war. They were expendable.

They were trained to fight, and then they were sent to fight to the death for the entertainment of the masses. Death was a spectacle.

Christians refused to go to these games. The broader society questioned their patriotism for not going to the games. And in a cruel twist, many Christians were martyred in these games.

Later, these games were outlawed by Christians.

Christians limited warfare.

I know that many people cite the violent history of warfare in nations that professed to be Christian as a reason to think that Christianity is a plague on civilized society.

We have fought wars. However, to be fair, it is also true that we have limited warfare!

Christians introduced the idea of just wars. Just wars must meet certain conditions.

Just wars must also be fought with rules of engagement. Unnecessary casualties should be avoided, and prisoners of war should be treated humanely.

Please understand that these concepts did not come into being apart from Christianity!⁵
Christians have dramatically limited warfare!

Disciples of Jesus can still make the world a better place.

Disciple of Jesus can still make the world a better place.

A disciple is someone who has decided to follow Jesus, is being changed by Jesus, and is multiplying disciples of Jesus.

To be a disciple of Jesus changes our heads, our hearts, and what we do with our hands.

How can disciples of Jesus still make the world a better place?

Decide to Follow: Agree that human life is precious.

Life is precious. Human life is sacred. Not because I say so. Because God says so.

God declares human life to be precious.

The unborn are precious.

People born with different abilities are precious.

People who have lost many of their faculties are precious.

You are precious. So am I. God declares it so!

What incredibly Good News in a world that measures life on its usefulness or its happiness!

Don't close your mind or your heart to the truth of the Gospel.

I understand that the topic of life is difficult. It is divisive in our country and our politics. I get it. Still, don't close your heart on this issue.

If you are a person with a loved one who is facing end of life, dealing with what that means in a society with so many medical options is complicated and painful. I understand that.

If you are a person who has perhaps terminated a pregnancy in the past, please understand that I have no intention today of piling guilt or shame into your life. There is new life in Jesus!

Don't close your heart to the truth of the Gospel.

Be Changed: Value your own life and the lives of others.

This is the heart change that the Gospel demands of us.

How can we align our hearts with the Gospel truth that God declares human life precious?

Value the gift of life God has given you! Thank God for who he made you to be!

Value the people around you—all of them. They come in different sizes, shapes, and colors. They have different personalities, different likes and dislikes, and different kinds of abilities. Some are fun, some take work to be around. They are all valuable in God's eyes!

Value life itself. Don't let yourself become desensitized to violence. Something inside you should recoil at violence and images of violence.

⁵ <https://www.learnreligions.com/just-war-theory-catholic-church-542124>

Multiply: Protect human life at least as well as our ancestors in the faith have.

This is where we align our hands with the Gospel truth that God declares life precious.

Before any of these changes happened in history, they happened among Christians first.

We ourselves don't abort our unborn children for convenience, we don't abandon our children, and we don't abandon the abandoned children of others.

We give care to the differently abled and to those who are losing abilities or closing in on the end of life.

We are not violent, nor do we condone senseless violence.

There are so many other issues we need to think through biblically for ourselves. We need to think through the use of reproductive technologies, stem cells in medical research, and a host of other thorny ethical issues when it comes to life.

Protecting human life starts by US protecting human life.

But then protecting human life may include public advocacy.

Should you speak up for the value God places on life? Yes. Absolutely.

Speak out. Organize. Advocate. Centuries worth of our ancestors in the faith have advocated in public places for the value of life. They were doing it in the days of the Roman Empire; they changed the face of Western Civilization, and there are disciples of Jesus doing it today.

Advocate for life! That's what we do, and God has used us to change the world.

If God values human life, then God values you.

God has declared you precious.

He wants a personal relationship with you.

He doesn't just want you to know about him; he wants to know you.

God who created you sees you, he values you, he died to pay the price for your sin, he rose victorious from the grave and beat death itself, and he wants a personal relationship with you.

Won't you say "yes" to Jesus today?