

(With video 99 balloons)

*What Does It Mean To Be Human?*

On May 15- 17, 2006 Johns Hopkins University held a symposium entitled *What Does It Mean To Be Human: A Public Discourse On Genetics, Ethics, and Spirituality*. The speakers included Francis Collins, Director of the Human Genome Project, professors of bioethics, medical doctors, lawyers, and Ravi Zacharias.

Ravi Zacharias is an outspoken defender of not only the existence of God, but the reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible.

Ravi Zacharias says, "When I first got the invitation to participate I thought isn't this odd? After all the centuries of human existence we're still trying to figure out who we are. Evidently we're not sure, or we wouldn't be asking the question. But then we're the ones trying to answer it. We as humans aren't sure what it means to be human and yet we're the ones trying to write a definition."

What does it mean to be human? When does life begin? How do we address the ever increasingly complex issues in our day of cloning, legalized abortion, doctor assisted suicide, invitro fertilization, stem cell research, and all the rest?

After a while it can make your head spin as you try to work your way through these issues.

Speaking at that symposium Ravi Zacharias said, "We are at a turning point of extraordinary developments in science and medicine and if we do not have the underpinning of a moral framework they will become the catastrophes in the world of humanity the way WorldCom and the others were in the business world. We provided MbAs with no ethical framework behind them and now we are producing those who are tinkering with the human genome and if we do not have the moral boundaries, that catastrophe will be infinitely worse."

I'd say what was true for that symposium, is true for our culture in general. We're not sure who we are, and yet we're trying to define who we are. Think about how futile that is. If we're going to decide what's right and what's wrong based on how things seem to us we have no reference point but ourselves.

That's like a pilot flying an airplane using the lights on his wingtips as reference points. You can't use the aircraft as a reference point for flying the aircraft. You

have to have a reference point outside the plane to get your bearings or you'll crash and burn.

I believe in many ways our nation has been trying to make moral decisions without a divine reference point. We've denied absolutes and then tried to make laws. We've eliminated God from the equation and we're floundering.

This coming week is a momentous week for our nation. We will swear in the 44th president of the United States, Barack Obama. It's a day that most African Americans didn't think they'd see in their life time. That makes it an amazingly significant day for civil rights in our country.

But next week will also mark the 36th anniversary of a decision that flies in the face of the most fundamental civil right, the right to life. January 22 is the anniversary of a supreme court decision that has influenced and shaped the debate of human life and medical ethics.

On January 22, 1973 the 9 justices of the US Supreme court ruled on a case known as Roe v Wade. The court's decision, coupled with a companion case, Doe v Bolton, effectively struck down abortion laws in every state and made the procedure legal through all 9 months of pregnancy.

Now you might be thinking, Ed, why are we getting political here this morning? let's talk about the Bible and spiritual issues.

We're going to do that this morning. We're going to talk about the Bible. See, sometimes a culture takes a moral issue, like when life begins, and makes a legal ruling on it. When that happens the moral doesn't suddenly become political. It's still a moral issue that the Bible speaks to.

So this morning we're not just delving into politics. We want to get to the heart of the issue. We want to answer the question, what does it mean to be human, by looking into the Bible and seeing what God says.

I believe that once we answer that question it will go a long way to helping us with some of these other pressing ethical questions.

And one more thing that I want to make clear, just like this isn't a political message, it's also not a "let's bash people who have been confused by our culture's message" time.

We want to get our bearings so that we can fly straight from now on. We come into this room with all kinds of issues from our past. God wants us to find restoration in His love. God wants to lift us up not beat us down.

Our past is past. Let me assure you, only Satan wants us to be trapped by our past. The God of the Bible wants us to be free.

Jesus put it this way. He said, *Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.* John 8:36

So, in light of Roe V Wade and these other ethical issues, what does it mean to be human?

*I. To Be Human Is To Be Made In The Image Of God*

**Turn to Mark 12 page 896**

Mark 12 takes place in the last week of Jesus' life. He's presented Himself on Palm Sunday and the crowds welcomed Him into Jerusalem. The Israeli religious establishment is beside itself with jealousy and envy. One way or another they were going to silence this upstart Galilean Rabbi who was making them look bad.

At this time in history Israel is occupied by the Romans and so Jesus' enemies try to get Him to say something that would be considered treasonous by Rome.

Here's one of their tries: **Read verse 13-15a**

Notice, these guys weren't interested in getting an answer because they wanted to learn. This wasn't a quest for knowledge. They wanted to catch Jesus in His words. They wanted to trip Him up. If He said don't pay taxes to Caesar, He'd be committing treason. If He said pay them, He'd seem like He was disloyal to Israel and the people would turn against Him.

I'm sure Jesus' detractors thought they had Him in a no-win situation.

But notice Jesus' answer: **Read verse 15b-16**

"Whose image (the word is *eikon* in the original) is stamped on the coin?"

So here's the answer... **Read verse 17**

Since the coin has Caesar's image then pay the tax. *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*

But now notice something very important here. They asked about what is Caesar's but they never asked the obvious corollary to that, what is God's? If they would have, Jesus would have said, "Look at yourself. Who's image is imprinted on you?"

They would have known Genesis 1:26-27 *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...*

*So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

In fact, before the time of Jesus so many Jewish people were losing their Hebrew due to Greek domination that an authorized translation was made from Hebrew into Greek. In that translation the word "image" in Genesis 1 is the word *eikon* from which we get icon.

God has done something for you and me that He hasn't done for any other living thing. He's stamped us with His image.

Every time I go to Outback Steak House or the drive through at McDonalds I'm acknowledging that there's a fundamental, essential, intrinsic difference between animals and humans.

We are stamped with what the theologians call the *imago dei*, the image of God.

Of course, not everybody recognizes that. Stephen Jay Gould, was a prominent American paleontologist, evolutionary biologist, and historian of science, described humanity this way: "We are here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures; because the earth never froze entirely during an ice age; because a small and tenuous species, arising in Africa a quarter of a million years ago, has managed, so far, to survive by hook and by crook. We may yearn for a higher answer -- but none exists.

This explanation, though superficially troubling, if not terrifying, is ultimately liberating and exhilarating. We cannot read the meaning of life passively into the facts of nature. We must construct those answers for ourselves from our own wisdom and ethical sense"

We have to look at our own wing tips to get our bearings. And when we do we decide that we're just cosmic accidents. We have no personal beginning and no personal eternity.

Isn't that liberating and exhilarating? Your life has no purpose, no meaning, your here for a few years and then you die and you cease to exist.

The lines that are drawn here are so clear. If we're just the "outcome of accidental collocation of atoms," as Bertrand Russell put it, then we make the rules.

But if we're made in the image of God as the Bible says, then each life has significance, worth, and value. Then God sets the parameters. Then abortion isn't the answer to an unplanned pregnancy. Then we seek to support and preserve life. Then we use very strict guidelines when tinkering with genetics and stem cells. Then we have an answer to the question, What does it mean to be human?

*I. To Be Human Is To Be Made In The Image Of God*

*II. To Be Human Is To Have Intrinsic Value as A Person*

**Turn to I John 2 page 1082**

**Read verses 1-2**

The Bible is clear that we're all guilty of sin before a holy God. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* Romans 3:23 *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way...* Isaiah 53:6

We're condemned by our sin but God gave His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. He died for the sins of the whole world. Isaiah 53:6 continues *the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

The Bible says Jesus *gave Himself a ransom for all.* I Timothy 2:6 Hebrews 2:9 says, *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.*

Think about what that means when it comes to our intrinsic worth. Society could say we're worthless, government could declare us of no value, science and medicine could say we're disposable, but God says we're of such value because we're His creations that He gave His Son to pay the way for each individual's

salvation.

It's amazing how contradictory we can be as a society. In one room of a medical facility we'll take the life of an innocent unborn child and across the hall we'll use every medical advancement at our disposal to save another child.

It doesn't make sense. Why do firefighters rush into burning buildings? Why do EMTs give their all to save accident victims? Why do medics risk their lives on the battle field to save the wounded?

Because we know, down inside, that every human life has intrinsic worth. The medic in Afghanistan doesn't say, "That soldier's lost a limb so he doesn't have value any more."

Our recognition of the value of individual life is innate. It's fundamental to who we are as people.

In 1993 Gary & Mary Jane Chauncey were traveling on an Amtrak train through Louisiana with their 11 year old daughter Andrea. The train left the tracks and ended up in a river.

Andrea was wheelchair bound because of cerebral palsy. Rescuers quickly arrived and started pulling people out the windows of the sinking train cars. Andrea's mother and father refused to get out without their daughter. As the waters flooded in they furiously fought to get Andrea's chair up and out the window. Andrea was saved but her mother and father drowned as the waters flooded in.

How does evolution explain those acts of love? It can't. The Chauncey's actions completely contradicted the concept of survival of the fittest.

To that mother and father their disabled daughter had such recognizable intrinsic worth that they were willing to sacrifice their lives for hers.

God declared our intrinsic value as His creations when He gave Jesus Christ to give us forgiveness and life.

*I. To Be Human Is To Be Made In The Image Of God*

*II. To Be Human Is To Have Intrinsic Value As A Person*

*III. To Be Human Is To Protect The Innocent And Most Vulnerable*

Human life is sacred. And it's only individuals who suppress the truth who would say any different.

George Gaylord Simpson, who has been called the most influential paleontologist of the 20th century gave us this opinion: "Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind."

How convenient to say we're nothing more than cosmic accidents and therefore no moral or ethical laws exist.

Isn't it striking, people's willingness to believe the most improbable account and explanation as long as it justifies their actions. As long as it allows them to think and act the way they want.

Today is Sanctity of Life Sunday. You would think with the preciousness of human life we wouldn't need to dedicate a Sunday to remind ourselves of what our forefathers called "self-evident truths." But unfortunately we do.

Lawrence Finer, associate director for domestic research at the Planned Parenthood Guttmacher Institute says, "The United States has one of the highest abortion rates in the developed world."

The fact is that since 1973 over 50,000,000 abortions have been performed in the US.

Back in the early 1970's when the abortion debate was in it's infancy the main argument used was to protect the health of the mother. Today that reason doesn't even show up on Planned Parenthood's statistics. This is what they report on their web site:

"The reasons most frequently cited were that having a child would interfere with a woman's education, work or ability to care for dependents; that she could not afford a baby now; that she did not want to be a single mother or was having relationship problems. Nearly four in 10 women said they had completed their childbearing, and almost one-third were not ready to have a child."

The last thing I want to do as a pastor is to heap guilt on anyone who is already struggling with a past decision. Over the years I've had a number of women share with me the emotional toll a past abortion has caused.

I would have to believe that everyone of us in this room this morning has made past choices they wish they could make over again. We've all failed. We've all made bad decisions. That's the very reason why Jesus died on a cross, to take the guilt of our wrong choices and give us new life.

God wants to restore and renew us through the power of the cross. But I also believe that we can't just ignore what's happening around us.

In Proverbs 24:11 God commands us to *Deliver those who are drawn toward death, And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.*

In Proverbs 6 we're told this about God. *These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.* 6:16-19

The 3rd thing on the list is, *Hands that shed innocent blood.*

We may not be able to change our whole nation but God wants us to be His hands, feet, and mouthpiece to those around us.

God hates, with a holy passion, the shedding of innocent blood and so should we.

God forbid that so many women should have to say, "I don't see any other way out of my situation except an abortion." God forbid that the lies of the pro-abortion community should have people's attention rather than the truth.

Legalized abortion has not only lead to heartache and sorrow and regret in so many lives but it's also paved the way for so many other crippling things in our society.

When a society declares that an individual's right of choice supersedes another's right to life we've opened the floodgates to everything from euthanasia to creating human fetuses so we can cannibalize their body parts.

This past Thursday President George W. Bush issued a proclamation today as National Sanctity of Human Life Day. In it he said this: America is a caring Nation, and our values should guide us as we harness the gifts of science. In our zeal for new treatments and cures, we must never abandon our fundamental morals. We



can achieve the great breakthroughs we all seek with reverence for the gift of life.

We encourage more of our fellow Americans to join our just and noble cause. History tells us that with a cause rooted in our deepest principles and appealing to the best instincts of our citizens, we will prevail.

Listen, abortion is wrong. It always has been, it always will be. Down in our hearts we know it. But, like all other wrong it's forgivable. We need to speak out about moral concerns in our society, but we also have to offer love and compassion to those who need help. We need to remember that the primary biblical call is to make disciples, not win arguments.

The Elliot Institute in Springfield, Illinois conducted a comprehensive survey of 260 women who had had abortions. 92% of these women report that they have struggled with feelings of guilt and 87% indicated that they suffered some depression.

A study published in *the British Journal of Ob&Gyn* reported that within 8 weeks after their abortions, over 1/2 expressed guilt, 2/5 complained of nervous disorders, 1/3 had experienced sleep disturbances, 1/3 had regrets about their decision, and 10% had been prescribed psychotropic medicine by their family doctor.

Satan's ways are hard. He's the thief who comes to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd. He's the Lord of Life. The Lord of Grace. And the Lord of compassion and forgiveness.

If you've fallen for the lie and had an abortion or encouraged someone else to have an abortion, come to Jesus Christ by faith and receive His forgiveness. It's full and free, bought and paid for by the cross.

In fact if you haven't had an abortion or encouraged someone else to have an abortion, you still need to come to Jesus Christ by faith and receive His forgiveness. The Bible says this to all of us:

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. John 3:16 & 36*

This morning you might be wondering “What can I do to make a difference? I’m just one person, and not a very influential one at that. What can I do?”

First of all you can pray. Pray for our Country. Pray for our new president. Unfortunately Barack Obama has already demonstrated his support for unrestricted abortion. Pray that reason and truth would be his guide in the future.

Along with praying, and of course being politically aware, let me give you a practical way of encouraging and supporting life. We’ve done this for several years now and not only is it fun, but it’s a tangible way to get started showing care and concern.

Out in the foyer there’s a bassinet with baby bottles. Take a baby bottle home and put it in popular spot like your kitchen counter. Let that bottle be a reminder to pray for the Bowie/Crofton/Severna Park Pregnancy Centers and the women who come there.

They do an outstanding job of assisting women in crisis pregnancies.

For the next four weeks put your spare change in that bottle and at the end of the four weeks we’ll collect them.

Here’s examples of what spare change can buy:

\$1.70	A pregnancy test
\$15.00	Emergency baby formula for 2 weeks
\$ 25.00	10 Bibles for women
\$100.00	2 abstinence presentation for a local high school
\$ 200.00	1 4D sonogram

We’ll collect those bottles back on February 15. Through this simple act of caring we can make a difference.

We can have a practical touch that may make a life long difference to a mother and a child.