

Proverbs 24:10-12 – My Brother’s Keeper

Intro

- We human beings are very good at coming up with ways to excuse or minimize our sin – acting as if we shouldn’t be held accountable by holy, righteous God when we defy him.
 - o The oldest recorded excuse for sinning is to blame someone else (Adam blames Eve & God, Eve blames the serpent – Genesis 3).
 - o The next oldest excuse is to try to say, “This isn’t my problem! It has nothing to do with me.”
 - Genesis 4:9 – Cain, who has just murdered his brother, utters the infamous question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” to try to distance himself from his sin.
 - God doesn’t bother to answer Cain’s question here but directly cuts to confronting him with his sin.

- Throughout the rest of Scripture, it is clear that we do have a level of responsibility toward other people. Saying “not my problem” is often an excuse for sinful neglect.
 - o Jesus sums up the moral intent of the whole OT Law by quoting commands from Deuteronomy 6:5 & Leviticus 19:18 (Matthew 22:36-40).
 - o This love for our neighbor includes actively helping those who are weak, poor, lonely, and outcasts – this concern reflects the heart of God and pervades Scripture.
 - In the OT Law given to Israel (e.g. Deuteronomy 10:18-19)
 - In the wisdom literature with its general principles for living wisely and pleasing God (e.g. Proverbs 14:31)
 - Jesus’ own explanation of neighbor love in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
 - In instructions to Christians about living out their faith (e.g. James 1:27)

Rescue those being led away to death

- This compassion for the weak and vulnerable includes a God-given responsibility to do something about it – to try to intervene on behalf of those whose lives are endangered.
 - o This brings us to our primary passage for today: Proverbs 24:10-12.
 - o This answers Cain’s flippant “Am I my brother’s keeper?” with a resounding “yes!”

- Standing with the vulnerable & the outsider – with those whom the powerful of society see as an inconvenience or “fair game” – often puts a target on your back as well.
 - o ...but if we trust God’s Word to guide us only as long as it does not inconvenience us too much, that’s pretty weak faith (if it can be called faith at all).
 - o Failure to do the good things God calls us to do is just as much a sin as deliberately doing something he has forbidden (James 4:17 – context: refusal to alter premeditated plans).

- The principles in this passage have many applications, but with this being Sanctity of Life Sunday, we are going to focus mostly (but not entirely) on one specific area of application.
 - o This Sunday is traditionally (since 1984) set aside to address the issue of abortion.
 - o As we go down through here do keep in mind that the unborn are by no means the only class of people to whom this applies...I'll come back to this later.

In the time of trouble (or “in the day of adversity”)

- Elective abortion is one of the most horrendous “acceptable sins” of our society.
 - o I’m not referring here to miscarriage care, an ectopic pregnancy, or similar medical emergency, but to the deliberate choice to kill an unborn human being.
 - o The Guttmacher Institute estimates there were 1,126,970 abortions in the US in 2024; an increase of ~60,000 over 2023.
 - In 2023, ~63% of those abortions were by pill in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy (with similarly high or increasing number since then).
 - This is a human life toll of equivalent to 25% of the population of the greater Detroit metro area each year of those two years alone.
- This mass murder has been reframed as a woman’s right to choose whether to nurture or to end a life because that life is wholly dependent on her.
 - o ...and we are told that if you disagree, you must hate women and are trying to push your religion on others.
 - o To try to do anything to protect the unborn is to put a target on your back, so many people retreat to the position that, “I wouldn’t do it myself, and I think it’s wrong, but I support each woman’s right to choose.”
 - “How small is your strength” that public approval means more than God’s command to strive on behalf of the innocent who are headed for death?
 - Maybe the excuse for doing nothing is, “it’s such a complicated issue.”

But we knew nothing about this...

- A person might not go so far as to say “I knew *nothing* about it,” but some sort of plea of ignorance is a common excuse for refusing to get involved on behalf of the vulnerable.
 - o Remaining *willfully* (intentionally) ignorant is not a valid excuse in God’s eyes.
 - “I don’t want to think/learn about it because it makes me sad.”
 - “Rather than try to understand the issue, I’m going to settle for ‘it’s complicated’ so I don’t have to take a stand.”
 - o God who knows our thoughts and motivations and who sustains our very existence knows if we are using self-imposed ignorance as an excuse for inaction.
 - o I think that, in their hearts, most people know that an unborn baby is a human life.
- Scientifically speaking, it is obvious that the unborn baby/embryo/fetus is a separate human life from the mother.

- A new DNA pattern is formed within minutes or hours of sperm fertilizing egg.
 - DNA is the coded “blueprint” contained in each of our cells that makes us physically unique.
 - The fact that the baby/embryo has different DNA than the mother means it is a different being.
 - You do not have two different DNA patterns in your body – every cell has the same pattern (with varying “bookmarks” depending on kind of cell).
 - At 4 weeks, the heart begins circulating blood.
 - At 6-7 weeks, there are detectable brain waves.
 - At 8-10 weeks, all major organs are present (though obviously not fully developed).
 - All of this is well within the first trimester.
- There are places in Scripture where God shows that he regards an unborn child as a person.
- In the Law: Exodus 21:22-25 – the criminal penalty for causing injury or death to an unborn child is the same as for injuring or killing any other person.
 - This is *not* justification to take vengeance into our own hands.
 - It *does* tell us a lot about God’s understanding of human life to see how it is treated in Israel’s national law that he personally wrote.
 - In poetry: Psalm 139:13-16 – David poetically describes God’s direct involvement in the mysterious process of him being formed in the womb.
 - He emphasizes God’s sovereignty over every part of his life starting from conception.
 - In this God-breathed poem, unborn David is still David.
 - In narrative: Luke 1:41-44 – the first person to leap for joy at the coming of Jesus was the unborn John the Baptist (~6 months) in the presence of unborn Jesus (<month).
 - Clearly, this is a highly unusual work of God to cause so young a child to have a spiritual/emotional reaction.
 - The point remains that this is God working through people (unborn people!) and that Jesus is present in person even as an embryo.
- Many (most?) abortion advocates are willing to admit that an unborn baby is some sort of human life but still argue for a variety of emotional scenarios in which abortion (ending that life) would seem to be a good idea.
- Some of these scenarios can tug at your heartstrings.
 - Lost in the emotion of these scenarios is the rock-bottom truth that you are still talking about intentionally killing an innocent baby.
 - “It’s okay to kill a baby in the womb when _____.”
 - Nowhere in Scripture will you find justification for killing an innocent person to increase our own comfort/safety or to “put them out of their misery.”

- From the beginning, God has regarded killing an innocent human being as an attack on the image of God which every person bears (Genesis 9:5-6).
 - o The shedding of innocent blood is an abomination to God (Proverbs 6:16-19).
 - Enough so that murder is one of the few crimes for which God authorized capital punishment (execution) by human government.
 - God takes very seriously violence against his image-bearers.
 - o Because we live in a world broken by sin there will be times when having a child is frightening, emotionally painful, and even dangerous.
 - But there are resources and options other than killing the innocent bearer of God's image.
 - We as Christians need to be actively involved in providing these options, not just trying legislate the end of abortion....more on that in a bit.

Will he not repay?

Three huge implications of God's repaying each one according to what he has done:

- It is not up to you or me to personally punish people who support or perform abortions.
 - o *God* knows the appropriate time and measure for punishment of unrepentant sin, whether that means working through human government or direct judgment.
 - o We do not combat murder by becoming murderers ourselves. Do not be like the people who bomb abortion clinics or shoot abortion providers.
 - o Even in the places in the Bible where God calls for capital punishment, it is to be carried out under proper government authority after a fair trial with eyewitnesses in full agreement, not vigilantism.

- God *will* judge unrepentant sin (e.g. Hebrews 10:30-31).
 - o ...whether direct defiance of his standards or refusal to serve him when he gives us the opportunity.
 - o Thankfully, God offers us complete forgiveness on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf (abortion is not the unforgivable sin).
 - 1 John 1:9 – When we confess our sin (agreeing with him that it is wrong and has no place in our life), he freely forgives.
 - 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 – We can be brought back into a right relationship with God because Jesus took on our sin so we could receive his righteousness.

- God *will* reward those who serve him faithfully (Galatians 6:9-10).
 - o We may or may not see good results from the righteous things we do.
 - o We *know* that God is at work through his people when they serve faithfully and there will be eternal results the goodness of which outweigh any present difficulty or frustration.

So how do we play a part in “rescuing those being led away to death”?

- This is a much longer application section than usual, so don't check out yet.

- Do not give up.
 - o Do not decide “it isn't worth it.”
 - “It isn't worth the hostility of society.”
 - “It isn't worth the effort when it seems to make such little difference.”
 - As if my limited perspective is more valid than God's omniscient, omnipotent one that says “do not grow weary in doing good.”
 - o Do not follow others into compromise. In the last round of elections, many within the Republican party (the traditionally pro-life party) compromised *hard*.
 - They loudly supported in vitro fertilization (IVF): a fertility treatment that necessarily creates & destroys many embryos as part of the process.
 - Leading party members (including Trump & Vance) clearly stated that they would not limit the abortion pill (the means of >63% of abortions).
 - Several candidates in tight congressional races identified as pro-choice, adopting the old Clinton slogan of making abortion safe, legal, and rare.
 - Do not let political loyalty or expedience sweep you along into positions that justify, protect, or encourage the legal killing of unborn image bearers.

- Support legislation that values human life. Every human bears the image of God.
 - o We are blessed to live in a country where we have some degree of input into its laws.
 - o Use that input (voting, calling & writing your congresspeople, peaceful protesting, signing petitions, etc.) to press for laws & policies that protect & nourish the lives of our fellow human beings rather than endangering or ending them.

- Support faith-based pregnancy centers (like *Spero* right across the street).
 - o These people often have more impact than politicians
 - Abortion bans don't change hearts, and even the much celebrated overturning of *Roe v. Wade* has done little to stem the tide.
 - Pregnancy care centers meet individuals where they are, frightened and broken and are able to give them hope and help, and even counseling for those who have had abortions in the past
 - o You can support in different ways
 - Prayer: these people are on the front lines of helping the weak, frightened, and outcast and they need our prayers.
 - Financially: services offered are free...but the money to stay open has to come from somewhere.
 - Volunteer: they need not just money, but good Christian people to be there and share the hope and love of Jesus Christ...contact them about how you can help.

- Consider whether God's will for your family includes adoption or foster care
 - o All of us who are believers have been adopted into God's family, and God calls some to extend that same love to others and adopt them into their earthly family.
 - o Even if God doesn't lead you into that, consider financially supporting others who are adopting or ministries that work toward that end...adoption is expensive.

- Personally help & encourage those tempted to seek abortion or struggling with being parents.
 - o Direct them to resources (like the pregnancy center)
 - o Show them love and friendship with your presence, time, and resource both before *and after* the baby is born!

- Show integrity & consistency in your commitment to caring about those whose lives are endangered: the vulnerable who face harm or death because some regard them as unimportant, inconvenient, or burdensome.
 - o i.e., don't be a hypocrite.
 - It undermines your credibility.
 - God hates it.
 - o Those of us who identify as pro-life are pretty good at seeing through the arguments on the Left of why it's okay to end certain lives through abortion or euthanasia.
 - "They'll be disabled."
 - "They're unwanted."
 - "They are suffering."
 - "Their life will be difficult."
 - "They are a burden to loved ones."
 - "Their existence is a reminder of painful experience."
 - We know that none of these arguments change the fact that it is wrong to kill a human being who bears God's image.
 - o But far too many of us are ready to see other loss or endangerment of life and say "nothing to see here...am I my brother's keeper?" as long as a spokesperson from the Right tells us they deserved to be thrown into a dangerous situation or killed.
 - "They're woke"
 - "They're LGBTQ+"
 - "They're protesting"
 - "They're undocumented"
 - "They're Somali, Haitian, Muslim..."
 - "They're accused of a crime"
 - o Be careful not to knee-jerk defend the devaluation of human life just because it's part of a group you dislike or justified by a source you admire.
 - o Reread Proverbs 24:10-12