



Exposing the Dark
Work of Abortion

Three Sermons from John Piper

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Table of Contents

02	Exposing the Dark Work of Abortion Ephesians 5:11
14	Shall We Listen to Men or God? Acts 4:13–22
28	Abortion and the Narrow Way That Leads to Life Matthew 7:7–14
44	Appendix: Fifteen Pro-Life Truths

Exposing the Dark Work of Abortion

*Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness,
but instead expose them.*

— Ephesians 5:11

I begin this morning by making sure that we understand the difference between a Christian call to pro-life action and a non-Christian call to pro-life action. I am glad that non-Christians are calling for an end to abortion. I am glad that there are “atheists for life.” One of the things that makes America work is that what Christians see as right behavior because of Christ non-Christians see as right for other reasons.

This is not surprising. Some of the truth that is rooted in Jesus as the Son of God is also revealed partially in creation. The law written on the heart of all men and women (Romans 2:14), no matter how marred by sin, is still God’s law. So there is always hope that, in the gracious providence of God, believers and non-believers in a pluralistic society might come to agree that certain behaviors are right and certain behaviors are wrong.

But I am a Christian pastor, not a politician. My main job is not to unite believers and unbelievers behind worthwhile causes. Somebody should do this. But that is not my job. Some of you ought to be doing that with a deep sense of Christian calling. My job is to glorify Jesus Christ by calling his people to be distinctively Christian in the way they live their lives.

Therefore I begin by showing you from Scripture (not from natural law, as crucial as that is for social survival) what is distinctively Christian in my call to pro-life action.

A CALL TO BE WHAT YOU ARE IN CHRIST: FOUR EXAMPLES

A Christian call to pro-life action is a call to the children of light to be what you are in Christ. This is utterly crucial to grasp if you want to act as a Christian. Let me give you four instances of what I mean from this text.

Let’s start in the verse just before our text—the last verse of Ephesians 4 (v. 32), “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” A Christian call to forgive does not say: forgive in order to earn the forgiveness of God. It says forgive because you have been forgiven by God. Look at the last half of verse 32: “Forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you.” Christian living moves from what God has freely done for us in Christ to what we should freely do for others. It is not the other way around.

A second example is in verse 1 of chapter 5: “Be imitators of God as beloved children.” It does not say, “Be imitators of God in order to get adopted.” It begins with your standing in Christ as “loved children.” “To as many as received Christ to them God gave authority to be children of God” (John 1:12). So the Christian call to imitate God in the world is not a call to earn a standing with him, but a call to be what you are—chips off the old block, loved children of God. Loved children love to be like their father.

A third example is verse 2: “Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.” It does not say,

“Walk in love so that Christ will start loving us and give himself up for us.” It says Christ loved us and gave himself for us, therefore walk in love. Be what he has died to make you, and secured for you.

A fourth example is in verse 8: “Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of the light.” It does not say, “Be the light of the world so that you can become children of the light.” It says, “You are light in the Lord. You are no longer darkness. You are children of the light. Walk as what you are.”

This is the difference between a Christian call to pro-life action and a non-Christian call. The call to forgive, the call to imitate God, the call to walk in love, the call to walk as children of the light—these are calls rooted in something that God in Christ has done for us. They are rooted in what God has already made us in Christ. They are calls to be what we are because of God’s forgiveness, God’s adoption, Christ’s sacrificial love, and God’s putting his light within us.

First a Call to Conversion, Then to Light-Shining

All of that happens to you when you become a Christian by putting your trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life. The rest of the story is: become what you are! Forgive—out of your forgiveness. Love—out of your being loved. Shine—with the light that Christ is in you. So the call to Christian pro-life action is first a call to con-

version—to new birth—to repentance and faith in Jesus. Then it is a call to let your light shine in the darkness—to walk as children of the light.

This is why in verse 9 Paul says, “For the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.” Paul calls goodness and justice and truth the fruit of light because it grows naturally out of light. Fruit comes out of a tree because of what the tree is. That is the Christian life: becoming what you are—bearing fruit.

The opposite of the “fruit of light” is “the works of darkness.” Look at verse 11: “Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness.” The opposite of “light” is “darkness” and the opposite of “fruit” is “works.” This is just like Galatians 5 where Paul contrasts the “fruit of the Spirit” and the “works of the flesh.” And the point is the same: true Christian living is essentially fruit-bearing, not essentially working. It is essentially letting the fruit show what the tree is like. It is not working to become a tree.

We become a tree and stay a sound tree by trusting in the free mercy of God and all that he is for us in Jesus. The Christian life—with all its pro-life action and everything else that is good—is being what we are, God-forgiven, God-adopted, Christ-loved, fruit-bearing trees.

A Distinctively Christian Call to Pro-Life Action

Now on that basis consider the distinctively Christian call to pro-life action. Verse 8b says, “Walk as children of the

light.” Verse 11 gives a negative and a positive way to do that. Negatively: “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather [this is the positive part:] expose them.” Walking in the light means not doing works of darkness and it means exposing the works of darkness that others do.

Therefore we learn from this text that Christians who walk in the light should be involved in exposing the dark and fruitless work of abortion. It is a dark and barren work, and we are called to expose it.

The word “expose” is used again in verse 13 where you get a clear idea of what’s involved: “When anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible.” The idea is that when we “walk as children of the light,” we will shine into places of darkness and cause the darkness to become visible, or to become light. Or to use the words of Jesus, when we let our light shine before men, the dark works of men become shown for what they really are: fruitless and shameful. That’s part of our calling.

In John 3:20 we see this word again. Jesus says, “Every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.” So the point behind this word is that Christians are called to shine the light of truth and justice and love into the darkness and bring evil to light for what it really is.

A Call to Be the Conscience of the Culture

Another way to say this is that God calls his people to be the conscience of the culture. Our individual conscience probes into our behavior and either approves or disapproves what we do. So the children of light are to probe into the life of their culture and approve or disapprove what it does.

I hope you hear the force of this. It is radically different from the passivity and moral withdrawal of many Christians. Many believers have a passive avoidance ethic and that is all. In other words they think: if I avoid the works of darkness, and don’t do them myself, then I am doing my Christian duty. I’m clean. I’m in the light. But that is not what verse 11 says. It says you are only doing half your duty. “Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness”—that’s an avoidance ethic. That’s half your duty. But it goes on, and in fact puts stress on the next phrase because it is easily overlooked and because it can be very costly: “Rather even expose them!” Don’t just avoid the works of darkness, expose them. This is not avoidance. This is action.

Expose the Dark and Fruitless Work of Abortion

Do you hear a call to action in this verse? Do you hear a call to do something in 1992 to expose the darkness and the fruitlessness (the barrenness!) of abortion? God is calling us in this verse—he is calling all Christians—to

expose the dark and fruitless work of abortion...

- To expose the fact that there are 1.2 million abortions in America every year—52 million since the Supreme Court overturned the public conscience of 48 states 19 years ago.
- To expose the fact that approximately 30% of all babies conceived in America are killed by abortion.
- To expose the fact that medically women are told not to have abortions before the seventh week of pregnancy (see the Yes/Neon booklet), and yet by the eighth week the heart of the baby has been beating for a month, there are measurable brain waves, there is response to touch, there's thumb-sucking, grasping with the hands, swimming with the arms in the amniotic fluid, distinct arms and legs and sexual organs. This much must—not may, must—be present before most abortion centers will cut the baby to pieces with a suction machine 4,000 times a day.
- To expose the fact that 9,000 babies were killed after the 21st week of pregnancy in 1987, fully formed and on the brink of being able to breathe for themselves—killed, legally!
- To expose the fact that in Minnesota we have a fetal homicide law that makes it “murder to kill an embryo or fetus intentionally, except in cases of abortion”—in other words, it's unlawful to kill the unborn child un-

less the mother chooses to have it killed. And that is a strange and dark criterion for lawful killing.

- To expose the fact that “There is inescapable schizophrenia in aborting a perfectly normal 22 week fetus while at the same hospital, performing intra-uterine surgery on its cousin” (Steve Calvin).
- To expose the fact that viability outside the womb is not a criterion of personhood and right to life, because we ourselves don't want to give up our personhood and our right to life if we must be sustained on a respirator or dialysis machine the way a baby has to be sustained by a placenta.
- To expose the fact that the size and reasoning power of a tiny person is irrelevant to human personhood because if it were, we might allow tiny and unthinking newborns to be killed.
- To expose the fact that genetically human embryos and fetuses are utterly different from all other animal life; if they are just left alone, with nothing added but nourishment, they will grow up.
- To expose the fact that if it is unlawful to crush the egg of a bald eagle, it is not excessively restrictive to make it unlawful to crush the egg of a human.
- To expose the fact that when two legitimate rights conflict—the right not to be pregnant and the right not to

be killed—justice demands that we give place to the greater right, the right that does the least harm—the one that does not willfully kill.

- To expose the fact that there are thousands of crisis pregnancy centers in this country ready to help, and almost all of them are free—unlike the abortion mills that charge plenty of money—and the older the baby, the more they charge.
- To expose the fact that there are no unwanted babies in Minnesota. Mary Ann Kuharsky (President of Pro-Life Minnesota) said in the Tribune she would take any baby whose life depended on it, and there are hundreds like her.
- To expose the fact that it is hypocritical to speak as though choice were the untouchable absolute in this matter and then turn around and oppose choice in matters of gun-control and welfare support and affirmative action and minimum wage and dozens of other issues where so-called pro-choice people join the demand that people's choices be limited to protect others. It's a sham argument. All choices are limited by life.
- To expose the fact that trespassing to save life is not a crime and that it does not undermine our legal system, but on the contrary endorses the one foundation stone without which that legal system in this land will fall, namely, the inalienable right to life. There will be

no law but the law of individual choice (=anarchy) if the foundation stone of life's value is destroyed. And abortion is destroying it.

God is calling passive, inactive Christians today to engage our minds and hearts and hands in exposing the barren works of darkness. To be the conscience of our culture. To be the light of the world. To live in the great reality of being loved by God and adopted by God and forgiven by Christ (yes—for all the abortions that dozens of you have had), and be to made children of the light. I call you this morning to walk as children of light. ✠

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man that had been healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may be spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any one in this name." So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people; for all men praised God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

— Acts 4:13–22

Abortion: Shall We Listen to Men or God?

Forty years the man had been unable to walk. We know this because Acts 3:2 tells us he was lame from birth and Acts 4:22 says he was over forty years old. Yet now he was leaping and running and praising God, because Peter had said (in 3:6), “In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk.” A great crowd had gathered. Peter had preached a powerful sermon. About 2,000 people were converted, and Peter and John were arrested and put in jail over night. The next morning they appeared before the court. Last week we saw how Peter moved from the local to the global in his message and brought it to a climax in verse 12 with the words, “There is salvation in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

THREE OBSERVATIONS FROM THE TEXT

Now in today’s text we see three things that are amazingly relevant for our life in a secular world, especially our relation to the issue of abortion.

1. The first thing we see is a description of Peter and John—the kind of people they were to stand up to the authorities.
2. The second thing we see is the way people often respond when the evidence for truth mounts against them.
3. And the third thing we see is how the disciples respond publicly to the unbelieving rulers of Jerusalem.

Let’s look at these one at a time in the biblical context, and then apply what we learn to our situation today.

1. The Description of Peter and John

The rulers and elders and scribes were astounded at Peter and John. Verse 13 says they “wondered.” Literally, they were amazed, boggled, stumped, astonished. They saw two things that didn’t fit together. Then they saw the real explanation. What didn’t fit together were Peter and John’s public boldness and their lack of education.

On the one hand Peter and John were speaking with straight-forwardness, and confidence and courage and clarity. And they were doing this in the presence of people with power and esteem and scholarship—the rulers and the elders and the scribes. It simply stunned the authorities. These men spoke as though they had the authority on their side. But what made this boldness so incredible was that Peter and John were not formally educated; they didn’t have the refinement of skill that comes from courses in rhetoric. That’s the point of verse 13: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered”—they were amazed.

Then they remembered that this Jesus, whom they had tried to get rid of, was just like that. John 7:15 says, “The Jews marveled [or: were amazed; same word] at [the teaching of Jesus], saying, How is it that this man has

learning, when he has never studied?” It was just the same with Jesus as with Peter and John. They were all bold and straightforward and clear. And they had insight into the things of God, even though they had never had the rabbinic education the scribes had.

So verse 13 says at the end: “They recognized that they had been with Jesus.” This is the way he was. They must have gotten it from him. A disciple, when he is taught, will be like his master (Luke 6:40).

2. The Response of the Rulers

Then we see the response of the rulers. Verses 16–17: “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any one in this name.” Here is something really amazing, and yet very common in the world. How would you describe the connection between what they say in verse 16 and what they say in verse 17? Verse 16: a great and undeniable sign of love and power has been done by these courageous men in the name of Jesus. All Jerusalem knows this. Verse 17: Let’s threaten them with harm and try to keep them quiet about this Jesus.

Verse 16 states reasons to seriously consider the truth of what Peter and John say. Verse 17 describes the be-

havior of a people who are not interested in the truth, but only in the benefit that they get from falsehood. It’s like saying: “O look, there’s smoke billowing up the stairway from the basement; quick let’s close the door and have dinner.” Or: “Look, people with cancer are being healed by this new drug; quick let’s ban it from the world.”

When people are getting some benefit from a wrong, they turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to the mounting evidence that they should change. That’s the second thing we learn.

3. The Response of Peter and John to the Threat

Verse 19 tells us how Peter and John respond to this blind threat. “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

This must have been an utterly exasperating and maddening response to the rulers. Why is that? Because it assumes something that the rulers refuse to assume. Peter assumes that he has to choose between listening to God and listening to the rulers. This assumes that the rulers are not speaking on God’s side. Peter doesn’t express any apology for this assumption at all. He just says it. And with a kind of disarming simplicity he speaks as if they must operate on his assumption: The issue, he says, is whether we listen to you or to God. Now you judge for yourselves what we should do. Go ahead tell us: God or

you! It's a question they could not answer without admitting they were not on God's side.

The basis for Peter's response is the utter assurance that Peter has that Jesus is alive, that he is Lord of the universe, that he healed the man, and that obeying him comes before obeying any human ruler. Peter and John know, because they have seen and heard. They have an experience of the living Jesus that has made them utterly unstoppable. So they do not suggest that maybe the rulers speak a little for God, and maybe the apostles do. No. The rulers are anti-God in telling them to be quiet about Jesus. And the apostles are in touch with the living God through knowing Jesus.

THREE LESSONS FOR TODAY

How is this all relevant for us today? Let's take each of the three things we have seen and state them as lessons for ourselves.

1. What You Need to Be Bold and Clear

In order to be bold and forthright and clear in what you say for Christ in public, you do not need to be formally educated or unusually skilled. What you need is real fellowship with Jesus—real experience with Jesus, the kind of experience that enables you to say: "I cannot but speak what I have seen and heard."

The Limits of Education

One thing I have learned from following the educational route as far as it goes in my field and then reading what the most educated write: there is nothing in advanced education that makes a person a courageous and clear spokesman for the truth. I believe in education. I believe some of our brightest young people should make scholarship a career for the glory of God. But let us get the idea out of our head that scholarship makes a man or a woman bold, courageous, straightforward, and clear. There is no positive correlation between advanced education and courageous clarity.

The Path to Boldness

What makes a person bold for the truth is being utterly sure that he has seen God's truth. What makes a person clear and forthright is a good heart that has no desire to slip anything in under the fog of ambiguity. Or another way to say it is that boldness and clarity come from spending time with Jesus. Jesus is the truth we need to see, and Jesus is good—radically good. The more you have real dealings with him, the more confident you become in the truth, and the more good you become in not wanting to exalt yourself or protect yourself with impressive words.

You just want to speak the truth for his sake and speak it with boldness and clarity—no fog, no haze, no bluffs, no evasions, no runarounds, no clever camouflaging of inde-

cisiveness. I love what James Denney said about preaching. It applies to all clear, bold communication for Christ: “No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save.” That becomes clearer and clearer with the more time you spend with Jesus.

So the first lesson for today is that you don’t have to be formally educated or unusually skilled in order to be bold and forthright and clear in what you say for Christ in public. What you need is real fellowship with Jesus.

2. Those Who Benefit from Wrongdoing

It is still true today that those who benefit from wrongdoing and wrong-thinking will usually turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to contrary evidence for what is right and what is true.

Justifying the Desires of Our Hearts

This disease affects every one of us more or less. The mind perceives reality selectively in order to justify what the heart desires. Complete objectivity—whatever side you are on—is a myth.

If showing pictures of mutilated babies threatens your desire for abortion on demand, then the pictures are emotionally manipulative or in bad taste or irrelevant. But if showing dead sea otters or oil slicked cranes or mutilated seals helps your cause, then this is simply telling it like it is and forcing people to come to terms with what is really happening.

A booklet distributed to students at South High recently in connection with sex education says, “Medically, it is best to have an abortion after the sixth week and before the 12th week of pregnancy.” But abortion defenders turn a deaf ear to the question: “Medically best for whom; baby or mother; or neither?”

The evidence mounts on all hands that the unborn are persons and patients alongside their mothers. But abortion providers turn a deaf ear to observations like Dr. Steve Calvin’s in a letter a few years ago to the Arizona Daily Star: “There is inescapable schizophrenia in aborting a perfectly normal 22 week fetus while at the same hospital, performing intra-uterine surgery on its cousin.”

Turning a Deaf Ear to the Bible

Many Christians involved in abortion turn a deaf ear to the Bible when it says that the growing life in the womb is the unique creative work of God knitting together a being in his own image (Psalm 139:13; Job 31:13–15); or when it speaks of babies in the womb with the very same words as babies out of the womb (Genesis 25:22; Luke 1:41; cf. 2:12, 16; 18:15); or when it warns repeatedly against shedding innocent blood (Psalm 106:38); or when it calls again and again for the protection of the weakest and most vulnerable members of the community (Psalm 82:3–4); or when it says that God alone has the right to give and to take human life (Job 1:21).

So the second lesson for today—and it applies directly to the issue of abortion—is that when people benefit from wrongdoing or wrong-thinking, they will turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to the mounting evidence for what is right and what is true. The mind selectively sees what will justify the desires of the heart. In the end that is what must be changed.

3. The Duty to Speak God's Truth

The final lesson from this text for today is this: Christians—people who bank their hopes on Jesus and spend time with Jesus and obey Jesus—should stand up in public and tell God's truth as they see it without worrying that secular listeners may not even agree with our most basic assumptions.

Isn't it amazing how Peter and John respond to the rulers! The rulers tell them to get out and not to speak in the name of Jesus any more. Then in verse 19–20 they say, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

One of the great obstacles to our speaking out in public about the truth as we see it with Jesus is that we think we have to win. Or we think we have to operate with the assumptions of secular leaders. But Peter shows us that this is emphatically not what we have to do. Our calling is not to win or to borrow the assumptions of the world. Our

calling is to stand up and tell it like it is in the eyes of God. Imagine how the rulers might have responded to Peter and John when they said, "You decide if we should listen to you or God." "Who do think you are! Telling us the choice is between what we say and what God says! How do you know we don't speak for God?"

All Peter says is, "We must speak what we have seen and heard." He is a witness. Now don't get me wrong. Some people are especially gifted and called to enter more extended debate and to try to find some common ground and labor to persuade. But the point here is simpler: all Christians should stand up and tell it like they see it. Let the chips fall where they will. Don't worry if the public doesn't even agree with your most basic assumptions. Your job is not to win. Your job is not to control this society. Your job is to say what God wants said.

The Bible says that the law of God is written on the heart of every person (Romans 1:32, 2:15). It says that everyone is created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). There is reason to believe, then, that your witness to the truth—about abortion, or any other issue—will trigger something deep inside of people. It will have the ring of truth in their heart of hearts, though it may be temporarily suppressed in unrighteousness. And who knows what God may be pleased to do if his truth is spoken boldly and clearly by tens of thousands of evangelical Christians?

Not Called to Win, but to Witness

The parent group at Roosevelt High School, where my son Benjamin goes, had a forum to discuss fundraising efforts for the school. Their proposal was that they install pull-tab gambling machines in the local bowling alley. Noël went to the meeting and stood up all alone and said, “There is already a problem in this state with young gamblers. Schools are to build character as well as give information. How can we help kids be responsible if we set an example as adults that gambling is a good way to raise money? Aren’t we just encouraging something that promotes greed, and lures the poor, and discourages the path of rewarding labor?”

They didn’t withdraw the plan. But that is not Noël’s responsibility. She said what God wanted said. God’s truth was heard in public and that is what she and you and I are responsible for—on the abortion issue and every important issue. We are not called to win; we are called to witness. ✠

Abortion and the Narrow Way That Leads to Life

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

— Matthew 7:7–14

The first thing to see in this text is the staggering truth that God—the Creator of the universe, who holds this world in being and governs all that happens—this God is the Father of all who receive Jesus and believe in him, and, as our Father, he is more inclined to help us when we call than the best father this world has ever produced. Look at verses 9–11:

Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more [much more!] will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

God almighty, maker of heaven and earth, is much more inclined to help us when we call than the best of fathers is in the best of families in all of history. That's the first thing to see.

MUCH BETTER THAN THE BEST EARTHLY FATHER

And the reason I said he is the Father of all who receive Jesus and believe in him is because that's what John 1:12 says: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." God is not the Father of everyone. He is the Father of those who receive his Son and believe on him as the divine Savior, Lord, and supreme Treasure that he is.

Apart from Jesus, the abortionist, the mom, the baby, the protester, the right wing, the left wing, the pro-lifer, the pro-choicer are all by nature children of wrath, not children of God. I use that phrase because the Bible uses it. Ephesians 2:3: "We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."

A GOD RICH IN MERCY

But God is not only a God of terrible holiness and wrath; he is also a God rich in mercy. And so he sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him from God's own wrath (John 3:17). He came not to be served but to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). To lay down his life for the sheep (John 10:15). To bear our sins in his body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). To provide us with a righteousness that comes not from our law-keeping but through faith (Philippians 3:9). And to reconcile us to God (2 Corinthians 5:18; 1 Peter 3:18).

All the children of wrath may become children of the Father through Jesus Christ. An aging abortionist, a few blocks from our church, after 3,000 abortions, can become a child of God. She could hear Jesus say, on her death bed, "Today you will be with me in paradise." The same is true for the mother of five aborted children. And

for the selfish, responsibility-shirking boyfriend. And for the secretive, shame-fearing, overbearing parent. And for the desperate 14-year-old girl.

A SAVIOR DYING FOR ABORTION-COMMITTING SINNERS

Jesus did not mainly come to stop abortions in this world. He came mainly to die for abortion-committing sinners. “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32).

There is one way to know God as your Father. And it’s the same for the people at Planned Parenthood, and the people at Pro-life Action, and the people at Bethlehem Baptist Church—Come to Jesus.

One of Jesus’ disciples, said to him, “Lord, show us the Father.” And Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:8–9). If you come to me, you have God as your Father. You will no longer be a child of wrath. But if you won’t, then you remain under the wrath of God (John 3:36).

THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY: JESUS SAVING SINNERS

The heart of Christianity is not a culture of life. The heart of Christianity is Jesus Christ dying and rising from the

dead to save sinners, who then become a culture of life.

Before we can hear Jesus speak his demanding words in Matthew 7:12–14, we must hear his delightful words in verses 9–11. The omnipotent, all-wise, all-holy, all-just, all-good, all-governing God is the Father of all who come to Jesus. And he is more eager to help when you call than the best father earth has ever produced.

Is he your Father? Have you come to Jesus and received him as your Lord and Savior and Treasure? Wherever you are on this line of sin and sorrow—the mother who aborted her child, the father who encouraged it, the doctor who performed it, the activist who tried to stop it, the politician who supported it or fought it, the passive person who never thinks about it—that is not the main issue. The main issue is this: Have you thrown yourself on Jesus for mercy? Have you been adopted out of wrath into the family of God through faith in Jesus?

FOR THE FATHER’S FAMILY

And the rest of this sermon is for the family of the Father. If you are not part of the family yet, I hope you will listen. It may make you want to come.

That was verses 9–11. God is our Father, if Jesus is our Savior.

Now verse 12: “So [=therefore] whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

The “so” is crucial. It’s the same as saying, “Therefore, because of what I just said, treat people the way you would like to be treated.” Because God is your Father, because he is more eager to help you than the best human father, and because he is omnipotent and has all things at his disposal, go ahead and live for the good of others and not just for yourself.

GOD IS YOUR FATHER! THEREFORE...

Do you see the connection between having God as your Father and living a life for the good of others? God is your Father. God will meet your needs. God will give you strength. God will guide you. God will catch you if you fall. God is always there for you. God will take care of your needs, when you meet the needs of others. Seek his kingdom first, and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

He is your Father! Therefore, make your treatment of others the way you would like to be treated. We can’t live this way on our own. And even if we could, it would not honor God. We honor God by loving others in the strength and wisdom and the grace that our Father provides. This is how our light shines before men that they may give glory to our Father (Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 4:11).

THE ALL-IMPORTANT ORDER: ADOPTED FIRST, LOVING SECOND

Do you see the order? It’s all-important. As children of wrath we come to Jesus; we receive forgiveness because he died for us; we are adopted into God’s family and receive the Spirit of adoption (Romans 8:14–17); and now that God is our Father, Jesus sends us into the world to love like this: “Therefore whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.” We don’t love people in order to get ourselves adopted. We love people because we are adopted.

Now with the blood-bought fatherly care of God as the root of verse 12, what’s the fruit? What’s involved in doing to others what you wish they would do to you? Two acts of wise imagination, one act of self-renunciation, and one act of joyful generosity.

WHAT’S INVOLVED IN DOING UNTO OTHERS

When Jesus says, “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them,” he means: what you would wish if you were in their situation. Suppose there is a 20-year-old sophomore at the University. Her parents are paying her way. She is dreaming of medical school. And suddenly she finds out she is pregnant. She is terrified. Her parents will be furious. Her dream of medical school seems about to go down the drain. And worse than all,

she doesn't know who the father is, because that's the way she's been partying.

Now suppose you are a 30-year-old guy at Bethlehem, married, with a good job, and virtually no needs. If somebody asks you what you wish others would do to you, you might joke and say, "Give me an iPad." Or, "Give me an Amazon gift certificate." Now if this guy thinks, "Jesus said, 'Do for her what I wish others would do for me,'" and gives her an iPad, or a gift certificate, he has not obeyed Jesus' command, even though he has done for her what he wishes others would do for him. That's not what Jesus means.

Two Acts of Imagination

What he means is: There are two acts of imagination you have to do in order to obey this command. One, you have to imagine yourself in her situation. There needs to be a wise, imaginative act of empathy. What is she experiencing? What are her pressures? What are her options? What is she contemplating? What is she feeling? And some of that is only knowable by talking to her. So love draws us into relationships. That's the first act of imagination. Getting yourself inside her head and heart and feeling some of what she feels and seeing life from her vantage point.

But that is not enough imagination. She may not know what she really needs, or even what she really wants at the deepest level. So you can't simply say, "I will imag-

ine what she's feeling, and then I will know what to do." You have to do another act of imagination: You have to imagine that you are really you, the Bible-saturated Christian, inside her mind and heart and situation, so that you see things from her situation and from the perspective of God's word. And then you ask: What would I wish that others would do for me? If I were really in her situation, knowing all I know about God and his grace, what would I want someone to do for me?

One Act of Renunciation

And that's what you try to do. And whenever you think that way and try to act that way, you realize how hard it is. This wasn't what you had originally wished to do with your time and your money. To make her need your goal now requires not only two acts of imagination, but a profound act of renunciation. You have to renounce what you had planned to do.

One Act of Joyful Generosity

And then, finally, you have to move from self-renunciation to an act of joyful generosity. Nobody feels loved if you try to meet their needs begrudgingly. If you are murmuring the whole time about how inconvenient all this ministry is, no one will feel cared about. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7), and so do receivers of that giving.

That's what it means to live "the golden rule," as verse

12 is sometimes called: “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them.” Two acts of wise imagination, one act of self-renunciation, and a heartfelt act of joyful generosity.

THE KEY: YOU HAVE A FATHER IN HEAVEN!

And none of that is easy. The key is: You have a Father in heaven. He loved you and sent his Son to die for you. He has freely adopted you. You are an heir of all that he owns. He has given you his Spirit. He is all-powerful and all-wise, and is more ready to help you when you call than the best earthly father in the world. That’s why verses 7–11 precede verse 12. Trusting and enjoying your heavenly Father is the key to loving like this.

SOCIAL ACTION AND GOSPEL PREACHING

Now the last thing I want to say comes out of verses 13–14, and it has been burning in me ever since I began my preparations for the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization where I spoke last October in South Africa. I want to say here to this church, that I love and serve, what I said there. I want to say it so that as we are “Building One People” (our capital campaign), we can bring into sharp focus who we are and why we exist and what our priorities are and why we believe God is calling us to spend his money on church extension in the Twin Cities.

Specifically, I want us to have real clarity about the relationship between social and political causes like abortion, or human trafficking, or the global AIDS crisis, or health care, or homosexuality, alcoholism and drugs, or unemployment, or homelessness, fatherlessness, or illiteracy, or crime, or racism, or inaccessibility to education, or clean water, or medicine—and the list goes on. I want us to have clarity as a church on the relationship between these kinds of suffering on the one hand, and the realities of heaven and hell on the other hand.

ETERNITY IS AT STAKE

Look at verses 13–14. Just after telling us to orient our lives on the needs of others, and to love with radical self-renunciation, Jesus calls that way of life the narrow gate and the hard way that leads to life:

Enter by the narrow gate. [In other words, love people like verse 12 says.] For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

What’s at stake in living “the golden rule” is destruction and life. Hell and heaven. At the end of the narrow way is Life. At the end of the wide way is destruction. Paul calls it “eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his strength” (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Nobody spoke more about hell in the New Testament than Jesus did. He used words like “outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12) and “gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13) and “torment” (Luke 16:23) and “unquenchable fire” (Mark 9:43) and “eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:46). It is, in his mind, eternal, conscious, and horrible.

THE GOLDEN RULE—AND HEAVEN AND HELL

And the point I want us to see here, as we close, is that Jesus connects the most practical, earthy command in the Bible (the golden rule) with the realities of heaven and hell. “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them,” means that we will care about every kind of suffering that we meet in this world. We don’t like to suffer. And so we don’t want others to suffer any kind of unjust suffering.

Jesus means that. He wants his people to care about the suffering of others in this age—the suffering of the unborn and the suffering of those with crisis pregnancies and every other form of suffering in this world. If we care about our own suffering, we will care about the suffering of others. If we care about our own flourishing, we care about the flourishing of others.

LOVE ACHES FOR ALL SUFFERING

Yes. And then Jesus says, in verses 13 and 14, that there

is a worse suffering than anything in this world. There is eternal destruction. Eternal suffering. And there is a better flourishing than anything in this world. There is eternal life. Eternal flourishing. The wide road leads to destruction. And the narrow road leads to eternal life.

From which I conclude this: Suffering in this world is terrible and limited, but suffering in the next world is terrible and eternal. And love sees it that way. Love does not shut its eyes to this world or that world. Love reckons with the reality of suffering here, and the worse reality of suffering there.

And what I see all around us today in the Christian church is the tendency to care only about the one or the other. And when I think of our “Building One People” campaign, I think of building a people across these Cities who absolutely will not fail to care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering.

CARING FOR ALL SUFFERING—ESPECIALLY ETERNAL SUFFERING

I say to you with even more urgency than I said it at the Lausanne Congress: “I plead with you. Don’t choose between rescuing people from suffering in this world and rescuing people from suffering in the next. Embrace them both.” It doesn’t mean we all spend our time in the same way. Gifts and callings and ministries are diverse. But it does mean that we all care about the suffering we

see now and the worse suffering to come.

O let us say at Bethlehem—let this one people say—we care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering. We care about all life (including the life of the unborn), especially eternal life. Let's not be among the sophisticated Christians who resist talking about eternal suffering, and the horrors of hell. And let's not be among the isolated Christians who resist working against the untold sufferings of this world.

LIKE JESUS, BECAUSE OF JESUS

Let's be like Jesus. In every social issue from abortion to alcoholism, from AIDS to unemployment, from hunger to homelessness, let's give the help that we would like to receive if it were us. And at every moment in that love, let us feel an even greater urgency to pray and speak and work to rescue people from everlasting suffering through the gospel of Jesus.

And to that end, may we rest and rejoice that we have a Father in heaven who hears our cry and will get us home. ✠

Fifteen Pro-Life Truths to Speak

You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.
— John 8:32

1. Existing fetal homicide laws make a man guilty of manslaughter if he kills the baby in a mother's womb (except in the case of abortion).
2. Fetal surgery is performed on babies in the womb to save them while another child the same age is being legally destroyed.
3. Babies can sometimes survive on their own at 23 or 24 weeks, but abortion is legal beyond this limit.
4. Living on its own is not the criterion of human personhood, as we know from the use of respirators and dialysis.
5. Size is irrelevant to human personhood, as we know from the difference between a one-week-old and a six-year-old.
6. Developed reasoning powers are not the criterion of personhood, as we know from the capacities of three-month-old babies.
7. Infants in the womb are human beings scientifically by virtue of their genetic makeup.
8. Ultrasound has given a stunning window on the womb that shows the unborn at eight weeks sucking his thumb, recoiling from pricking, responding to sound. All the organs are present, the brain is functioning, the heart is pumping, the liver is making blood cells, the kidneys are cleaning fluids, and there is a fingerprint. Virtually all abortions happen later than this date.

9. Justice dictates that when two legitimate rights conflict, the limitation of rights that does the least harm is the most just. Bearing a child for adoption does less harm than killing him.
10. Justice dictates that when either of two people must be inconvenienced or hurt to alleviate their united predicament, the one who bore the greater responsibility for the predicament should bear more of the inconvenience or hurt to alleviate it.
11. Justice dictates that a person may not coerce harm on another person by threatening voluntary harm on themselves.
12. The outcast and the disadvantaged and exploited are to be cared for in a special way, especially those with no voice of their own.
13. What is happening in the womb is the unique person-nurturing work of God, who alone has the right to give and take life.
14. There are countless clinics that offer life and hope to both mother and child (and father and parents), with care of every kind, lovingly provided by people who will meet every need they can.
15. Jesus Christ can forgive all sins, and will give all who trusts him the help they need to do everything that life requires.

