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Sermon Notes

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Pro-Life Hearers Only?

James 1:22, 27

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

The elephant in the room of public discourse... abortion.

You may think it is constantly being debated... but it isn't. The so-called right to have an abortion is the law of the land, though it is the single most unjust law in American history. Yet the public debate is generally squelched. Recently, I was listening to a talk radio station in which an issue like abortion might have reasonably been discussed. A caller brought up the topic, and the talk show host immediately shut the caller down, dismissing it as old news and said there was nothing left to talk about.

Randy Alcorn wrote a book called *Why Pro-Life?* In it, he lays out the arguments for the pro-life position. He describes the need to face this issue with these powerful words:

Abortion is America's most frequently performed surgery on women. One out of four children conceived is surgically aborted, with an unknown but growing number of chemical abortions. Since 50 percent of pregnancies are unplanned, this means half of unplanned pregnancies are terminated by abortion. There are about 1.37 million reported abortions in the United States every year. In the U.S., 43 percent of women of childbearing age have had or will have abortions. Virtually every family, at some level, has been touched by abortion.

The stakes in this issue are extraordinarily high. If the pro-choice position is correct, the freedom to choose abortion is a basic civil right. If the pro-life position is correct, the 3,753 abortions occurring every day in America are human casualties, more than all lives lost in the September 11, 2001, destruction of the World Trade Center.

Abortion is the ultimate "hot button." The very word raises powerful emotions. Among issues people feel strongly about, abortion ranks number

one – above anti-Semitism, alcohol abuse, homelessness, the death penalty, pornography, and flag burning.

A recent Gallup poll indicated 26 percent of Americans say they are very strongly pro-choice, while 29 percent say they are very strongly pro-life. Taken together, that means 55 percent of Americans hold a very strong view on abortion, and they are almost evenly split in their beliefs.

Since the other 45 percent aren't firm in their opinions, and since many who once felt very strongly have changed their beliefs, likely more than half of Americans can still be influenced in their thinking about abortion.

This is a CHRISTIAN problem!!! It is an EVANGELICAL problem!!!

Some Christians may think, "This issue is for unchurched people who are having abortions." In fact, 43 percent of women obtaining abortions identify themselves as Protestant, and 27 percent identify themselves as Catholic. So two-thirds of America's abortions are obtained by those with a Christian affiliation. Eighteen percent of all U.S. abortions are performed on women who identify themselves as born-again or evangelical Christians. That's nearly a quarter-million abortions each year in Bible-believing churches.

The abortion issue isn't about the church needing to speak to the world. It's about the church needing to speak to itself first, and *then* to the world.

So, every year in January, I preach a Sanctity of Human Life sermon... and I do it because I feel bound by the Lord to keep this issue in front of our eyes at FBC... because I want to challenge us to be faithful in this issue even though it will cost us a lot to be faithful.

I. How Deep is Your Pro-Life Commitment?

A. Majority Here would Claim to Be Pro-Life

1. We would check that box in a poll
2. We vote pro-life at elections
3. We hate pro-abortion logic, rhetoric, world-view
4. We may have even given money to a Pro-life ministry, prayed for it, gone to a fundraising banquet
5. BUT...

B. How Much Have You Sacrificed for the Pro-Life Cause?

1. Some have made this issue the focus of their lives
2. Some see it on a par with the slavery issue of the 19th century in America
3. Others have called it the central civil rights issue of our day
4. Randy Alcorn was tried and convicted in a court of law because of his involvement in Pro-Life demonstrations... he was tried under the RICO

On the first Friday in May 1990, an envelope came to the door of Randy Alcorn's semi-rural home in Gresham, Oregon, east of Portland. Inside the envelope was a copy of a writ of garnishment for Alcorn's wages. The writ required Good Shepherd Church, where Alcorn was pastor of missions, to surrender a portion of his wages.

Alcorn understood instantly what lay behind the writ. In 1989 Portland police had arrested him several times for blocking the doors of several abortion clinics. One of the clinics had sued him and other "rescuers," winning a small judgment plus attorney's fees. Alcorn had refused to pay, believing it would violate his conscience to write a check to an abortion clinic.

As a result of the writ of garnishment, Alcorn resigned his position and resolved to live the rest of his life with no paycheck, trusting God to meet his needs.

FBC: are we ready to become radical in our obedience to Christ?

On issues of the poor and needy? On issues of evangelism and missions? On issue of money and possessions? And especially on the sanctity of human life?

What are we willing to SACRIFICE to obey God's word on the sanctity of human life?

II. Basic Biblical Principles on Sanctity of Human Life

A. God is Creator, King, and Judge of All Human Life

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Psalm 24:1-2 The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; ² for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.

Genesis 18:25 Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?

B. All Human Beings Are Created in the Image of God, and therefore Human Life is Unique and Sacred

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

This image is still in place, though marred by sin... all human beings are STILL in the image of God... therefore, even to speak a curse against a human being is to curse the image of God

James 3:9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.

1. The "Sanctity of Human Life" = the sacredness or holiness of human life
2. Human life, created in the image of God, is sacred and set apart unto God
3. The sanctity of human life is established throughout scripture by the special laws and actions of God surrounding human life... by the way that human beings are dealt with in Scripture
4. The Sanctity of Human Life is also woven into the very fiber of our being
 - It caused rescue worker to plow through the rubble of the earthquake in Haiti last January looking for survivors; no such effort is ever made to save any other living creature
 - The Sanctity of Human Life causes us to be elated when 33 Chilean miners are rescued from a mine shaft almost a half mile deep after being trapped down there for more than two years... the joy felt like a tidal wave around the world was more evidence for the uniqueness of human life
 - The Sanctity of Human Life causes surgical teams to labor over a single patient for hours to save his life; it causes searchers to scour over miles and miles of undulating ocean waves to look for survivors of a downed ship; it causes unimaginable grief at the loss of a single toddler in a drive-by shooting incident during a gang war in Syracuse, NY

C. Human Beings Are Commanded to Be Fruitful and Multiply

1. The gift of procreation was given by God at creation and it was repeated to Noah after the flood

Genesis 1:28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

2. This command stands... it means that the process of procreation is sacred and a gift of God

D. Human Life Begins at Conception

1. This is the fundamental issue in the abortion debate

2. Biblical proofs abound

- Elizabeth's statement to the pregnant Mary, the mother of Jesus

Luke 1:43-44 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

DOUBLE PROOF: the baby inside Elizabeth leaped for JOY... only persons can feel joy; the baby inside Mary (Jesus) was conceived by the Holy Spirit... thus Mary was already the mother of Elizabeth's Lord

3. If human life begins at conception, then the human being should be protectable by the same laws that protect all human life
4. Personhood under the law is an inalienable right given us by our creator... no one else has the right to call us a person or deny us personhood, no matter what our geographical location
5. I am no more a person on a mountain than I am a person in a valley or in a cave; and a baby is no more a person outside of his mother's womb than he was inside it... personhood is a gift of God, not ascribed by the CHOICE of another, even if it's your mother

E. All Children Are a Blessing from God

Genesis 1:28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.

Psalms 127:3-5 Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. ⁴ Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. ⁵ Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.

F. Satan Hates All Human Beings and Wants to Murder Them

John 8:44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.

Revelation 12:4 The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born.

G. Human Beings Are Forbidden from Taking Human Life

Exodus 20:13 You shall not murder.

H. God's People Are Commanded to Rescue the Perishing and Care for the Needy

James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Proverbs 24:10-12 If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength! ¹¹ Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. ¹² If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?

William Marshall: It seems as if the idea here is those who are being taken away to death due to ignorance or injustice. In these cases, we are to step in and fight for justice. We are to come to the aid of those who cannot fight for themselves. We see this principle in other passages as well. In Exodus 1, God commends the Hebrew mid-wives for rescuing the Hebrew males and later He commands Israel to not murder (Exodus 20:13). Likewise, we read of God's judgment against Israel for sacrificing her children to the idols of Canaan (Psalm 106:32ff). God calls us to fight against these injustices. In our day, we must stand against abortion. We must fight it in every way that we can. We must never grow comfortable with our nation's acceptance of it.

I. Judgment Day is Coming

Matthew 12:36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

J. Grace through Jesus Christ is Available to All Who Repent and Believe

1 Timothy 1:15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst.

These are ten basic facts... this is the word of God on the abortion issue!! We say we believe these things... but how are we living in light of what we say we believe

III. James's Warning: "Hearers Only" Are Self-Deceived

James 1:22-25 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks

intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-- he will be blessed in what he does.

A. The Great Danger: Knowing the Truth, But Not Living It!!

1. The ten things I've listed, I believe all of you would assent to
2. What we have to ask is, "Are we merely listening to the word, and in so doing deceiving ourselves?"
3. American churches are FULL of self-deceived people who have been listening to the truth for years but never acting upon it
4. He likens such people to those who see themselves in a mirror and then go away and immediately forget what they look like
5. The LAW of GOD is a mirror for our souls... it teaches us our sins, shows us our need for grace... it has the power to bring light and heat, conviction and change
6. BUT only if we genuinely believe it and prove that faith by our actions

B. Are We Merely Listening to the Word on Abortion and So Deceiving Ourselves?

1. It is so easy to be complacent, and say, "I believe all the right things about abortion"...
2. God wants us to ACT on what we claim we believe
3. James makes it plain later in this same book that a faith that does not act is dead

James 2:14-17 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

4. Most Americans that claim they believe the ten things I laid out a moment ago do very little by way of sacrificial ACTION based on those truths

C. The Great Danger of Self-Deception

1. The greatest danger is to be self deceived about our salvation

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

2. But there is a danger of self-deception on lesser issues as well
3. We can think we are serving Christ simply by assenting to the right doctrines when that doctrine has not changed our lifestyle a bit

IV. James's Exhortation: Do What It Says

James 1:22-25 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. DO WHAT IT SAYS. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not DO WHAT IT SAYS is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, NOT FORGETTING WHAT HE HAS HEARD, BUT DOING IT-- he will be blessed in WHAT HE DOES.

- A. James Wants His Hearers to Go Out and LIVE the Truth
- B. Too Often... We Rest in Our Knowledge of the Word
- C. The Bible Makes it Plain: God Wants a Lifestyle of Active Obedience to the Word
- D. Our Judgment is More Severe Based on What We Know and Don't Act On

Luke 12:47-48 And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. ⁴⁸ But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.

V. James's Vision: Pure, Faultless, Acceptable Religion

James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

- A. Religion: A Life of Sacrificial Service to God
 1. So often, we reject the word "religion" as though it were a bad thing
 2. We have heard, "It's not a religion... it's a relationship"
 3. Well, friends, there's nothing wrong with religion, as long as it's the RIGHT religion, and God defines it here
- B. Three Key Words
 1. Acceptable Religion

- God defines what He's looking for from us
- From the very beginning of religion, God has accepted some things and not others

Genesis 4:4-5 The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.

- What is the point of living a life that is not acceptable to God?
- A life of saying we believe something but not actually living it out is not acceptable to God
- A life of Spirit-filled sacrificial service to the poor and needy, to the lost, to our brothers and sisters in Christ is acceptable to God

2. Pure Religion

- The word pure means free from alloy, free from defiling ingredients
- There is religion that is essentially man-made, idolatrous, ultimately demonic
- Then there is religion that God accepts as PURE... because it is heavenly in origin

James 3:17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure

So also is the religion that comes from heaven... it is pure

How is this religion pure? It is free from earthly motives, earthly praise and adulation...

3. Faultless Religion

- The word means unsullied, free from pollution... very similar, almost a synonym of "pure"
- God is seeking a pure and unpolluted religion in His eyes

C. God Defines It:

1. Protective service to widows and orphans

- The word is related to that of overseers... overseeing widows and orphans in their distress
- The distress has to do with ongoing provision, protective care in a harsh world

2. Purity from the world

- The world is a defiling force... Satan's masterpiece

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

- Many calls in the Bible pull on us to be separate

2 Corinthians 6:17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

- It is the essence of pure religion in God's sight to be holy as He is holy

1 Peter 1:15-16 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

NOTE also: external journey (widows and orphans), internal journey (pure from the world)

D. What Does this Have to Do with Abortion?

1. Widows and orphans represented the most vulnerable members of society
2. The provide for them and protect them from danger is pure and undefiled religion in God's sight
3. How much more the preborn infants whose own mothers would have them removed from the land of the living!!!
4. Care for women in crisis pregnancies, and concern for the babies they are carrying fits this verse perfectly
5. And concerning being free from the pollution of the world:
 - Abortion is part of the world's system of false doctrines... set up by Satan
 - Satan drives people with sexual lust to immorality with each other and with materialism to care more for financial security than for people... these philosophies, coupled with Satan's attacks on the concept of transcendent truth and the worth of the human being has made abortion the centerpiece of his agenda for America and the world
 - Many do not get involved with Pro-life issues because they are afraid of the world's responses, and perhaps have already bought into the world's philosophies underlying the so-called "Pro-choice" movement

- God is greatly honored by people who refuse to be polluted by the world in this momentous issue

VI. Application: Let's Do the Word, Not Merely Listen to It!

A. Our Knowledge of these Ten Facts Should Shape Our Lives

1. Because God is Creator and King over the earth...

- We should realize that we are accountable to God for every moment of our lives and every dollar and every spiritual gift and every opportunity to serve Him
- We should come to Him daily to kneel before Him and ask Him what is His will for us

2. Because all human beings are created in the image of God, and are therefore sacred

- We should treat them with respect, see them in light of eternity, deal with them with reverence
- James says we should not speak against or slander or curse another person because that person is created in the image of God
- Still less should we be blasé about abortion... it should fill us with a holy horror that human beings are being killed as they are

3. Because we are commanded to be fruitful and multiply

- We should think of marriage as God-ordained platform for new lives being born
- We should shun and refute the pagan mentality of the threat of over-population

4. Because life begins at conception

- We should reject forever all abortions as immoral... even those lives conceived through rape and incest... just as we would not advocate infanticide of babies simply because they are conceived by rape or incest... we would call it murder if a mother killed her seven year-old and gave the reason that she was conceive by rape or incest
- We should courageously refute muddle-headedness on this issue, beginning in the church; a human being is such from the moment of conception; we are called on to be SALT and LIGHT in the world; the church is the pillar and foundation of the truth in the world; we should be

willing to be persecuted for righteousness' sake; we should learn the genetic proof that the conceived child is human from the moment of conception; we should speak the truth with BOLDNESS

- We should delight in life from the moment of conception on... we should stand in wonder at the marvels of God knitting together a baby in it mother's womb; we should say with David in Psalm 139, "I will praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

5. Because all children are a blessing from God...

- Delight in children the way Jesus did; welcome them in your heart and delight in them
- Resist the bizarre worldly view that children are essentially a burden that forces you to change your life, an inconvenience that hinders your joy
- Reject the Planned Parenthood slogan, "Every child a wanted child." Once a child is conceived, you have to WANT it or you will sin against it
- That doesn't David should not have felt the devastation of his sin when Bathsheba told him she was pregnant after he had committed adultery with her; that child in one sense should never have been conceived because it was a child of adultery; HOWEVER, once God has begun to knit a child together in his mother's womb, killing it should be neither LEGAL nor DESIRABLE
- Every child should be seen as a blessing from God, bringing joy and life and happiness
- Love your children... cherish them... hug them, pray for them, delight in them, thank God for them
- Love other people's children... rejoice when you hear that a baby has been born; pray for other people's children, that they would grow up loving and serving Jesus
- Help Diana Lisle and Matthew Hodges and Larry Parrish and others to reach the children of Liberty Street Apartments; every Tuesday, they do a wonderful Bible study and outreach to those kids; they are building bridges of love and relationship in the community that God can use for eternal fruit

6. Because Satan hates human beings and wants to murder them...

- Pray against the demonic spirit of abortion that has gripped our nation; see it as a Satanic attack on the human race

- Understand that if you get more and more involved in Pro-Life ministry, you will feel more and more spiritual attack in your life; Paul says of the devil, “We are not unaware of his schemes.” Stand firm in your resolution to see the Satanic stronghold of abortion come tumbling down under the onslaught of biblical truth and biblical love

7. Because human beings are forbidden from killing...

- Don't get an abortion... ever.
- Don't support so-called “abortion rights”... the Declaration of Independence speaks of “inalienable rights” endowed by our Creator... the Creator has not endowed us with the right to deprive another person of life, liberty or property without due process of law... this is NOT A RIGHT
- Put forth whatever efforts you can—through prayer, and financial giving, and sacrificial love, and political action—to see the long abortion nightmare end in our country
- Be aware of the political issues and actions of the government that connect with abortion; watch this President and this Congress very carefully; pray against the extreme views of President Obama on abortion

8. Because God has commanded us to rescue the perishing and care for the needy...

- Be willing to be inconvenienced for the sake of the poor and needy; be willing to find a ministry to widows, orphans, poor people, the homeless, women with crisis pregnancies, etc.
- Invest your time, energy, money in these things... not just your prayers
- Sometimes our prayers can be hypocritical dodges from a calling of God; like “Please, O Lord, send someone else!!”
- Let's ask the Lord to make us a radically active church based on the word of God

David Platt, pastor of the Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, AL... wrote a book called *Radical* that many of you have been studying; his desire was to pastor a church that made a RADICAL commitment to deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow Jesus

Platt recounted going to a local foster care office in Birmingham and asking them how many families they would need to care for all the children. They laughed. Platt asked again. They said 150 families. Platt went back to the Church at Brook Hills and preached on orphan care from James 1 (v. 27 in particular). As a result,

160 families signed up to serve as foster care families. As they began to start serving as foster care families, Platt was meeting again with the local foster care officials. One of the women there pulled him aside and asked him what he had told those people that caused them to come and serve through foster care. Platt told her that he did not tell them anything that caused them to come. He said they came because the God who loves people told them to come and reflect His love to people around them. To reflect His love for children to the children around them.

That's what it means to be a DOER of the word, not a hearer only

9. Because Judgment Day is coming...

- Whatever you are planning on doing, do it NOW
- God will call us to account for our actions; we will soon be standing in front of Him, giving Him a detailed, careful account
- Repent now, and change your actions while there is still time
- If you have sinned in the area of abortion, bring that sin before God in confession
- That brings me quickly to the grace of God

10. Because God's grace is lavishly available to all through Jesus Christ...

- Come to Christ!! Trust in Him as your Savior
- Know that there is no sin we commit, no matter how grave or shameful, that can't be covered by the ocean of God's grace in Christ
- Cling to the cross for the forgiveness of sins
- THEN come near to God for the clarity of vision needed to serve Him in the area of prolife ministry
- Ask Him what He wants you to do
- Then come to Him daily for grace to DO IT

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.