

Jason Upchurch - Q & A - The Apostles, Abortion and IVF, Chronicles

This morning begins a Q & A series that will last a few weeks and then we will begin studying through the book of Malachi. Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament and I think will be a wonderful book for us to study and I would encourage you to read through it a few times before we get there to familiarize yourself with it.

Most of you know that our regular diet of sermons here at RBC is expositional sermons through books of the Bible. We are also working our way slowly through systematic theology. But it has been my habit over the years that between books I answer questions that you give to me about the Bible, ethics, theology and we use those questions as the basis for a few sermons.

When I was in Bible college my pastor would do this occasionally during Sunday night sermons and I always found it helpful and fascinating and many of the questions people had I wondered about too. So without further adieu, here we go.

Turn to John 15:18-25. We'll come back to this verse in a few minutes.

1. What happened to the 12 apostles?

This is a great question because we don't have a lot of information in Scripture about this answer. But the short answer is that most of them came to a violent death for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They didn't live in luxury or opulence. They suffered for their faith even as they planted churches and preached the truth. Most of the information we have is from church history and most of the information I'll share here comes from Foxe's Book of Martyrs although we do have a few snippets about their deaths in the Bible.

1. Peter was crucified, which is what Jesus promised would be his end in **John 21:** Truly, truly I say to you when you were young you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old you will stretch out your hands and another will dress you and carry you to where you do not want to go." (This was to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God). Stretching out his hands indicated crucifixion.

Ancient church fathers Jerome, Eusebius, and Origen all record that Peter was crucified upside down as he didn't feel he was worthy to be crucified in the manner of Jesus.

2. Andrew, the brother of Peter, preached the gospel in modern day Turkey and was also crucified.

3. James, the brother of John, was killed by Herod in **Acts 12:1-5.**

4. John was ordered to be thrown into a massive cauldron of boiling oil, but somehow miraculously survived, kind of like Daniel and the lions den. He was later exiled to the island of Patmos where he wrote the book of Revelation. Fox says he is the only apostle we know of to escape a violent death.

5. Phillip - remember he was the one who asked "show us the Father and it will be enough." And Jesus said if you have seen me you have seen who? The Father. **John 14:8-9**

Philip preached the gospel in Upper Asia - modern Turkey - and "was scourged, thrown in prison, and afterwards crucified in AD 54."

6. Bartholomew was crucified.

7. Matthew is said to have preached the gospel in modern day Iran and Ethiopia along what was called the Silk Road. He was impaled with a pole in AD 60.

8. Thomas was impaled with a spear.

9. James the lesser, as he is often called, was beat and stoned by the Jews at 94 years old in Jerusalem.

10. Thaddeus (aka Jude) was crucified in modern day Turkey.
11. Simon the Zealot was crucified.
12. Judas, the betrayer, hanged himself. We see that in **Matt 27:3-10**.
13. Matthias, who was chosen to replace Judas in **Acts 1**, was stoned in Jerusalem then beheaded.
14. The apostle Paul - though not one of the 12 - was beheaded at the command of Nero.

Jesus said if they hated me, they will what? Hate you too.

The apostle John said: Do not be surprised, brothers, that world hates you. **1 John 3:13**

It's easy to forget in our society that Christians are hated. Because our country has been so shaped by Christians principles and worldview it's hard to remember just how good we have things even as the society around us is crazy. We enjoy many protections and conveniences that our brothers in other times and other places of the world did not enjoy.

Listen to Jesus though. **Read John 15:18-25**

There are constant warnings in the NT that we are not to be surprised when the world hates us because the reality is that they hate Jesus. That's ultimately what is happening.

Are there times when the world aligns itself with the morality of Christians? Sure because the Law of God is written on human hearts. But unbelieving humans hearts are fickle. That's why in the OT you can see the country of Judah swing wildly in morality from one king to the next. People follow rulers wherever they lead - whether to righteousness or sin.

But Jesus makes it clear: if we are following him and we are hated, it's because they hate Jesus. And if they hate Jesus they hate the Father.

Our treatment by the world is a spiritual issue. But we're called to persevere because even when we're persecuted the gospel goes forward. And Jesus says that when we are persecuted for his name, we have a reward in heaven.

2. Isn't the book of Chronicles just a repeat of the books of Kings?

The answer is yes and no. Just like the 4 gospels could be seen as a repeat, there are areas of the OT that repeat as well. But there are significant differences between them.

Chronicles is really 2 books. 1 Chronicles covers from Adam to Solomon and 2 Chronicles covers from Solomon to the return of the exiles with the decree of Cyrus. It covered a longer period of time, focuses more on the big picture and is more of a record of names. There are a lot of names and genealogies in Chronicles - which makes sense given it's name.

A book like this would have been crucial for a monarchy because it dates royal lineage all the way back to the beginning of the Kingdom to establish royal thrones. The author of Chronicles goes back to the beginning of Creation in the opening words: "Adam, Seth, Enoch, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methusalah, Lamech, Noah, Shem...so on." He doesn't even say "so and so begot so and so and he died." He's got limited space so it's name, comma, name, comma..."

In contrast, 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 2 Kings cover a shorter timeline but with more detail on specific people. 1 Samuel is the story of Samuel, Saul and David. 2 Samuel is just the life of David, 1 Kings is the life and downfall of Solomon and the divided kingdom. 2 Kings records the downfall of the divided Kingdom until the deportation to Babylon.

So Samuel and Kings are focused on a shorter timeline, have more personal stories than Kings. Honestly, I think reading Samuel and Kings is just fun Bible reading. It's better reading than the Lord of the Rings or the Narnia series. There's kings and queens and battle intrigue and it just shows the Lord's faithfulness to his covenant people through it all.

3. What does it mean to be made in the image of God? How does that affect our actions with regard to abortion and IVF?

This is going to be technical then spicy. But something to understand is that what we believe actually has real world effects on our ethics. And as Christians we can't just do what feels good, we actually have to search Scripture to guide our actions.

And when we search Scripture we don't just look for specific commands. We need to be aware of what the London Baptist Confession calls good and necessary consequences. That is, there's no verse that says you shall not do IVF. There was no IVF when the Bible was written. But we can take a host of biblical commands, prohibitions, patterns and situations and come away with a theological conviction that's more than just a simple opinion.

This question about abortion and IVF are super important because they really gets to the foundation of who we are as creatures and basically all we hear about on the news every night with the upcoming election. We are creatures, meaning that we are created. But we are not animals So **Turn to Gen. 1:26-28.**

We see this term here and in other places.

Jas. 3:9 warns us that with the tongue "we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the image of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing; my brothers these things ought not be so."

1 Cor. 11:7: Paul says about headcoverings: "For a man ought not to cover his head since he is made in the image of God, but woman is the glory of man." Paul seems to be saying that a woman's glory is greater than man's therefore she should be covered.

I quote those verses not to make this question even more spicy, but simply to say that the image of God is not just some OT thing that's gone, it's a reality now the NT writers clearly identify as something that affects our lives in a variety of ways.

Before we unpack the passage just know that pastors and theologians have tried to define the *imago dei* - the image of God - for centuries. It's a big deal and has huge implications.

Theological Louis Berkhof says that reformed theologians have agreed on 5 things when it comes to the image of God.

1. That man has an **invisible soul that is immortal**. Tigers and elephants don't have souls. They have a spirit and we might say personality. But only humans have an immortal soul that will exist forever.
2. We are **rational and moral** with intellectual functions. Animals are not rational or moral. We don't arrest owls for eating mice. That's not a category. Some animals are complex and more "intelligent" than others, but they're not rational like humans.
3. We have **intellect and integrity** and the ability to walk in harmony with those. Cheetahs don't think about geometry or how to abide by a set of HOA rules when planning their garden. We do.
4. Our **bodies are made to exercise dominion** over the world, whereas animals are not. Gorillas, though they look similar in many ways, are not designed by God to have dominion over the world. Our bodies are uniquely designed by God - male and female - for dominion.
5. We are **commanded to take dominion** over creation.

Those are ways theologians have described and defined the image of God in man. Here in **Gen. 1** is where we find that language initially.

When God created the world he made living things and non-living things. Among the living things, God made a variety of animals and he classifies them into different categories. Things that fly, things that swim, things that move on the earth and things that creep on the earth. That's the animal kingdom according to God.

And then he created man to rule over the animal kingdom. **Read 26-28**

So humans - male and female - are the pinnacle of God's creation. And we are the pinnacle because we are made in the image of God. What does that mean? Let's look.

A. We are to have dominion over other created animals. That is, we rule over them. Whether it's cows or chickens or whales or mosquitos, or fruit trees - we are called to master the planet. Put another way, we are not just another type of animal nor are we to give deference to animals.

This has huge implications for land management: forestry, ranching, city planning, environmentalism, or how you treat your pets.

B. We are accountable for that dominion. Mastering the planet is not optional. It is a command of God who will judge us based on this. Lions won't be judged by God at all. There's no judgement for small mouth bass or kangaroos. Man alone will be held accountable for whether we were good stewards of God's creation.

C. We also are commanded to be fruitful and multiply. Humans are called to have children. Despite all the globalist propaganda out there right now, the earth is basically empty of humans. That sounds crazy because there are 8 billion people in the world. But if you take 8 billion people and evenly divide it up in just the lower 48 United States, every person on the planet would get their own quarter acre parcel of land which is basically an average city lot.

Without any sky scrapers or apartment buildings or multi family units. And the rest of the planet would have no humans. God wants his earth filled with people because people are made in his image. He wants image bearers to fill his earth.

So we have dominion over animals, we're accountable, we are to be fruitful and multiply.

D. We are to subdue the land. **Read 28**

This is what Adam was called to do in the Garden - subdue the land. Adam is functioning as God's manager in the Garden. God created and brought order. And Adam is to fine tune the creation that God made.

Men and women are called to subdue creation. We are to guide it toward order and prosperity and fruitfulness. Now, just to make some connections here. That doesn't mean we need to have literal gardens and trees with fruit, okay? God has equipped us with a lot of different skills and he expects us to use them to make our lives and the lives around us better.

Whatever proverbial garden God has given you should look better than your pagan neighbor.

Do you have dominion over software? Then it better be godly dominion. Do you have dominion over a trade? Then it better be to God's glory. Do you have dominion over 5 acres or 5 kids? Then cultivate it well. You get the idea. Everything we have has been given by God and he expects us to rule it well.

And this mandate and divine order has never been rescinded. We are still to be fruitful and multiply, subdue animals and the world around us. And wherever you see Christians come with the gospel that's exactly what happens. Societies flourish when Christians arrive. Why? Because we have divine purpose and divine grace to master a society in the way God wants.

So chapter 1 of the Bible talks about how we're made in the image of God. This has implications especially for ethics. Obviously we are to work hard, to have stable fruitful families. But there's more.

Turn to Gen 9. This is God's covenant with Noah after he drowned the whole world in a flood. The dominion mandate is repeated to Noah and his descendants. **Read 1-7**

So God repeats the mandate. Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth, subdue it. And he adds 2 things.

First, you can now eat animals. After the flood, that's okay. Before the flood there was no explicit authorization to do that, but now there is. We can eat animals because they are not people. We cannot eat people because they are not animals.

This is why no one bats an eye when we ask if they want to go grab a burger, but we'd all be locked up if we cooked and ate aunt Sally.

Second, speaking of killing, God institutes capital punishment for those who shed innocent blood. **Read 5-6**

God is so committed to having humans be fruitful and multiply that if an image bearer of God kills another image bearer of God, then the murderer is himself to be put to death.

And people will say "How can you be pro life and pro capital punishment - that's a contradiction." No it's not; God is so pro-life that he commands his image bearers to take the lives of those who take lives.

God says if you slaughter an image bearer of God - another human - then you have forfeited your life as an image bearer of God.

Now we find out later in the Law that there are degrees of accountability. Killing someone by accident is different than premeditated murder. We would call this the difference between first degree premeditated murder and manslaughter. But being made in the image of God requires - and I use that word specifically - that we put to death those who wantonly murder others.

There has been no retraction of this command anywhere. And the NT upholds capital punishment.

Jesus said if you live by the sword - if you kill people wrongly - you will what? Die by the sword. Peter had no legal right to take a swing at Malchus who was trying to arrest Jesus.

Paul says that magistrate - Caesar - does not bear the sword in vain. God appointed them to be a terror and a judge to those who do wrong. God has given the right of capital punishment to all nations.

Paul says in **Acts 25:11** that if he really is guilty of doing something deserving death then so be it. He never says the death penalty is wrong, he says he doesn't deserve it.

Pilate said to Jesus that he had the power to free him or crucify him. Jesus didn't say "you can't crucify me - that's not your prerogative." He said you wouldn't even have that power unless God gave it to you. Jesus acknowledges Pilate's God-given right to put to death.

So being made in the image of God means that we do everything to protect life from conception to natural death. And these realities all influence Christian ethics and the ethics of life.

The moment a woman's egg is fertilized, a human life has been made and that life is made in the image of God and should be protected. Even in the OT this was recognized.

Turn to Exo. 21:22-25. Remember this is 3,400 years ago before there were DNA tests and microscopes and ultrasounds. **Read**

This is an odd situation but to keep focused what we find here is that God values life in the womb. Why? Because that's when life begins.

God knits life together in the womb. He is the one who formed us.

For all time we have known that what is growing in the womb is a human. No one except the most blinded have been confused by that. And here God says that the person, or persons, who hurt the life in the womb are to be punished in accordance with the damage they cause. Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

This is the concept of proportionality in punishment. If the men who are fighting hit the woman and her babies die, then they die. Why? Life for what? Life. What's in the womb? Life. A living human made in the image of God. This is a specific law living out the principle of the Noahic covenant.

They took a life. Their life is forfeit. How does that affect abortion and IVF?

Abortion is the taking of human life. It is this passage. It's murder whether the child was healthy and the mom just wanted a girl, or whether the child was conceived in rape or incest or whether the child has birth defects. All life in the womb is sacred because all life in the womb is made in the image of God.

Those who take that life are to be put to death. And I do not buy the idea that women are victims of abortion. Maybe very few: minors who are forced by a boyfriend or a parent or manipulated in some way. But the vast majority of women know exactly what they're doing when they walk into an abortion clinic. That's why it's so hard.

And because humans are made in the image of God from the moment of conception there is no moral difference between killing a 2 year old and killing a baby 3 months into gestation or killing 90 year old grandpa because he's in pain. We are made in the image of God.

So abortion should be illegal in every instance.

Now, because abortion is so prolific, there's a good chance you or someone close to you has had an abortion. And we need to square the idea that abortion is murder.

But you know what God offers murderers? And thieves? And adulterers? And arrogant people? Forgiveness through faith in Jesus. Paul was a murderer. David was a murderer. Moses was a murderer. Simon the Zealot - one of the apostles - was a political insurrectionist and potentially an assassin.

There is forgiveness with God. Full and free and glorious pardon that we don't deserve and could never earn. Washed white as snow. But that requires confession and repentance from the sin.

1 John 1:8-9: If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us of all our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God can cleanse anyone from the sin of murder.

What about IVF? In Vitro Fertilization. In Vitro literally means "in glass." In vitro fertilization is when a doctor removes eggs from a woman and implants those eggs with sperm from a man in a petri dish.

Now, on the surface, that doesn't seem necessarily bad. But here's the problem: because of the difficulty and expense, usually a dozen or so eggs are harvested from the woman. And all are fertilized. Which means how babies were just made? A dozen.

Then usually 3-4 fertilized eggs - babies - are placed in the woman with the hopes that 1 or 2 will survive. If there are 2 usually the doctors will require the woman aborts one of the babies to ensure safe delivery of one baby. That's round one, 3 babies die to make one baby.

The other 8 babies are put in a freezer to be used for round 2 or 3 with the exact same procedure. This is a causality rate of around 75-90%. Women under 35 only have a 50% chance of one live birth per cycle. 3-4 babies implanted for a 50% chance of 1 live birth.

Women 38-40 is 25% chance. 41-42 is 12% chance. Over 42 is 4-5% chance. They are making babies so that they die. The idea that we can just put off having kids and do IVF later is a fiction that Christians can't buy into.

The babies who are still in a froze state we call snowflake children. And right now there are literally millions of snowflake children in the USA. Some have been abandoned because after 1 or 2 kids the parents decided they didn't want more. Many are discarded. Many are given away for snowflake adoption - that's a real thing.

There are other ethical issues that play into this. What happens when a married couple who started IVF get divorced and they don't want their embryos anymore. Or, as happened at one facility, the power went out and the freezers shut down and we don't know if the embryos made it. Or what about two lesbians who come to the facility with their gay friend who is the sperm donor wanting a baby?

I'll just throw this out there for political fun, but President Trump says if he's elected he wants insurance companies or the government to pay for IVF treatment. That would be a travesty of massive proportions.

You guys, I do not believe that Christians can support IVF at all. In hope of having kids, parents actually knowingly destroy life made in the image of God. And they shrug their shoulders because it's the price to pay for kids. That price is too high.

I've known parents who had kids through IVF. The kids are truly human. They are made in the image of God. But they have a dozen brothers or sisters who were knowingly sacrificed against their will so that these kids could live.

The cost is too great. The stakes are too high. I get the idea that we want to have babies. And barren couples grieve that they can't have kids. And simply telling them "Well go adopt" is not always the helpful answer, though it may be the answer. But morally I don't think this is a bridge Christians can cross.

Is there forgiveness for utilizing IVF? Yes. God is gracious and kind and merciful. But IVF does not uphold our commitment to life made in the image of God.

Pray