

## “Sanctity of Life: a Theology of Martyrdom” Romans 14:7-8

**Context:** Advances made in life-sustaining technology over the last twenty years have permitted the prolongation of biological life with questionable outcomes. Patients' experiences with pain, suffering, indignity, and financial burdens have forced the medical community to reconsider sustaining life at all costs. Currently, this reconsideration has issued into the acceptance of quality of life criteria (QoL) over an ever-weakening sanctity of life principle (SoL) in the majority of medical literature guidelines and *praxis* studies which address life-sustaining care in the United States. Addressing SoL is important, but more important is an understanding of just what SoL means.

**Life Principle:** If you have addressed your doubts in a moral decision and they still remain, don't do the choice in doubt (cf. Romans 14:23).

### 1. Sanctity of Life: what is it?

The phrase 'sanctity of life' signifies the giving over of a person's physical, rational, emotional, and spiritual existence to God. It comes from the combination of three ideas. The term 'sanctity' is an English translation of the biblical New Testament Greek term *αγλος*, denoting dedication or giving over to God. The word 'life' comes from the biblical New Testament Greek term *ζωη* and signifies both the natural and transcendent existence of a person. The preposition 'of' signifies the description of sanctity attributed to life.

### 2. Sanctity of Life: what is the scriptural basis? Genesis 1: 26-27; Matthew 8:22; Eph. 2:1-11; Romans 12:1-2

Every person is created with the potential to re-present God. That inherent potential is either enlivened and intentionally set aside to God or dead and intentionally set apart from God. Enlivened individuals are called to devote their minds to spiritual transformation that clarifies how they are to live their physical lives as willed by God in their community.

### 3. Sanctity of Life: what does it have to do with me? Phil. 1:20-24; John 15:12-17

Biological life is a gift purposed for bearing witness to the presence of God and, although respected, it is not sacred in and of itself. Biological life is seen as an opportunity to re-present Christ by means of service or labor to the 'other.' Sometimes that labor includes a loving sacrifice of our physical life on behalf of others for the glory of God.

### For Further Study:

- A Christian construction of the sanctity of life principle (SoL) is founded upon the image of God. Our **doctrinal statement 'On Mankind'** under **what we believe** states that God created man in His own image (<http://gracepointfellowship.org/files/DocStmnt.pdf> - cf. footnote 3). As a **theological study method**, look up the substantive, relational, and functional concepts of 'image of God' in Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 498-510 (see footnote #4 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image\\_of\\_God](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image_of_God)) and my conclusion in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (39/1 Mar 1996 pp. 118-119 of SoL pdf). What does "image of God" mean in both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures? How does each person's inherent nature to re-present God found in Genesis 1:26-27 confer life's sanctity?
- As a **theological study method**, study the meaning of 'sanctity' and 'life' given in my article in JETS (39/1 Mar 1996 pp. 119-121 SoL pdf). Why would actions like physician-assisted suicide, partial birth abortion, and embryonic experimentation violate the SoL principle?

As a **Bible study method**, use your concordance to look up the 'image of God.' How is the image of God related to the sanctity of life in Genesis 9:6? What is the significance and tension of requiring physical life for physical life in Genesis 9:6?

### Transformation exercise:

Memorize Romans 14:8. Take at least 5 minutes each morning and ask God to reveal activities in the day in which you might be especially attuned for living for Him and for dying to self. If you don't feel like devoting each morning to this, why not?