

Being Christian in today's culture Episode 4:

Who determines the value of life?

TRANSCRIPT

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NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** You're back in the Denison forum podcast. I'm Mark Turman, executive director of Denison forum, sitting down with our cultural apologist and founder, Jim Denison. Jim, how are you today?

[00:00:10] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Well, I'm doing this under duress, Mark.

[00:00:13] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, I know, I know there's, there's a small little event going on that we won't mention any further so as to not confuse anybody, but we could all be doing something on a beautiful spring day other than, well, other than this or a lot of other things, right?

[00:00:28] **Dr. Jim Denison:** We could even be watching the Masters Golf Tournament, but I didn't say that, did I?

[00:00:32] **Dr. Mark Turman:** You, you digress, you digress.

[00:00:35] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I digress. That's exactly right.

[00:00:37] **Dr. Mark Turman:** That's right. Well, we're

[00:00:38] **Dr. Jim Denison:** must really be committed to this ministry, Mark. And I think we are.

[00:00:41] **Dr. Mark Turman:** we are, we're highly committed. That's right. But we're happy to have this conversation with each other and with you today. What we like to do at the Denison forum is we are seeking with God's help to equip everyone that we can to think biblically, to live beautifully with the Bible calls, living holy.

And then to act redemptively to make the world a better place for everyone until Jesus comes again. And we hope that this conversation in this series that we are presenting to you right now called being Christian in today's culture. We hope that it's helping. If you've missed any of the previous episodes, you can always go back and pick those up at any time that you want.

They are in some way foundational to the conversation today. And we'll refer back to that in a moment. But all of these episodes, eight in total are intended to give you a lens to look through regardless of the issue that you're confronting today in your life, your family, your church, or your community you're worried about what's going on in the world on a global scale.

All of us are, are required and called by God to think in those terms in these days. And as Dr. Dennison has reminded us often, if God didn't think that he could use us in these days, we wouldn't be living in these days. And so we're not here by accident. We're here by his sovereign providential direction.

And we want to be, as we talk about at Dentist and Forum, salt and light in every good way. And so we hope that this series is helping you to do that. We've been talking through this series of being a Christian in today's culture around what we call seven pillars of biblical flourishing, seven ways, seven pieces of a lens, or seven lens, you might say, to look through to understand how to understand the Bible and how it applies to what's going on in our culture today.

And so today we're picking up on the next one of these pillars of biblical flourishing, the sanctity of life. We've already talked about initially embracing biblical truth and authority the necessity of faith in Christ. We talked about that last time. Today we're moving to this next step in a very, very big cultural conversation that's going on at multiple levels in our culture around the sanctity of life.

Obviously things like abortion are a part of that. And sometimes people's minds run into that one category, but the sanctity of life from a biblical perspective is much, much bigger than that. And we're going to try to cover as much of it as we can over the next few minutes. And we hope that it's helpful for you, Jim.

I just wanted to ask, we've been using this word flourishing a lot. Some people use the word thrive. We oftentimes make it a very personal, individual kind of thing. But if you were defining flourishing from a biblical standpoint, how would you frame that?

[00:03:35] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's a great question. Jesus said that he came to give us life and give it to the full or to give it abundantly as John 10, 10 says. That's not always our definition of what that looks like, is it? If that's the case, Jesus didn't keep his promise. With his disciples, all of whom but John were martyred for following Jesus.

In fact, Jesus said in this worldview will have opposition. Jesus said, if they persecuted me, they will persecute you. So he doesn't mean by that necessarily material means doesn't necessarily mean by that popularity. In fact, often he means the opposite of that. What I think he's talking about shalom.

This concept of wellness with God, others, and ourselves. It's a Hebrew concept, as you know, even to this day. As you know, Mark, having been to Israel any number of times, that one of the ways folk greet each other is to say, is to wish that, that that word of shalom to one another. Well being with each other.

A sense of joy that transcends circumstances. Kind of the idea here. That's what's behind the word blessed or bachorios. So it's this idea of well being. Well being with God with others and with ourselves That really bears us up even if we are facing persecution or opposition or challenges In the fallen world as Jesus said that we would so it's not circumstantial It's the ability to transcend circumstance with a sense of wellness that only the holy spirit can ultimately produce in our lives

[00:04:55] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. So when, when you're traveling in places like Israel it's just not right. To, to say that the word Shalom is the same thing as hello, or the word Aloha in Hawaii. It's, it's a much richer term. And like you said, so biblically grounded and so much more encompassing than just a simple greeting. It really is a blessing, something of a prayer really, when people are offering it to each other, particularly in the environment of Israel.

Am I saying that right?

[00:05:27] **Dr. Jim Denison:** No, you're right. Exactly. So even those that would be secularist Jews, about 40 percent of the Jews that live in Israel do not observe Shabbat or Sabbath. They don't observe the kosher dietary laws or the other traditions of Israel, of Judaism, but even they will use this word shalom and mean more than hello or goodbye.

They mean, I wish you peace. I wish you well. It's a greeting and a way of saying goodbye that means I want the best for you. And that really is pervasive in Jewish culture, as you know, and in Jewish society. I wrote the other day around a fascinating article that I read, in which a person was asking, why are Israelis so happy?

And the point they're making, there was a recent study, they do this every year, of happiness indexes by nation, and Israel came in fifth. United States came in 22nd. And this is after the invasion of October 7th. This is while they're in a fight for their existential future. And yet they're fifth in happiness.

And it's what he's describing, there's a sense of well being in Judaism, there's a sense of community, of collectivism, of family, of wishing each other well, of wanting the best for each other. I've been there more than 30 times and I have never felt afraid one time. There has never been a time on any street in Israel that I have not felt protected, that I've not felt the others around me to want my best and me to want their best.

So there really is this pervasive Judeo Christian idea that we can have a kind of shalom, a kind of flourishing that the world can't produce and that the world can't take.

[00:07:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, it makes me think of a couple of studies here in my own community, we actually commissioned what we called a well being study that was implemented for us by a major university and they came in and were assisting us and they also built upon a previous study that was done in England about well being and one of the things they found was confirmed in our own study that just because a community or a country is doing better materially doesn't mean that they're necessarily happier.

In fact, the, the study that you just referred to indicates that nobody would say that Israel is in a better position right now than most of the United States. In fact, it's in a far worse and more precarious position with enemies, you know, on three sides and an ocean on the other. And very much in a threatened environment, but still from a standpoint of a wider understanding of wellbeing and a sense of joy.

And a sense of confidence. They are far exceeding us. Even though we might say we have certain advantages that we would think would make us happier. Jim, I want to turn the conversation a little bit on this flourishing idea. I may get this wrong, but I think it was Christopher Hitchens who said that all religion is a virus on the soul of humanity and should be eradicated is, am I getting that?

Am I attributing that

[00:08:25] **Dr. Jim Denison:** It's actually Richard Dawkins. It said religion is a virus and the software of humanity that must be expunged.

[00:08:33] **Dr. Mark Turman:** right. And so there's become in the last few decades, really this conversation from people like Dawkins and others that not just Christianity, but all faith. is actually detrimental to individuals, communities, countries, and even whole generations. And, and yet there are strong claims that particularly Christianity has brought enormous Blessing to the world.

I just wonder how you might summarize that for us and just this idea that, you know, we, we generally know in our ministry, in our work that we're probably not going to change everybody's

mind, but we also know from some of the studies that we've realized that if we can influence, you know, 10 percent or 15 percent of a given culture that we can actually Make a transformative impact into just about everything that goes on in that culture.

So what I'm driving at is, , if Christians, if people Even if a relatively small percentage of Christians listen to this podcast and engage with other resources that we and others might put into their hands to be more mature, more more influential in their communities, in their lives. Is there a sense that if Christians are flourishing?

Then there's a spillover effect that there's this kind of this idea that I've heard you use this phrase, the, you know, the rising tide raises all boats. Is that a legitimate argument or, or position that we can take as Christians?

[00:10:02] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah. I think it is certainly from a historical point of view. And you would think almost from a logical point of view, if in fact there is a God and this God is in fact all knowing, all loving and all powerful. And if he actually can, by the power of his Holy spirit, continue the earthly ministry of Jesus through the bodies and the lives of Christians, if we are in fact the body of Christ, then by definition, If Christians are walking in the Spirit, there has to be a positive outcome.

Just as in Jesus earthly ministry, there was a positive outcome everywhere he went. Bodies were healed, and souls were saved, and lives were changed, and families were mended, and community was different, and there was a transforming impact everywhere he went. Well, that would almost by definition have to be true.

If we are, in fact, doing what the Bible says we are, if we're continuing his ministry as the body of Christ today. It's not the Lord's fault if we're not doing that. It's not Christianity's fault if Christians aren't walking with Christ. We can't do that in human strength. It takes the Holy Spirit working in us to do what only the Spirit can do.

As I've so often said, we can't convict anybody of sin. We can't save souls. We can't change lives. Human words can't change human hearts. But God can do through us anything he's ever done. All of God there is, is in this moment. Anything God has ever done, He can still do. Jesus said, we'll do greater things than He did.

He didn't mean that in a qualitative sense, that we will be able to do miracles that exceed His. He meant it more in a quantitative sense, that two billion Christians can do more things in the world than one person, Jesus, in His earthly incarnate existence, could. And so, there's this collective outcome that you would just think would have to be the case, and in fact is demonstrated across history.

You can think about any number of social ills for which the church played a direct role in bringing about transformative good, from the ending of slavery under Wilberforce to the enormous advances in civil rights, we have a long ways to go, but nonetheless we have made a great deal of progress in civil rights and led almost entirely to by Christians, much of that by Christian ministers, Martin Luther King Jr.

and a whole cohort of ministers who were doing this in the name of the gospel, in the name of the Lord to advance the kingdom of God. I used to know the exact number, but I know it's just a handful of the top 200 universities in America that were not started by churches or denominations. The same with hospitals, nearly every well known hospital system in the United States was started out of a denomination or out of a church, out of a faith based environment.

Hospitals themselves were invented by churches and Christians back in the medieval era. So much of the well being that we think of in the culture is institutionally the result. Of things that Christians and churches have done as they've lived their faith out as they've acted their faith more directly Even the downsides have upsides the downsides of the colonization of much of what we think of as a developing world by the western world that has had Enormous negative consequence from slavery to depreciation to racism and all of that.

At the same time, I believe God was able to redeem that in ways by using that advance East India trading company or whatever it might've been to create a platform for missionaries to be able to go and share the gospel. In ways that have brought multitudes of people to personal relationship with God through Christ.

It's almost like Paul using roman roads and roman peace and roman, customs to get the gospel out across the roman empire God continues to do that even in places where the west is not west the rest of the world. God has used the events of the West in ways that have advanced the kingdom and brought people to faith in Christ and transforming faith.

So all that to say, we could go on and on, but the studies are very, very clear, very, very dramatic. Even people like Jonathan Rauch, who are themselves not believers, We're talking about the impact of Christianity on the environment. Richard Dawkins, we mentioned before, has made news recently with his claim that he is what he calls a cultural Christian.

He says he doesn't believe a word of Christianity, hasn't changed his mind theologically, but he's so grateful for the impact of Christianity where he lives in the UK. And is very concerned about the growing impact of Islam in the UK from a cultural point of view. He's grateful for not only the beauty and the architecture and the aesthetics of the church, but for the contributions of the church to hospitals and educational systems, and to so much of what has created Western environment.

So, all that to say, We could go on and on about all the positive effects by which Christians are doing what you would think they would be doing if they're walking in the power of the Spirit, continuing the earthly ministry of Jesus, advancing God's kingdom, praying every day, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God loves to answer that prayer every day.

[00:14:51] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Would you, so let me ask you if you would go a step further a little bit in your explanation. I'm just wondering some things that are very much kind of right in front of us in terms of a cultural standpoint. Could we say that Christianity has been influential in a positive way, say with issues like immigration and with the treatment of women?

Those two issues have been particularly, you know, large in the forefront of many people's minds. And can we make the same claim when it comes to the treatment and the reality? You and I live in Texas. The whole immigration conversation is very much. Right in our part of the world. Could we say that, that Christianity is helping to make the stories and the struggles of immigrants better?

Can we say that about the way women have been treated? We, we've talked, you know, in, in conversations before about how Jesus raised the value of women in his culture when they were only considered little more than property, basically. Have, have we, as a Christian movement really continued that passion that was in Jesus's heart.

[00:15:59] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's a great question. And there are definitely some negative answers to the question. You think about the clergy of youth scandal, which hasn't only affected women, but has greatly affected women. You think about the degree to which some Christian traditions have minimized the roles of women in leadership and have felt made pretty clear statements that denigrated their ability to release their calling to do things that would be considered Christian leadership, preaching and teaching, and especially teaching men and preaching to men.

And so certainly there has been a side of. The Christian story that would not be elevating of women's roles as much as it should have been the case. But there's been another side as well. There's, going back again to the time of Christ, and the degree to which Jesus elevated women in ways that were almost scandalous in the first century, in the Judaism of his day.

You move that forward. You think about some of the great heroes of Christian history, themselves having been women, people that have followed the Lord in ways that were very, very sacrificial. Martin Luther. Made it very clear there would have been no Reformation as we think of without his wife, Catherine von Bora, who he thought was as equal as a theologian and was absolutely indispensable to the building of the Reformation movement in Germany.

The degree to which she was not only his helpmate and his, and his partner in that sense, but in every way he felt a theological partner as well. There were other women in the Reformation who were instrumental in translating his works and publishing his works and commenting on his works, in distributing them effectively, in encouraging their husbands to support this movement financially.

There's a lot of story yet to be told about the degree to which the Reformation was itself advanced through the leadership and the influence of women across the way. When you think about the so called Pentecostal movement, a charismatic movement, that is really sweeping the world now, and it's where so much of Christian advance is happening, you think about women that were involved in the early stages back in the early part of the 20th century, who were themselves in the leadership of Pentecostal, a charismatic movement. And that movement itself, especially in in the what you think of as the Southern hemisphere have been especially influential in women.

Very, very critical at that point in my own Baptist tradition, I'm thinking of people like Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong who, Mary Hill Davis, who were leaders, pioneers. In ministry and engaging foreign cultures in ways that were enormously inspirational for us today. And then even in my own personal experience, one of the finest communicators I know is Anne Graham Lotz.

Billy Graham used to call her the finest preacher in the family. And her prophetic call, her ability to communicate so effectively, so powerfully, just one example. My wife often says of Anne, because they're very close friends and Janet sometimes says, you might say that she shouldn't preach. You can't say she can't preach. You've never heard her preach and not think that she cannot communicate in ways that are transformative that God uses in absolutely empowering ways. So while we grieve for things like the clergy abuse scandal, of course, we at the same time want to come along and be very grateful for how God continues to use the entire body of Christ to advance the kingdom that Jesus came to initiate.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. We are all Abraham's seed and heirs according to the covenant. That's just as true now as when Paul was first inspired to speak those words.

[00:19:16] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. So, so good. So helpful. And I can imagine some people thinking that, well, I thought we were going to talk about sanctity of life and we are. And in fact, everything that we've been talking about relates to connects to this very core thing that we want to talk about in a moment, the sanctity of life.

But to set that up, Jim I want to go back for just a moment. We, we said that in some sense, the first couple of ideas that we pursue embracing Biblical truth and authority and the necessity of

faith in Christ were foundational. to everything else that we were going to talk about in this series. In what sense did you mean that in what sense is the embracing, the accepting of biblical truth and authority and the necessity of faith in Christ.

When I think about those being foundational, it's almost like the first one may be a directional. That, that the Bible is inviting us to a whole different direction by embracing Christ as our king and the truth that goes along with him. And then the necessity of faith in Christ is the power of that faith.

To enable us to live in the ways that we're describing in these truths about flourishing. Am I thinking about it with you in the same way? Is that what you mean by that being foundational?

[00:20:33] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Exactly what I mean by that. Precisely so, Mark. We come along to see the Bible as the word of God, the authoritative truth of God, but I can't live that word out myself. I don't have the ability as a fallen human to live and think biblically as I wish I could. But when I trust Christ, that second pillar, then the Holy Spirit comes to live in me.

And now the spirit, according to Romans 8, 29, is making me more like Jesus. And now the spirit, when I'm filled with the spirit in Ephesians 5, 18, now the spirit enables and empowers me to live in a way that, that accomplishes the biblical authority in my life, biblical truth and thinking in my life. So we trust scripture to be true, but then we trust Christ as our Lord.

And he empowers us to live out that truth in our personal lives. And then you bring that forward even to this third pillar, it's in the context of the power of the Holy Spirit enabling me to live and think biblically, that now I can think about the beauty and the sanctity of life in a practical, proactive way.

Now I can not just affirm biblical truth here, now the Holy Spirit will help me to act that out, will help me to love as I am loved, will help me to see each life as sacred as God does. Augustine said God loves each of us as if there were only one of us. Now he calls us to do the same thing. To love everyone Jesus loves, and Jesus loves everyone.

To see every life as sacred from conception and natural death requires the work of the Holy Spirit in my life. To value every person as God does. So that's why I think there's a bit of an order to this, and layering here, as we move through these things in a bit of a sequence, and embrace them in a way that makes all of them more empowering than any one of them by themselves could be.

[00:22:06] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Yeah. So, so helpful. Like, you know, and I'm going to do something that's a little bit dangerous here. All right. Which is. You've had your your theological hat on in in such a great way just now I'm going to ask you to put on your philosopher's hat

Which which may just turn you loose in a way that we won't be able to stop So I just want to warn everybody of that but now building on that idea of what you just said We move to this idea that all life is sacred i've i've heard you in many different contexts use the idea that something is self evident You and preparing by reading the white paper that you've written that people can get to through this podcast, it'll be in the show notes for the podcast if they want to read.

All this essay that you have written about the sanctity of life, we want them to do that as a way of taking their understanding even deeper. That and some additional reading that I've done, some thing particular document we'll get to about the dignity of human life from the Roman Catholic Church recently.

But is. Is that idea that all life is sacred, or in the terms of this Catholic document, dignified? Am I thinking right? That's the, the term for that is ontological? Is that what we mean, or what do we mean when we say that all life is sacred is, should be to us, self evident? What do we mean by that term?

[00:23:32] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Oh, thank you. I get to do philosophy for a bit. This is exciting. And so, we'll try to do this briefly. I understand not everybody would be as excited as I am right now inside all of this. So, philosophers like to use big words. You know, I, I don't know if it makes us more impressive. We think it does anyway.

And so we use this word ontology. Ontology is a word about being. Ontos is the Greek word for being and logos, the word for word. So it's a word about being. It's an ontological statement to say that the world is material. Or the world is spiritual it's an ontological statement to say the moon is made of green cheese, or to say the moon is made of lunar material, whatever you might want to call it.

That's an ontological statement. If I come forward and say life is sacred, I'm making a statement about being itself. I'm making a declarative statement that life itself intrinsically Apart from any instrumental function it might bring to bear, or any utilitarian value it might have to society, is intrinsically, self evidently sacred, in its own essence, ontologically.

Now, when I want to come along and ask, how do you know that? Now you're asking about epistemology, which is the doctrine of Knowledge. How is it that you know what you know? You know what you know rationally, practically, and intuitively, we've talked about. So rationally, I would want to argue, life is either sacred or it is not.

We have a binary opportunity here, a binary decision to make here. And then practically, I want to come along and make the argument, and then intuitively as well, within a relational construct. So lots of ways epistemologically to get at the ontological statement. But the bottom line here is, At the end of the day, I'm going to assert from biblical point of view, from a philosophical point

of view, life is inherently sacred, not just in what it does instrumentally, not just in how it's seen in society from a utilitarian point of view.

Once you start down that road, now you're with Peter Singer. Now you're with the ethicists out there that are saying we are animals just like all other animals. That we're of no more value to society than any other animal is or isn't, and that we ought to be accorded even life itself to the degree that we are worthy of such designation by virtue of what we do for others.

This is a move that champions euthanasia for the infirm. It's a movement that champions euthanasia, even for those who are suffering with mental illness. There's a story in the news right now about a 28 year old young woman whose parents are supporting her decision to end her life because she struggles with mental illness, and her life is no longer valuable.

It's no longer of worth, they're saying. It's hard to say this, Mark, but it's almost the same thing as saying, I've got this pet, and the pet is valuable to me to the degree that it does something for me. It doesn't have an intrinsic value, it only has an instrumental value. Well, those are your choices.

Life is either self evidently, inherently valuable, sacred, or it is sacred to the degree that it's useful. And that's why life in the pre born stage can be ended if it's not useful to the mother. That's why life can be ended at the end of life stage if it's no longer useful to society. If it takes up too many of our medical resources, if it, Doesn't provide enough benefit for the cost and all the things that are inside that.

These arguments are being made right now in triage medicine. As you know, I work in medical ethics and triage medicine is what do you do when you don't have enough supply for the demand? We had to ask this back during covid. What would we do if we had more patients and we could care for them? How do you prioritize care?

How do you decide who to give your limited resources to triage medicine? These things are being asked right now, because 20, 80 percent of our medical resources are used on 20 percent of our patients in the United States. 80 percent of those resources are used on 20 percent of those patients. And so the argument is, if we'd stop caring about the sickest of the sickest, we'd have a great deal more resource for everybody else.

And if they don't have the likelihood of ever being productive citizens again, it's a bad investment by society. It's an argument being made in medicine right now. I'm so grateful that the healthcare system I serve is not. We're making the opposite argument. We're a Christian ministry of healing. We're making the opposite argument because we believe in the sacredness of all life.

But this argument out there is being made that we're not going to invest limited resources on people that can't pay us back as it were, who even if they get well on some level, are not going to

be as productive as the cost to society and getting them to that place. That argument's happening right now.

Expect that to continue to grow and ask yourself, would you want that to be you? Would you want that to be your child? Would you want that to be your spouse? Would you want somebody else deciding? Whether or not your child or your grandchild could receive medical benefit, medical care. If it can't be proven that that child is going to benefit society to a degree that makes that investment worthwhile on a purely business transactional level.

Those are your choices. Life is intrinsically sacred or it is not. And if it's not, it's utilitarian. And that's a free for all in the larger world that's out there. That's a frightening future.

[00:28:46] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And yeah, just a couple of things. Number one yeah, make, first of all, I want to let everybody know there will be a test at the end of this podcast and the test will be two questions. Can you spell ontological and can you spell epistemology? Okay. That'll, that's the test that's coming at the end of this.

But if you, if you like me, you know, sometimes got lost in philosophy class when you were in college or graduate school. We're going to help you with that. But now you start to see where things like philosophy really do enter into the modern questions that we're facing. And as Jim, you were saying, it really is a binary choice.

You're either, you're either front confronting the idea and embracing the idea, the ontological idea that all life is sacred or The other side of that is it's it's instrumental. It's utilitarian and you have to decide because if you if you subscribe to the argument to the idea that life should be measured on a utilitarian basis, then you're into the question.

Well, who who decides the measure of that utility?

[00:29:51] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's right.

[00:29:52] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Because now you've moved it.

[00:29:53] **Dr. Jim Denison:** right,

[00:29:54] **Dr. Mark Turman:** no longer. It's no longer God or an authority outside of us that's, that's declaring what is valuable and why it is valuable. Now it becomes some kind of a, of a mechanism or a metric. And who gets to decide what the metric is, right?

And that's where you

[00:30:14] **Dr. Jim Denison:** What you're seeing with Hamas right now, that's, well, just illustrate that quickly in Israel's war with Hamas. Hamas has a very different ethic than we do at this point. In their, in their view, the civilians living in Gaza are a means to the end of advancing Hamas's agenda. That's why they've taken a billion dollars.

That was intended to be invested in the care of Palestinian civilians, schools and, and businesses and feeding programs and invested that in 500 miles of underground tunnels that no civilians were allowed to enter to protect Hamas. So that they can advance their war against Israel. And if 30, 000 civilians have to die, that's the cost of war.

And the hope here is that they can marshal enough public opinion against Israel as a result of the civilian deaths that they're bringing about by their war strategy to cause Israel to back off and Hamas to survive and live to fight another day. That's an instrumental view of humanity in play. You see the same thing in China right now with the People's Republic of China and the way that the Communist Party there is doing a surveillance society and is doing a value based system that evaluates people out of this total surveillance by virtue of their loyalty to the Communist Party and the Communist agendas.

It's down to everything like the kind of jobs you can have, the kind of houses you can live in, the kind of travel you can make. The kind of medical care you could receive in Cuba. It's exactly the same thing. If you're loyal to the party, you get better houses, you get better medical outcomes, you get better schools for your kids.

You get better military assignments. Once you move that direction, that's the world in which you find yourself. And the reason it's binary mark is that sacred by definition, isn't a quantifiable term, something sacred or it's not. It's not a little bit sacred. I guess it's a little, I guess it's kind of like being pregnant.

You're either pregnant or you're not. You're not a little bit pregnant. You're not a little bit married. There's some categories that either are or aren't and sacred is one of those. Life is either sacred or it is not. There's not a middle ground there where it's kind of sacred. Once you start going to kind of, you've really stepped away from sacred and now you're back to the utilitarian and the instrumental we were talking about a moment ago.

That's why it's such a binary choice and not be more significant.

[00:32:31] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, I heard I heard this one person in a book that we've been reading together that we'll talk about in a future podcast where we were talking about that in terms of slavery in the foundation of our country and people who study that area the founding of our country, the writing of the constitution some will recognize.

The compromise, what was called the three fifths compromise, where those states that had slavery in their midst were seeking greater representation. And they came up with what they called a three fifths compromise, where every slave was valued at three, three fifths of a human being, not a whole human being a very utilitarian kind of way.

And as this author described it. He said, you know, America says that African Americans are valuable. Kinda. They're, they're three fifths valuable, or at least in that metaphor in that, that particular age of history. And like I said, when it comes to something like it being sacred, it's an exclusive category.

It, it, it either is or it isn't. And that's a very foundational reality that we need to understand when we're getting into this conversation. And, and when I, when I bring it around to application, Jim, I'm wondering how this might look. When we, when we reject the sacredness of life and, and the image of God on the lives of every human being, are we actually engaging in some form of idolatry?

And if so, how would we describe that, that idolatry?

[00:34:04] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I'm glad you asked that. Idolatry is worshiping something that's not God as though it is. You can be idolatrous with regard to an object. You can be idolatrous, I think, with regard to even an idea if you're elevating it to a place where it's taking transcendence over God or taking the place of God.

Well, as we've talked about before, the basic temptation in all of human history is Genesis 3 5, you will be as God. That's Satan's only strategy. It doesn't have a second strategy because the first one works. Every temptation is a variation on that theme. Be your own God by stealing this or by lying about that or whatever else the particular manifestation might be.

So at the end of the day, that's the basic temptation of fallen human nature. It's the will to power, as Nietzsche said. It's a desire to be our own God. Well, anytime we come forward with that, we're committing idolatry on some level. So when we're saying about life, God is wrong and I am right. You And I get to choose for myself whether this unborn, preborn child is to live, because I don't believe it has the inherent right to life.

I don't believe it has the inherent sanctity, sacredness, that should guarantee it life. Well, that made an idolatrous move. I've put myself up as God over God. I've elevated my opinion over God's word. I've done something that is idolatrous in so doing. If I elevate something else that's more valuable than that life, if I'm worried about my career, if I'm worried about having additional childbearing responsibilities or what, well, those have just become idolatrous because I put those ahead of that which God calls sacred.

Of that which God values. And now I've made my career an idol, as it were. Or whatever might be the reason by which a person would choose us. Same with euthanasia. If at the end of the day we're allowing infirm people to take their own lives, we're asking, well, why are we doing that? Well, some would say because it's death with dignity.

And we want them to be able to die in a, in a, in a happier, healthier way. Now we're putting happiness ahead of life. We're making happiness idolatrous. We're making a lack of pain idolatrous because we're putting something ahead of that, which God values as sacred. I don't want people to die in pain either.

One of the misnomers of the death with dignity movement is that palliative care. And medical care has come so far in recent years and now there's so much more ability to help people to die without being in pain than used to be the case. With palliative and hospice care, we can help people die with dignity in ways that don't require interventions that are intended to end their lives in a way that this thought of us as euthanasia.

And so there are ways to not be idolatrous and yet serve those in pain. I had to make that decision with my own mother. As she was dying of cancer and could make decisions that were palliative and that made certain that she would not suffer, but that did not have the cause of intending her, of ending her life.

And so there are ways to do that in medical practice today, almost always. There are exceptions, but they're very few these days. And even those are getting less and less, for which I'm grateful. All that to say, Mark, anytime we choose something over life, we've made the something more valuable than that which God calls sacred.

And that's an idolatrous move. Whatever that thing

[00:37:20] **Dr. Mark Turman:** because it's not convenient for me right now, or The person, the caregivers who say, well, I, I want this senior citizen in my family or in my circle. I want to help them die sooner, faster, quicker supposedly because it's going to be better for them.

But what may be behind that in other ways is it's better for me. It's no longer an inconvenience for me. And when we do that, we're https: otter. ai

Become our values. I wanted, wanted to go back to the, the person you mentioned a moment ago, Peter Singer, I can remember a couple of years ago kind of wandering my way really into a conversation, listening to another podcast that featured Peter Singer talking about this idea that from his perspective and his understanding of things that human beings are no different in value, importance, significance.

From animals. Now for those who are not familiar, Peter Singer is a very highly esteemed professor at Princeton. And I'm, I'm just wondering do you have anything you want to tell us about that line of thinking that you haven't already said? But more, what does it say about our culture that a prestigious university like this has a professor in this area?

In this line of thought, what, what is that, what should that be telling us about where our culture is in its misunderstanding of the sacredness of life?

[00:38:47] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Well, it says a couple of things. First of all, Princeton started out of a Presbyterian denominational worldview and that would it at the time. Have been very affirming of the sanctity of life of the sacredness of every life is now employing somebody who's exactly the opponent of the very values that we're founding principles when Princeton itself began as a college for preachers as a place that was brought out of a very much a very centric so much even too conservative.

Biblical worldview in the context of Calvinistic issues and theological conversation, that sort of thing. So there's a Calvin Miller, the well known author years ago, taught me something I've not forgotten. He said everything starts on the right moves to the left. All the energy is on the right. All of the startup energy is on the right, but over time things get institutionalized.

Movements have to create institutional rubric in order to perpetuate themselves. And then institutions become means to the end, and then they become an end to themselves. And the further you move away from denominational founding, the further you move away from the values. That were part of the founding of that organization.

It's kind of like the cultural Christianity that Richard Dawkins has been championing lately. If you cut the tree off at the roots before long, you don't have a tree. If you don't have the roots, you don't have the tree. You're climbing a ladder, cutting it out from under you and wondering why you're falling to the ground.

And there's some of that going on, I think. And Peter Singer, just one illustration. Of the degree to which so many of our universities or elite universities were started in the context of a biblical worldview and just don't represent that anymore. There's sacred organizations that maybe have a religion department and even the religion department may itself not be in any sense aligned with the values that began that university.

That's a thing to be aware of for all of us. The temptation toward from the right to the left and pulling away from all that. But the second thought quickly in answer to your great question, why would this kind of instrumental sort of devaluing of human life be as popular as it is? That somebody like Peter Singer has the, has the hearing that he does, has, is able to have the platform that he does.

Well, he's a brilliant thinker. To begin with, he's very controversial, and I think some of that may be by design a little bit, and that is a way of getting publicity, as you know, if it bleeds, it leads, and the more controversial a person is, the more interesting they become, and the more platforms are going to want to use that as a means of advancing audiences and that sort of thing, and maybe some of that goes together inside all that, but out of Darwinian evolution forward, there really has been a foundational shift.

In Western society, from the idea that we were created by God, that we have, we're here on purpose, to the idea that we really are here as the result of evolutionary chance and chaotic circumstance. And if you really believe that, well then Singer on some level is right. We might be more advanced than other species, at least at this point in the story, but that doesn't mean that we're intrinsically any better than anybody else.

Just because one dog is smarter than another doesn't mean that species is intrinsically more valuable than this one over here. Just because one of your children is more gifted than another doesn't make that one worthy of life in a way the other is not. And so, once you start, you're down this hypothesis that says that life is the product of random some would say even coincidental natural processes.

And that none of us is here by purpose or on purpose. Well, then you kind of get where we're seeing a risk. I don't know that his ethics could have all gained a hearing prior to the advance and the popularity of Darwinian theory relative to human nature. And then one other piece to add would be Freudian psychoanalysis, which would come along and debunk religion, of course, as mythical wish fulfillment, as a need in in humanity to have a father figure that we can trust, that we can depend upon.

So, culture's been taught. You're here by coincidence, just like every other animal is, and your belief in God is a leftover, superstitious belief in a father figure that you really just need to set aside and get with the program. Those two large ideologies have been working on our thinking for a long time now, and somebody like Singer is just kind of an expression of that in the context of his particular ethical thinking.

[00:43:05] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And I call it out, you know, neither of us has an interest in picking on Peter Singer per se. That's not, that's not what we're doing. But I, the reason I want to call it out is because of what we've talked about and continue to talk about so much, which is. Ideas have consequences, and as John Stone Street says, bad ideas have victims.

And if you look at some of the very stark examples of the brokenness of our culture you, you need to understand that it's not a matter of simply the people at the extreme edges. It is pervasive. Within all kinds of areas within our culture, within educational realities, within medical ethics

and medical practice and choices that we're all likely to run into in one way or another, whether it's regarding an unexpected pregnancy or the end of life issues for somebody that we care about.

It's These, these issues in particular, the issue of the sanctity of life and where we understand that, that our life and our value originates with God and is received by us. It is not created by us. It's not conceived by us, but received as a gift from God as the Bible proclaims at the very beginning.

But we need to understand that these things are, are weaving themselves all throughout our culture. In medicine and in psychology and in all of these kinds of areas, Jim, even in your paper that supports this podcast you call out some things relative to economics, to economic theory and how not only Darwinian thought, but some of the thoughts of Karl Marx and some of the economic systems that.

We see in the world how they have a tendency to attack the sanctity of life and to stratify people into categories. Talk about that for a minute. How does it even show up in the areas of economy and finance that people are not considered valuable equally and, and inherently. So, you know, that, that

[00:45:10] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Thank you for that. So Karl Marx is writing in the context of the Industrial Revolution in some of its earliest and some of its worst manifestations. This is a long time before child labor laws will come to bear, it's a long time before the protections for workers and unionizing around workers and for workers will come to bear.

And so Marx comes along and has this critique, understandably, I'm not a Marxist on any level, but he wasn't the only one saying this. A lot of people were saying this. A lot of churches were saying this, that we're living in a world here where people are being made a means to the end of the world.

Production of society or of that company or of that industry or of that factory or whatever it might be. They're just cogs on the wheel and what we really need to do is abolish all of that get to a classless society where individuals aren't the victims of their employers aren't the victims of the institutions or the factories or Whatever it might be that the industry that they are themselves serving Well, he's at the same time and this is where he gets an enormous conflict inside his own thinking He is as an atheist As a pure materialist, he's working on Hegelian dialectical materialism, which, what that means is that you have a thesis, antithesis that kind of come against each other and create a synthesis that becomes a thesis, antithesis, synthesis.

He thinks that's how history moves forward. And he thinks we're in a class society that's going to have an uprising of the proletariat of the workers and you're going to get to a classless society,

which of course has never happened, but that's the thinking that's going to happen inside all this. And so he's on this one level wanting to liberate workers from being used as tools.

As, as instruments in the hands of nefarious factory owners and industry and all that, all that's inside that. But on the other side, because he has no sacredness of human life from a biblical point of view, he's an atheist, economics are the end by which his version of secular salvation occurs. What he wants is a classless society where everybody prospers economically.

Where economics, he's himself an economist, where the best way to measure flourishing, back to your first question, would be economically, would be financially. And so at the end of the day, if the economic outcome is success, then you are an instrument against what he just said. You are a tool. Your life is a means to the end that can be measured in terms of its quantity of output.

You really are nothing more than what your employer values your work as. So he's got this inherent contradiction. In his thinking here, he wants to liberate you from being a tool in the hands of industry, but at the same time, your life is a tool in the hands of economic forces, and you are a means to the end of producing material output, material outcomes.

Again, both instrumentalist. Neither of them understanding the sanctity of the individual. Had he understood that, then his concerns about child labor and about the abuses there into an early industrial revolution would have, I think, had a much greater outcome, a much more positive outcome, as was the case of those that were in the Christian worldview, championing solutions to those very things.

There were themselves in some of those front lines as well. And some of the early labor reform laws came out of Christian movements and Christian leaders. Some of the early movement toward unions and unionization was advanced by churches and by Christian leaders as well. And so the good side of what Marx was trying to do without the material materialistic end unto itself, that is where his dead end.

winds up. I've seen it in person. I've seen it in Cuba. I've seen Marxist dialectical materialism at work. And at the end of the day, the horrific impoverishment The horrific lack of even basic necessities on an island 90 miles from the United States. The distance in our terms here of Dallas to Waco demonstrates the power of worldview and demonstrates what Stone Street says, what John says, that bad ideas have victims.

We're seeing it in North Korea, we're seeing it in much of China right now, and we're seeing it on our own doorstep in Cuba.

[00:49:28] **Dr. Mark Turman:** a place where his aspiration. That we would become classless ends up enslaving us to be instruments of instruments that we can't get away from is what

happens. Is there a system in which capitalism faces this same threat or is it, it's guilty of this same thing of saying that some people are more important, more valuable than others and capitalism does a version of its own.

Is there a sense in which that economic system that we're more familiar with Attempts to do some of the same thing in attacking the sanctity of all human life. Is there an example of that too?

[00:50:08] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Absolutely. Yeah. Again, at the end of the day, this is why, as you and I have so often said, we need that second pillar to enforce that first one. If the first is biblical authority, the second is personal faith in Christ that transforms us, that enables us. And empowers us to live beyond our will to power and our desire to advance our own agenda, to be our own God.

Capitalism offers yet another path to be your own God, doesn't it? Now it offers a way by which you can succeed financially on a level, materially on a level that is, I think, more effective. That should effective and efficient than the classless Marxist sort of sort of state run economic system is.

You can certainly thrive more effectively in capitalism than you can in communism. As the United States versus Cuba, I think illustrate pretty clearly, but if your ultimate goal is to measure success in material terms, you wind up at the same place. At the end of the day, people are a means to the end of your material advancement now.

Now they are rungs in the ladder that you're climbing. Now you're commodifying people. Now you're objectifying people as a means to the end of your economic outcomes. And so capitalism can be just as abusive. Of those that are using other people as a means to their advancement as can be the case in other systems as well That's why the bible doesn't prescribe a specific economic system.

The bible is not like Sharia law in islam where it prescribes very specific Detailed laws for every dimension of life. The bible doesn't do that The Bible, the Bible offers us principles for living. It offers us transcendent, timeless principles like the sanctity of life, which brought into a specific economic system can make that system far more fruitful and cause those that live in it to be far more flourishing than could be the case with the Bible.

Otherwise, the Amish, for instance, can live in a very socialistic environment, which, if it's empowered by the sanctity of life and a biblical worldview, is a rising tide raising all boats in a way that, that that even advances the well being of individuals by advancing the well being of the community.

On the other hand, when you get down to Cuba, you see that same kind of socialistic environment that advances the government rather than the individual. And it's used as a means to political advancement rather than individual advancement. They're both socialistic in a sense, but they have very different worldviews and therefore accomplish very different outcomes.

We want to choose the biblical worldview as foundational to the economic system that we seek to live in and thrive in and bring about to the larger flourishing. So

[00:52:39] **Dr. Mark Turman:** because of you if I if I follow your thinking right if if we don't bring our conviction about the sanctity of all life into our Understanding particularly in our culture and our involvement in capitalism Then what we will end up with is is we will end up making Our possessions and our sense of financial material success, our idol.

And we'll be back to that place that preacher sometimes come back around the idea that too many of us live by that principle, whoever has the most toys wins at the end, that's that we get down to that kind of simple really shallow way of evaluating our lives and what we've spent, what, what it's cost us is a real valuing of all life.

Because as you said, Everybody, everybody around us was just simply a means to our ambition, a means to our end. So we have to be careful about going

[00:53:30] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Mark, I would add quickly, I was going to say, I would add very quickly, we can even add a Christian layer to that, so to speak. And now we can make God a means to our capitalistic advancement to go to church on Sunday. So God will bless me on Monday, pray. So God will meet my needs be nice to people. So God would be nice to me.

You know, this transaction, like we've talked about before kind of the Greco Roman put a sacrifice on the altar. So the gods will bless your crops. You know, we can be capitalistic even about our relationship with God. And now we're not just using people as a means to our end, we're using God. as a means to our end and using faith as a means to our end.

Over the years that I've pastored, over the 40 years or so, I've seen a lot of folk, unfortunately, that really felt prey to this idea. I think it's a satanic deception. They can't keep you out of church. He'll want you to go to church for the wrong reason. It can't keep you from praying. He wants you to pray for the wrong reason.

Once you just study scripture for the wrong reason, and that is to make the Bible the manual of self advancement and to go to church for what you can get out of it and to trust God so that God will bless you. So we can be in that sense, will to power motivated, even as Christians within a capitalistic or communistic or any other system.

[00:54:44] **Dr. Mark Turman:** I could, I could imagine somebody listening to us right now thinking, okay, Jim, now you've gone to meddling in my world. You've gotten too close to. The reality of some of the ways that my life plays out. We just have a couple of more minutes, but I did want to chase out one, maybe two more questions with you along this very important idea of sanctity of life.

Lots of conversation in our culture today about identity and even movements, what you might call the identity theory. I remember you and I were doing a podcast. probably a year ago with with your friend Chris Brooks. And he said, you know, the questions that people are asking today are in many ways predominantly anthropological questions, questions about what does it mean to be a human?

And what, what should we understand about that? I go back to that conversation. How, how would you say that an understanding of the sanctity of all human life is related to this question of identity, and why is it important for us to have a good biblical answer for what the Bible says when it, when we ask the question, well, who am I?

Why is it important that we have a good biblical answer to that? Starting with you're, you're a sacred individual,

[00:56:01] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, thank you for that. Henry Nouwen speaks of us as the Beloved, with a capital B, in the sense that we are loved by God, regardless of who we are or where we are. That's not only because we are people that God values, even more, it's because God is love. 1 John 4, read. God can't not love you. He loves you because He is love, not because you're worthy of love.

That's the first important plank in building the kind of self esteem the Lord would have us live and having the kind of personal Anthropology that Chris would want to talk about. Understand that God loves you because he's love. Therefore, there's nothing you could do to make him love you any more than he does or any less than he does.

He can't help it. His character requires him to love you. You can't lose that because it's not yours to gain. It's not yours to lose. It's his gift by virtue of his character so we start with that see yourself as the beloved as henry now and says because god is Love and then second come along and understand because that is true measure your worth by his grace The best single piece of advice i've ever received given to me by my youth minister when I was in high school He said always remember the source of your personal worth The source of your personal worth is not in what you do, it's in what Christ has done.

It's not in what the world thinks, it's in what God thinks. apply the sanctity of life to yourself. Not just to the pre born child, or the informed adult, or whatever other context might be in this

conversation. Start with yourself. Understand that Jesus thought you, loved you so much he died for you.

He'd do it all again just for you. Because he is for you. Love, and he loves you as much as he loves anyone who has ever existed. Loves you as much as he loves Billy Graham, Mother Teresa. He loves you even more than I love my grandkids, which is hard for me to imagine. That's how unconditionally he loves you.

See yourself the same way. See yourself through that same prism. Love yourself as he loves you. When Jesus says the second, the great commandments is love your neighbor as yourself. That's what we're talking about now. The more I love myself, the more I have a love I can give my neighbor. The more I'm able to love myself, it's that love is a fruit of the Spirit, as the Holy Spirit enables me to do that, the more I think and love others without needing them to love me, without needing anything from them, without needing what they can do for me.

I'm free to love them however they feel about me. I'm free to love them whether they reject me or not, because I love because I am loved. When we understand that, everything changes. Now we're free to serve God, not so He'll love us, but because He loves us. Now we're free to thrive in our culture. Not to be people of worth, but because we're people of worth. Now we're free to serve others, not so they will serve us, but because Christ has served us. Changes everything. If you remember the source of your personal worth, and know that you are the beloved, because God is love, and He loves you because that's who He is. Okay. Okay.

[00:59:10] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So and really a great place for us to kind of wrap here and to land this conversation. So many places I wanted to go if we had more time, but I will encourage people to pick up this conversation in an even deeper way.

Go to the show notes for this podcast. You can download Dr. Dennison's white paper on the sanctity of human life as essential. To what it means to be Christian in today's culture and to flourish and not only to flourish for yourself, but to help others and to help your community to flourish. One of the thing we wanted to mention before we get away is we are helping in the Dallas area with an event that's coming up on May the second, the event is called the defense of the unborn, how we can be actively involved in protecting those who are not yet born through the changes that are going on relative to our countries.

ongoing difficulties around abortion. So the event will be on Thursday, May the second beginning at 6 30 and ending at eight, it is at the park city's Baptist church, which is where Dr. Denison formerly pastored 15 years ago. I will be emcee for this event and we will have a panel of different folks that will be there.

Dr. Ryan Dennison, who is Dr. Dennison's son and has a PhD in church history and also helps with writing various things for our ministry. Dr. Ryan Dennison will be a part of the panel. We will hear some incredible conversations. A woman whose life was changed when she thought she wanted to experience an abortion through a chemical abortion.

But then had a change of heart. And God worked in a miraculous way. We will also hear some other presentations about how we can continue to contend for life, especially life of the unborn in this day of a very confused thinking and really an attack on many people's lives and many children's lives.

More than 60 million children have already been sacrificed on the altar of abortion. And we are praying that God will bring an end to that plague in our culture and that abortion would be just unthinkable on its own merits in our lifetime. And so this event is intended to help with that. You can find out.

More information at [DOTU 20, 24. com](http://DOTU2024.com) [DOTU 2020, 24. com](http://DOTU202024.com). You can find out about the event. Join us on May the 2nd. If you're in the Dallas area, we would love to have you. And as always, thank you for being a part of our conversation. We hope it's encouraging. Please rate, review us and share this with your friends.

Dr. Denison, we'll see you next time on the Denison forum podcast.