

Resisting Confusion

Isaiah 5:²⁰ Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,

Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness,

Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter:

²¹ *Woe to those who consider themselves wise [are wise in their own eyes] and judge themselves clever. [CSB]*

As I was scrolling through the newspapers on the last week of my LSL it was brought home to me powerfully that we are living in a society where more and more, as in Isaiah's day, evil is being called good, where darkness is being substituted for light, where what is bitter – should cause us grief and sorrow – is called sweet, desirable

A society that is under God's pronouncement of Woe, His declaration of judgment

And so before I start the advertised series on the Creed I wanted to talk to you about the growing deliberate confusion of good and evil, right and wrong, light and dark in our society

So we won't share in it

So we will keep calling good what God calls good, and evil what He calls evil and

So be a different people, the holy people He calls us to be – different in our thinking, different in our choices, and so different in our lives – because we trust Him, our saving God.

A people who can by being different be salt and light, and offer life and hope to a society under God's pronouncement of woe

What is being said

What provoked me was two articles, one in the Australian, the other in the Age

The first was titled

- **'Our brother shot our father dead. It was a heroic act'** From **The Weekend Australian Magazine**

July 2, 2022

It tells the story of Glenn Stratton and the circumstances surrounding and the aftermath of his shooting his father at his father's insistent request. It is a tragic story, being told to argue that the restrictions surrounding accessing help to die under the Victorian Assisted Dying act are too restrictive and not fit for purpose – for the father in the story was not assessed as being likely to die in the following six months, yet he was determined to die on the day of his choosing, just as he had been determined not to access palliative care.

But what struck me was the way this killing was spoken of

[John Fuller, their lawyer "Glenn in my mind acted in a selfless, courageous and compassionate way to assist his father," says Fuller. "He consciously put his father's wishes and needs before his own, knowing the consequences of his actions would likely lead to a significant term of imprisonment."]

Donna [sister] "Glenn is often withdrawn and struggles mentally every day. He struggles to keep what happened out of his mind and this will torment him for the rest of his life. [But] I am so proud of Glenn, the courage he displayed in - helping Dad with his last wish. Whilst legally wrong, it is the most selfless act that anyone could have done, and this has changed him forever."

Searle [brother] “..... my new hero is now my brother, for sacrificing his own freedom in the greatest act of love one can commit!!!”

We are now a society where, in a national newspaper, the demand to have one’s life end at the time of one’s choosing is accepted as legitimate, and it can be said that the violent taking of a life, that being emotionally coerced into doing what should never be done, is a heroic, selfless act, the ‘greatest act of love one can commit.’

Let that sink in – killing another, acquiescing in their wrong demands, is the ‘greatest act of love one can commit.’

That is evil for good, darkness for light.

The second article was one published in the Age looking at Australian responses to the American Supreme Court decision to overturn the precedent set by Roe vs. Wade

It was titled **‘My body, my choice’: Thousands rally in Melbourne to support US abortion rights**

[Again published on July 2nd, but updated to ‘protect the privacy’ of one of the interviewees.] In this article the destruction of a human life by another human was also presented as, well, a good, as a form of salvation from overwhelming circumstances.

You might hesitate to talk about abortion as the taking of a human life, but it is.

From fertilisation the developing embryo is a distinct human life

It is human – with the same chromosomal inheritance as any human, in bodily continuity with the life that will emerge from the womb and grow into an adult, if undisturbed. Each of us was began our lives as an embryo.

It is distinct – it is not part of the mother but a genetically unique human life, affecting its environment from the beginning

And it is alive – that is the problem for many, the fact that it will grow and make more demands on them

Yes, It is dependent and developing – but so are babies, and unconscious or severely ill people are dependent on others

Being a human life dependent on other humans does not diminish your status as human

The more hard headed of those in favour of abortion, like Peter Singer, recognise that the embryo and foetus is a distinct human life. They just reject the idea that merely being human confers any absolute ethical protection for that life – and make its value depend on the value the mother gives to it.

So what is being said, and printed without challenge or qualification, about the destruction of human life

Alex Gordon *“Abortion saved my life,” she said. “I was in an abusive relationship, and if I was trapped with that man, I don’t know if I’d still been here.”*

Taking human life, the killing of another, is talked about in a respected newspaper as a legitimate form of salvation from overwhelming circumstances for which the embryo bears no responsibility

Katie said of her abortion at 18 *“The contraception I was taking failed. It happens, and I wasn’t ready to be a mum.*

“It was not an easy decision, and it’s not one that I made lightly, but I don’t regret that. It allowed me to finish my school, I got to go to university because I had an abortion.”

Taking human life is talked about as legitimate if it allows you to fulfil your personal ambitions,

But more,

That destruction of life is being normalised, presented as a legitimate and appropriate response to a pregnancy that is unwanted. The article continues to quote

Natasha Sangiah, who had an abortion because she did not want a baby at that stage in her life.

“It shouldn’t just be in extreme situations. It should be an everyday decision that we should be able to make,”

That is the society we are in.

Where God has protected human life from the beginning, as sacred, made in His image, declaring to Noah

Genesis 9:6 *Whoever sheds human blood,
by humans his blood will be shed,
for God made humans in his image.*

Where he has forbidden non-judicial killing in society, declaring to His People

Exodus 20:13 *Do not murder.*

We now see the taking of human life – whether our own when we choose, at our own hand or by the action of others; or the taking of the yet unborn human life – as a good, as life enabling, a means to give us the life, the kind of life, we desire, think best for us.

We are calling evil good, darkness light.

We need to be clear about that, and we need to be different.

The Character of the choices being made

So – for clarity – let’s consider some common features of this embrace of death, of choosing killing as desirable and good.

First, the choices of abortion and assisted dying share a common character

The choice is seen as being between a diminished and difficult life without killing and a better life or existence with killing.

There is the choice with euthanasia or assisted dying between pain and limitation and a ‘life’, or existence, or a claimed non-existence that is still the person’s imagined future existence, that is pain free

Or, with abortion, a choice between being encumbered with a dependent child and all that might mean for the woman – whether that is being stuck in an abusive relationship, or being tossed out of home by parents, or an inability to pursue education, or stress and tiredness that seems so hard – between that difficult life or the ability to pursue life where you can be freed from those difficulties

A choice being made, often, in a context of fear and anxiety

In both what is desired, the better life, can be had if they can kill or have someone else kill, take life against God’s command

Where the good life is theirs if they take sovereignty over life and death, theirs or another’s, into their own hands

In that sense the choice of abortion and euthanasia shares the character of all sinful choices but felt with greater intensity in these extreme situations

The same choice was faced by Adam and Eve in Genesis 3

They could have the desirable life, the devil told them, the life where they would be like God, know good and evil

Have their, as Eve considered the fruit that was good for food, a delight to the eyes and desirable for obtaining wisdom, have their physical, aesthetic and intellectual appetites fulfilled

If they disobeyed God and ate

Or continue in what was now seen as a lesser existence, a diminished existence, if they did what God commanded and not eat of that tree

Adam and Eve could have that good life – if they would trust themselves and their own wisdom, and ignore and disobey God's word

If they would reckon evil – believing the devil's lie and disobeying the generous, loving Creator God – good, and good – being faithful to God by obeying His command – evil

And the outcome of their choice – was death

It is the same choice we are all tempted to make whenever what we desire conflicts with what God says

Where God says we should be faithful to our marriage, and we want out

Where God says we should obey our parents, but we think we know better

Where, in Titus, God says we should submit to rulers and authorities, and obey, but we resent their instruction and authority over us

Titus 3: Remind them to submit to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, ² to slander no one, to avoid fighting, and to be kind, always showing gentleness to all people.

Will we say life is founding in trusting our own wisdom, or trusting God's word

It is the choice our Lord warns us against when He calls us to follow Him

Mark 8: ³⁴ Calling the crowd along with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it.

The choice to save our own lives by trusting in ourselves and pursuing what seems best to us, and not trusting the God of life

Whatever the surrounding circumstances, whatever our fears and anxieties, the choice of abortion and euthanasia has in the end this common character

TO trust and obey the good God who says we must not kill, or to trust ourselves and be wise in our own eyes

And, secondly, the idea that killing can be good needs, like the first sin, lies to sustain it.

Consider some of the lies surrounding Euthanasia

You have sovereignty over your own life – not true. You did not give yourself life. God did. Your life is given and sustained by Him. You are His creature entrusted with a life for which you are accountable to Him. He is sovereign, not you

You have a right to have others help you take your life. Not true. No one has a right to demand that others disobey their Creator God to fulfill their own wishes

You will be better off if you take your life. And scripture says it is given to people once to die, and after death face judgment [Hebrews 9:27]. You are never better off if you die in rebellion to the living God

That killing is an appropriate treatment of suffering. No. Treating suffering is the appropriate treatment for suffering, whether that is pain relief, or overcoming isolation and fear. The destruction of the sufferer is not treatment.

Love is facilitating someone's wrong desire. It is never love to help someone disobey God.

What lies sustain Abortion?

Let's just consider a slogan that is presented as if it is an argument - My body, my choice

The first lie is that it is only the woman's body that is involved and so the choice is entirely hers and should be left to her alone.

There is another human life involved, which as a distinct, innocent human life, should be considered and protected.

All of us, as I have said, start life as an embryo, and there was never a time when we were not human and became human.

Our lives have been in seamless continuity from conception. If your mother had aborted you she would have been destroying you.

The body of that distinct human life is also involved, and so thought should be given to the circumstances under which it could be justly destroyed and the protections that life is entitled to.

But all that is obscured by the slogan.

On this lie the nature of the choice the woman makes is then distorted.

It is framed as a choice that only has to do with her, that only her wants, needs, and body are concerned, and that she can make the decision in isolation from the needs of others

This is an unreality

My body, my choice – is then the claim that another human life cannot create an obligation to care for it just by its existence, even if it is closely, intimately, related

That a helpless, dependent human life has no necessary, intrinsic claim on our love or compassion

And where that life's needs conflict with our own plans or needs we can harden our hearts to it, have a right to pass by on the other side without even a twinge of guilt

On this understanding No relationships, with the responsibilities they bring, are obligatory

But God has obligated us to others – you will love your neighbour as yourself – is a command

And relationships with others do create obligations – including bodily ones

Two simple examples

You don't have a choice over whether you wear a seatbelt, nor can you choose to sell your kidney.

And those restrictions on your bodily rights are there for the common good, the good of others – to prevent the burden on the healthcare system of accident head injuries, or the corruption of the supply of transplants

Thirdly, this choice, while allowing those who make it to escape from the real problems they confront, doesn't deal with them at all

Pain needs to be addressed, along with loneliness and isolation

Homelessness, poverty, abuse – are all real and distressing problems that need engagement. While individuals may engage with them society at large has less need to when killing becomes an acceptable solution.

Fourthly, these are choices that harm others.

Sometimes there are obvious victims, like the as yet unborn human whose life is terminated.

Or in the case of voluntary assisted dying, Where there is a right to die that quickly becomes a right to expect others to help me die, and I can demand my rights be met, feel there is a right to ask of another what no-one should ever ask of any – that they kill them; to insist that if they loved, they would kill. And that is to do the other person harm.

The story of Glenn illustrates that.

He has written *For what's in my mind just won't go away*

And will always be with me at the start of each day

He has an image of death seared into his mind from which he cannot escape.

His sister Donna wrote

Donna [sister] "“Glenn is often withdrawn and struggles mentally every day. He struggles to keep what happened out of his mind and this will torment him for the rest of his life.

There is exposure of others to moral and emotional co-ercion – whether of those in the family, or of those in professions that deal with the sick and dying – and it does harm

But the harm to others goes further

The assertion of a radical human sovereignty is in the end isolating and corrosive of the bonds of mutual obligation that holds a society together. It is a recipe for radical loneliness and insecurity. It reinforces the view that you will only be loved, only have your interests considered, while you have value to the other person, and not be loved for yourself, have value in yourself.

Fifthly, it harms those who make that choice

It exposes them to the Judgement of the just God whose will they have ignored and disobeyed

It leaves them with a life of diminished value – they live knowing their life is not sacred, but only has the value others put on it.

With Grief and guilt, for it is hard to deny that you have destroyed a life, even if you felt you had no other choice.

And where killing is normalised as right and good because it is your choice the only path that can address those harms, the path of repentance and forgiveness, is blocked – for you cannot identify what has been done as wrong, give it the seriousness you may feel – you can't name it as the enormity of taking an innocent life;

and you cannot acknowledge the sovereignty of the God who has given life, and whom you have wronged in taking it, the God who can alone forgive you and give you peace

And that perhaps is the greatest harm of calling evil good, and good evil

To think and speak of killing as good and life saving – is wrong

I know I haven't dealt with all the hard cases around abortion and assisted dying, or the circumstances that make these attractive choices to some. My goal has not been to give a full treatment of the ethics of abortion or assisted dying.

The helpfulness of clarity

My goal has been to Draw your attention to the normalisation of killing, of destroying human life, in the way our society speaks of those actions – because we can start to think like our society,

The constant repetition of lies is at the heart of all propaganda because it is effective – if not in changing minds at least in numbing us to the wrong, undermining our moral intuition, and so making the unacceptable easier to accept

We have to resist that

Our understanding of what is right and wrong, good and evil, and Our moral intuition, what we feel to be right and wrong, must be shaped by the word of God

We are to live transformed lives and that starts, says Paul, with the renewal of our minds, changing our thinking as we come to know and love God's will

Romans 12: Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. ² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

So we need to be clear about what God says is good and right, and what He says is wrong

Three reasons why we should not succumb to confusion

Firstly, being clear about sin, about what God says is wrong, keeps the path of repentance, that is the path to peace with God and eternal life, open for others for You can only repent of what you are convinced is wrong, [and many are calling wrong – right. Believers should speak the truth].

Secondly, clarity now will help you when the time comes when you are facing these choices, when you know the anxiety and fear of facing an incurable and painful illness, or a pregnancy that threatens to disrupt and, as you see it, impoverish your life.

When, for example, You have finished your family, and find you are pregnant – cannot bear to think of the tiredness, the disruption, of being drawn back into a stage of life you had thought you had moved on from

Or you or your daughter falls pregnant out of wedlock. It shouldn't happen, but it happens

Or the results of the ultrasound show that your baby has a genetic abnormality, that may or may not be consistent with life

Or all the treatment options are exhausted, and you are facing loss of dignity, and constant pain

It is better to have thought it through now, to be clear on God's will, so that then, in the midst of the darkness of fear and anxiety, you can walk in the light of His word and entrust your life into His hands and honour Him by resolving to persevere in doing what pleases Him, what He says is right – for He can keep you

And that's the third reason for thinking clearly

So that we can live confidently the different lives God calls us to in all circumstances

Our Different lives

Foundation:

Believers in the Lord Jesus have been given and called to a different life, a transformed life, because in the gospel we have had our eyes opened to know and trust the living God

We are people who know God is good and God is almighty

We know His love, and wisdom, and power

And we know this because when the Lord Jesus had a choice – between what He desired and what He feared, between life and death, the shameful death of the cross

He was the opposite of Adam and Eve

He didn't look to His own desires

He said "Not my will, but yours be done"

And that decision was fruitful, not of death and diminishment, but of life, His own exaltation over all, and abundant life, eternal life, for all who trust Him

In being saved through the cross we know that the God who calls us to trust Him and show that in obeying Him is infinitely wiser [1 Cor. 1:18-25]

Infinitely more powerful

Infinitely more loving

Than we or anyone can imagine

Hopefully none of us who confess that Jesus is Lord and that He has died for our sins thinks we know better than God – or when we find ourselves thinking that don't repent with shame and sorrow

Like the Lord in the garden we might and often do struggle in the weakness of our flesh to align our wills with His will, but we cannot doubt the goodness or good purpose of the God who gave His Son for us

And we are different because we know that

As Paul says in *1 Corinthians 6*:¹⁹ *Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,*²⁰ *for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.*

Now this is blasphemy to a culture that worships human autonomy, that says authenticity is the greatest virtue and you must be true to yourself, to being who you choose to be, accountable to yourself

But this is our blessed reality

We belong to Jesus

As you are teaching your children in the New City Catechism. Remember its first question

"What is our only hope in life and death? That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ."

Hear the longer answer to that question from the Heidelberg catechism, from which it is adapted

Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?

∴ That I am not my own,¹
 · but belong with body and soul,
 both in life and in death,²

to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. ³
 He has fully paid for all my sins
 with his precious blood, ⁴
 and has set me free
 from all the power of the devil. ⁵
 He also preserves me in such a way ⁶
 that without the will of my heavenly Father
 not a hair can fall from my head; ⁷
 indeed, all things must work together
 for my salvation. ⁸
 Therefore, by his Holy Spirit
 he also assures me of eternal life ⁹
 and makes me heartily willing and ready
 from now on to live for him. ¹⁰

That is our comfort and hope

Christians live and die as those who belong to Jesus

And it is the reality that informs all our decisions

Work, marriage, how we use our money – and what we do when another human life seems to impose on us, or we feel our own life burdensome

We do what pleases our Lord

And His will is clear. Life is His, is to be reckoned as sacred, and may only be taken as He commands

And that commitment, the different lives we are given and called to

, while being clear about right and wrong, will find expression in living lives of love, and

Love – will not live a selfish life. So it won't, if you're a bloke, use women for pleasure and then abandon them

Love will not live a hypocritical life, where you say the way of life is trusting God and doing His will no matter what the cost, but are then not living that way yourself

Where you, when it comes to something that affects you, are still being wise in your own eyes – disobeying the government where it suits you, or your parents, or harbouring sexual sin

Such hypocrisy is a failure of love, making the life-giving truth unattractive. Love shows how good it is to trust God.

And Love, according to our opportunities and station in life, will engage with the needs that taking human life does not address

the loneliness and isolation of the dying

the challenges faced by mothers – whether financial, or personal – minding children, providing safe accommodation, even opening your home

There are big needs, and so big opportunities to do good

And love will be ambitious to do good Titus 2:14, 3:6-8, for we have been saved to do good

Titus 2: ¹⁴ He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works.

*Titus 3:*⁶ *He poured out his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior*⁷ *so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life.*⁸ *This saying is trustworthy. I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed God might be careful to devote themselves to good works. These are good and profitable for everyone.*

So for example, Some of you might think of training to be involved in Palliative care – at any level

Or using your gifts and skills – in raising money, or organisation, or policy development, to support women through their pregnancy and their as yet unborn babies

Love speaks

Love speaks of sin – clearly, to give opportunity of conviction and repentance

Love speaks of judgment – God says ‘Woe’ and His Word is not expressing an opinion, but a certain outcome

Love speaks of forgiveness Mark 3:28, 1 John 2:1-2, for there is forgiveness says our Lord for all sins

*Mark 3:*²⁸ *“Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for all sins and whatever blasphemies they utter.*

Love speaks in love

As we are ignored, dismissed, misrepresented, grieved there is a temptation to speak angrily, but these are issues that demand

Tears, not tirades

Gentleness not anger

Jesus saves His anger for hypocrites, not for sinners who are lost and blind to what is right, like sheep without a shepherd

Love forgives

We should be individuals and a community that supports repentant sinners because that is what we all are

We don’t think our reputation, as a friend, a parent or a church, is damaged by supporting someone who may have slipped up or made some wrong choices but has repented and wants to follow Jesus

Love prays

For salvation

Fearsome thing to hear God’s Word pronounce Woe over our society, over our neighbours

We need God to open their eyes to their danger, and embolden us to preach

Saving is His mighty work, and we should be asking

Drop off in attendance at the prayer meeting – monthly, cold,

And in many ways symbolic

If only praying for these things monthly – terrible

So I assume you are praying for these things privately, in your growth groups

But it is an important symbolism, and good to do in itself

Says we are moved, gripped by the reality of judgment, and by God’s graciousness in sending His Son into the world

We are confident of the access we have to Him together

Love prays

Isaiah 5:²⁰ Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,

Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness,

Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter:

²¹ *Woe to those who consider themselves wise [are wise in their own eyes] and judge themselves clever. [CSB]*

Our society is increasingly one that substitutes evil for good, and good for evil, that is determined to be wise in its own eyes

WE must not be like them

We must be clear about right and wrong

WE must live different lives, wise lives lived in the fear of the LORD, that trusting awe of the all mighty, all wise, wholly good, rich in mercy and love, living God Father, Son and Spirit

Lives that are lived in love

Love that speaks the truth

Love that seeks to be rich in doing good

Love that seeks the welfare of our society in prayer

I know that there is much more that could be said, and these can be deeply personal issues

Not convinced that abortion and assisted dying – asking someone else to kill you – are wrong, the wrongful destruction of human life – come and talk

If you are struggling with your own hard choices, struggling to trust – come and talk

If you are wondering if you can be forgiven

Or feeling shame at past actions

Know – the living Lord Jesus can forgive all our sins. He has that authority

The Lord endured shame on the cross so that you could come without shame into the presence of the Father, and be without shame amongst His people

And if you want assurance of that – come and talk

OR just angry – that I could speak of these things in this way

Come and talk and work out whether I have taught God's word faithfully, and whether you are angry with me or with God and His claims on your life

He can handle your anger and your questions

He is better and bigger than you imagine

And He is the One with whom in the end you must find peace