

Question: Are there any references in the Bible regarding the Sanctity of Life?

Answer: The Bible defends the sanctity of life from Old Testament to New Testament. While sometimes not as specific as a modern reader might want it to be, there are clear verses that address moral issues that we face today. Throughout most pages of the Bible, there is a definite dynamic theme that pushes for the respect of life. One of the most important passages in the Old Testament regarding the true unique quality of all human life is how we were created. God made human beings in his image, “in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” If God made us in his image and likeness, then it must mean that He had a special plan for us, and that our lives indeed matter. The sanctity of life continues with the commandment from God to Moses that, “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). To not murder means that it is not up to another human being to decide who lives and dies, rather, it is up to the one who created us. God cries out in Genesis 4:10 after Cain killed his brother Abel saying, “your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!”

One of the biggest issues today regarding the sanctity of life is abortion. The Church has come to the fore on the issue and states in the *Catechism* that, “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception.” (2270) The argument that many pro-choice advocates make against the Christian perspective is that there is no scriptural basis for the defense that the sanctity of life begins at conception. The Church disagrees and cites several scriptural verses that ground its teachings that the sanctity of life begins from the moment of conception. Jeremiah 1:5 states that, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.” This verse teaches that even before we were born, God knew us, blessed us, loved us, and called us human beings. God wants us to see that we are not accidents or a speck of dust in the cosmos, but in fact an intricate part of His universal design, intended to be an integral part of the world and Christian community. Another Old Testament verse tells us that God formed us in the womb the way he wanted us to be, “Your hands (God’s) fashioned and made me; and now you turn and destroy me. Remember that you fashioned me like clay; and will you turn me to dust again?” (Job 10:8-10) This passage references Job’s suffering and call to God. Job knows that it is God who creates and God who can destroy. One of the greatest examples of God’s love and uniqueness in us is found in Psalm 139. It states, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body.”

New Testament passages on the sanctity of life are not as clearly defined and referenced. Jesus throughout his ministry preaches peace and love to others. He states at the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 to, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” Jesus says this to challenge men and women of faith. Love is the keyword in this passage. If we love someone, then we obviously would not want to kill them. Jesus knows this and challenges all his followers to love their enemies and propagate the peace he has come to proclaim. Through love, our ability to kill and persecute disappears. Jesus also speaks of revenge for an unrighteous act. Jesus says that revenge is no longer an option. He tells us, “If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.”

It should be stated that while the Bible does promote the sanctity of life, the Law of the Old Testament also allows for people to be punished by death in certain instances. Through the process of time and a growing understanding of God’s revelation, the Church teaches today that the lives of those who are guilty of heinous acts should be preserved because preserving life is, “more in conformity to the dignity of the human person.” (*Catechism* 2267)