

Whatever you fear, love, and trust in the most is your god. If you fear, love, and trust in money, then that is your god. If you fear, love, and trust in the approval of men, then that is your god. Yet, this is what our sinful flesh does by nature. It fears, loves, and trusts in anything but the one true God. It can do nothing else. The epistle to the Hebrews says that the devil kept people in lifelong slavery by the fear of death. Death is a frightful and fearful thing. But the fear of death is nothing other than unbelief and contempt for the one true God who alone has power over death. To fear death is to make death your god. It is idolatry.

This fear of death is in all of us by nature. To some, the fear of death is the bare terror of dying and the judgment that comes after. To others, it is simply the fear of losing the comforts and pleasures of this life. This is why Jesus says that if you love your life, then you will lose it. He is warning us against idolatry. He is calling us to trust in him who has the authority not only to kill our bodies but even to condemn our souls. Trust in him who has every right to damn you forever. Because this is the one true God, unlike any other so-called gods. This is the Lord of life who has overcome death, who does not count our sins against us, but delivers us from condemnation.

The fear of death is a profoundly spiritual thing, which runs deep within fallen human nature. It leads people to false worship and despair. Someone might claim that he has overcome this fear of death. But he has only desensitized himself to it. He has only made himself numb. If a man takes his own life, he isn't overcoming his fear of dying. Instead, he's giving into it. He's making a sacrifice to death, imagining that he can somehow satisfy this cruel god. But as Solomon says in Proverbs 27, the grave and destruction are never satisfied.

Just look at the idol worship described in the Old Testament. The prophets of Baal, in their attempt to prove their religion right, cut themselves with knives as they cried out to their false god. The Canaanites burned their children on the altar of the false god Moloch. This is what the fear of death leads to. The fear of suffering, the fear of missing out on your dreams, the fear of losing money – whatever shape this fear of death takes – only leads people to false worship and despair.

We need to understand that this is what is going on today in our own land. And as your pastor, I need to warn you about something very serious. It is something that is wrapped in political talk, but we as Christians need to know that it is a direct attack, not only against common decency and civil morality, but against the very fabric of our Christian faith.

This November, Missouri voters will be voting on an amendment, which legalizes abortion in our state. It's called the Right to Reproductive Freedom Initiative, a name that is meant to deceive foolish people into supporting the murder of infants. Of course, they say that it wouldn't include those babies that are viable and can survive outside of the womb. But this is just an arbitrary standard meant only to deceive and kill. What child is ever viable apart from the love and care of his mother? The fact is that abortion, at whatever stage in the pregnancy, is the murder of a baby who is still in the womb. It's a disgusting act.

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It's also nothing new. Ancient civilizations had methods of terminating their pregnancies. Women would drink a certain amount of poison, which would kill their children in the womb. The Greco-Roman historian Plutarch talks about this practice in one of his writings. He called it *Pharmakeia* in Greek, a term used several times in the New Testament, which is often translated as sorcery or witchcraft.

There is also a very early Christian document called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, which was meant as a manual for catechizing those who were entering into the Christian church. It's written to Greeks, and it lists sins that they should stop doing if they are going to be Christians. Such sins include pedophilia, fornication, and stealing. It then lists magic and sorcery – *Pharmakeia* – and immediately after this it says, “You shall not murder a baby by abortion nor kill one that has been born.”

Killing unborn babies was clearly a common act conducted by sorcerers. And these sorcerers are expressly condemned in the New Testament. St. Paul lists sorcery as one of the works of the flesh. St. John writes in Revelation chapter 22 that these sorcerers are locked out of the heavenly city, along with the dogs, the fornicators, the murderers, idol worshippers, and all who love and practice lies.

Those who vote in favor of this amendment will be participating in this sorcery. To give your approval to this wicked act is no different than giving your approval to the prophets of Baal and Moloch in ancient Israel. This was one of the reasons God killed almost all of the Canaanites when he gave their land to Israel. It is a demonic act, which no Christian can ever support.

Of course it's a demonic act! Of course the devil would spur on the murder of infants! After all, God told the devil that a baby would bring him down. A child born of a Virgin would destroy the devil's kingdom and crush his head. So it makes sense why the devil hates babies so much. This is why he led Israel into the unspeakable acts of Baal and Moloch worship. It's why he leads self-described Christians into this unspeakable act today. The devil hates babies, because he hates Christ who came to seek and save those who are lost. He doesn't want you to have babies. He wants you to think that having or not having babies is some kind of autonomous choice that you made. And if you do have babies, he certainly doesn't want you to bring them to be baptized and raise them to know and trust their Savior!

This is all part of the fear of death. Poor and naïve women are deceived into killing their offspring, because they are afraid. They are afraid of the responsibility, perhaps afraid of the shame, afraid of being judged, afraid of what they are not able to handle. In other words, they are afraid of death. And which one of us can't see where these women are coming from? After all, this is the same fear of death, which is in all of us by nature. The devil wants to keep us slaves to it. He wants us to sacrifice to this false god of death, imagining that we can somehow satisfy it.

Of course, it won't happen. A woman who gets an abortion never gains true and lasting peace or satisfaction. No, she is left with nothing but a bad conscience. Some of them

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develop a seared conscience, like those evil priestesses who preach in favor of abortion from supposedly Christian pulpits. But I would guess that a large portion of them, if not most of them, are left with a burdened conscience. And few of them have anywhere to turn, no one to tell them that there is a better God than the false god they have been deceived into serving.

This is the only God who is to be feared. He is the only God who has the right to kill and make alive. He had the authority to kill all of mankind in the flood, because they were filled with violence. He had the authority to drown the host of hardhearted Pharaoh in the Red Sea. He had the authority to kill all the priests of Baal and Moloch, and strike the murderous King Herod dead. He will judge the highest judges of this world. He is Lord over all lords. He alone is to be feared. And this one true God is the God who saves. He came into the flesh in the person of his Son, bore the sin and the terror of death, which plagues all people, died on the cross, and was raised from the dead. This is the God who forgives, who shows mercy, who heals the broken heart, gives peace to the burdened conscience, and raises the dead. He isn't like those false and cruel gods. No, he is kind to those who tremble at his Word, and always faithful to his promise.

Another false god described in ancient Israel was Dagon, the god of the Philistines. When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it into their temple and set it before the statue of Dagon. The next morning, they found their false idol facedown on the ground before the ark of God. They then set Dagon back in its place. But the next morning, they found it again, facedown before the ark of God, and this time the false god had its head and hands broken off.

This is what every false god must do before the one true God. Every false God must stop and be destroyed before the face of our Savior. And this is especially true of the false god of death. Death is a fearful thing. The people of Israel had to stay outside the camp for a day if they even touched a dead body. But here comes Jesus, the Lord God in the flesh, entering into a city called Nain. There is a funeral of a young man, the only begotten son of his widowed mother. They are carrying the open coffin. But what does the Lord do? He does what everyone would avoid doing. He touches the coffin. He takes on himself the uncleanness of death, which stains all of us. But at his touch, death stops in its tracks. Death must halt before the one true Lord of all.

And then our kind and compassionate Lord tells the mother not to cry. No polite person would dream of telling a grieving mom to stop crying. But even these bitter tears must stop before the Lord of life.

He then speaks to the dead young man. He says, "I say to you, arise!" He speaks with authority. "I say to you." It's as if he were saying, "Don't listen to any other voice but mine. Don't listen to any other so called god. Don't be deceived or intimidated. Listen to my voice. Because my words are Spirit and Life. So get up. Awake, you who sleep! Arise from the dead! And Christ will give you light."

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Then he gave him back to his mother. This is the kind of God we have. Jeremiah says that Rachel weeps for her children and she can't be comforted. There is no amount of comfort in this world, not even the most thoughtful and compassionate actions, that can comfort a mother who has lost her child. But this is exactly what our God does. He gives him back to her. This is the hope of all who grieve. It is the hope of the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Our God is the God of the living. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. All who trust in him will live even though they die, and all who live and believe in him will never die.

Finally, Luke tells us that the people were amazed. Literally, he says that they were all taken with fear. Fear of whom? Of death? No. Death has met its match. Here is the great prophet promised from ancient times who would crush the head of the devil. Here God has visited his people in the flesh. And as this gospel spreads throughout the world, it continues to shine into the darkness of this dying age.

So dear friends, don't be afraid of death. Don't be fooled into going along with sorcery. Stand up against this false worship. Tell your friends and neighbors and family about the one true God. Confess the name of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He who spilt his blood and gave up his life to save you from sin and all terror of the grave is the same Lord who is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. He is with you, even and especially when you must die. Let us pray:

Once in the blest baptismal waters
I put on Christ and made Him mine;
Now numbered with God's sons and daughters,
I share His peace and love divine.
My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
Thy peace may bless my dying day.

Then may death come today, tomorrow,
I know in Christ I perish not;
He grants the peace that stills all sorrow,
Gives me a robe without a spot.
My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
Thy peace may bless my dying day.

And thus I live in God contented
And die without a thought of fear;
My soul has to God's plans consented,
For through His Son my faith is clear.
My God, for Jesus' sake I pray
Thy peace may bless my dying day. Amen.