

Connect360: Human Dignity

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- *Lesson 5 in the Connect360 unit "Sacred Life: God's Plan for Us" focuses on 1 John 4:19-21.*

Honoring and recognizing the human dignity in others is a daily command for God's children and could look different in various cultures and communities. There is no checklist of actions to follow that ensures we are rightly observing the dignity of others, but there are principles that may help us be more intentional in the way we treat others with dignity.

The first principle is to be aware of who is vulnerable around you, and make sure they are not inadvertently or deliberately being neglected or misused. There is an old philosophical saying called Hanlon's razor that frequently goes something like, "Never attribute to malice something that which is adequately explained by ignorance." It means most actions that would be perceived as malice are likely more accurately done in ignorance or unawareness. You did not intend or mean to be rude or offensive but have nonetheless said or done something unkind or unloving toward fellow image-bearers.

Hanlon's razor also acknowledges that oftentimes even without our being aware, we are capable of inflicting harm (could be physical, emotional or spiritual) on others.

Human dignity commands a certain amount of Christian concern to constantly be mindful and alert to the needs of those who are vulnerable and at risk of their dignity being violated. This requires a posture of listening and humility when talking with those who may come from different backgrounds and experiences than our own, and a deep commitment to affirming the dignity of others even when it may go against

cultural norms.

The second principle is to not conflate honoring human dignity with partisan ideologies. In the ideological culture wars of our day, oftentimes issues tend to quickly become polarized and partisan. Especially when human dignity may necessitate policy interventions, politicians have a habit of quickly stepping in and claiming the issue as “theirs” when, for God’s children, all issues related to the sacredness of human life belong principally to God.

As children of God, we advocate and support the dignity of life not because a particular politician supports it, but because God’s truth tells us to. The Christian witness requires a holistic and total commitment to the kingdom of God above all else.

Finally, the third principle is to be aware that the affirmation of human dignity often means extending beyond verbal approval to physical action. There may be times when words of affirmation may not be enough, and Christ-honoring action is necessary for the believer.

Consider in the biblical examples how the overwhelming majority of the biblical witness involves calls to action, not only affirmation. God certainly calls us to care for the vulnerable and marginalized, but God also tells his children to act on that. Visit the prisoner, feed the hungry, and give clothing to the undressed (Matthew 25:31-46). Human dignity is a spiritual truth we believe that should compel us to act when dignity is not being honored.

Put differently, observing and affirming human dignity is an expression of God’s great commandment.

By Katie Frugé, director for the Center for Cultural Engagement and the Christian Life Commission of Texas Baptists.

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