

HOT TOPICS – ABORTION

“Abortion: A Biblical Perspective” (Gen. 1:26-27; Psa. 139:13-16)

Abortion is one of the greatest tragedies of our time. Around the world, millions of babies have been aborted throughout the last century. In one generation in the USA over 50 million unborn children have been aborted since 1973. In Singapore more than 10,624 babies were legally aborted in 2012 (almost a quarter of all pregnancies). The most dangerous place in the world today for a child is not in some third world slum or war zone but inside a mother’s womb!

The subject is rarely addressed in public debate. Even churches rarely comment on it. Yet, Christians down the centuries have always opposed abortion on Scriptural grounds. One of the earliest extra biblical writings of the NT church from the first century AD was the *Didache* or the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. It categorically states, “You shall not kill the child in the womb or murder a new-born infant.” John Calvin echoed that truth when he wrote,

The foetus, though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being, and it is a most monstrous crime to rob it of the life, which it has not yet begun to enjoy. If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man's house is his place of most secure refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy a foetus in the womb before it has come to light.

When a woman says she have a right to do what she wants with her own body, we must ask: *Where did you get that right?* All rights of humanity are rooted in the rights bestowed by the Creator as revealed in the Bible. There is no other objective source of authority. The Scriptures has a great deal to say about the value of unborn human life. God is against abortion, the true church has always been against it, and we must also be against it in our generation.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF LIFE

(1) God is the Creator who alone has the sovereign right to give and take away the lives of His creatures (cf. Acts 17:28; Dan. 5:23; Job 1:21; Eccl. 3:2, 11). Therefore, to take a life is to strike a blow against God’s sovereignty. It is a defiant attempt to dethrone God by the rebellious heart.

(2) The giving of a child (Gen. 25:21; Ruth 4:13) or the refusal to allow a child to be conceived (Gen. 16:2; 1 Sam. 1:5) is God’s sovereign prerogative. He creates personally every life, “*Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:4). No baby is a mistake but each child is a product of divine purpose to display the glory of God. Therefore, abortion is an anti-God act as it kills God’s sovereign creation.

(3) Every child is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), which means that every human has the capability of rational thought, personality, and moral responsibility. Therefore, each child has great theological significance. There are no mere mortals in the womb! To take the life of another human being is to desecrate that unique image. God expressly declared this correlation when He instituted capital punishment, “*Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man*” (Gen. 9:6). There is a world of difference between an animal and a human. Everyone intuitively recognises and affirms that in our attitudes and conduct e.g. even

the most ardent evolutionist recognises that to run over a cat is very different from running over a child and reacts instinctively to affirm that. The law of most countries reflects that very fact also.

(4) The unborn child is not a “thing” but a person. The Bible never refers to the unborn child as a “foetus” or an “embryo” but a person. From a Scriptural perspective to be pregnant is to be with child, not with that which might become a child. The reality of personhood is never measured in the Bible by age, stage of development, or mental, physical, or social skills. In Luke 1:41 we read of the unborn “*babe*” being involved in spiritual worship, “*And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.*” Such Spirit-filled worship by the babe in the womb is a function of personality.

The child has a distinctively personality from the mother. Elisabeth testified that the babe in her womb acted autonomously in worship, “*For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy*” (Luke 1:44). Interestingly, the word translated “*babe*” here is the Greek word *brepbos*, which is used for a living baby that has been born in Luke 18:15 and 1 Peter 2:2. The Scriptures regards the unborn in the same light as the new born! David affirms he was a sinner in the womb, “*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me*” (Psa. 51:5). Only a person can be a sinner! The Bible makes clear that even before birth, the person exists and is known by God.

Interestingly modern science has affirmed many of these theological principles. The unborn child is not a mere appendage to the mother in the womb. From the moment of conception, he has: his own unique set of genes, his own circulatory system, and his own blood type. Evidence can be seen that the differentiation of the embryonic cells begins *on the day of conception*. Indeed, the unborn can live or die independently of the mother and vice versa. This child is a separate person with a separate identity. It is nonsensical to believe that human personhood is bestowed merely by location - inside or outside the womb. In the face of attempts by abortionists to de-personalise the unborn child as a lifeless amorphous residue, Matt Walsh questions:

Does the unborn human not exist? Is it dead and lifeless? Is it possible for a being to be dead and lifeless with the mere potential to be living and existing? ... Reality dictates that a BEING must always BE from the moment that it IS. Can a being be, but not be at the same time? Can a being be an actual being and a potential being simultaneously?

(5) Life begins in the womb from conception. The Psalmist recalls God’s special design and care for the child in the womb,

For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. (Psa. 139:13-16)

The Psalmist described the person in the womb, as not *something* that might become David, but *someone* who was David! When you touch an unborn child, you touch the personal handiwork of God. There are other passages of Scripture that attest this fact (cf. Job 10:8-12; Isa. 49:1-5; Jer. 1:4-5; Luke 1:40-44; Gal. 1:15). God elected Jacob over his twin Esau while in the womb (Romans 9:11) and the Holy Spirit records the conflict of these two persons in the womb before birth (Gen. 25:22).

We all instinctively recognise that the child in the womb is no mere collection of tissues, like an appendix, but a living person. A pimple is a mass of tissue yet no one believes that there is any moral or ethical issue with the dermatologist removing a pimple by a laser. Even abortionists do not call a dermatologist an “abortion doctor!” Modern scientific advancements such as ultrasound images deliver unquestionable proof that the unborn is a living child. Professor Micheline Matthews-Roth of Harvard University Medical School states, “It is scientifically correct to say that an individual human life begins at conception.”

This reality is reflected in most penal codes where there are particular criminal laws with severe penalties for killing an unborn child in the womb by e.g. physical assault of a pregnant woman. The ultimate moral schizophrenia is that a man can be prosecuted today for killing an unborn child in the womb of a mother, but the same man is granted legal immunity to kill the same infant in an abortion clinic! What is called an “immoral criminal assault” by a criminal court in one context is applauded in the abortion clinic as “pro-choice” moral right in another context. The results are the same but the definition is rearranged to suit the context! Why does the latter come with an escape hatch but not the former? American writer, Doug Wilson comments,

It is as though some horrible event happened in Canada that caused a stream of refugees to head for our border, and someone with very precise legal reasoning skills developed the schizophrenic policy of shooting the refugees on their side of the border, but demanding the ultimate in medical care for them if they managed to make it across the border alive. You can learn a lot of amazing things in a Harvard grad class.

Even abortion advocates struggle to formulate consistent terms in this debate. They talk about “termination” which implicitly refers to the termination of a life. You don’t terminate inanimate objects! So what precisely is being terminated?

(6) The taking of the life of a human by another human is clearly limited in Scripture to very specific circumstances e.g. warfare, capital punishment, self-defence etc. Abortion is not a justified ground in Scripture for taking human life. Biblical theologians recognise that abortion is murder i.e. unjustified killing of a human life. This is a transgression of the sixth commandment, “*thou shalt not kill*” (Exod. 20:13). The penal code for killing the unborn child in the womb in ancient Israel reflects God’s view of the sin of abortion,

If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life... (Exod. 21:22-23)

The fact that “*life for life*” is the judgment for even the unintentional killing of the unborn demonstrates how sacred the life of the child is to the Lord. John Jefferson Davis notes of the

Israel penal code, “far from justifying permissive abortion, in fact grants the unborn child a status in the eyes of the law equal to the mother’s.”

(7) The devil has a murderous spirit and murderous agenda, “*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning...*” (John 8:44). In particular the Bible records the devil has inspired campaigns to murder children. He famously did it in Moses’ day and he did in the time of Christ. Many abortion procedures involve tearing a baby apart limb from limb while still in the womb.

The killing of children has always been part of pagan religions but it has never been part of biblical Christianity in the OT or the NT era. God has always had a special love and care for children (cf. Matt. 18:10; 19:14). The Bible informs that He sends them as a blessing into homes, “*Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward*” (Psa. 127:3).

RAPE/INCEST

A common objection to those who uphold the biblical position on abortion is to raise the thorny issue of rape and incest. The argument is that it would be unfair and unwise to expect a pregnant woman to carry a baby conceived in those circumstances. The weakness in such an argument is the assumption that abortion would be the best solution and, indeed, the only solution.

The greatest response to that is to point out that the biblical principles set out above hold equally true in those scenarios. The nature of the child has not changed. Would we think it right to kill an infant conceived through rape or incest after it is born? You do not deal with the consequences of one sin by committing another. The unborn child does not deserve to bear the punishment of the sins of the biological father, “*The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin*” (Deut. 24:16). The baby is not the criminal here. The woman who has been attacked has no more justification for violating the life of the unborn child than the man who raped her!

Furthermore, there is no empirical evidence that proves with any certainty that a woman would feel emotionally better by an abortion. Some studies by pro-life groups have concluded that abortion merely adds to the trauma of rape victims¹. There are other solutions such as adoption that can be utilised in extreme cases like this. Simply creating a second victim never undoes the damage to the first.

DISABILITY

Another pro-abortion argument is that if an unborn child has a disability it should be aborted as this would not be fair on the mother or even the child. However, we are not free to take the life of such a child just because it is not convenient to have a baby. All pre-natal human life is fully human and therefore precious to God.

A disabled unborn child is the product of the fall. The mother and father sinned in Adam and are responsible for the consequences of sin that has affected their unborn child. It would be an additional sin to murder the child that their sin caused to be that way. God sovereignly ordained that suffering would be the part of every one of us including disabled children, “*And the*

¹ See *Why ProLife?* (2012) by Randy Alcorn and *Victims and Victors* (2000) by Sobie Reardon Makimawhya

LORD said unto him, *Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?* (Exod. 4:11) This is for His glory (cf. John 9:3). We have no right to rebel against God's sovereign choice and attempt to destroy what He has created.

There is a moral conundrum here for those who advocate aborting disabled children. For if it is wrong for a disabled child to be born it is surely just as wrong to allow them to live. By killing an unborn child we open the door to those who advocate killing those who are born. Furthermore to abort a disabled or deformed child in the womb is a terrible slur on disabled children who live godly and meaningful lives. It is also an insult to those parents and friends whose lives have been blessed in bringing up such children. A mother who aborts a disabled child in the womb would miss out on an opportunity to let God's power and grace be manifest in her family by her sacrificial *agape* love for another person (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7-10).

MOTHER'S LIFE IN DANGER

There is one ground that most Protestant theologians recognise as justifiable grounds for medical intervention to save the life of the mother. This is when the mother's life is at grave risk from the unborn child such as an ectopic pregnancy or surgery to prevent the spread of uterine cancer. The argument is that the unborn child has no more right to take the life of the mother in this scenario. Some will go as far as to say that she has the right of self-defence. We are biblically called to be pro-life for the lives of mothers also so she can live and take care of her existing family.

Although the medical procedures may be similar to those used in abortions, this is not a morally equivalent context, as the intervention by the doctors is not directly intended to kill the child but to save the mother. The tragic side effect will likely be the death of the child. This is consistent with the pro-life ethic. However, even then the goal should be to preserve the lives of both the mother and the child, if at all possible.

The statistics on this issue show this is a very small area of all pregnancies. The former United States Surgeon General, Dr. C. Everett Koop stated publicly that in his thirty-eight years as a paediatric surgeon, he never came across one scenario when it was clear that the unborn child's life had to be taken in order to save the life of the mother.

Any parents in such a scenario who are faced with such a difficult decision should only do so after ascertaining all the facts, and then after much prayer and seeking godly counsel. However, no one should dictate to them how they should ultimately decide. The parents must finally make a decision according to their conscience and then live with the consequences of the decision they have made. Some may choose to go ahead with the pregnancy and leave God to determine the consequences whereas others may feel justified in medical intervention. Both decisions honour the sanctity of life – either the mother's life or the child's life.

CONCLUSION

Some has said that "The hallmark of a dying Society is one in which its people embark in killing their young." As Christians living in a secular society, we have the biblical duty to try to persuade others that the laws of our nation should be based on the moral standards of God's Word (cf. Acts 24:25; Luke 3:19).

Abortionists euphemistically call themselves "Pro-choice" but even they recognise that we are not permitted to choose *anything* we like in this world. There are moral boundaries that

limit our choices. All laws relating to abortion are based on moral values. These must be objective and consistent. One poet summed up the moral contradiction at the heart of this debate,

***And if I want my baby, my baby is a person.
And if I don't want my baby, it is not a person.
If I want her, it's illegal to kill her.
If I don't want her, it's legal to kill her.
Therefore, the personhood of my baby and her right to be protected under law are defined
by my sovereign desire.
The might of my will is the right to kill.***

Advocating abortion also creates all kinds of moral dangers for a society. Granting the wish to kill within the womb leads logically to having to grant the desire to kill outside the womb. Today it is the unborn in the womb. Tomorrow it will be the disabled, elderly and anyone else regarded as socially unacceptable and not worthy of life as “non-persons.” Some are already advocating this logical extrapolation. Atheist professor at Princeton, Peter Singer openly advocates infanticide of disabled newborn children:

Human babies are not born self-aware, or capable of grasping that they exist over time. They are not persons.....The life of a newborn is of less value than the life of a pig, a dog, or a chimpanzee.²

Abortion is the immoral killing of the defenceless and the innocent in the womb. It must be biblically condemned. It is designed to take life and not merely prevent life occurring. God hates the shedding of innocent blood (Prov. 6:16). Any woman who has had an abortion will have to face God in eternity with the blood of her child on her hands, “*So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God*” (Rom. 14:12).

A woman who has an abortion has to endure the emotional, spiritual, and physical consequences of taking the life of her child for the rest of her days. Studies show that the guilt can be overwhelming. Abortion is a terrible sin, which must be repented of. However, it is not the unpardonable sin. King David murdered another man and found forgiveness after he truly repented. A woman who has had an abortion can deal with the guilt of her past by following in David's footsteps, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9).

² Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, (Cambridge University, 1979), 122-123