
A Biblical Perspective on Abortion

This statement on a Biblical perspective on abortion was adopted by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God on August 6, 1985.

Just a few years ago the term abortion in law implied criminality in producing miscarriage. An abortionist was one who practiced producing criminal abortions.

Today when the word abortion is used, it almost immediately brings to mind the legal practice of destroying unborn children. Even though abortion on demand has been legalized, it is still immoral and sinful.

Change of Medical Definitions

Proabortionists have done everything in their power to promote abortion on demand. They have adopted expressions by which they describe the unborn child and the abortion process to try to make the practice respectable.

Dr. C. Everett Koop was surgeon-general of the United States. When he was surgeon-in-chief of the Children's Hospital of Pennsylvania and professor of pediatrics and pediatric surgery at the School of Medicine, the University of Pennsylvania, he wrote: "We who as a people always knew that abortion was the killing of an unborn baby were brainwashed to believe that the destruction of the 'products of conception' or the destruction of a 'fetus' is not the same thing as killing an unborn baby. Traditional medical definitions were deliberately changed in order to do away with our moral repugnance toward abortion."¹

Proabortionists refer to the abortion process as "interrupting" rather than terminating a pregnancy. They talk of "evacuating the contents of the uterus" or of removing "postconceptive fertility content." They refer to the unborn baby as "potential human life" when it is obvious the organism is human and alive before birth. Human life is potential only before the male sperm and female ovum join to form a new living human being.

Christians must not be deceived by inaccurate, deceptive medical terminology. They must be guided by the principles and precepts of Scripture.

What the Bible Says About the Unborn Child

While some have tried to justify abortions before the unborn child can sustain life outside the womb, the Bible does not make such a distinction in the life process. The term viable fetus may properly indicate, as a scientific fact, the time when life can be sustained outside the womb; but it does not indicate that life as a person fails to exist prior to that. Those who may be tempted to accept abortion at some early stage just because it is declared legal would find it helpful to consider several Biblical truths.

1. The Bible recognizes that a woman is with child even in the first stages of pregnancy.

When the virgin Mary was chosen to be the mother of Jesus, this announcement was made to her: "Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son" (Luke 1:31). The angel then informed Mary that her cousin Elisabeth was pregnant. The words used were: "She hath also conceived a son in her old age" (Luke 1:36). Scripture makes it clear that in the prenatal phase John the Baptist was recognized as a son even though it was 3 months before the time of delivery.

In Luke 1:41,44 John before birth is recognized as a "babe." This translates a Greek word used of children both before and after birth (Acts 7:19). The words "she hath also conceived a son" indicate Jesus was recognized as a son though Mary's pregnancy was in the earliest stages.

The Bible always recognizes the prenatal phase of life as that of a child and not as a meaningless product of conception. There is no distinction made in the value of life between the born and unborn child.

Even when pregnancy in Bible times was due to an illicit relationship, the quality of that life was not questioned. The daughters of Lot were pregnant by incest (Genesis 19:36), but this was not considered a condition that called for abortion. Bathsheba recognized she was pregnant by adultery (2 Samuel 11:5), but this was not viewed as being encumbered with a mere appendage of matter to be removed from the mother's womb.

John Calvin made a very significant observation concerning abortion in commenting on Exodus 21:22,23: "The fetus, though enclosed in the womb of his mother, is already a human being, and it is a monstrous crime to rob it of 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 fetus in the womb before it has come to light."²

2. The Bible recognizes that God is active in the creative process of forming new life. To abort a pregnancy is to abort the work God is doing.

Concerning Leah, the wife of Jacob, Scripture indicates, "When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb.... So Leah conceived and bore a son" (Genesis 29:31,32, NKJV).

When Job compared himself to his servants, he asked, "Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One fashion us in the womb?" (Job 31:15, NKJV).

In pointing out God's impartiality Job said: "Yet He is not partial to princes, nor does He regard the rich more than the poor; for they are all the work of His hands" (Job 34:19, NKJV).

Isaiah speaking for God wrote: "Thus says the Lord who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you: 'Fear not, O Jacob My servant' " (Isaiah 44:2, NKJV). And again, "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: 'I am the Lord, who makes all things' " (v. 24).

David summed it up well when he wrote: "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. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:13-16, NIV).

Concerning Psalm 139:13-16, Donald Shoemaker wrote: "This passage can only evoke holy caution and respect for unborn life. God is at work, and as we observe we must worship, for the place where we stand is holy ground. Such respect for the divine origin of life is not to be found among the proabortionists. Theirs is an unholy intrusion into the divine laboratory to interrupt and to destroy the handiwork of the blessed Creator! God loves the unborn. This psalm will never let us forget it."³

The omniscient God who knows what happens to persons after their birth also knows what happens to these persons before birth. He is creatively active in the birth process, and to terminate a pregnancy is to destroy the work of God. Abortion is evil man's defiance of the Almighty. It is an indication of the depths to which a consenting society has fallen.

3. The Bible recognizes that God has plans for the unborn child. Only He knows the potential of this new life.

When God called Jeremiah to his prophetic ministry He indicated the ordination was prenatal when He said: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; and I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5, NKJV).

When Zechariah the priest was ministering at the altar of incense, an angel announced that his wife Elisabeth would give birth to a son who should be called John. Then it was revealed that God had definite plans for this child. He was to be a forerunner of Jesus (Luke 1:11-17).

To destroy the life of an unborn child is flagrantly to disregard the plans God has for that life. It robs the unborn person of the privilege of choosing to be an instrument of God's design.

4. The Bible recognizes that God is sovereign in all things, including the quality of life of the unborn child.

When people reject God, eventually they make human life relative. Some are considered worthy of life; others are considered expendable.

A study by Dr. Leo Alexander of Harvard University, a psychiatrist at the Nuremberg trials for Nazi war criminals, showed the beginnings of the holocaust were found in the belief that some human life did not deserve to exist.

As a result of this belief they killed the unwanted, the lame, the crippled, the retarded, and eventually even disabled veterans who served Germany in World War I. From there it was just a small step to the holocaust.⁴

When people set themselves up as God to determine if a life is worth living-whether before or after birth-they are rejecting the sovereignty of the Creator of all things.

There are things finite humans cannot understand. God's ways are above man's ways. While today's medical technology makes it possible to know that less than desirable conditions sometimes exist in unborn children, it is important to remember they are still God's creations.

When Moses complained of his lack of eloquence, God said, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?" (Exodus 4:11, NKJV).

When man establishes criteria for what constitutes unworthy lives, he is invariably wrong because he fails to recognize the plan and purpose of God. Who but God knows whether someone destroyed in the holocaust might not have discovered a cure for cancer. Who but God knows what blessing millions of children killed before birth might bring to improve the quality of life.

In the course of an impressive address before the House of Representatives, the following quotation was included from a person who was born as a result of a rape: "Some people disclaim their natural habitat. I always name my origin. It didn't hold me back, and neither has my color. I was born in poverty. My father raped my mother when she was 12. Now they've named a park for me in Chester, Pennsylvania."⁵

The quotation was from Ethel Waters who ministered to millions through the medium of gospel song. Had abortion been legal at that time, quite possibly someone would have suggested it. If this had happened, the world would have been much poorer. The work of evangelism would have been deprived of a great gospel singer.

When Pregnancy Threatens the Life of the Mother

In earlier years mothers sometimes died as a result of pregnancy. Today because of advances in medical science, this condition rarely occurs. Should such an isolated situation develop, and if after prayer for healing God in His wisdom does not miraculously intervene, the individuals involved would need to look to God for further guidance. The diagnosis of attending prolife physicians will be helpful in arriving at the proper conclusion.

God's Attitude Toward Killing Innocent Persons

God's Word is very explicit concerning the taking of innocent human life. "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13, NKJV) is not only one of the Ten Commandments, but also a dictate which reoccurs throughout Scripture.

God instructed Moses to set a law before the Children of Israel which brings the sanctity of life of unborn children into focus. "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, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Exodus 21:22-24).

Dr. Stanley M. Horton, former professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, stated the opinion of many when he wrote the following concerning Exodus 21:22-24: "The situation here is of two men who are fighting as a result of a quarrel. The same Hebrew verb is used in Exodus 2:13 of the two men Moses saw fighting. Somehow as they are fighting, they hit a pregnant woman, and her child 'comes out,' that is, is born prematurely. If there is no 'mischief,' no 'mortal accident,' to the child or the mother, then the man who struck the woman must pay a fine as determined by her husband and ratified by the judges. But if there is 'mortal accident' causing the death of the child or the mother, then the law of a 'life for a life' takes over.

"'Her fruit' is the Hebrew yeladeha, translated 'her children' in this same chapter (v. 4), as well as everywhere else it occurs in the Old Testament. The plural is used here because it would not be known in advance whether more than one child was in the womb.

"'Mischief,' Hebrew ason, is used in Genesis 42:4 where Jacob is afraid something might happen to Benjamin (as he thought had happened to Joseph), that is, death. (See also 42:38; 44:29.)

"It is clear from this that the fetus is recognized as a child and has the same rights as older children."

God's attitude toward the killing of innocents is clear. Except in capital punishment decreed through the judicial process (Numbers 35:12) or protection of property at night probably involving self-defense (Exodus 22:2), no one is guiltless who takes the life of another.

Concerned Christians and the Abortion Issue

When the evil of abortion on demand for convenience is considered, it is obvious concerned Christians must act as they would in the case of other evils of commensurate magnitude. There are steps Christians can take to restrain and hopefully reverse immoral trends.

1. Christians should pray earnestly for divine intervention in the affairs of men. This would eliminate degrading national moral standards and consequently the laws that permit evils such as abortion on demand for convenience.

The power of a spiritual awakening can be seen in history. France and England both had revolutions in the 18th century. France had a political revolution which resulted in untold suffering and bloodshed. England had an industrial revolution. The difference between the two is that England enjoyed a spiritual awakening. It elevated the quality of life in the land, possibly averting a violent revolution such as France experienced.

A spiritual awakening in our country could have a salutary influence on today's moral climate. Not only would the sanctity of human life be honored, but moral standards in general would be lifted.

2. Concerned Christians should help provide for Biblical moral instruction in all possible forums. Instead of the standards of the church being influenced by humanistic and even atheistic philosophies, a church thoroughly rooted in the eternal truths of God's Word can lift the standards of society. When people accept the absolutes of Scripture rather than the relative values arising from speculative human reasoning, all levels of living will be greatly improved.

When disregard of Biblical standards of righteousness is recognized as sin, when refusal to acknowledge the sovereignty of God is recognized as sin, when rejection of Jesus' salvation and lordship is recognized as sin, the condition of society will be vastly improved. Then problems such as abortion will be greatly reduced.

Biblical instruction must be given its proper emphasis both in the church and the home. Believers must be so thoroughly rooted in Scripture that they can give a reason for convictions based on God's Word.

3. Concerned Christians should counsel those with unwanted pregnancies about the alternative of adoption. They should support Christian agencies. They should lovingly assist in every way possible those wishing to give their children up for adoption. Such parents find themselves in a very confusing role.

4. Concerned Christians should actively support prolife legislation and oppose any legislation designed to destroy the moral fiber of society. As citizens of our country they should express their opinions to governmental representatives. They should become influential in determining the kind of people who will be placed in public office. They should encourage committed Christians to seek positions of influence.

5. Concerned Christians should compassionately minister to those who suffer overwhelming remorse and guilt from having had, or having participated in producing, abortions. These people need to be reminded that when they confess their sin to God, He forgives and cleanses. They need to be reminded that Jesus said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). They need the prayerful, moral support of those who are strong in the Lord.

¹C. Everett Koop, "A Physician Looks at Abortion," in *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, ed. Richard L. Ganz (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1978), p. 8.

²John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, trans. Charles William Bingham, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950), 3:41-42.

³Donald Shoemaker, *Abortion, the Bible and the Christian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976).

⁴Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1979), p. 106.

⁵Thomas J. Bliley, Jr., of Virginia, *Congressional Records*, Extension of Remarks (Washington, D.C., House of Representatives, July 25, 1983).

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