

CHAPTER 5

Abortion: A Thoughtful Analysis of a Volatile Issue

CULTURE SHOCK

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO TODAY'S MOST DIVISIVE ISSUES

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CHAPTER 5

ABORTION:

A THOUGHTFUL ANALYSIS OF A VOLATILE ISSUE

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me,
and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of
heaven belongs to such as these.”

Matthew 19:14
Jesus of Nazareth

Friday, 4:57 p.m.

It’s almost quitting time. Home is on the horizon, and dinner with the family is calling you. You are at your desk, sorting stacks and slipping a few items into your briefcase for light reading later, when there’s a light tap on the door. It’s Debbie. She’s twenty-nine years old, an up-and-coming executive in your company. She’s on the fast track, demonstrating huge potential. She sees your briefcase, hesitates, and then asks, “Can I get a moment? Sorry to keep you, but I need to ask you something.”

You stop what you’re doing, set the briefcase aside, and invite her to sit down. The moment she asked for ends up being forty-five minutes long. Through her tears Debbie begins to talk about the man in her life whom she thought was going to be the answer to her prayers. He suddenly left her after discovering she is three months pregnant with his child.

She mentions, in passing, her career goals and schedule. She confesses she’s never felt so alone. The loss, confusion, anger, and shame seep through her words. She didn’t expect to be in this place. She doesn’t know what to do. She looks at you through her tear-filled eyes and says, “I know you’re a good person. And you’re my boss. What should I do?”

What would you tell Debbie—and why?

After Church

June is forty-one years old. You really like her. She’s been a Christian for about eighteen months and is still refreshingly rough around the edges. She doesn’t know much about social graces and casually brings up some subjects usually not talked about in mixed company. She’s a little bit loud. She has four children from two former relationships and has come to faith from a difficult drug background.

But it's so exciting to see what's happened to her life! She's really changing and growing spiritually. She has a great job now and is able to support her kids by herself.

In a somewhat inappropriate way you've come to expect from her, she approaches you in a crowded hallway and begins speaking as you count the dozen or so people who can't help but hear the conversation. She says, "Look, I need to ask you a question. You remember when my ex-husband came back and we tried to work it out, but then he left for good? While he was here . . . I found out just yesterday I'm pregnant. I have four kids, I sure can't handle five, and I can't miss a day of work. You've been a Christian a lot longer than me. What should I do?"

What would you say to June—and why?

Tuesday, 6:28 p.m.

You sit down to eat dinner with your family. Wow! The day is over; it's great to be home, and the food before you smells and looks delicious. As you and your family pray over the meal, your cell phone rings softly, but you look down and silence it because you're not going to take the call right now. Within seconds a text pops up from Amy that says, "I really need to talk to you tonight."

Amy . . . she is a sixteen-year-old girl; you've known her since she was four years old. She's the daughter of great family friends you vacationed with earlier this year. You've watched her grow up and become this amazing student and beautiful young woman. She has a volleyball scholarship ahead of her, and she just said, "I need to talk to you." You can't help but think, *This can't be good.*

She comes over after dinner, and you go into the study and close the door. After a little catch-up time, she begins to relive the moment she was so excited about three months ago when that guy who is so popular and so cool asked her to go to the prom. The dream of going out with a super-good-looking athlete turned into the nightmare of her life when she became a victim of date rape.

But Amy felt so overwhelmed and so ashamed she didn't know how to handle it. She just shut down. She told no one—not her mom, not her dad, not her sister or a girlfriend. But because you've been her small-group leader in high school ministry at church, she considers you a safe confidant. She's terrified because she has now missed two periods and suspects she's pregnant. She's too scared to get a pregnancy test and has been blaming her regular early morning upset stomach on nerves. With tears flowing down her cheeks her cracked voice pleads, "What can I do? I mean, this will ruin my parents' reputation. My dad is a leader at the church. My mom teaches women's Bible studies."

What would you tell Amy—and why?

These are not imagined unplanned-pregnancy scenarios—they are real stories that represent that daily crucible of doing life with Christ. And regardless of where you find yourself landing on the issue of abortion, it's one of the most divisive issues in America today.

Abortion is not just a topic out there for casual discussion. There are always lives at stake. It's not like this is simply a theological issue. The fact is that 65 percent of all women who have abortions self-identify as Christians.¹ I mean, abortions are a reality inside all kinds of churches. So what would you say to a person with an unplanned pregnancy who is considering an abortion? How do you treat someone who has had one? Not just what do you think, but what do you believe and why?

When this topic comes up, usually it's like missiles being fired between two groups who can't even begin to hear each other. The atmosphere and attitudes are characterized by heat, anger, threats, and often violence. In this chapter, we're going to take a different approach. Regardless of your background, history, or past perception, I'm going to ask you to lean back, take a deep breath, and let me shed some light, not heat, on this divisive issue.

To do that, let's begin with some research. As objectively as possible, we will examine both sides of the issue. We will then evaluate where they have been and where they are now and look at the evidence that supports each position.

I can almost guarantee that in the next few years you will find yourself answering painful questions about abortion from someone you care about deeply. I also realize that some reading this may have already had an abortion and now are wondering, *Where is God in all this?*

Understanding the Pro-Abortion/Pro-Choice Positions

Abortion today rarely spends much time out of the headlines. The legal struggle continues to unfold. But it's difficult to understand where we are if we don't have a sense of the history of abortion. Abortion has been with us for a very long time.

If we travel back a decade and a half, the lines between the pro-abortion and the pro-life movements were plainly drawn. The information from each side developed at the time addresses the issue in a clear, understandable way.

Planned Parenthood spelled out three basic premises that motivated their work.²

Premise 1: It's not a baby; it's a fetus. The literature spoke almost exclusively about the fetus rather than a baby. It spoke very little about pregnancy and focused largely on the woman's needs and emotions and the impact of an unwanted pregnancy on her career, her future, and her body.

Premise 2: Unwanted pregnancy puts women at risk. The literature stressed the anguish, pain, and difficulty that an unwanted pregnancy brings into a woman's life. It focused on the situations of rape, incest, and abnormal stress and highlighted the dangers of pregnancy in older women. It justified "abortion on demand" because of those reasons.

Premise 3: The woman is more important than the fetus. Most importantly, there was a clear distinction between the *who* of the woman and the *what* of the fetus. It was made clear that the woman is a “who,” or a person, and the fetus is a “what,” or a mass of tissue. Based on this tenet, the logical conclusion is that a woman should be able to decide when, where, and how to deal with a mass of tissue inside her own body.

Now, if we are going to move from deadlock and violence to dialogue on this issue, we need to understand this pro-choice presupposition:

IF a fetus is a mass of tissue (not unlike an appendix or a wisdom tooth), and IF you believe this with all your heart . . .

THEN the removal of that mass of tissue, if it is inconvenient, makes perfect sense. A woman has the right to do with it as she wishes.

Any understanding of the pro-choice opinion must begin with an understanding of the presupposition.

Understanding the Anti-Abortion/Pro-Life Position

Pro-life literature from crisis-pregnancy clinics and other pro-life organizations have two basic premises upon which their beliefs are based.³

Premise 1: Life beings at conception. The pro-life literature states that life begins at conception. The focus, then, is on the need, rights, and welfare of the fetus. The life, the fetus, is almost always called a baby or pre-born baby. The presumption is based on a singular logic: that from the time of conception, nothing else is added. The embryo simply begins a process of development—a process, in fact, that continues for a number of years outside the womb.

Premise 2: Unborn babies are fully human. The literature holds that at conception, this life is a human being—not a fully developed human being, but human nonetheless. There is, in fact, no difference between a five-, six-, or eight-month pre-born baby and a newborn infant except location. To kill either is to kill a human being.

All the debates, the speeches, the fighting, the emotions, the hatred, the gesturing, and the protesting come down to one simple question: Is the fetus fully human life, although not fully developed, or is the fetus a mere mass of tissue in the mother’s body? To address this question, we need to understand this pro-life presupposition:

IF a fetus is a pre-born human being (not fully developed) . . .

THEN it must be protected from externally caused death, under the same ground rules that prohibit all taking of innocent life.

These were the battle lines years ago; the issue was focused primarily on whether a fetus was in fact a baby or not. I have a statement from Planned Parenthood that specifically states, “To call the fetus a human being is arrogant and absurd.”⁴

That Was Then—What about Now?

Technology transformed the argument completely. The sonograms of the past were crude compared to today’s technology. Images then were black-and-white and grainy, and you could barely make out the form of a baby moving in there.

But technology moved up to 4D ultrasound. The image is no longer something that vaguely looks like a baby. Today’s ultrasound images reveal an amazing look at a child moving, kicking, and sucking its thumb. The details are startlingly clear very early in the pregnancy. Even in the San Francisco Bay Area (one of America’s most liberal cities), over 85 percent of all women who see this image when they have an unplanned pregnancy decide to carry the baby to term.⁵ This technology has transformed the abortion debate.

Confronted with photographic proof that the old premise (the fetus is a mass of tissue, not a baby) was invalid, the pro-abortion/pro-choice side began to shift their messaging and arguments. Notice the dramatic shift in the following excerpt from current literature published by Planned Parenthood.

We all have many important decisions to make in life. What to do about an unplanned pregnancy is an important and common decision faced by women. In fact, about half of all women in the United States will have an unplanned pregnancy at some point in their lives. About four out of ten women with an unplanned pregnancy decide to have abortions. Overall, more than one out of three of all US women will have an abortion by the time they are forty-five years old.⁶

Today, when you read the extended literature from Planned Parenthood, they no longer use the term *fetus*. They talk about a baby or a pre-born baby. The message is, “This is the new normal. It’s unfortunate. We wish there weren’t so many abortions, but for very specific reasons, we need to keep this a real option for women.” The focus in the literature now makes the central issue in abortion simply a matter of timing, viability, and what method you use. They recognize and admit they are dealing with babies, and the rationale for abortions has shifted to emphasize the right and well-being of the mother.

The Guttmacher Institute is a national and international authority on abortion research, originally founded as a wing of Planned Parenthood. Much of their work expresses the core apologetic of the message of Planned Parenthood. Their language states, “The reasons women give for having an abortion underscore their understanding of the responsibilities of parenthood and family life.” In other words, the decision to have an abortion means being responsible and acting with full understanding of the impact. As an explanation for why they have exercised their “right” to abortion, three out of four women cite their concern for taking care of another person in the family. Three-fourths also state they can’t afford

another child, and three-fourths say the child would interfere with their work, their school, or their ability to care for a dependent. And over half claim abortion is necessary because they are unmarried and do not want to be a single parent or the pregnancy is causing conflict with their husband.⁷

Whether the above sounds reasonable or irrational to you, I want you to take a deep breath while I do my best to reframe the abortion debate for today. I'm going to walk through both sides of the debate, using each side's materials as the basis for our discussion. Then I will ask you to walk with me on a journey to examine medical evidence and the history of abortion (which may surprise you) and look at what God says from Scripture.

Before we go on, let me remind you of the three stories I shared in the beginning of the chapter. Although the names were changed to protect the identities of those people, the questions and decisions were real. How we answer the genuine questions of people in crisis is a real issue, a core matter of life for all people, but especially the followers of Christ.

Since 1973 over fifty million babies, not fetuses, have been killed in the United States with abortion procedures.⁸ Fifty million people—a significant percentage of our population. Both sides of the issue would not agree these are pre-born babies. The staggering number is not a cold statistic but rather a life-and-death reason why this is important to talk about.

Not long ago I was preparing to speak on this subject. A man in the audience stopped me and said, "I just want to say something. I've looked at the printed notes you provide, so I know what you're going to speak on tonight." I could tell he was struggling with his emotions. He continued, "If I get up and leave, I just want you to know it's not you."

I said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "My mother was fourteen years old when she was raped and got pregnant with me. Her entire family and friends wanted her to abort me. And this fourteen-year-old girl was like a crusader who refused to have me aborted. And every time this subject comes up . . ." He started to cry. He said, "It is so emotional for me."

His wife, sitting next to him, grabbed his hand tightly and added, "Well, I'm sure glad she refused, because I don't know where I'd be without him."

This incident reminded me that this discussion isn't about statistics, numbers, theories, or political views. This is about life. It can be really easy to answer hypothetically as you weigh the evidence and evaluate the issue of abortion. It becomes very different when it gets down to a real face-to-face life situation.

Summarizing the Pro-Choice and Pro-Life Positions Today

The issue today is, Does the pre-born baby have an inalienable right to live, under any circumstances, or does the mother have the right to terminate her pregnancy to care for her family and her welfare, both present and future?

The pro-life position hasn't changed. If the pre-born baby is human, then it's inconceivable to take the life of that innocent person. It amounts to murder. And since the woman now knows it's a baby, the case for premeditated murder could be made.

The pro-choice position *has* changed. No longer is the argument over whether the fetus is a mass of tissue. Now the argument is that if a pre-born baby negatively affects the mother's mental or physical health or the welfare of her family or future, then safe, legal abortive options must be kept available to that woman.

These are polar-opposite views that people are deeply passionate about. So passionate, in fact, that some have been not only vocal but also violent with one another.

A Thoughtful Look at the Evidence

To gain any real understanding of the current debate over abortion, we need to look first at the history of abortion. This is not a recent issue that sprang forth in the sixties along with bell-bottom pants and long hair. There are, in fact, three eras in history when abortion has been "on demand." Understanding why abortion was encouraged and what forces supported and opposed it in the past will shed a great deal of light on today's dialogue.

Was Aristotle Pro-Choice?

The first era of "abortion on demand" was during the Greco-Roman period. Both Plato and Aristotle, while they believed that a child had life long before birth (boys sooner than girls), put the welfare of society and family above the rights of a child and were strong proponents of abortion. It is not clear who was given the choice, however. Abortion and infanticide went hand in hand, and the father clearly could have a newborn child killed if he so chose—a situation that often occurred if the infant was a girl. Plato's *Republic* made abortion or infanticide obligatory if the mother was over forty.

It was only with the spread of early Christianity, with its emphasis on the sanctity of human life, that the practices of both abortion and infanticide began to diminish in the Greek and Roman worlds. Christians in Rome became well known for scouring the dump sites for exposed babies and raising them as their own. An examination of early Church writings, especially the *Didache*, reveals passionate pleadings for the value of children and the value of life on the part of early Christians. Because of the convictions of the early Church and the transformation of the culture, these practices were eliminated for the next fifteen hundred years.

Were Nineteenth-Century Feminists Pro-Life?

History can often turn our preconceptions upside down, and what occurred in the mid-to-late 1800s found abortion illegal after “quickening,” the time when a mother could feel the movement of her unborn child in the womb. But after 1840, as abortion became more acceptable for women and more lucrative for doctors, things began to change. The birth rate in the United States dropped from 7 to 3.5 children per family by the late 1800s, with abortion terminating one-fifth to one-third of all pregnancies. Abortion ads were numerous in both big and small newspapers.

But two newly emerging groups of people aligned themselves to stop abortion: the American Medical Association (AMA) and the early feminist movement. The AMA had seen many of the results of these abortions and, because of the crude medical technology of the day, recognized a growing number of casualties from the procedures. Doctors were economically affected as well. Abortions reduced, by at least half, the number of births they could have performed!

But the real story is with the early feminists. Why were they against abortion? Early feminists recognized late nineteenth-century America as a male-dominated culture, exploiting women through abortion. When men were promiscuous, they wanted to cover their tracks. Men pushed for abortions, and with no way to support themselves or their infants, women by and large complied. Men thought of abortion as a means of birth control and as an escape from any responsibility.

Without known exception, the early American feminists condemned abortion in the strongest possible terms. In Susan B. Anthony’s newsletter, *The Revolution*, abortion was described as “child murder,” “infanticide,” and “foeticide.” Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who in 1848 organized the first women’s rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, classified abortion as a form of infanticide and said, “When you consider that women have been treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit.”⁹

The early feminists decreed abortion as a violation of women’s rights. The AMA and the women at the forefront of the feminist movement teamed up to enact laws that outlawed abortion in America.

How Did We Get Here from There?

Today, we are in the third era of “abortion on demand.” After following the activities of the late nineteenth century, we might as well look around and ask ourselves, *How in the world did we get here?*

The pro-life victory of the second era was short-lived. Newspapers stopped printing the gruesome details of abortion, began displaying abortion ads, and stopped referring to abortion as killing unborn children. Doctors, having become uncomfortable with the rigidity of anti-abortion laws, wanted them reformed, reclaiming the right to decide what was best for their patients. American clergy remained characteristically silent on the issue, while promiscuity heightened with the advent of the “Roaring Twenties.” Media and public sentiment shifted away from the rights of the unborn child to the health and welfare of women.

In 1959 the American Law Institute published a new “moral code,” allowing “therapeutic abortion” in cases of rape, incest, and risk of mental or physical health of the mother. In 1967 the AMA and National Organization for Women voted and spoke in favor of abortion reform, and many states passed reform legislation that would broaden the definition of “therapeutic” abortions.

A curious media factor strengthened the pro-choice debate when experts predicted the world would starve to death in the near future unless population growth could be stopped. As a result, abortion became a strangely conservative issue, a crusade to “save the world” rather than a “tragic choice.”

Soon the appeal for abortion reform became a campaign to overturn the law. In 1969 the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) was formed. Then, when public sentiment accepted the concept of “therapeutic abortion” but seemed far from accepting “abortion on demand,” the crusade shifted its attention to the courts, and the case of *Roe v. Wade* made moral, cultural, and legislative history.¹⁰

In *Roe v. Wade* the Supreme Court overturned a Texas law that prohibited abortions except when necessary to save a woman’s life. It determined that a right to privacy exists that protects a woman’s decision to have an abortion and ruled that states could not restrict abortion within the first three months of pregnancy.¹¹

Additional laws removed virtually all barriers to abortion at any time during pregnancy, and some sources tell us that abortion became the second-most-common surgical procedure after circumcision.¹²

Approximately 1.2 million abortions are performed each year.¹³ The accumulation of each year’s total since *Roe v. Wade* has reached over 56 million in the US since 1973.¹⁴ Under current law, some states are *not* required to gain the consent or notice of husband, parent, or guardian before an abortion is performed.

Medical Science

Where does that place us? Is our society one that permits the wanton, deliberate death of over a million unborn children per year or one that simply allows women to exercise free choice in regard to their own bodies? To answer this question, we need to proceed from our historical overview to the testimony of medical science. We have seen that the moral discussion of abortion hinges on the issue of *when* human life begins, and unlike the Greeks, Romans, and nineteenth-century Americans, we have the benefits of advanced technologies and modern medicine to aid us in our search for answers.

Consider the following facts:

- The heart begins to beat between the eighteenth and twenty-fourth day after conception.
- Brain waves have been recorded as early as forty-five days after conception.
- The mother can feel physical movements as early as forty-two days after conception.

- At eight weeks, the baby possesses the unique fingerprints it will have for life.
- All bodily functions are present at eight weeks and are functioning at eleven weeks.
- At eleven to twelve weeks, a baby can suck its thumb.¹⁵

Question: Would all of the above indications reflect a human baby or a mass of tissue?

The criteria for death as established by the Harvard Medical School may be used in reverse to demonstrate human life at early stages of pregnancy. Reversed, then, those criteria would indicate that the unborn is alive by the sixth week of pregnancy.

The criteria for a person being dead is (a) no response to external stimuli or pain (b) no spontaneous movements or respiratory efforts (c) no deep reflexes (d) no brain activity, indicated by a flat electroencephalogram (EEG).¹⁶

Using these observations of science, if the reverse of even one of the above criteria occurred, the fetus would be considered alive. At eight to eleven weeks, they *all* occur. The evidence for medical science is so strong that an unlikely group has surfaced to oppose abortions: atheists.

Take, for example, Elizabeth Cornwell, who is the executive director of the Richard Dawkins Foundation. As an avowed atheist, Dawkins and his followers have claimed to have a greater freedom in living than those bound by religious limitations. Curiously, they have taken an anti-abortion stand. Cornwell has been quoted as saying, “There’s a war on the womb. As a secular pro-lifer, I believe my case is scientifically and philosophically sound. Science concedes that human life begins at fertilization, and it follows that abortion is ageism and discrimination against a member of our own species.”¹⁷

So we now have atheists who are pro-life. In fact, when the late Christopher Hitchens was asked, “Are you pro-life?” he did not hesitate to say yes. He repeatedly defended using the term *unborn child* against those on the left who say an aborted fetus is nothing more than a growth or an appendix or a polyp. “Unborn child seems to me to be a real concept. It’s not a growth,” Hitchens said. “You can’t say that the issue of rights didn’t come into question.”¹⁸

I admire these atheists for having logical integrity in this case. They are forcing all of us to ask how and why our species kills itself. How do you remove fifty million people from the US population and not expect to cause a ripple effect? The unspoken assumption is that all those human beings don’t matter because they’re silent. They can’t speak for themselves. And yet I’ve met so many who, having realized how close they came to being aborted themselves, are deeply grateful to their mothers, who had the courage to take a stand for life.

Modern-Day Idolatry?

When we pause long enough to realize that every abortion sets off some kind of chain reaction of loss, the effect is sobering. As the dominos fall one after another, it dawns on us that this issue is, in all likelihood, the most important moral issue not just in our day but in all of history.

I remember reading the Old Testament as a young Christian and being struck by some of the obscure passages about the Canaanites and other “-ites” God was judging. The description of their pagan lifestyles involved the sacrifice of their children to an idol. That obscene idol most often was Molek, a false god they thought they could appease or manipulate by putting their babies in the fire. Even I, fresh from ignorance of the Bible and struggling to understand the finer points of the Christian life, read those passages and was sickened as I thought, *How can anybody be so twisted to willingly kill their own baby? How bizarre. How barbaric!*

But when we realize how we idolize our personal freedoms, careers, and independence today, it’s not a far stretch to think of abortion as the modern sacrifice to an idol. We just have different gods. Our gods are the god of convenience, the god of “Gotta finish school,” the god of “Can’t afford this,” and the god of “I don’t want my life messed up.” This is a profound issue facing the Church as well as the rest of the world.

As I prepared this chapter, doing my best to look at this issue objectively, the statistic that most shocked me was that almost 65 percent of all women who have had abortions self-identify as Christians—35 percent Protestant, 28 percent Catholic. Tragically, 56 percent of all abortions are performed on women in their twenties and another 18 to 20 percent are performed on teenagers. So more than 70 percent of all abortions are being performed on women age thirty and under.

The Biblical Record

Although the Bible has no direct quote with regard to the issue of abortion (i.e., “Thou shalt not abort”), the precepts and principles found in Scripture are crystal clear on exactly how God feels about human life, both outside and inside the womb.

Premise 1: God finds all life sacred and human life the most valuable and precious commodity in the world.

How can we determine the value God places on human life? Value is determined in three ways, and those three ways are emphasized in Scripture.

First, value is determined by creation and design. We assign value to things based on who created it. Try buying a Ralph Lauren polo shirt for the same price as a T-shirt without a little insignia on the pocket. Or try purchasing a Van Gogh or Picasso painting. We place value on the object by virtue of who created it. Likewise, in Genesis 1:27, the Bible says, “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” God is the creator of human life.

He took His stamp, His image, and implanted it on every human being on this planet. That gives each human being infinite value and worth.

Second, value is determined by protection. Clearly, we only protect things that are valuable. Dime-store trinkets, Timex watches, and costume jewelry, we may leave on the nightstand or dresser. Precious jewels, family heirlooms, irreplaceable treasures, we keep in a safe-deposit box. We protect the things we value the most.

Our world leaders provide another example. They are heavily guarded everywhere they go, from summit meetings to dinner parties. Security agents even surround them on family holidays. This is because those who hold the world's highest offices are considered to be of great value.

What kind of value does God place on His creation? Consider the protection He dictates for human life in Genesis 9:6: "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind." God put the maximum social protection around a human life—the death penalty.

Finally, value is determined by cost. If you were offered a camera for free and could choose between a \$5 disposable and a \$5,000 Canon DSLR, which would you choose? Ordinarily, the more you pay for something, the greater its value. How much did God pay to redeem mankind?

First Corinthians 6:20 says, "You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." The price paid for you was the life of God's own Son—the ultimate price for any father to pay. Mark 10:45 tells us the whole purpose of Jesus's coming: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

So God has said that human life is the most precious commodity on this planet because it was **created** by Him, it is **protected** by Him, and our redemption **cost** the death of His Son. The highest price that can be paid has been paid for human life.

If, as we've just seen, God finds human life the most precious commodity on earth, what if God affords the same priority to the fetus or unborn child?

Premise 2: Scripture affords the same sacred value to the unborn child as it does all other human life.

In Psalm 139:13–16, the psalmist declares,

You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . . . 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.

Even a casual reading of both the Old and New Testaments reveals that God was intimately *involved* in every human life—not only after they were born but before the earliest development stages in the womb.

Value by Design

How much **protection** did God afford unborn children? In Exodus 21:22–25, we find a detailed application of one of God’s commandments as it relates to an unborn child. We are told that if two men are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there’s no injury, then the men must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands. “But if there is serious injury [miscarriage], you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise” (vv. 23–25). God guards the life of the fetus with ultimate protection: threat of capital punishment.

Interestingly, this very passage is often used by pro-abortion advocates who claim that the phrase “gives birth prematurely” in this instance (v. 22) refers to a miscarriage and applies it to protecting only the mother’s life here, not the unborn child’s. However, a close examination of the text in the original language reveals that this is not the case at all.¹⁹ Clearly the law protects both the unborn child and its mother.

What about the value by **cost** for the unborn baby? In Psalm 51:5, a penitent David reflects on his sin and cries out to God, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” Here we see that sin is a matter of heredity existent in us prior to birth. Hence, the redemptive purchase price of the blood of Jesus Christ applies to our sinful nature whether we are a mature adult or a pre-born baby.

What are we to conclude from the biblical record? That God views the fetus as a unique intricate work of His hands, for whom He provides the ultimate protection and has paid the ultimate price. Unborn children are the focus of His love, attention, and future plans. Their lives are of no less value than yours or mine.

The Bottom Line

My hope and prayer is that people on both sides of this issue have gained insight into the presuppositions of the other side. Until we honestly see this issue through the eyes of those who disagree with us, we will not stop “hurling stones” and will start thinking through this divisive issue.

“Pro-lifers,” do you understand why those who believe a fetus is “just a mass of tissue” resist interference with what they view as a personal decision?

“Pro-choicers,” do you understand why those who believe that a fetus is a human life are so passionate about protecting that life?

Are you prepared to stop attacking people and start attacking the issue? Are you willing to “lay down arms” long enough to give a fair, logical, and non-emotional evaluation of the data? If so, let’s suspend our biases and preconceptions long enough to examine the summary of the evidence.

Medical evidence shows us that although we can’t pinpoint the definitive moment life begins, we know that the heart starts to beat at approximately eighteen days after conception, followed within eight weeks by the presence of all bodily functions. If we are intellectually consistent with our definition of what constitutes “living,” medically speaking, the fetus is a human being, not a mass of tissue.

Biblical evidence shows us that God created humankind in His own image, paid the ultimate price (the death of His Son) in order to reconcile His creation to Himself, and places the maximum social protection around human life. With the same authority and assurance, the Bible teaches that God affords an unborn child the same rights and protection as a full-grown adult.

Historical evidence shows that culture and trends have changed over the centuries. The medical community and feminist activists were at one time the strongest opponents of abortion. Could it be that culture and economics are what have driven these groups to flip-flop on the abortion issue? Is it possible that the data is clear but has somehow been lost in the rhetoric of other issues? Couldn’t someone actually be a strong proponent of women’s rights while holding the sacredness of human life in the womb?

Imagine with me a public forum or debate around the issue of abortion. After exploring all the information I just presented, I have asked representatives from both sides of the issue to convince the crowd to join their side of the debate.

Let’s begin with the pro-abortion/pro-choice representative. The presentation begins with the four reasons they believe we must have legal abortion options:

First, because sometimes the woman’s life is at stake if she carries the baby to full term. If we didn’t have abortion, how could we save a woman’s life?

Second, pregnancy as a result of rape or incest requires legalized abortion. How can we punish a person for being violated by someone else? They should never have to live with the horror and the memories a child resulting from that experience will cause them to have.

Third, if we abolish abortion, then women will be forced, like in the past, to seek help from butchers performing illegal abortions, and many will be killed or maimed.

Fourth, it would invalidate the best technology we have. We live in a day when we do realize now, because of technology, that this is a baby. But there are times when it’s just impossible for a woman to be a good mother because a child puts so much stress on her life and family. We now have an abortion pill, and it can be taken early on, and it’s very simple, it’s not painful, and RU-486 is being

used around the world. If you eliminate abortion, it wouldn't waste this technology for those who have to have abortions.

Now let's hear the responses from the pro-life representative:

First, C. Everett Koop was a surgeon general of the United States who practiced pediatrics for thirty years, and his testimony is that during his medical career, with the medical advances in understanding and technology, he was not aware of a single case in his own practice or his colleagues' practices where a choice had to be made between the lives of the mother and the child. That argument is a "straw man." It's a very emotional argument based on a circumstance that just doesn't happen.

Second, of all the people who are raped, only .06 of one percent ever get pregnant. Yes, pregnancies do occur as a result of rape, but it doesn't take meeting too many people like Don (who shared his story about his fourteen-year-old mother being raped and refusing to have an abortion) to convince you that two wrongs don't make a right. A tragic means of conception, yes. But Don's life, wife, and family are all a testimony of the value of life even when conceived in the worst of circumstances.

Third, the thesis that back-alley abortions are going to occur is false. Eighty-five percent of all abortions were done legally before *Roe v. Wade*. Only 15 percent were done illegally. In a given year, three hundred deaths of women due to illegal abortion were recorded. In the early days of abortion, 1.6 million abortions were performed a year, but now we're down to 1.2 million annually. Three hundred women dying a year as a result of illegal abortions would not even begin to tip the scales of the hundreds of women who have died as a result of legal abortions. Some of the recent court cases have exposed conditions in legal abortion clinics that make the back-alley horror stories look like high-tech operating rooms.

Fourth, the RU-486 pill is far from easy and painless. It's not like a woman simply takes a pill and everything goes away. The process involves a series of visits to the clinic. And after all this, a woman will find herself alone in a bathroom aborting life from her womb. She will face one of the most traumatic experiences in her life alone as she discharges her baby from her body and lives with that for the rest of her life.

In fact, what this pro-life advocate would say is, "What's never mentioned is the trauma and the pain that a woman experiences often years later called 'post abortive syndrome.'" I received a letter describing the impact. The young woman describes her journey:

At the age of fifteen I became pregnant and my mother panicked, seeing only one solution. She took me to get an abortion. I spent the next twenty-five years keeping silent. I did not recognize the subsequent cries for help in the form of suicidal thoughts as being a consequence of that sin. Turning to drugs and alcohol for refuge only postponed my pain. A double life ensued that no

one seemed to notice: straight-A performance by day, rebellious mind-numbing behavior by night. Eventually I married and sadly learned I could not bear children. Despite the inconclusive medical evidence, I could not help but blame the abortion.

In summary, it appears that there is no legal, responsible way around it: The unborn are living human beings, loved by God and deserving, though defenseless, of our respect and protection. When we move from the frenzy to the facts, that data is overwhelmingly and clearly conclusive.

What Do We Do Now?

Finding Forgiveness

“What if I’ve had an abortion?” Abortion is not the “unpardonable sin.” Scripture is full of accounts of those who committed grave sins, even murder, and were not only forgiven by God but greatly used by Him. The stories of David, Moses, the apostle Paul, and others teach us that God can bring beauty and healing from the pain of wrong decisions. God’s Word promises that if we honestly confess our sin, He will forgive us, release us, and walk with us through the process of healing. Without a doubt this is an extremely painful and emotionally charged issue, but there is *hope* for those who have been involved. If you or someone you love has had an abortion, or if you have encouraged or pressured someone you know to have one, please understand there is forgiveness and restoration available to you, from both God and His Church.

As I have counseled women who have had one or more abortions and several men who have pushed their wife, girlfriend, or daughters to do the same, I am astounded at the depth of guilt, shame, and remorse that remains even many years later. I want to remind you that help is available, and the first step is talking with someone you can trust. The condemnation and power of the past over your life is the secrecy and the shame it brings. Get it out in the open. God promises in James 5:16 that as we confess our sins to one another, we will experience healing.

Taking Responsibility

“What can I do to help?” With knowledge comes accountability. There are a variety of ways to respond to God’s clear affirmation of the sanctity of human life. You may choose to volunteer at a crisis-pregnancy medical clinic, become a trained pregnancy counselor, or open your home to unwed mothers as they carry their babies to term. You might write persuasive, articulate letters to Congress, help fund pro-life centers, help distribute information, pray earnestly, promote adoption planning, or remain informed. At the very least, we each should understand the key issues surrounding abortion and develop our own clear, factually based responses.

Establishing Limits

“How far should I go in the fight to protect human life?” As strongly as you and I may feel about our responsibility to protect the lives of the unborn, harming others or breaking the law are *never* righteous options. Bombing clinics, harassing and harming doctors, and taking part in violent civil disobedience

are not biblical answers to this issue. Our methods must match our message! Anger, hatred, screaming, violence, and graceless behavior harm rather than help the cause of Christ. The witness of every Christian suffers when someone claiming a biblical mandate takes another rude stab at justice.

God's heart is generous toward humankind. He made us, He bought us with the life of Jesus Christ, and His desire is that each of us would know an authentic, dynamic relationship with Him. No matter where we stand on this issue, He loves us deeply and wants us to express the same unconditional love to each other. The unborn child, the teenage victim of date rape, the husband or boyfriend who encourages someone to abort her child, the doctor who holds the syringe or suction tube, and the angry protester on the clinic steps—they are all the focus of His specific, abundant, life-changing love.

I urge you to prayerfully consider the part you need to take in preserving the sanctity of human life in your world. Is there a step He wants you to take, an attitude He wants you to change, or a person He wants you to help? Please don't wait. Do you know the facts well enough to present them to someone else in a confident, winsome way? Please commit them to heart and memory. Or consider sharing this book with someone who needs clear information and a word of encouragement to make a wise choice for their life and future.

Our world is in need of words and actions of love, grace, truth, and forgiveness. When it comes to abortion, they are an essential part of growing your faith and, for millions of unborn children, a matter of life and death.

NOTES

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