

Abortion

A Valley Bible Church Position Paper www.valleybible.net

Abortion is a controversial and often passionate issue in our nation. It divides churches, political parties and even families. The controversy is over whether the intentional termination of a pregnancy is morally wrong and if so, what laws should be enacted to prevent people from providing or obtaining abortions.

The central question which must be addressed in determining whether abortion is necessarily a moral wrong concerns the character of the fetus (a term referring to a baby in the womb from the end of the third month of pregnancy until birth). Our responsibilities to the fetus are much different if we consider it to be a person rather than simply living tissue.

We believe the intentional termination of a pregnancy is a sin. This paper will provide the reasons why we hold this belief. These reasons include biblical reasons and philosophical reasons. The biblical reasons hold the most weight for us and will be addressed first since we understand the Bible to be God's direct, inerrant revelation to man. However, we realize that this is a problem for our society as a whole and that many would not recognize the Bible as authoritative on this or any other matter. Therefore, we will include many other arguments that are not based on the teaching of the Bible in order to attempt to persuade our fellow man. Finally, we will describe what the response of the church should be.

Biblical reasons why abortion is morally wrong

The Bible does not directly teach about abortion. This is basically because abortion was an abhorrent idea in a nation where childlessness was considered a curse. However, this does not mean that the Bible does not provide us with ample information to understand God's view of abortion. We are created as people in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; 9:6) and the Bible indicates that babies in the womb are people.

1. Psalm 139:13-16

"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 is the God-inspired record of David's praise of God's sovereignty in his life. This praise is for God's omniscience, knowing all things including David's thoughts before he expresses them. This praise is for God's omnipresence, that wherever David might go, he cannot escape from God. This leads David to contemplate his life and confessing that God formed him with care in the womb.

2. Psalm 51:5

“Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

Psalm 51 was written by David to record his repentance after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. David confesses that his sinful act demonstrated the original sin that was within him, concluding that from the moment of conception, he had a sin nature. This implies that we have the image of God at the point of our conception though scarred by sin. Only actual people have a sin nature. Only actual people can be called sinful, with a soul in need of redemption.

3. Exodus 21:22-25.

“If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, 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.”

These verses teach that if a woman gives birth prematurely, but the baby is not injured, then only a fine is appropriate. However, if the child dies, then the law of retaliation should be applied. In other words, killing an unborn baby would carry the same penalty as killing a born baby. A baby inside the womb should have the same legal status as a baby outside the womb.

Some have argued that the first verses only refer to a case of accidental miscarriage. Since only a fine is levied, they say that an unborn baby is merely potential life and does not carry the same legal status as a baby that has been born. However, the normal Hebrew word for miscarry is not used in this passage (cf. Genesis 31:38; Exodus 23:26; Job 2:10; Hosea 9:14). Most commentators now believe that the action described in verse 22 is indeed a premature birth not an accidental miscarriage. Also, even if the verses do describe a miscarriage, they cannot be used to support abortion since injury was accidental, not intentional (as abortion would be). Nevertheless, the action was still a crime.

4. Luke 1:41, 44

“And it came about that when Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb....’For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy.’“

These verses show that John the Baptist was a person while he was still in the womb. Luke 1:41-44 describes John as a baby in the womb who leaped with the human emotion of joy. He is clearly described as being a person in the womb.

John was not the only one described in terms that depict humanity in the womb. Jesus Himself was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb (Matthew 1:20), which connotes that His incarnation began at conception. Jeremiah was also called by God while in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5), which indicates Jeremiah actually existed as a person in the womb. The Bible indicates that God makes man in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:27) in the womb, not during the birth process.

Philosophical reasons why abortion is morally wrong

While there is no agreement in our nation regarding the validity of the Bible, we do share an innate sense of logical reasoning. Therefore, the philosophical reasons against abortion are very important for bringing change in our society.

The most basic question for those unconvinced that abortion is the taking of an innocent life is “when does a person begin to exist?” Many people will seek to avoid this question and when faced with it often claim that this is simply unknowable.

However, there are many things that are in fact known from the field of medicine, much of which has been discovered in recent decades. Also, there is basic agreement on many ethical questions concerning life, such as opposition to infanticide. These form a basis for having a dialogue that should result in a conclusion that abortion is the taking of an innocent life.

1. We know that the embryo (a term referring to the baby during its first three months in the womb) is genetically unique from the point of conception.

From the very beginning of the joining of a sperm and egg into an embryo there exists a distinct DNA. To say that the embryo, and later the fetus, is part of the mother’s body is medically inaccurate. Every physical part of the mother has the same DNA, including her egg, but the embryo is genetically different.

Also, there is no genetic difference between the developing embryo and the fully developed adult. From the point of the fertilization of the ovum, the resulting human has its own life-long characteristic code and specific identity. From this point forward the change is only a matter of its growth, not a change in kind.

Everyone reading this paper did not come from an embryo, we were an embryo. We did not come from a fetus, we were a fetus. We did not come from a baby, we were a baby. Therefore, we must conclude that our life, our humanness, our personhood, began at conception.

It must be noted that while genetical uniqueness is unquestionable proof that a distinct, individual person exists, it does not follow that you have to be genetically unique to be a person. Identical twins are not genetically unique, yet there is no question that they are both individuals with their own souls which must stand before God. Therefore, the genetic argument only works the one direction. However even if you are not genetically unique, you are still a person.

This distinction is become of increasing importance as the possibility of cloning humans nears. The abortion argument of “it is my body and I have the right to choose” may be replaced with “it is my genetic material and I have the right to choose.” We may find ourselves in a society that not only kills unwanted babies, but one that purposefully creates babies for their body parts. We will be told that you can grow your own replacement heart from your own genetic material, we will not be told about the child that dies in the process.

2. Since we know when a person is no longer living, this should guide us in deciding when life begins.

Years ago life was considered to end when the heart stopped beating. Medical evidence shows that the heart is formed and begins to beat as early as the 18th day in the womb. If life was considered to start with the heartbeat there would be hardly any legal abortions.

With advances in medicine came the ability to detect brain waves. This is now perhaps the most important element in deciding if life has ended. Brain waves may be detected in a fetus at around the 42nd day in the womb. If life was considered to start with the presence of brain waves there would be a great reduction in legal abortions.

3. We do not consider that location in the womb negates personhood.

While the test of viability of a fetus outside the womb is sometimes ignored and abortions are performed in spite of the viability of the fetus, there is a general ethical sense that if a baby can exist outside the womb it should be allowed to live. A great majority of people would find that intentionally killing a fetus that if delivered would be a healthy baby needing no great medical attention to be abhorrent. Location inside the womb does not determine that a fetus is not a person.

4. We do not consider that dependency upon another person negates personhood.

Due to medical advances, babies are now surviving even when born during sixth month of the pregnancy. While the ability of babies to live outside of the womb will probably be possible at even earlier stages of development in the future, viability alone does not determine personhood.

Many people in our society are totally dependent upon the function of another for their survival. In particular, babies, if left uncared for, will die. If a mother abandons her baby without proper care, they are arrested. There is no debate about the moral responsibility of the mother, it is assumed. Likewise, there are many adults that are fully dependent upon another for their care. You cannot morally abdicate your responsibility for caring without making arrangements for the care to be taken by another. This holds true with the pregnant mother, who temporarily is morally responsible for the baby until she makes other arrangements for the child, such as adoption.

5. We do not consider that a poor quality of life negates personhood.

Abortions are normally justified due to assumed negative circumstances for the child. If a doctor projects a child will be born with a significant birth defect, some women will consider an abortion. Of course, if a baby is actually born with the birth defect it cannot be killed. Thus the potentiality of malformation is seen as grounds for terminating life, while the actuality is not.

Some mothers choose to abort their fetus because they do not believe they can care for the child, love the child, provide for the child, etc. The desire of the mother and

the difficult circumstances for her is seen by many as a sufficient reason to terminate the pregnancy. However, once the child is born, no set of poor circumstance or lack of motherly love is sufficient for the child's life to be terminated.

Therefore the quality of life, either economically, emotionally, or physically, is never grounds for the termination of it. After all, a poor pregnant teenager, engaged to a man who was not the father, chose to bear the Savior of the world.

The burden of proof

Even if we are unconvinced that both the biblical arguments and the philosophical arguments against abortion are adequate, we are still left with a moral dilemma. Unless we are certain that abortion is not the taking of an innocent life, we are obligated to oppose it.

The U.S. Supreme Court in its verdict in the case of Roe vs. Wade (1972) stated, "We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to an answer."

While it may be said that the Western culture founded on Judeo-Christian values held abortion to be morally wrong and that physicians subscribe to the Hippocratic Oath ("I will not give a woman a pessary to produce abortion"), nevertheless, an inability to be certain when life begins does not demand the legalization of abortion. The burden of proof in law is on the prosecution. The benefit of doubt is with the defense. This is also known as a presumption of innocence.

If we are hunting and see movement in the bushes, we know we must not shoot until we know that what we are shooting at is not a person. Likewise, we don't bury a body that we think may be dead, but one that we are sure is dead.

Therefore, the burden of proof regarding the personhood of the fetus rests with those who contemplate the termination of the pregnancy, with those who facilitate the termination of the pregnancy and with those who fail to oppose the legal termination of pregnancies. The ending of a life is far too great a decision to act without certainty.

Answers to pro-abortion objections

1. "The mother has the right to control her own body."

The fetus is not part of the mother's body, it is an individual with its own body. While it is dependent upon the mother for sustenance, so it will also be upon birth. The mother does not have the right to do anything she wants with her baby.

Furthermore, even if the baby were part of the mother's body, which it is not, the mother still does not have the right to do anything she wants with it. We do not have the right to kill ourselves. We do not have the moral right to chop off our arm. We may be able to do these things but they cannot be considered morally right.

2. “The fetus is not really a human until it is born.”

If it is not a human, then what is it? What occurs in order for it to be considered a human? A change in location, from inside the womb to outside the womb? Beyond location, the difference between babies that are born and those unborn is one of development. This development does not cease upon birth but continues long afterward. There is no essential aspect of development that is unique to a fetus in the womb. In other words, there is no determining physical factor which anyone can point to that turns a baby who is born into a human.

3. “The fetus is not human because it has no personal consciousness.”

If consciousness were what makes a person human, then those in comas lapse into a non-human form! An aspiring murderer ought to knock his victim unconscious prior to the murder so they would not be guilty of taking an innocent life!

Self-awareness is one of the developing characteristics of humans. Newborns have no more sense of self immediately after they are born. Yet babies have consciousness before and after birth. They have brain waves from six weeks after conception. As early as three months after conception they can feel pain and sense pressure. Consciousness develops into self-awareness as the baby grows and it takes many months after birth for this to be clearly developed. No one suggests killing babies who lack self-awareness.

4. “People are going to have abortions anyway, so legalization makes them safer.”

Legalizing an evil does not make it morally right. Nor does it necessarily curb its abuse. This notion leads to legalizing all kinds of evil. In fact, changing a law can have an effect on the attitude towards an evil, making it less desirable. Such was the case with laws abolishing slavery. Finally, a clean and safe killing is a small consolation for the victim.

5. “Abortion solves unwanted pregnancies.”

It may solve the problem of the unwanted pregnancy but it does not help the mother or the child. Depression often follows abortion as women live with the guilt of their act. Adoption is a far better solution, without the consequences.

6. “No unwanted baby should ever be born.”

Unwanted pregnancies normally turn into a wanted child if the child is allowed to survive. Also, even if the mother does not want the baby, this does not make the baby “unwanted” for many families would be more than glad to raise the child. In addition, just because someone is unwanted does not give us the right to end its life, for our desires cannot trump the rights of others, particularly the right to life.

7. “Abortion should be rare, but not illegal; we cannot legislate morality.”

While it is true that we cannot make people moral through passing laws, it does not follow that we should therefore not pass laws that seek to curb immoral behavior. In fact, we have many laws that seek to reduce immoral acts, such as laws prohibiting murder, stealing, rape, etc.

Furthermore, if terminating a pregnancy is not immoral, then why should it be rare? There is a widely held sense, even among those who consider themselves against any laws limiting abortion, that abortion is not a good thing. This is because God has put a conscience with all of us which causes a feeling of guilt regarding moral wrong. This is reflected in the desire for abortion to be rare.

8. "Abortion should be outlawed except in certain cases, such as rape, incest and to protect the life of the mother."

If we believe that the fetus is a person, then we should not abort the pregnancy regardless of the setting of the conception. While rape is a horrible crime, the baby conceived should not be killed. The age-old adage "two wrongs don't make a right" applies. Incest has the additional element of potential birth defects, yet if any defects exist they do not make the child less of a person. Just as we do not end the life of a child with birth defects, we ought not to end the life of a baby in the womb with birth defects.

The case of protecting the life of the mother brings the possibility of a moral dilemma, where we must choose between competing moral demands. However, the life of the mother must be actually at stake. Often the life of the mother is at risk but the risk is minimal. Studies have indicated when a mother's life is deemed in danger and a birth occurs, it is very uncommon for the mother to die. If the threat to the life of the mother is certain if the baby is delivered then there would indeed be a clear moral dilemma where a choice must be made as to which life would be saved. This requires a judgment on the part of the physicians, mother and family, which should be respected.

Finally, we recognize that for political purposes these exceptions are commonly given. Those advocating these exceptions may be doing so for political expediency rather than from moral conviction. We understand that if an agreement cannot be reached to outlaw all abortion, as much of it as possible should be.

Our response to abortion

There are steps that we can take to serve God in light of the current abortion problem, but we must be careful. In our public and private attempts to bring change upon individuals we should seek to persuade but not coerce. Unfortunately, too much of the Christian response to abortion has been unpersuasive and seen as coercive. Also, our response to abortion in the church should be different than abortion in our society. In this we must follow the example of Jesus Christ and those He trained as His apostles.

1. We should be persuasive without being coercive.

Our opportunity to be persuasive begins with prayer. Only God can change people's heart and the changed heart to honor God is the primary task that God is calling us to (cf. Matthew 28:19-20). As we encounter the abortion issue we must pray for God to bring change in the minds and hearts of individuals. As we speak with people either personally or publicly, we must conduct ourselves with grace, gentleness and reverence (cf. Colossians 4:5-6; 1 Peter 3:15). Our compassion and love will set the

framework for these compelling reasons why abortion should not be performed or supported. Since the truth concerning the morality of abortion is with those opposing abortion there is certainly no reason to violate any laws in our attempt to persuade. There is no need to be argumentative or belligerent, which undermines any attempts to instruct (cf. Proverbs 15:2).

Much of the effort to change the abortion laws has been in the political arena. To attempt to bring political change without persuading the people of the need is a recipe for failure. This explains why in spite of great attempts, there has been no change in our abortion laws. We simply have failed to persuade our society about the morality of abortion and too much of our opposition to abortion has been counterproductive to our case.

2. We should follow the example of Jesus and His disciples.

Abortion is not new. It was actively practiced in the days of Christ and the early church. It was also legal in the Roman Empire. Christ and His disciples did not make it their ministry to change the government laws. They did not make it their ministry to create moral practices among the non-Christians. They did not revolt, they did not picket, they did not lobby.

The apostles dealt with professing Christians differently than with the world. They understood that their role among unbelievers was redemptive, not political. They were not seeking to moralize the unconverted, but to convert the immoral. Therefore, the means that we should use to bring change in abortion is by seeking to bring change in the hearts of individuals, seeking for them to turn from their sin to faith in Christ.

We should actively oppose abortion among Christians and actively proclaim the gospel of Christ among non-Christians. With regard to the church, our responsibility is clearly different. We are to reprove, rebuke and exhort, with great patience and instruction (2 Timothy 4:2). This does not mean we are uncompassionate or unloving. In fact, we are following God's plan for how to express love to His people, maturing them toward Christ's righteousness.

With regard to those who do not profess to be followers of Christ, our task must be evangelistic. We cannot allow the abortion issue to interfere with our mandate from God to be his ambassadors for reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). As individuals and together as the church we must function as followers of Christ to make the message of the forgiveness of sins known and received among the world. We cannot allow our desire to see every child protected from the moment it is created in the image of God to distract us from this mission.

Completed: May 2000