

Isn't abortion just about what a woman does with her own body?

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Scr. Reading: Ps 139**

TEXT: various

Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask

March 1970, 21-year-old Norma McCorvey (“Jane Roe”) filed suit against Dallas County Assistant DA Henry Wade, challenging a law that made abortion a criminal act except to save the life of the mother. Over the next several years, her case made its way through the legal system all the way to the Supreme Court; and on Jan 22, 1973, the High Court ruled in her favor. In their decision, they wrote that laws which prohibit abortion violate a woman’s rights as defined by the Fourteenth Amendment thus rendering all such laws unconstitutional and legalizing abortion (with certain technical restrictions – e.g., until viability [28 or maybe 24 weeks], and after viab. for health of the mother [incl. her psychological health]).

Since that date 40 years ago, 55 million preborn babies have been killed. That’s almost 11x the population of the state of Colorado, almost 18 percent of the population of the whole United States. Around 1.2 million unborn children are killed annually in the US. The good news is, that number is down about 25% from a high of around 1.6 million abortions in 1990. But 1.2 is still an incredible number—more loss of life *every year* in America than those who died in the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Iraq, and Afghanistan *combined*.

You can see immediately how the Supreme Court’s ruling framed abortion as an issue of women’s rights—and not only their right to good health. The Court explicitly grounded its decision in a woman’s “right to privacy.” Thus our question for today: “Isn’t abortion just about what a woman does with her own body?”

And in fact, statistics show that most abortions aren’t performed to protect the health of the mother in any real sense. According to a 2005 study by the Guttmacher Institute, 25% of women seeking an abortion say they aren’t ready for a child. 23% say they can’t afford a baby. And 19% say they already have at least one child and don’t want another. As Christians, we want to acknowledge that these concerns are not trivial issues; but we also must ask if they are really adequate justification for an abortion. An abortion-rights advocate once observed that most

Americans are pro-life (which is true) with three exceptions: rape, incest, and “my situation.”

...which is part of what makes abortion such an emotional issue. There are very complex and very personal matters involved in abortion, and we need supernatural power to handle this issue in a gracious, Christlike way. We need to pray fervently and frequently for God’s help. We need to think clearly, not emotionally. We need to rehearse our reasons ahead of time so we’re well prepared and confident when the topic arises. And oh, how we need to avoid the caricatures, which reduce the pro-life position to an angry personal attack: “You are a murderer” and the pro-choice position likewise to: “You hate women.”

How we carry ourselves on this issue is crucial.

ILLUS: Former mayor of NYC Ed Koch told a story (*His Eminence and Hizzoner*, quoted in Moore, 2.1.13) about a pro-life activist whose presentation had a remarkable impact. Jean Head, a nurse, met with him when he was a Congressman to present her arguments urging him to protect the unborn, but what stood out in his mind was that when she came, she brought flowers. Koch knew that, if he ever changed his position on abortion to be pro-life, the pro-choice crowd would be “crazed with anger.” They certainly wouldn’t approach him with roses.

Friends, if you are pro-life and claim to be a Christian, let me stress how important it is that you carry yourself in a manner different from “crazed with anger.” If your position is right, you can be confident in your reasons and patient as you present them. Furthermore, if you are going to be consistent with your pro-life position – not to mention your Christianity – you will treat everyone with dignity and respect, including those with whom you emphatically disagree.

Why is this so important? Because those who have been or will be touched by abortion are always closer than you’d think. In your neighborhood, at your workplace, in your Bible study group, in our congregation, there are both men and “women vulnerable to abortionist propaganda, not because they reject the church but because they’re afraid they’ll lose the church. Pregnant young women are scared they will scandalize church people when they start to show, so they

keep it secret. Parents are fearful their pregnant daughter, or their son's pregnant girlfriend, will prompt the rest of the congregation to see them as bad families." (R. Moore, blog post 1.22.13) They're tragically vulnerable to the abortion clinic's false gospel: "Come to us, you who are weary and heavy-laden, and we will give you rest. We'll take care of this problem, and it will all go away forever." Christians know that only Jesus can make that kind of promise! But if we don't carry ourselves with grace and love when we handle abortion in theory, why should anyone believe we'll be gracious and loving when we learn that abortion is an actual part of their story?

As always, we're reminded that apologetics starts in the heart:

1 Peter 3:15 *In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you;¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and respect,*

Good answers, grounded with hope. Answers like what? For this question, we might want to appeal 1) to the Bible, 2) to science, and/or 3) to logic.

THE BIBLE

Why appeal to the Bible? Don't non-Christians reject the Bible? Sure. But this question isn't going to come only from non-Christians. Why not? Because you don't have to believe abortion is wrong in order to be a Christian. (A very close friend of mine – who is also a pastor – opted to have an abortion under circumstances that weren't exclusively related to the physical health of the mother. Again, abortion is always closer than you'd think.)

Do you realize, it's not necessary to be pro-life to be a Christian! The Bible defines Christians as those whose sins are forgiven by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In fact – CAUTION: cardiac health threat ahead! – it's not even necessary to be a Republican to be a Christian. Our church isn't united around the gospel of the GOP, nor should it be. Can I get practical with you about this? Are you committed enough to the gospel to welcome a Democrat into our membership? If so, why do you assume everyone here will laugh at your Obama jokes? Can we please dispense with the assumption that Christianity =

American conservatism? I'll be perfectly honest with you: I long for the day when our membership is so unified in the gospel, so humble in our opinions, and so loving toward other people, that we can handle radical diversity in our politics, our positions, and our preferences. "Wild hair and 10 piercings in your face? Come on in! Addicted to drugs and porn? There's help and hope here! Pro-choice? Welcome!"

I'm not saying we'd be happy for everyone to stay where they are when they come. But if we make their issues THE issue instead of making Jesus THE issue, they'll never come in the first place! We believe that the word, the Spirit, and the gospel are powerful to deal with people's issues. The gospel + a safe environment + time will transform people every time.

End of parenthesis. Now, on to the biblical data... Several texts demonstrate genuine human life/activity before birth:

Jeremiah 1:5 *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."* (cf. Gal 1:15 re: Paul)

Luke 1:41-44 ⁴¹ *And when Elizabeth [6 mos. pregnant] heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."*

Psalms 139:13-16 ¹³ *For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance...*

These verses aren't pro-life arguments by any stretch, but they do show the value of a child even before he/she is born. At the very least, we have to notice that these texts assume the unborn are persons, not masses of tissue.

Furthermore, Scripture pulses with God's heart for the fatherless and widows and His wrath against those who shed innocent blood. God values life, and He proactively favors the helpless, the humble, the weak

– like unborn babies, still in the womb.

There's much, much more we could say about the Bible and abortion, but this one thing we must say: abortion is not the unpardonable sin. Yes, it's true that the Supreme Court of the United States will not protect any of us from the judgment of God for our sins. But Jesus can. Yes, judgment awaits for unforgiven sin, but God is happy to forgive because of Jesus. Yes, God's wrath is provoked by the shedding of innocent blood, but Jesus bore it all in His own body on the cross. The woman who has had the abortion needs to know that, if she is hidden in Christ, God does not see her as "that woman who had the abortion." Likewise for the man who encouraged it or the parents who funded it. God hasn't been subverted from sending you to hell because you found some gospel "loophole." In Christ, you have quite literally already been to hell. And, in the resurrected Christ, God says what He thinks of you: "You are my beloved child and in you I am well-pleased." All that, and nothing less, is what the Bible thinks about abortion.

SCIENCE

Prenatal development: (from the Mayo Clinic website)

- Conception = 46 chromosomes, the new person's genetic makeup is in place – eye color, hair, raw materials of personality & intelligence
- 3 weeks = brain, spinal cord, heart begin to form; end of this week, own blood, heartbeat; size of the tip of a pen
- 5 weeks = brain, face, eyes, legs, hands begin to develop; nostrils visible; slightly larger than the top of a pencil eraser
- 6 weeks = brain waves are detectable; ½" long
- 9 weeks = officially called a "fetus"; every organ in place, bones taking shape, fingerprints forming, can bend fingers around an object in hand
- 10 weeks = fingernails, face has a definite human profile; 2½" long, weigh ½ oz.
- 12 weeks = bones are forming, breathing (fluid) & swallowing
- 4-5 mos = hear mom's heartbeat, music & other external sounds; 5½" long

We're only halfway through the pregnancy. Clearly, this isn't a mass of tissue; science has rendered it undeniable that this particular tissue has a human nature all its own.

The point here, of course, is that abortion isn't just about what a woman does with her own body. When she's pregnant, there's the distinct and valuable body of another person within her. In fact, women know this intuitively, and research shows that 84% of mothers decide not to have an abortion after seeing an ultrasound of their preborn baby. (referenced in Middelberg, 167)

In fact, it seems like the pro-choice camp is becoming more and more willing to acknowledge this:

Of all the diabolically clever moves the anti-choice lobby has ever pulled, surely one of the greatest has been its consistent co-opting of the word "life." Life! Who wants to argue with that? Who wants to be on the side of ... not-life? That's why the language of those who support abortion has for so long been carefully couched in other terms. While opponents of abortion eagerly describe themselves as "pro-life," the rest of us have had to scramble around with not nearly as big-ticket words like "choice" and "reproductive freedom." The "life" conversation is often too thorny to even broach. Yet I know that throughout my own pregnancies, I never wavered for a moment in the belief that I was carrying a human life inside of me. I believe that's what a fetus is: a human life. And that doesn't make me one iota less solidly pro-choice.

...Here's the complicated reality in which we live: All life is not equal. That's a difficult thing for liberals like me to talk about, lest we wind up looking like death-panel-loving, kill-your-grandma-and-your-precious-baby storm troopers. Yet a fetus can be a human life without having the same rights as the woman in whose body it resides. She's the boss. Her life and what is right for her circumstances and her health should automatically trump the rights of the non-autonomous entity inside of her. Always.

When we on the pro-choice side get cagey around the life question, it makes us illogically contradictory. I have friends who have referred to their abortions in terms of "scraping out a bunch of cells" and then a few years later were exultant over the pregnancies that they unhesitatingly described in terms of "the baby" and "this kid." I know women who have been relieved at their abortions and grieved over their miscarriages. Why can't we agree that how they felt about their pregnancies was vastly different, but that it's pretty silly to pretend that what was growing inside of them wasn't the same? Fetuses aren't selective like that. They don't qualify as human life only if they're intended to be born.

...My belief that life begins at conception is mine to cling to. And if you believe that it begins at birth, or somewhere around the second trimester, or when the kid finally goes to college, that's a conversation we can have, one that I hope would be respectful and empathetic and fearless. We can't have it if those of us who believe that human life exists in utero are afraid we're somehow going to flub it for the cause. In an Op-Ed on "Why I'm Pro-Choice" in the Michigan Daily this week, Emma Maniere stated, quite perfectly, that "Some argue that abortion takes lives, but I know that abortion saves lives, too." She understands that it saves lives not just in the most medically literal way, but in the roads that women who have choice then get to go down, in the possibilities for them and for their families. And I would put the life of a mother over the life of a fetus every single time — even if I still need to acknowledge my conviction that the fetus is indeed a life. A life worth sacrificing. (Mary Elizabeth Williams, "[So What if Abortion Ends a Life?](#)" on Salon.com, Jan 23, 2013)

LOGIC

Test the logic of the argument.

- "Personally I'm against abortion, but I don't believe in forcing my view on others. I believe women ought to have a right to do as they please with their own bodies."

If you hear that, just clarify their argument and keep the terms consistent. Ask "Why are you personally against abortion?" The common answer is "Because I believe abortion kills a baby, but that's just my view." So now you can respond: "So you believe abortion kills an innocent baby? It makes sense then that you'd be against it personally, but why do you think the law should allow people to kill their own innocent babies? Do you really believe it's wrong to kill your own child, but you don't think we should stop people from killing theirs?"

- "Abortion saves a child from a potentially abusive situation." Would we apply that logic to a 2-year-old? What if his dad's drinking problem is going to get really bad in 4 years — should we save him from that abuse by killing him now? In *Tactics*, Greg Koukl points out that, for many arguments people make defending abortion, you can use a response he calls "trotting out the toddler." The gist of the argument is this: if it's acceptable to take a child's life on one side of the birth canal, why not on the other? How could a journey of a few inches possibly transform a mass of tissue into a valuable human being? If women

should have the right to choose to end the baby's life inside the womb, why not the choice to end their 2-year-old's life? Logically, newborns would seem to be vulnerable to a woman's right to choose, just like a preborn baby currently is.

- "I don't believe any unwanted children should be allowed to come into the world."

Even when a woman didn't want to get pregnant—she feels almost like her body has been invaded by this uninvited person—doesn't she have a duty to that life within her? If someone broke into your house and left a 2-month-old baby in the living room, wouldn't you feel a sense of responsibility to protect and care for that life at least as long as it was under your roof?

Furthermore, who's to say whether this baby will be wanted by some adoptive parents? Pregnant women aren't the only ones who want babies.

Ultimately, the abortion issue centers on this one question: What is the unborn? If it's not a human being, no justification for abortion is required. If it is, no justification for abortion is adequate. (Greg Koukl, *Tactics* p 203-4, footnote 1)

Practical tips:

- Be sensitive. Each person's story is different. If you don't know their history related to abortion, proceed very slowly and carefully. It's very possible you're talking with someone who's been personally touched by abortion in one way or another, and their questions are just the tip of a whole iceberg of hurt and confusion related to this topic. Don't start giving arguments if what they really need is to hear about the good news of God's forgiveness in Christ.
- Pinpoint the real need. Some people have a belief problem—they think the unborn child isn't really a human being. Others have a practical problem—they don't know how they'll ever be able to afford another child. You have to know their needs in order to know whether to go into evangelism mode, apologetic mode, or into practical care mode.

- If dialogue is an option, you might consider Stephen Wagner's *Common Ground Without Compromise: 25 Questions to Create Dialogue on Abortion*. Great conversation starters, great for moving the dialogue along without it getting hostile.

NOTE: the spirit of murder isn't restricted to the abortion clinic. According to Jesus, it's alive and well every time anger breaks out and vents its hatred at people made in His image. So it's good news for all of us that the blood of Jesus can cleanse the bloody hands—and light the hate-darkened heart—of us all.

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