

## *Sermon: What the Bible Says About Abortion*

Steve Cole | January 2004

Thirty-one years ago this past Thursday, on January 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision. As Christians, we need to remember that what is legal is not necessarily moral in God's sight. Morality is not determined by popular or judicial opinion, but by what the Bible says. So I want us to look at what the Bible says about abortion. I could (and have, in a public school classroom) argue against abortion without reference to the Bible. It is a human atrocity. But since most of you accept the Bible as God's inspired Word, I want to explain what it says on this important subject.

Some who call themselves "evangelicals" argue that since the New Testament does not directly address the matter, we should not be dogmatic about it. They say that it is a "difficult moral issue," where we need to allow room to differ and not impose our personal views on others. Many evangelical pastors refrain from speaking on the subject because it is controversial and potentially divisive. And many pastors dodge it because they have drifted from the Bible as the source of absolute moral truth.

Christian pollster George Barna recently reported that only half of the country's Protestant pastors have a biblical worldview, which he defined as believing that absolute moral truth exists, that it is based upon the Bible, and having a biblical view on six core beliefs (the accuracy of biblical teaching, the sinless nature of Jesus, the literal existence of Satan, the omnipotence and omniscience of God, salvation by grace alone, and the personal responsibility to evangelize). Southern Baptist pastors ranked highest, with 71 percent holding to a biblical worldview. Among other Baptist pastors, it fell to only 57 percent. Other denominations ranked much lower.

I believe that the Bible gives us God's absolute moral standards that apply to every culture and every age. Furthermore, the Bible warns that God will judge every person based on His righteous standards (Acts 17:31; Rev. 20:11-15). We cannot plead ignorance as an excuse for disobedience or apathy (Prov. 24:11-12). God holds us accountable to the standards of His Word, whether we know those standards or not. We dare not be uninformed!

Also, our consciences need to be informed by Scripture, not by popular opinion or slogans. I have found professing Christians who have been influenced by the popular pro-abortion rhetoric. For example, the slogan, "Pro-family, Pro-child, Pro-choice" makes perfect sense to some, or it wouldn't be plastered on bumper stickers. But stop and think, "What is the choice that they are advocating?" The answer is, the choice to kill your baby! So that bumper sticker is about as logical as saying, "I'm pro-women, pro-rape"! It is utter nonsense!

Another bumper sticker reads, "Against abortion? Don't have one." That assumes that abortion is a personal preference, not a moral issue. Imagine a bumper sticker, "Against rape? Don't commit one"! That's fine if rape is just a preference, but if it is a heinous crime, that's ludicrous! Another slogan says, "Keep your laws off my body!" In other words, "We can't legislate morality." But we do have laws against rape, incest, child abuse, theft, and murder. Those are moral issues, all of which stem directly from the Bible! One of the main purposes for law is to protect the innocent and the weak. Laws about abortion relate directly to these matters.

Before we look at what the Bible says about abortion, let me briefly comment on what abortion is and on what the Supreme Court decision was all about. Abortion is the extraction or expulsion of the immature human fetus from the mother's womb with the intent to end the life of that fetus prior to natural birth. Fetus is a perfectly good medical term, as long as you remember that it refers to a developing human baby. But you will never hear abortion advocates speak of it as a baby or child. Sometimes they even call it the "product of conception," or a piece of tissue! Have you noticed how often the news refers to anti-abortion activists (not pro-life activists), and refers to those advocating baby-killing as pro-choice or defenders of abortion rights? How did we ever come to think that we have an inherent right to kill our children?

Of course many abortion advocates argue that it is not a human baby that they are killing, but science is against them. Before conception, there is not a new human life. But at the moment of conception, there is a new life, possessing 46 chromosomes, distinct from both the mother and the father. Genetically, the baby is not the mother's body! By 21 days, the first heartbeats have begun. At 45 days, brain waves can be detected. By the ninth and tenth weeks, the thyroid and adrenal glands are functioning. By 12 or 13 weeks, he has fingernails, sucks his thumb, recoils from pain, and has his own unique fingerprints. The only things that developing life needs to become what we are, are time and nurture.

What was *Roe v. Wade* all about? By a vote of 7-2, the U.S. Supreme Court held that until a child in the womb is viable (capable of sustaining life outside the womb) or "capable of meaningful life" (the court reckoned this to be six or usually seven months), the mother's desire for an abortion should take precedence over the baby's right to life. For the last two or three months, the court said that the state may protect the unborn, but that it must allow an abortion if the life or health of the mother is threatened. The court defined her "life or health" to mean her physical, emotional, or psychological health, her age, her marital status, or the infant's prospects of a distressful life and/or future. In other words, a woman can kill her child in the womb legally for any reason right up to the moment of birth!

According to former Surgeon General, Dr. C. Everett Koop, the most common reason for abortion is convenience. Only three to five percent of all abortions performed are for reasons of rape, incest, the possibility of a deformed child, or severe threat to the life of the mother. In the U.S., one out of every six women who have an abortion describes herself as an evangelical Christian (*Newsweek* [5/1/89], p. 31). In other countries, such as China and India, where male babies are favored over female babies, the abortion and infanticide of girls has led to a severe shortage of brides for young men.

Now let's consider what the Bible says about abortion:

Since God is the creator and sustainer of human life, we should value and protect the lives of all innocent humans.

By saying "innocent humans," I am allowing for the authority of the state to exercise capital punishment and to wage war for national defense. Being pro-life does not require us to be against capital punishment or to be pacifists. For sake of time, I cannot deal with those topics in this message. I want to present five lines of biblical evidence for valuing and protecting unborn children.

1. Human life is unique in that God created us in His image.

In Genesis 1:26, God distinguished humans from the rest of the animal creation. Only of man did God say, "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." He appointed man to rule over the other creatures on earth. By the way, apparently before the Flood, man was vegetarian, but after the Flood, God ordained the eating of meat (Gen. 9:3-4). The animal rights movement erroneously puts animal life on the same plane as human life. That concept stems from Hinduism, not from the Bible.

The Bible clearly affirms that human life is not the product of impersonal chance plus time. Man did not evolve from lower forms of life. God directly created man in His image, which means that we have the capability of rational thought, personality, and moral responsibility. Someone may argue that this is simply a matter of faith. I would say that it is a matter of reasonable faith. The view that something as complex as human life is the product of pure chance is a matter of unreasonable faith, because there is simply no evidence or other example of such complexity arising from random chance.

Also, even the most ardent evolutionist behaviorally affirms that human life is distinct from animal life. Imagine Mr. Evolutionist driving along when he encounters a squirrel in the road, still writhing from being hit by a car. He slams on his brakes, jumps out of his car, and frantically dials 911 on his cell phone. "I'd like to report an injured squirrel! If the paramedics get here quickly, they may be able to save him!" But, alas, they are too late! The man sits by the squirrel corpse, sobbing, until the mortuary arrives. He will never forget this tragic scene.

Ludicrous? Yes, but change the squirrel to a human baby and that scene would be truly horrific. Why? Because we all recognize that people are distinct from animals. The reason, according to the Bible, is that people are created in God's image; animals are not.

## 2. The Bible forbids us from shedding innocent blood.

The Bible clearly commands, "You shall not murder" (Exod. 20:13). As already mentioned, the Bible does not forbid all killing, such as in capital punishment by the government, national defense, or personal defense. But murder is forbidden. The Bible uses the phrase "innocent blood" about 20 times, and always condemns shedding innocent blood. God chastised the Jews for shedding innocent blood when they sacrificed their children to the idols of Canaan (Ps. 106:38). As John Piper argues, "Surely the blood of the unborn is as innocent as any blood that flows in the world" (Brothers, We are Not Professionals [Broadman & Holman], p. 222).

## 3. Pre-natal human life is fully human and thus precious to God.

Consider a few of the many biblical passages:

### A. God superintends life in the womb (Ps. 139:13-16).

David is affirming in poetic language that God superintended his formation in the womb (also, Job 10:8-12). The Bible repeatedly affirms that God's providence governs everything from the weather (Ps. 148:8; Job 37:6-13), to animals' food and behavior (Ps. 104:27-29; Job 38:39-41; Jonah 1:17; 2:10), to seemingly random events, such as the rolling of dice (Prov. 16:33). Surely if God governs these relatively minor things, then He also governs the formation of people in the womb. The Lord tells Moses, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?" (Exod. 4:11). So even birth defects, which science attributes to freak occurrences in nature, are under God's direct superintendence for His sovereign purposes!

There are so-called bio-ethicists that are consistent in applying their evolutionary bias to human life, but their conclusions are horrifying! For example, James Watson, one of the discoverers of the double helix structure of DNA, suggested in 1973, "If a child were not declared alive until three days after birth, then all parents could be allowed the choice only a few are given under the present system. The doctor could allow the child to die if the parents so choose and save a lot of misery and suffering. I believe this view is the only rational, compassionate attitude to have" (cited by Francis Schaeffer & C. Everett Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race* [Revell], p. 73).

In 1978, Watson's partner, Francis Crick, said, "... no newborn infant should be declared human until it has passed certain tests regarding its genetic endowment and that if it fails these tests it forfeits its right to live" (ibid.). Peter Singer, who incongruously is professor of bio-ethics at Princeton, argues that if a child is born with hemophilia, to allow the parents to kill him so that they could replace him with a normally healthy child may be morally right (cited by Piper, ibid., p. 217, note 3)!

B. The Bible ordains the penalty of life for life when the life of an unborn child is taken (Exod. 21:22-25).

The earlier edition of the NASB had an unfortunate translation that slanted the reader toward one of two possible interpretations, but not to the best one. The updated edition has corrected the problem. The earlier edition read, "And if men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a miscarriage, yet there is no further injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him...." The translators added the word "further" and they interpreted the Hebrew, "her children come out," as, "she has a miscarriage." The implication would be that to kill the fetus is only punishable by a fine, nothing more.

The updated edition reads, "... so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury...." As the following verses (23-25) make clear, if there is an injury, then the offender must be penalized, life for life, eye for eye, etc. These are the same penalties as in offenses against adults (Lev. 24:20). The Hebrew verb translated "to depart" or "come out" (Exod. 21:22) refers to a live birth in 11 separate Old Testament passages. It never refers to a miscarriage, although in one text (Num. 12:12), it refers to a stillborn. There is another Hebrew verb that is used for miscarriage. So the most likely meaning of Exodus 21:22-25, based upon verb usage, as well as the Old Testament high regard for pre-natal life, is that the baby in the womb has as much value as an already-born person.

C. The Bible affirms the distinctiveness of individuals in the womb, thus showing that they are fully human.

We won't take the time to look up each reference, but consider the following examples:

\*Jacob and Esau were distinct individuals in the womb (Gen. 25:23; Rom. 9:11-12).

\*Samson's mother was not to drink wine, because her son was to be a Nazirite, who would abstain from alcohol (Judges 13:3-5).

\*Jeremiah and Paul both acknowledged that God formed them in the womb and knew them by name (Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15). Isaiah 49:1, 5 affirms the same thing about Messiah.

\*John the Baptist recognized Jesus while both were still in the womb (Luke 1:35-36, 39-44)! This is an amazing text! Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy when Mary conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Mary went to visit Elizabeth before John was born. Thus Elizabeth would have been in her last trimester, while Mary was in her first trimester. Yet John recognized Jesus in those early months of Mary's pregnancy! I think that this is the strongest passage that a baby in the womb in the first trimester is a person created in God's image. We are not free to take the life of such a child just because it is not convenient to have a baby!

We have seen that human life is unique in that God created us in His image. The Bible forbids us from shedding innocent blood. Pre-natal human life is fully human and thus precious to God.

4. To view babies as inconvenient to the point of killing them is to violate Jesus' view of children.

As I mentioned, about 95 percent of all abortions are done for convenience. A girl gets pregnant through out-of-wedlock sex. Neither she nor her boyfriend are ready for the responsibility of being parents. It would be an economic hardship, or it may require interrupting her education. An abortion is a convenient way to dispose of the whole problem.

In Luke 18:15-17, people were bringing their babies to Jesus so that He could touch them. The disciples rebuked the parents. Jesus had better things to do than to bless babies! It was a great inconvenience! But Jesus rebuked the disciples and welcomed the children. The Greek word for infant in Luke 18:15 is the same word Luke uses for the infant in Elizabeth's womb (1:41, 44). God shows His great love for us by calling us His children (1 John 3:1). Surely, we should have the same attitude as Jesus towards our children from the time of conception onwards!

But what about an "unwanted" child, whose birth would be an extreme hardship? What about a baby conceived by rape or incest? What about a deformed baby, who will suffer all his life and never be normal? Wouldn't it be the lesser evil to abort these babies and spare them and the parents a life of hardship and pain?

5. To kill babies in the womb in an attempt to avoid suffering is to try to dodge God's purposes for suffering.

The Bible is clear that in this fallen world, God ordains suffering for His wise and good purposes (Rom. 8:28). Sometimes we suffer as the consequences for our own sin (Heb. 12:3-11), which can include the hardships associated with having a baby out of wedlock. (Sometimes it may be wise for an unwed mother to give up her baby for adoption, but even that is a painful consequence of sin.) Sometimes we suffer on account of other people's sins (Gen. 50:20). This would include the hardship of having a baby conceived through rape or incest. Sometimes we don't know the reason that God permits suffering, except that He wants to display His grace and power through our weakness (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

To abort because having a child would cause emotional or economic duress is always wrong. To argue that it is better to kill a deformed child in the womb than to allow him to live is an affront to the thousands of people born with severe handicaps, but who live meaningful and productive lives. It is an affront to the many families that love and care for such children. On rare occasions, there may be the difficult dilemma of performing an abortion to spare the mother's life. But even then, the goal should be to preserve the lives of both the mother and the child, if possible.

## **Conclusion**

Much more could be said if we had time. There are other biblical arguments against abortion. There is mounting evidence that many women who choose abortion suffer severe long-term emotional and physical problems.

I want to conclude by suggesting some action points. Some of these are things that every Christian can and should do. Others are things that only some will be called to do. But at some level, all of us need to come to the defense of unborn children.

(1) We can pray about the situation. It is ultimately a spiritual battle (Eph. 6:10-12). Pray for pro-life judges to receive Senate confirmation, especially to the Supreme Court. Pray for the horrors of abortion to become obvious to our self-centered culture. Pray for Christians to get involved in the pro-life cause.

(2) We can vote for pro-life candidates. Don't vote for pro-abortion candidates. You ask, "Are you a one-issue voter?" I grant that being pro-life does not qualify a person as a good political leader. But being pro-abortion should disqualify anyone from public office. For example, if a candidate said, "I believe that black people should not hold public office," that one issue should disqualify the candidate from office. Why doesn't favoring killing babies disqualify a candidate? The person who favors abortion is an immoral person!

(3) We can write our legislators and the newspaper to support the pro-life cause. Hold them accountable!

(4) We can support the pro-life cause with our money and time. Godly women are needed to counsel young women with problem pregnancies, so that they choose life for their babies. Godly families that are able should consider taking in such young women and helping them carry their babies to term. There are many ways to get involved.

(5) Our church should discipline any members who advocate abortion, perform abortions, or obtain abortions in disobedience to being counseled about God's truth on the matter. It is a national tragedy that two of our former Presidents, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, both claimed to be Southern Baptists, but were pro-abortion. Their churches should have disciplined them publicly.

In conclusion, I want to speak to any who may already have had an abortion or who may have urged someone else to have an abortion. Perhaps you did it in ignorance, but now you realize that you committed a serious sin in God's sight. The great news of God's Word is that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). The apostle Paul, who persecuted the church and was responsible for the deaths of many innocent people, wrote that, and then claimed, "among whom I am foremost of all." Paul found God's forgiveness and mercy at the cross. No matter how great your guilt, if you will turn from your sin and trust Jesus Christ as the one who bore your sin on the cross, God will pardon all of your sin and credit the righteousness of Jesus to your account (Rom. 4:4-5).

Discussion Questions 1. Does being pro-life mean that all forms of birth control are wrong? Are some forms of birth control wrong? Why?

2. How would you answer someone who said with reference to laws against abortion, "I don't believe you should be able to force your religious views on others?"

3. Should Christians practice civil disobedience to protest the current abortion practices? Give biblical support.

4. Should Christians support "compromise" legislation, such as banning abortion except for rape, incest, or severe deformity? Why/why not?

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