

A BIBLICAL VIEW ON
ABORTION



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ABORTION



Abortion is a controversial issue and one that divides nations where it has been legalized. The Bible provides a context to understand this issue and promotes human dignity from conception to natural death. A number of the books listed as resources will equip you to make a consistent pro-life defense. Here are a few different ways to think about the arguments against abortion.

Biblical Arguments Against Abortion

Imagine you have someone in your life who has recently become a Christian. After reading a Bible, he or she comes to you and

asks about abortion. After all, the word “abortion” is not found in the Bible, but Christians are supposed to be pro-life. What verses might you cite?

One key passage is Psalm 139. In this psalm, David begins by acknowledging that God is omniscient and knows his thoughts before he expresses them. David adds that wherever he might go, he cannot escape from God. He then contemplates the origin of his life and confesses that God was there forming him in the womb:

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:13-16).

David speaks of God’s relationship with him while he was growing and developing before birth. Notice that the Bible doesn’t speak of fetal life as mere biochemistry. The description here is not of a piece of protoplasm that becomes David. This is David already being

cared for by God while in the womb. We also see that God is the Master Craftsman fashioning David into a living person.

Another significant passage is Psalm 51. This Psalm was written by David after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and records his repentance. David confesses that his sinful act demonstrated the original sin that was within him, "Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). This verse implies that he was created in the image of God and he already had a sin nature.

Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6). And though God's image in humanity was marred at the Fall, it was not erased. Thus, the unborn baby is made in the image of God and therefore fully human in God's sight.

Medical Arguments Against Abortion

There are many other biblical arguments we could use to make an argument against abortion, but let's change our situation. Suppose you have someone in your life who does not believe the Bible. You may share biblical passages, but he or she is not convinced by those verses. Are there other arguments against abortion?

There are many compelling medical arguments against abortion. For example, a human embryo at conception is genetically distinct from the mother. To say that the developing baby is no different from the mother's appendix is scientifically inaccurate. A developing embryo is genetically different from the mother and is also genetically different from the sperm and egg that created it. A human being has 46 chromosomes (sometimes 47 chromosomes). Sperm and egg each have 23 chromosomes. A trained geneticist can distinguish between the DNA of an embryo and that of a sperm and egg. But that same geneticist could not distinguish between the DNA of a developing embryo and a full-grown human being.

Another argument can be made from the definitions of life and death. If one set of criteria have been used to define death, could it also be used to define life? Death used to be defined by the cessation of heartbeat. A stopped heart was a clear sign of death. If the cessation of heartbeat could define death, could the onset of a heartbeat define life? The heart is formed by the 18th day in the womb. If heartbeat was used to define life, then nearly all abortions would be outlawed.

Physicians now use a more rigorous criterion for death: brain wave activity. A flat EEG (electroencephalograph) is one of the most important criteria used to determine death. If the cessation of brain wave activity can define death, could the onset of brain wave activity define life? Individual brain waves are detected in the fetus after about 40-43 days. Using brain wave activity to define life would outlaw at least a majority of abortions.

Legal Arguments Against Abortion

The best legal argument against abortion can be seen in the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade*. Most of the Supreme Court's verdict rested upon two sentences. "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."¹

Although the sentences sounded both innocuous and unpretentious, they were neither. The Supreme Court's non-decision was not innocuous because the ruling overturned

¹ <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/410/113/>

state laws that protected the unborn and has resulted in over 60 million abortions in the United States.

The decision also seems unpretentious by arguing that the Court did not know when life begins. But if the Court did not know, then the justices should have acted “as if” life was in the womb. The legal burden of proof should lie with the life-taker, and the benefit of the doubt should be with the life-saver. If the Court didn’t know when life begins, then it should never have declared open season on the unborn.

The Supreme Court stated that it did not know when life begins and then violated the very spirit of this legal principle by acting as if it had just proven that no life existed in the womb. Even more curious was the fact that to do so, it had to ignore the religious community and international community on the subject of the unborn.

Had the religious community really failed to reach a consensus? Although there were some intramural disagreements, certainly the weight of evidence indicated that a Western culture founded on Judeo-Christian values held abortion to be morally wrong. People with widely divergent theological perspectives (Jewish, Catholic, evangelical and fundamen-

tal Protestants) shared a common agreement about the humanity of the unborn.

The same could be said about the international legal community. Physicians around the world subscribed to the Hippocratic Oath ("I will not give a woman a pessary to produce abortion"). The unborn were protected by various international documents like the Declaration of Geneva and the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Philosophical Arguments Against Abortion

An important philosophical question should be asked of anyone who approves of abortion. Where do you draw the line? In other words, when do you believe a human being becomes a person?

The Supreme Court's decision of *Roe v. Wade* separated personhood from humanity. In other words, the judges argued that a developing fetus was a human (i.e., a member of the species *Homo sapiens*) but not a person. Since only persons are given 14th Amendment protection under the Constitution, the Court argued that abortion could be legal at certain times. This left to doctors, parents, or even other judges the responsibility of arbitrarily deciding when personhood should be awarded to human beings.

The Supreme Court's cleavage of personhood and humanity made the ethical slide down society's slippery slope inevitable. Once the Court allowed people to start drawing lines, some drew them in unexpected ways and effectively opened the door for infanticide and euthanasia.

The Court, in the tradition of previous line-drawers, opted for biological criteria in their definition of a "person" in *Roe v. Wade*. In the past, such criteria as implantation or quickening had been suggested. The Court chose the idea of viability and allowed for the possibility that states could outlaw abortions performed after a child was viable. But viability was an arbitrary criterion, and there was no biological reason why the line had to be drawn near the early stages of development. The line, for example, could be drawn much later.

Any argument for abortion can also be logically used as an argument for infanticide. As if to illustrate this, Dr. Francis Crick, (co-discoverer of the structure of DNA) demonstrated that he was less concerned about the ethics of such logical extensions and proposed a more radical definition of personhood. He suggested in the British journal *Nature* that if "a child were considered to be legally born when two days old,

it could be examined to see whether it was an 'acceptable member of human society.'² This is not only an argument for abortion but also an argument for infanticide.

Other line-drawers have suggested a cultural criterion for personhood. Ashley Montagu, for example, stated, "A newborn baby is not truly human until he or she is molded by cultural influences later."³ Again, this is more than just an argument for abortion. It is also an argument for infanticide.

Dr. Joseph Fletcher argued in his book *Humanhood* that "Humans without some minimum of intelligence or mental capacity are not persons, no matter how many of these organs are active, no matter how spontaneous their living processes are."⁴ This is not only an argument for abortion and infanticide; it's adequate justification for euthanasia and the potential elimination of those who do not possess a certain IQ.

² Francis Crick, 'Logic of Biology,' *Nature*, 2 November 1968, 429-430.

³ Ashley Montagu, *Sex, Man and Society* (New York: Putnam, 1967).

⁴ Joseph Fletcher, *Humanhood: Essays in Biomedical Ethics* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1979), 135.

What About Exceptions?

Proponents of abortion usually raise questions about what could be called “hard cases” (like rape, incest, or handicaps) and focus on these exceptions. We may devote a future booklet just to the subject of these hard cases. But here are a few important points to consider.

First, it is important to remember that exceptions should not be used to justify the rule. Difficult ethical examples should not be used to determine a universal moral principle. Second, if the unborn child is human (as we have just demonstrated) then hard cases and exceptions should not be used to justify abortion.

For example, the argument for killing a handicapped unborn child would only be valid if it also applied to killing born people who are handicapped. Suppose a parent had a child that had a spinal cord injury in grade school. Would any parent be able to justify killing a paraplegic child? If the unborn child is human, then the same compassion should apply.

In the examples of rape and incest, we should first acknowledge that the way a child came into the world was through a horrific act. But the guilty party should be punished, not the innocent child who was conceived. We do

not put children to death for what an evil man has done.

Over these many decades, I have had a number of men and women in our radio studio that were conceived as a result of rape or incest. It would be hard for me or anyone to tell them that they should have been aborted because of the way they were conceived. A child is a child regardless of the circumstances of his or her conception.

In conclusion, we can see that there are many good arguments against abortion. Not only are there biblical arguments against abortion, but there are also medical, legal, and philosophical arguments against abortion. The Bible and logic are on the side of the Christian who wants to stand for the sanctity of human life.

Additional Resources

Randy Alcorn, *Pro Life Answers to Pro Choice Arguments* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1992)

Kerby Anderson, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), chapter six.

Scott Klusendorf, *The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

Gregory Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009, 2019).

Curt Young, *The Least of These: What Everyone Should Know About Abortion* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1983).

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