

Abortion: Is the unborn human? / COB / 11.06.16

Introduction / Issues

- † **[1: Tebow]** If you looked in the bulletin, you saw the title Linda put there is “Election Surprise.” What is the surprise? Am I running on the Ethics ticket? Am I voting for Tim Tebow? Will I reveal this whole Hillary/Donald fiasco was a hoax and there actually are two respectable candidates?
- Actually, the title “Election Surprise” symbolizes my indecision about the sermon topic when Linda wanted to print the bulletins on Tuesday morning. I figured, at that point, at the least, the topic would be a surprise to me.
 - I do want to touch on an election issue today, not so much to sway your vote, but because the election has brought an issue to my mind, and I think it is time we talked about it in this forum.
- † **[2: grace]** That issue is abortion. Please don’t get up and leave. I know this is not a pleasant issue for a beautiful Sunday morning, but it is a polarizing issue in politics, in society, even in churches, so it merits discussion. And some of you have been asking me to preach on it for some time now. This will not be an all-encompassing discussion, but it will serve as an introduction.
- Before we start, let me say a few things. First, I have friends who have had an abortion, and I love them. So there will be no hate speech today.
 - Second, to me this issue comes down to one question: is the unborn human embryo-fetus-baby a human life? If not, then sure, why not be pro-choice? If, however, you think the unborn is a human life, then you cannot be in favor of abortion rights, any more than you would recommend killing off the incompetent elderly or rebellious teenagers; it would be murder.
 - Third, if you have had an abortion, and today you feel a conviction that it was a mistake, I want you to know that God and this pastor extend grace and forgiveness to you. Please do not leave here feeling guilty or unloved, because Jesus paid the penalty for your sins, all of them, and his body, the church, is here to help you heal and find acceptance.
 - Let me pray briefly, and then we will get started. . .

Is the unborn a human life?

- † **[3: pea]** My wife is pregnant right now. We found out at what the doctors call “six weeks,” which means the baby was four weeks old. We loved this baby from that moment. Emotionally, I cannot understand how anyone can doubt this is a human life. Yes, she is inside her mother, depending on her mother for nourishment and protection, but so what? She’s going to depend on us after she is born too.
- When we saw our first ultrasound that week, we heard the heartbeat. Our child was only the size of a pea, but she had a heartbeat, what a miracle! and that was one of the most thrilling moments of my life. As an embryo with one month of life, she was developing kidneys, liver, lungs, and ears.
 - **[4: dance]** At our second ultrasound, another month later, our daughter was dancing! She dances like her father, the poor girl, doing the groundhog dance from Caddyshack. I decided to interpret that as her telling us “I’m all right, nobody worry about me.” The rest of the

Caddyshack theme song is rebellious and can wait until her teen years. Now called a fetus, she was developing bones and cartilage and all her essential organs; she had toes and a nose and muscles enough to do the dance we saw.

- **[5: wave]** At our third ultrasound, twelve weeks since ovulation, ten since fertilization, our baby was waving at us! She was the size of a plum, but her digestive system had started to function, she had a tongue, hair follicles were starting to develop, her ovaries were forming; and we found out from her DNA which passed into her mother's blood, that she was a girl.
- Now we are at the end of the first trimester. Our little girl is about two inches long. But she is our baby. We cannot speak for every pregnant parent, but that's our emotional and experiential perspective.

† **[6: embryo]** Scientific literature says at first we have an embryo, then after eight weeks, we call the embryo a "fetus." Some find it easier to accept abortion of an "embryo" or a "fetus" rather than of an "unborn baby." According to scientific literature, however, "fetus" literally means the unborn offspring of a mammal, i.e. an unborn baby.

- Interestingly, my perusal of pro-choice websites did not offer any viable scientific argument for considering the fetus as not being a human life.
- If a single living cell was found on another planet, scientists would exclaim we had found evidence of life elsewhere in the universe... Within two weeks of conception, the human embryo is multiple cells; by three weeks, the brain, spinal cord, and heart are in development. The heart starts beating at twenty-two days.
- At fertilization, day one, though only a single cell, the embryo is a living organism with all the chromosomes containing the DNA for a new and unique human being. In that moment, God has already placed all the genetic characteristics of that person, including gender, eye and hair color, personality, love language, intelligence, athleticism, even likelihood of baldness [which hopefully is low for my daughter, at least until she is far older than I presently am].

† **[7: development]** In 1967, dozens of scientific authorities gathered at the First International Conference on Abortion.

- The medical group came to a near unanimous conclusion [only one dissenter]: they said, "The majority of our group could find no point in time between the union of sperm and egg, or at least the blastocyst stage [one week after fertilization] and the birth of the infant at which point we could say that this was not a human life . . . The changes occurring between implantation, the six-week embryo, six-month fetus, a one week-old child, or mature adult are really stages of development and maturation."
- In other words, to scientists, the growth of our embryo into a fetus into birthed baby is of the same nature as the growth of a baby into a child into a teenager into an adult, it represents stages of person's development.

† In 1981, a congressional subcommittee [the Subcommittee on Separation of Powers to Senate Judiciary Committee S-158, 97th Congress] solicited scientific testimony on this question. The opinion of the biologists and geneticists was clear: life begins at conception.

- Dr. Mathews-Roth, of Harvard Medical School, cited over twenty embryology and other medical textbooks to conclude that human life begins at conception.

- World-renown geneticist, Dr. Lejeune, testified, “To accept the fact that after fertilization has taken place a new human has come into being is no longer a matter of taste or opinion. . . it is plain experimental evidence. Each individual has a very neat beginning, at conception.”
 - I am not offering my sermon as definitive research, but after perusing various websites, it seems to me dispassionate scientists agree that life begins at fertilization. Their political or religious views about abortion might vary, but the science seems set.
- † **[8: SBC]** It might surprise many of you that evangelicals have not always been strongly pro-life or anti-abortion. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote an interesting article about this.
- He noted that in 1971, two years before the landmark Supreme Court decision, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution calling for legalization of abortion on demand for various reasons, including the possibility of emotional damage to the mother and the likelihood of abnormality in the baby. In other words, they favored aborting unwanted babies.
 - **[9: CT]** In 1968, *Christianity Today* published an article that stated, “Whether or not the performance of an induced abortion is sinful we [Protestant religious leaders] are not agreed, but about the necessity of it and permissibility for it under certain circumstances we are in accord.” So not only did Protestants largely agree on the need for abortion, even those who thought it sinful were willing to allow it.
- † Today, the more theologically liberal denominations take a pro-choice position. Surprisingly, according to a Pew survey in 2013, only about a third of evangelicals think abortion is a critical issue, and slightly more of us think it is not even an important issue at all [Fisher, 5].
- **[10: Exodus 21]** So what about scripture. Pro-choice groups cite **Exodus 21.22-25 NIV:** [In Hebrew, God dictated] **If people are fighting and 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.** This was written in Hebrew.
 - The Latin translation of the fourth century, now called “the Vulgate,” interpretively translates this to be injury to the mother after a miscarriage, so pro-choice advocates have argued that the unborn must not be a human life since there was no punishment for the death of the baby.
 - The older Greek translation, called the Septuagint, interpretively translates this to be injury to the prematurely born baby, so the death of the baby would require death of the perpetrator, and so on. This was a Jewish translation, which was used by the early church. So In Jesus’ day, many Jews and most Christians would have viewed death of the baby as a capital offense.
- † **[11: laments]** Pro-choice groups sometimes quote Jeremiah or Job wishing he had never been born [Jeremiah 20.14-18; Job 3.16-19] or sayings of how it would be better not to be born than to be wicked or miserable [Psalms 58.3-8; Ecclesiastes 6.3-5], but these texts do not argue in favor of abortion, or even deny the sanctity of life, they merely use hyperbolic literary devices to make their point and express despair.
- Pro-choice groups also quote certain passages to say that life begins with breath, thus outside of the womb. These verses, however, talk about the breath of life God gives – his breath, not ours.

- † **[12: Hosea]** Their better argument cites when the prophet Hosea calls for judgment on Israel, which had turned wickedly away from God, because one of Hosea's curses includes miscarrying wombs. You could argue that if God causes a miscarriage, he is in a sense performing an abortion.
- But all misfortune, including every miscarriage, is allowed to occur by God, yet we do not attribute that evil to God, because we know he is tolerating evil and suffering for a while, so he can work it all for good somehow.
 - Also, since Hosea's words are a judgment, we have to realize that throughout the Old Testament, God brings death to entire people groups for having walked away from him. This includes men, women, children, babies, and even those still in the womb. So this is not an argument in favor of abortion, but recognition that God's judgment is thorough and harsh to our ears.
 - Most importantly, what God sovereignly decides about a person's fate – the mother or the unborn child – is not necessarily the same privilege God extends to mankind. God is the sovereign creator, so he may justly do as he pleases, even strike people down to death in his judgment. Again, this is true for those in the womb or birthed babies, as much as for adults. Though God has this privilege, he does not grant it to us at our discretion.
- † **[13: Didache]** The early church's position is pretty clear from the Didache, written for church governance in Rome at the same time the New Testament was being written. **Didache 2.2** [Holmes translation]: **“You shall not abort a child or commit infanticide.”** So Christians were not to kill their children before or after birth.
- This is echoed in the Epistle of Barnabas, also from the first century. In the second century we have writings from Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Athenagoras which make clear that the church considered abortion to be murder.
- † **[14: Psalm 139]** Let's consider **Psalms 139.13-16 NIV**: [David prays to God] **“For you [God] 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 [like “the secret place,” a metaphor for the womb]. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”**
- God knows everything, right? And all of time is experienced by God at once, because he is outside of time. So he knew all about my daughter before we even conceived her; he knows all about her now, in the womb. Best of all, her development is a creation of God, both her spiritual development and her physical/material development.
 - This process is echoed in **Jeremiah 1.5 NET**: [God said to Jeremiah] **“Before I formed you in your mother's womb I chose you. Before you were born I set you apart. I appointed you to be a prophet to the nations.”**
 - Isaiah said something similar: **Isaiah 49.1 NIV**: **Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.**
 - God has a plan for my daughter, a plan he made before he gave her human life when my sperm fertilized my wife's egg. She probably will not grow up to be as important as Isaiah or Jeremiah, but I will be satisfied if she grows up to know and walk with God.

- † **[15: Psalm 51]** David says something related, but disturbing in **Psalm 51.5-6 NIV: Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you [God] desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.**
- Though still in the womb, my daughter already suffers under the curse of inherited sin, the corruption to her human nature that mars her from being the image of God she is intended to be. She also carries the guilt of imputed sin, which is true for every person, because God holds all humanity guilty of straying from him back in the garden of Eden. This is disquieting for a new parent to consider.
 - I am encouraged, however, by the thought that the Holy Spirit already is at work in her. She surely will not be as important to God's plans as King David, but I assume the Holy Spirit is doing something to limit the effects of sin in her and start the process of bringing her to faith in Christ.
- † **[16: Luke 1]** I told you our daughter danced for us and waved at us when we were doing the ultrasounds. Of course, she did not know we were looking, she was responding to the probe jostling her environment. But look at what happened while Jesus and John the Baptist were in the womb.
- **Luke 1.39-45 NET: In those days Mary [who was pregnant with Jesus] got up and went hurriedly into the hill country, to a town of Judah, and entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth [who was pregnant with John]. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She exclaimed with a loud voice, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child in your womb! And who am I that the mother of my Lord should come and visit me? For the instant the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled."**
 - So John the Baptist, while still in the womb, knew of the presence of Jesus, also still in the womb! Obviously the Holy Spirit was at work here, in the mothers and the unborn babies, but my point is that Jesus in the womb was already the Messiah-savior, even as his mother was carrying him; and John, who would grow up to be a great prophet, already was hearing from the Holy Spirit and responding, even though he also was still in the womb.
 - It is also worth noting that the Bible uses the same terms for the unborn as it does for babies after birth. In other words, the unborn are considered babies.
- † **[17: Exodus 20]** This is important, because the Bible is clear about not murdering any person.
- One of the Ten Commandments, the legal guidelines for the new nation of Israel, was **Exodus 20.13 NIV: You shall not murder.** The New Testament makes clear this commandment exists for the church age, under the New Covenant, as well.
 - The reason for this is the sanctity of human life, which derives from God making people in his image. We talked about this last year, when we were studying the beginning of Genesis. **Genesis 1.27-28 NET: God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the ground."**

- Like everything else, man and woman reproduce after their kind, so generations will be like their parents; but man and woman were made in God’s image, so they were like their Father, God, and could reproduce his image.
- 1.28 is a command to multiply people, it is a command to represent God and rule in his name. But the only way that filling the earth with people was going to fulfill our purpose of representing God and ruling in his name, was if we were multiplying the image of God.
- God invested spiritual life in people, and he blessed them to be able to procreate that spiritual life in new physical life, in their babies. This is one of the greatest blessings in the creation! With each pregnancy, we procreate a new spiritual life, which is part of God’s original plan and purpose for mankind. It is true that every child is conceived with corruption, and thus needs a savior in Jesus, but every child – even while in the womb – has a soul, has spiritual potency, carries inherent within the original design of being the image of God.
- Thus there is sanctity in all human life. That means every child, every fetus and embryo, is a blessing, even one conceived in sin, even one conceived through sin against us, even one with abnormalities. When we create new life in the womb, we multiply the image of God! That is why every person is valuable. That is why abortion, suicide, assisted suicide, and murder are sinful.

Issues

- † **[18: journal]** There are a lot of aspects of this issue we cannot discuss fully today. As I said at the start, this is an introduction. Before we close, let me offer some further thoughts on why this is important for Christians to prayerfully and scripturally consider.
 - In 2012, the government estimated one out of six pregnancies in the US was aborted. Reports were of 699,000 abortions that year, that’s 1900/day, 79/hour. There were 1069 abortions that year in Chester County; that’s almost three per day, and almost none of them done in the sterile environment of a hospital. Studies suggest about 30% of women will have an abortion.
 - I will not describe the process of surgical abortion. Rest assured it is disturbing, a literal tearing apart of the body of the fetus. Chemical abortion once the fetus is developed involves injecting poison into the baby to induce a heart attack. RU-486 prevents the fertilized egg from attaching to the uterine wall or causes the placenta body to detach and induce the uterus to contract to deliver the dead embryo.
 - This is an issue on which the media is trying to limit conservative Christian influence or even the objectivity of presenting all viewpoints. For example, in 2000, *The New York Times* and *USA Today* rejected an advertisement from Focus on the Family which criticized partial-birth abortion. That’s the process by which the doctor pulls the living baby out of the womb feet first, but leaves the head inside for legal purposes, until he can kill the baby.
 - Having gone this far in our culture, the *Journal of Medical Ethics* published a 2012 article in favor of what the authors called “after birth abortion.” They said the same reasons used to justify abortion could be used to justify killing a child already born, such as finding the child is defective. One feminist theologian has written women who quietly have put their infants to death are not doing wrong. A University of Manchester bioethics professor says “There is no obvious reason why one should think differently from an ethical point of view, about a fetus when it’s outside the womb rather than when it’s inside the womb.” Interestingly, that is our argument for concluding abortion is wrong!

- † **[19: Philippians 2]** We have not touched on the issue of a woman's rights. We should do another sermon next year, focusing more on that. I will not step into the legal issues today. But morally, if every life is sacred, if every new life is a gift from God, part of his plan to multiply his image, then we as a society and we as Christian women, should be thinking of how to sacrificially serve that child entrusted to us, rather than how to conveniently stand on our rights by getting rid of it.
- One pro-choice website said that even if a fetus had a right to life, it did not have the right to use the woman's body for nine months, therefore abortion should be allowed. I think scripture, in the Old Testament and the New would argue for a more selfless approach to this problem.
- † Another issue is the danger of illegal abortions. Again, we do not have time to get into this. But if the danger of illegal abortions is our justification for legalization, it is a pretty weak justification.
- We have to do what is right and trust God with the results. If abortion is taking a human life, then we should not allow it just to avoid negative effects for those who commit that sin and break that law.
 - To me this is a scriptural and biological issue: are the unborn human? That determines what our view on abortion should be. Not all biblical scholars or scientists agree on the answer, but from my biblical studies and biological studies, I think the unborn are human babies in development, who deserve the same protections which the Democrats, among others, champion for everyone else.

Response

- † **[20: grace-love-truth]** Let me close today by suggesting some responses we could make.
- First, if you get pregnant, take advantage of free counsel and care at places like Pregnancy Resources at Cornerstone in Gap. Do the research on your options. Even if you do not think you can care for the child, there are many families waiting for a baby who would be willing to adopt. Based on my understanding of scripture, I suggest avoiding the abortion option.
 - If you have had an abortion in the past, I hope you understand that was not the right choice. Repenting is simple: you just confess to God that you made this mistake, you are sorry, and you will not do so again. Once you have repented, accept God's cleansing and forgiveness. Do not carry your guilt with you day to day, because Jesus paid the penalty for your sins, he took your guilt upon himself. It is the Devil's trick to have you live with lasting guilt, so that you are weak and less energetic for God. God's plan is you feel the conviction of your error, you repent, and then you move on with his blessing and empowerment.
 - If you know anyone who has had an abortion, forgive them and love them. If someone comes forward in this church to admit a past abortion, let's forgive them and love them. Christ has loved us and given us grace though we were terrible sinners, though we continue to sin against him. Let us extend that same love and grace to others.