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ABORTION: TERMINATING A PREGNANCY

Ekkehardt Mueller



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Biblical Research Institute
Silver Spring, Maryland

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Introduction

Abortion is a much—discussed and controversial topic, especially in Western societies. This study, divided into six parts, attempts to examine the issue from a biblical perspective. We will start with the state of affairs, followed by a description of the variety of opinions on the subject. We will then explain the approach taken in this study, and move to the Holy Scriptures and its teachings on the topic of abortion. We will deal with difficult issues too, and end with a section on implications.

The State of Affairs

In this section we begin with a short comment on pregnancy and the development of the unborn child, before continuing with aspects related to abortion.

Pregnancy

While in some societies and people groups, women—for various reasons¹—do not necessarily consider it desirable to become pregnant and have children, in other societies women deem it a positive experience. They wish to become mothers. Although pregnancies normally have effects that may be understood as downsides, many women are willing to accept these for the joy of having their own child, especially when they are married and, together with their husband, want to not only form a couple but also become a family. In a number of cultures, not being able to have children is seen as a disgrace and a disadvantage.

The Old and New Testaments report that people in biblical times felt the same way. Numerous stories indirectly lament the infertility of women, beginning with Sarah, Abraham's wife (Gen 11:30); Rebekah, Isaac's wife (Gen 25:21); and Rachel, Jacob's wife (Gen 29:31). The Old Testament continues with Manoah's wife, who was barren but through God's intervention gave birth to Samson (Judg 13:2), one of the judges of Israel. Hannah's moving story is reported in 1 Samuel 1:1–20. The shame of barrenness and her exuberant joy of becoming the mother of Samuel is expressed in 1 Samuel 2. According to the New Testament, Elizabeth was also barren and, like Sarah, in her advanced age, gave birth to John the Baptist (Luke 1:7, 13). These

¹ Such reasons may include not wanting to contribute to overpopulation, enjoying life, convenience, and the personal freedom of not having to devote time, money, and energy to children.

women regarded pregnancy as a great privilege and their children as divine gifts. Indeed, their children's potential was revealed later in their lives, and they became heroes of faith. The angel told Zachariah,

Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared. (Luke 1:13–17)

Mary accepted her unusual pregnancy as God's will and gave birth to the Messiah, singing her inspiring Magnificat (Luke 1:46–56). These examples should not be understood as only male descendants being a blessing. Throughout both Testaments, male and female characters are praised for their faithful lives and actions.

Apart from infertile individuals who were blessed with fertility, God promised blessings of offspring for all of Israel: "None shall miscarry or be barren in your land" (Exod 23:26). God, as the helper of the needy, "gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD" (Ps 113:9). But males can also be barren (Deut 7:14). In any case, being with child and having children is considered a great privilege and gift (Pss 17:14; 113:9; 127:3–4; 128:3, 6). And all parents and children are called to be children of the Most High (Ps 82:6).

Hays portrays the New Testament teaching on this topic:

Within the *symbolic* world of the New Testament, God is the creator and author of life. The prologue of John's Gospel asserts that all life comes into being through the creative power of the Logos . . . (John 1:3–5). Wherever new life begins to develop in any pregnancy, the creative power of God is at work, and Jesus Christ, who was the original agent of creation, has already died for the redemption of the incipient life *in utero*. That is why Barth can say, "The true light of the world shines already in the darkness of the mother's womb." We are privileged to participate in the creative work of God through begetting and bearing and

birthing children, but there can be no new life without the generative power of God.²

Now, in a world seriously affected by sin, not each and every pregnancy is a joyous, problem-free event. While pregnancy is not a sickness, it still causes at least uncomfortable and taxing times for most mothers. In some cases, it can lead to serious conditions or bring the prospect and threat of death. Shortly before he passed away, Jacob blessed Joseph and then his other sons with him. In his speech, we still recognize his pain about the death of Rachel, who had passed away while giving birth to Benjamin (Gen 48:7). But apart from health challenges, a pregnant woman may face other disturbing situations that may negatively impact the pregnancy: a loved one may die, the father of the child may leave her and the unborn child, abuse may have occurred, or the fetus may have defects. But we should not forget that in the large majority of cases, “the normal response to pregnancy within the Bible’s symbolic world, is one of rejoicing for God’s gift—even when this gift comes unexpectedly.”³ This is so even today, in spite of birth pangs and labor. Says Jesus, “When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world” (John 16:21).⁴

The Development of a Child

The development of a child in utero is indeed amazing. Since we cannot directly see the fetus nor realize how it grows, we may tend to regard it as more of a “thing,” or a being in a secondary sense, rather than a truly human person.⁵ On the other hand, seeing a newborn baby often elicits curiosity, a sense of joy, and a feeling that this little human needs protection and care. Not so much with the unborn, which may not trigger the same positive emotional response in adults that a newborn would, because we do not encounter the fetus directly.

² Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 450.

³ Hays, 450.

⁴ If not stated otherwise, the English Standard Version (ESV) has been used for biblical quotations.

⁵ Konstantinos Kapparis, *Abortion in the Ancient World* (London: Duckworth & Co., 2002), 33, explains: “A recent study concluded that ‘women tend to define new life as being human earlier than men and by a different set of characteristics than men. They tend to regard it as human when they know it is growing. On the other hand, men do not identify the new life as human until they can see it or communicate with it.’”

Therefore, it may be helpful to point out how a child develops in the mother's body under normal circumstances.

Conception	The father's sperm penetrates the mother's egg cell. Genetic instructions from both parents interact to begin a new and unique individual who is no bigger than a grain of sugar.
Day 1	The first cell divides into two, then two into four, and so on.
Days 5-9	The new individual implants in the mother's womb. The baby's sex can already be determined.
Day 14	The mother's normal menstrual period is suppressed by a hormone produced by her child.
Day 18	The heart is forming. Soon the eyes start to develop.
Day 20	The beginnings of brain, spinal cord, and nervous system are laid.
Day 24	The heart begins to beat.
Day 28	Muscles are developing along the future spine.
Day 30	The child in utero has grown ten thousand times, to between six and seven millimeters (one-quarter inch) long. The brain has human proportions. Blood flows in the veins and is separate from the mother's blood supply.
Day 35	The pituitary gland in the brain is forming. Mouth, ears, and nose are taking shape.
Day 40	The heart's energy output is twenty percent of an adult's output.
Day 42	The skeleton is formed. The brain coordinates movement of the muscles and organs. Reflex responses have begun. The penis has begun to form in male infants. <i>The mother misses her second period.</i>
Day 43 (1 ½ months)	Brain waves are recorded.

Day 45	Spontaneous movements have begun, and teeth are developing.
7 Weeks	Lips are sensitive to touch, and the ears may already be taking on the family shape.
8 Weeks	The child is well proportioned: a small-scale baby is three centimeters (one and an eighth inches) sitting up, and a gram (one-thirtieth of an ounce) in weight. Every organ is present. The heart beats sturdily; the stomach produces digestive juices; the liver makes blood cells; the kidneys begin to function; the taste buds are forming.
8 ½ Weeks	Fingerprints are being engraved. They will grow larger, but they are unique and will never change. The eyelids and palms of the hands are sensitive to touch.
9 Weeks	The child bends fingers around an object placed in the palm. Thumb-sucking begins. Fingernails are forming.
10 Weeks	The body is sensitive to touch. The child squints, swallows, furrows the brows, and frowns.
11 Weeks	The baby urinates and makes complex facial expressions, and even smiles.
12 Weeks	The baby is capable of vigorous activity—kicking, turning feet, curling and fanning toes, making a fist, moving thumbs, bending wrists, turning the head, opening the mouth, and pressing lips tightly together. Breathing has begun.
13 Weeks (<i>End of First Trimester</i>)	The baby is prettier, and the facial expressions resemble the parents'. Movements are graceful, reflexes vigorous. The vocal cords are formed, although without air the baby cannot cry. The sex organs are apparent.

4 Months	The baby can grasp with hands, swim, and do somersaults.
4–5 Months	<i>The mother first feels the baby move.</i>
5 Months	Sleeping habits are noticeable. A slammed door will result in activity. The child responds to sounds in frequencies too high or low for adults to hear.
6 Months	Fine hair grows on eyebrows and head. Eyelash fringe appears.
(End of Second Trimester)	The baby's weight is about 640 grams (one pound, six ounces), and height is twenty-three centimeters (9 inches). Babies born at this age have survived.
7 Months	Eyeteeth are present. Eyelids open and close. Eyes look around. Hands grip strongly. The mother's voice is heard and recognized.
8 Months	Weight increases by one kilogram (over two pounds), and the baby's quarters get very cramped.
9 Months	The child triggers labor, and birth occurs, usually 255–275 days after conception. Of the forty-five generations of cell divisions before adulthood, forty one have already taken place. Four more will come during the rest of childhood and adolescence. ⁶

This development of a human being has been divided into different stages, and different terms are used to describe these stages:

In the first few days the new living entity that has been created is usually referred to as a zygote. From the moment the zygote has made its way to the uterus it becomes a blastocyst. . . . By the end of the second week the “successful” blastocyst has developed to the point where it implants itself in the wall of the uterus. From this significant moment of implantation until the end of the

⁶ John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 76-78. Elmer P. Sakala, “Observations on Abortion: One Perinatologist’s Viewpoint,” in *Abortion: Ethical Issues and Options*, ed. by David R. Larson (Loma Linda, CA: Loma Linda University Center for Christian Bioethics, 1992), 4-10, offers additional helpful and detailed insights.

eighth week, we speak of an embryo. After the eighth week the embryo becomes a fetus in the narrower sense of the word (even though the word is sometimes used for the entire period from conception to birth). . . . It is important to remember that this “portrayal of development in stages is artificial and unnatural.”⁷

We now turn more directly to the topic of abortion and begin with definitions of the term “abortion.”

Definitions of Abortion

The term “abortion” is used in different ways today. For instance, a miscarriage is nowadays called a “spontaneous abortion,” carried out by the female body independent of willful intervention by the mother or other people.

But normally an “abortion” is understood as the termination of an unborn human life in the body of a woman.⁸ Walter Jeffko defines it as follows: “Abortion is the direct killing of a fetus, either by causing its death in the womb or by removing it from the womb before it is viable, that is before it can survive outside the mother’s womb.”⁹ Abortion can be done in various ways—for example, by the use of medication that kills the fetus within a few days, or by surgical procedures. This type of abortion is what this chapter is concerned with—not “spontaneous abortion.” Abortion as the willful termination of an unborn human life is further described by the following subcategories:

“Late-term abortions” are typically performed toward the end of the second trimester of pregnancy—that is, approximately after the twenty-first or twenty-fourth week. However, they are also available up to the ninth month (thirty-sixth week).¹⁰

⁷ Reinder Bruinsma, *Matters of Life and Death* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 69–70. The quotation used by him comes from Sakala, 10–11. Niels-Erik Andreassen, “A Biblical Perspective on Abortion,” in *Abortion: Ethical Issues and Options*, 51, suggests that the Bible distinguishes between conception, gestation, and birth.

⁸ Wikipedia defines abortion as follows: “Abortion is the ending of a pregnancy by removal or expulsion of an embryo or fetus before it can survive outside the uterus. An abortion that occurs without intervention is known as a miscarriage or spontaneous abortion. When deliberate steps are taken to end a pregnancy, it is called an induced abortion, or less frequently ‘induced miscarriage’. The unmodified word *abortion* generally refers to an induced abortion. A similar procedure after the fetus has potential to survive outside the womb is known as a ‘late termination of pregnancy’ or less accurately as a ‘late term abortion.’” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion#cite_note-definition-1 (accessed September 5, 2019).

⁹ Walter G. Jeffko, *Contemporary Ethical Issues: A Personalistic Perspective* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 60.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Capital Women’s Services, <https://www.capitalwomensservices.com>

The phrase “elective abortion” refers to a voluntary abortion at the request of a pregnant woman for reasons other than health concerns.¹¹ Such reasons may include 1) living in poverty; 2) encountering difficult circumstances, such as being single or living in an abusive relationship; 3) feeling the child would threaten the pursuit of her education or career; 4) not feeling ready to have a child, or another child, or simply wanting to avoid motherhood at all; or 5) wanting to avoid the shame of having become pregnant.¹² The phrase “elective abortions,” the vast majority of all abortions, focuses almost exclusively on pregnant women. Physicians who perform these procedures, or persons who may force or threaten a woman to have an abortion, such as the father, family members, or human traffickers are considered secondary or tertiary. The fetus is referred to as the “product of conception”—a euphemism. Although Elmer Sakala considers terminations of pregnancy that occur earlier than implantation of the fertilized egg in the uterus to be contraception, and holds that abortions are more questionable the later the fetus is in development, he still states,

Employment of this euphemism [“products of conception”] avoids reference to the fetus and provides a surgical context for the abortion. The expression, however, tends to downplay and obscure the striking and exquisite development of even a first trimester fetus. Even early abortions procedures do not involve formless blobs of protoplasm but delicate, finely orchestrated embryological processes following a sequence meticulously devised by the Creator Himself.¹³

[/overviewofabortioncare.php?gclid=EAIaIQobChMlt-urkZO95AIVTwOGCh3oQwLGEAAYASAAEgI3rfD_BwE](https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/op-eds/abortion-is-never-medically-necessary) (accessed September 6, 2019). There are voices, such as “Fact: Late-Term Abortions are Never Medically Necessary,” Lila Rose and Mary Davenport, <https://thefederalist.com/2019/02/26/fact-late-term-abortions-never-medically-necessary/> (accessed September 6, 2019), see also Donna Harrison and Lila Rose, “Abortion is never medically necessary,” February 26, 2019, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/op-eds/abortion-is-never-medically-necessary> (accessed October 5, 2020).

¹¹ “An elective abortion is the interruption of a pregnancy before the 20th week of gestation at the woman’s request for reasons other than maternal health or fetal disease.” “Elective abortion,” <https://www.britannica.com/science/elective-abortion> (accessed September 6, 2019).

¹² See, e.g., Lawrence B. Finer, Lori F. Frohworth, Lindsay A. Dauphinee, Susheela Singh, and Ann M. Moore, “Reasons U.S. Women Have Abortions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives,” *Perspectives on Sexual Health and Reproductive Health*, 37, no. 3 (2005):110-118.

¹³ Sakala, 4.

This study will address “induced abortions,” abortions carried out with the purpose of ending the life of the unborn for various reasons—social (elective abortions), medical, or otherwise. Medical reasons refer to issues regarding either the health of the mother or the child. They can be mild, moderate, or severe.

Another phrase using the term “abortion,” which does not fit the above definition, is the “after-birth abortion.” This is a euphemism for infanticide, which is not only suggested by some academics or health practitioners but may also be carried out by a parent, relative, or another person. Neither “spontaneous abortions” nor “after-birth abortions” directly concern us in this study.

Data Concerning Abortions

Abortion has been a much-debated issue for decades, and is practiced extensively. “Between 1973 and 2005 more than 45 million legal abortions were performed in the United States. . . Figures from 1996 show that approximately 3,700 abortions occurred each day in the United States. . . According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute. . . nearly half of the pregnancies among American women are unintended, and four in ten of those end in abortion.”¹⁴

In the United States, the phenomenon has been studied so widely that numbers are available on how many women in certain age groups, social classes, religious affiliations, races, and other groups have abortions. The reasons why these women chose abortions have also been investigated. “Six percent of abortions are performed because of potential health problems regarding either the mother or child. In contrast, ‘93% of all abortions occur for social reasons (i.e. the child is unwanted or inconvenient).’”¹⁵ Social reasons include, as indicated already, poverty and financial difficulties, interference with education, work, or career, perceived unreadiness for a child, being unmarried, etc. A 2004 study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute on a more limited sample of participants came to the following conclusion: “Our data suggest that after carefully assessing their individual situations, women base their decisions largely on their ability to

¹⁴ Feinberg and Feinberg, 63. This quotation is associated with the Alan Guttmacher Institute. “The Guttmacher Institute isn’t affiliated with a political party, and so it is nonpartisan in the strict sense of the word. It is true that the group does work to ‘ensure that all women are able to exercise their reproductive rights and responsibilities,’ which puts them among advocates of abortion rights” (Wikipedia, s.v. “Guttmacher Institute,” last modified March 10, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guttmacher_Institute [accessed March 17, 2020]).

¹⁵ Feinberg and Feinberg, 65.

maintain economic stability and to care for children they already have.”¹⁶ Loren Seibold states,

Having an abortion is often argued as the way to keep unwed mothers from sinking under family responsibilities. The data doesn’t support that. Women who have had abortions are more likely to become pregnant again and have more abortions, and are more likely to require welfare. They have more health and emotional problems, which makes it harder to find a job, and diminishes their chance of establishing permanent relationships with a male partner — they’re more likely to never marry, more likely to divorce, and more likely to go through a long string of unsuccessful relationships.¹⁷

“In both surveys [1987 and 2004], 1% [of the sample of abortion patients] indicated that they had been victims of rape, and less than half a percent said they became pregnant as a result of incest.”¹⁸ “Only a small proportion of women cited concerns about their own health. However . . . these concerns encompassed not just risks to future health, but also the health burden of pregnancy itself.”¹⁹

While the abortion rate in the United States declined between 2008 and 2014, it is still anticipated that “nearly 1 in 4 women” will “have an abortion during her reproductive years.”²⁰

But abortions are not limited to the United States only. “In 2003, worldwide there were nearly 42 million abortions some 48% of all abortions worldwide were considered ‘unsafe.’”²¹ The magnitude of the issue becomes even more pronounced as one compares the yearly number of abortions worldwide with the population of certain countries. Forty-two million aborted children represents more than the total population of Poland in 2019 (about thirty-eight million). It is about half of the population of Germany (about eighty-four million). To eradicate the entire population of a country would be a

¹⁶ Finer et al., 117.

¹⁷ Loren Seibold, “Why I’m Neither Pro-Life Nor Pro-Choice,” *Spectrum*, December 18, 2009, <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/column/2009/12/18/why-i%25E2%2580%2599m-neither-pro-life-nor-pro-choice> (accessed March 17, 2020).

¹⁸ Finer et al., 113.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁰ See Rachel K. Jones and Jenna Jerman, “Population Group Abortion Rates and Lifetime Incidence of Abortion: United States, 2008–2014,” *American Journal of Public Health* 107, no. 12 (December 2017): 1908.

²¹ Feinberg and Feinberg, 66.

gigantic genocide. But what we encounter is a colossal feticide. From such a perspective, the problem is urgent and cannot be ignored.

Arguments used by proponents of abortion may be startling at times. This is not only with those who are not directly affected, but also with pregnant women. Here are two examples: 1) Some women regard killing the unborn as less problematic than giving away the newborn for adoption or for care by foster parents so that he/she may reach his/her full potential. "More than one-third of interview respondents said they have considered adoption and concluded that it was a morally unconscionable option because giving one's child away is wrong."²² 2) "Although some [women] described abortion as sinful and wrong, many of those same women, and others, described the indiscriminate bearing of children as a sin, and their abortion as 'the right thing' and a 'responsible choice.'"²³ On the other hand, Crosby points to an earlier study in which 72 percent of the pregnant woman seeking abortion claimed not to be particularly religious, "but 96 percent afterwards felt that abortion was 'taking of a life' or 'murder' . . . 'A psychological price is paid.' . . . Thus psychic trauma to the mother is probably more likely to result from an abortion than from a birth."²⁴ Also, to claim that abortion is a sin and still maintain that it is the best option for social reasons sounds contradictory, and may appear to be a justification for behavior that the woman herself may have questions about.

The Variety of Opinions on Abortion

Opinions on abortion vary widely. These opinions depend on one's presuppositions and value system. Here is a summary of some, but by far not all, positions on the topic:

Some people argue that all types of abortions should be allowed, suggesting that the fetus is not a human person and therefore can be aborted. Peter Singer proposes,

My suggestion, then, is that we accord the fetus no higher moral status than we give to a nonhuman animal at a similar level of rationality, self-consciousness, awareness, capacity to feel, and so on. Because no fetus is a person, no fetus has the same claim to life as a person. Until a fetus has some capacity for conscious experience, an abortion terminates an

²² Finer et al., 117

²³ Ibid., 118.

²⁴ Crosby, 66.

existence that is—considered as it is and not in terms of his potential—more like that of a plant than of a sentient animal like a dog or a cow.²⁵

Others agree that all or most kinds of abortions must be permitted, suggesting that an abortion is an individual's decision, which no one else has the right to interfere with, and that a woman has the full right to decide what happens with and in her body. This reasoning is different from the first, placing the value of individual choice over the sanctity of human life. But the result is basically the same. Charles Bellinger discusses the position of British philosopher Soran Reader:

The core of her argument is that a woman should be able to choose abortion-as-killing if she does not want there to be a human being alive somewhere in the world to whom she is related as mother. She should have this ability because the inhabitant of her womb belongs to her; it is her child, a piece of property over which she has “maternal authority.”²⁶

While it is certainly true that the expecting mother is most directly affected by the pregnancy, some people would suggest that an abortion should not or even cannot be decided by the pregnant woman alone, but that society, government, churches, the father, family, etc. should also have a say. “Abortion is first of all an individual matter. . . . But abortion is not only an individual matter. The church cannot ignore the issue. It must give moral guidance to its members and it must therefore take a position.”²⁷

Another group would suggest that some types of abortion should be allowed, but not others. Abortion cannot just be evaluated from the pregnant woman's perspective, but must also be viewed from the perspective of the child, who has as much a right to live as the mother. Still, abortion may be permitted in cases of rape and incest, congenital defects of the unborn, and threats to the mother's health or life.²⁸

²⁵ Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 74–75. See also Charles K. Bellinger, *Jesus v. Abortion: They Know Not What They Do*, Theopolitical Visions (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 78.

²⁶ Bellinger, 102. If this line of argument is followed, could a man also claim that he “does not want there to be a human being alive somewhere in the world to whom [he] is related as” father, with all the consequences following from such a statement?

²⁷ Bruinsma, 67.

²⁸ See “Religious Groups’ Official Positions on Abortion,” Pew Research Center, January 16, 2013, <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/01/16/religious-groups-official-positions-on-abortion/> (accessed March 17, 2020).

The last group is opposed to abortions in principle. There are some who categorically object to all abortions,²⁹ while there are others who allow for abortions in only the most rare and severe medical cases, such as anencephaly of the baby or when the mother's life may be lost if medical intervention does not take place. Richard Hays states,

The New Testament teaches us to approach ethical issues not by asking “What will happen if I do x?” but rather by asking “What is the will of God?”. . . If the New Testament witness were put into practice, abortion would almost never be seen necessary within the Christian community. Furthermore, the New Testament emphatically excludes some of the patterns of reasoning commonly used in support of abortion, particularly the appeal to the “right” of individuals to make autonomous moral decisions, the “right to privacy,” and the “quality of life” argument.³⁰

These positions and opinions reveal a number of underlying issues. There is the question of whether the unborn is a human person who therefore must be protected, or if the unborn child is not yet a person. If it is decided that the unborn is not a human person, then—so the reasoning goes—the fetus can be aborted. A second issue is whether or not abortion is murder or killing, falling under the scope of the sixth commandment. If it is, is it problematic or not? In other words, killing might be permissible, as some have suggested. Third, when different civil or religious rights conflict with each other, which right has priority—the right of the mother, or the right of the child? Is a child automatically considered inferior? Fourth, apart from the issue of killing, is a child the property of the mother? If so, at what age do the mother's property rights come to an end? Or do they not end as long as the mother lives? Is the child more or less a slave of the mother, and should it remain so? Finally, the question is what role the

²⁹ E.g., the Catholic Church. See “Know the Issues: Abortion”, Diocese of Phoenix, <https://dphx.org/respect-life/know-the-issues/abortion/> (accessed March 17, 2020).

³⁰ Hays, 455–456. Pew Research Center came up with the following statement: “Carson has compared abortion to slavery and called for it to be banned in all circumstances, but Adventists are actually somewhat divided over abortion. About four-in-ten (42%) say abortion should be legal in all or most cases, while 54% say it should be entirely or mostly illegal. This latter group includes one-in-five Seventh-day Adventists (19%) who take Carson's view that abortion should be illegal in all cases” (Michael Lipka, “A Closer Look at Seventh-day Adventists in America,” Pew Research Center, November 3, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/03/a-closer-look-at-seventh-day-adventists-in-america/> (accessed March 17, 2020).

Bible has to play in the abortion debate. These and other issues need to be evaluated.

Our Approach

Attempts to provide answers to the issue of abortion depend on certain premises. The answer of an adherent to one of the world religions may be different from the answer of an atheist. Again, the answer of a Christian may, for instance, differ from the answer given by a Hindu. And the answer of a Christian who believes in God as the Creator of all life may differ from the answer of a Christian who believes in some sort of evolution.

Here are the presuppositions with which we will work:

1. God exists and has revealed Himself in various ways, particularly in special revelation through His Word—Scripture—and the person of Jesus Christ.

2. The Bible is the Word of God and reveals to us, among other things, God's nature—as much as humans are able to comprehend it—human nature, our human predicament, God's plan to create *shalom*,³¹ and God's will for humanity to live a life in harmony and peace with Him and with each other.

3. God's written Word, the Bible, and God's incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, as revealed in Scripture,³² have to be taken seriously. This applies to biblical texts and passages that must be understood according to the Bible's own way of interpretation as well as various biblical principles. Matters of life and death—and therefore also the issue of abortion—are particularly important.

4. God is the Creator of all life as well as all inanimate matter. As Creator, God has a right to us and can tell us how to deal with matters of life and death. They fall under His jurisdiction, not ours. Human life is not humans' property.

5. The Ten Commandments reflect God's will. They have to be understood as moral absolutes. As such, they are binding for all human beings.

³¹ *Shalom*, often translated as “peace,” points to wholeness and well-being in all aspects, including salvation. See Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, “*Shālôm*,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1980), 931.

³² While Jesus Christ is the highest revelation of God, we know of Him through Scripture. A Jesus independent of the Bible is a human construct that may vary from one person to the next and may even be contradictory. To say something definite about Jesus, we have to go to the record of the Bible and especially—but not exclusively—to the New Testament Gospels.

6. Humans have the divine gift of free choice. This even includes transgressing and/or rejecting God's will as revealed in His law, thereby rejecting God Himself. One can choose to live in a close relationship with God or to remain estranged from Him. However, such choices have consequences. In the Old Testament, these consequences are described as blessings or curses, dependent on human decisions and actions (e.g., Deut 28). The New Testament connects eternal life with believing in Christ and living with Him (John 1:12; 3:16, 36).

7. A biblical ethics of abortion must begin with the issue of abortion in general before moving to challenging cases. "Important ethical issues typically have hard cases. . . . Hard cases should never be the basis for developing normative ethical principles. As the saying goes, hard cases make bad laws. That is true in law, and it is equally true in ethics."³³

Methodologically, our approach is founded on principle-based ethics rather than utilitarian/situation ethics.³⁴ We are looking for biblical principles to come up with a theology/ethics of abortion. It has been suggested that the Bible only indirectly discusses abortion. Supposedly even the New Testament is silent on the issue; therefore, it is argued, believers must also be silent and let each one make his or her individual decision. Michael Gorman asks the question: "Could it be that when it comes to abortion, the New Testament's silence implies neutrality, ambiguity, or even acceptance?"³⁵ If this were the case, this would also mean that with all other modern issues (e.g., smoking, domestic violence, environmental care and climate control, cybersex, modern forms of slavery) the Bible would not provide any guidance and thus would become largely irrelevant to people of the twenty-first century. We believe there are sufficient biblical principles to guide us as we study the issue of abortion.

Here we must pause a moment and consider Christian theology. Exegesis is the instrument that deals with the interpretation of biblical verses and passages and includes, among other things, a careful

³³ Feinberg and Feinberg, 125.

³⁴ This is what Remwil R. Tornalejo, "The Status of the Unborn and the Seventh-day Adventist Abortion Guidelines," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 16, no. 2 (2013): 126, requests. Concerning a situationist approach, Carsten Johnsen, *God, the Situation Ethicist* (Sisteron, France: Untold Story, n.d.), 190, maintains, "God is the Situation Ethicist par excellence. But He is also the only One who has a perfect right to be a Situationist. Why? Simply because He is the only One who perfectly knows the situation, the context in its absolute totality. . . . So for a human being to presume that he, as well, has a right to be a situation ethicist is nothing less than taking God's place. It is the presumption of self-deification."

³⁵ Gorman, 27.

study of the historical and literary contexts of the passage. Biblical theology studies themes within biblical books and across the entire Bible. It observes trajectories, changes, and advances. Systematic theology not only discusses the major topics of the Bible, providing an overarching system of theology, but also addresses contemporary issues and questions that are not directly spelled out in the Bible, yet are indirectly found there through principles. Here Christian ethics comes in. People face four types of questions: 1) questions on biblical texts (e.g., Dan 7 or 8), 2) questions on biblical topics (e.g., the Sabbath), 3) questions on biblical concepts (e.g., the Trinity), and 4) theological and ethical questions not mentioned in Scripture (e.g., human cloning). Abortion belongs mainly to the last category, which needs to be addressed by finding biblical principles that speak to the issue.

This should not surprise us because it has been pointed out that “the thought of abortion was so foreign to Judean-Christian thought that it is not even mentioned in the Scriptures.”³⁶ But this statement addresses explicit texts. It is true that there is no text demanding, “You shall not abort a fetus,” yet through principles the Bible, and especially the New Testament, speaks clearly enough to the issue of abortion. Research has shown that “Jesus and the early Christian movement of the first three centuries practiced non-violence.”³⁷ Gorman shows that abortion was rejected by Jews at least between 100 BC and AD 100. “No contradictory early Jewish texts about abortion have been discovered.”³⁸ Three early Christian documents, which were considered semi-authoritative by early believers, mention abortion negatively. Didache 2:2 and the Letter of Barnabas 19:5 speak against killing a child by abortion or a newborn by infanticide. The Apocalypse of Peter threatens women with hell who have “procured abortions.”³⁹ In agreement with Muller, Gorman reasons that the New Testament’s “silence on abortion testifies to the antiabortion stance of its original Jewish-Christian writers, its compilers, and its earliest

³⁶ Richard Muller, “Abortion: A Moral Issue?,” *Ministry*, January 19, 1985. See also Michael J. Gorman, “Why Is the New Testament Silent About Abortion?” *Christianity Today*, January 11, 1993, 28.

³⁷ Marcus Borg, “Endorsement of Every Church a Peace Church,” quoted in Robert H. Brimlow, *What About Hitler? Wrestling With Jesus’s Call to Nonviolence in an Evil World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), 22.

³⁸ Gorman, 28.

³⁹ The Apocalypse of Peter (Ethiopic), 8, reads: “. . . And the women (are) swallowed up (by this) up to their necks and are punished with great pain. These are they who have procured abortions and have ruined the work of God which he has created.” The Apocalypse of Peter (Greek), 26, states: “. . . And these were those who conceived children outside marriage and who procured abortions.”

hearers and readers. In a very real sense, then, the New Testament canon did indeed speak, and still does speak, against abortion.”⁴⁰

Scripture and Abortion⁴¹

As we enter the discussion of the Bible and abortion, we remember that Scripture talks about creation, paradise, and the fall. Everything God had made was perfect—very good. Nothing troublesome was part of human life. The issue of miscarriages, genetic defects in the fetus, threats to the life of the mother and/or child, rape, and other forms of violence were not found in the garden of Eden. The issue of abortion was nonexistent.

This changed dramatically when Adam and Eve made a decision to turn away from God and pursue their own course (Gen 3). This tragic decision introduced sin into the world and, with it, human mental and emotional instability, a tendency to disregard God’s law and do evil, or a kind of schizophrenia of wanting to do what is right and yet doing the opposite, addictions, fractured relationships, oppression, enslavement, violence, a sense of meaninglessness, extreme poverty, suffering, pain, bodily illness, harmful genetic mutations, a change in the entire ecosystem and its effect on humanity, numerous other consequences; and finally death (Rom 6–8).

God’s plan of salvation envisions a paradise that surpasses even the original paradise, for instance, by God being constantly present and living among His people. But, in the meantime, we have to struggle with minor and major—even extreme—difficulties. Future mothers/parents may find themselves in very adverse situations, considering whether to keep or abort an unborn child. Economic factors, societal pressures, and the devastating effects of sin on the human body and mind may contribute to these deliberations, making abortion appear to be an alternative to carrying a child to full term. For direction in such situations, we as followers of Christ turn to the Word of God. Holy Scripture expresses God’s values for life and provides guidance for prospective mothers and fathers, medical personnel, churches,

⁴⁰ Gorman, 29.

⁴¹ Part of the wording in this section is taken from a draft of an abortion statement written by the present author and reviewed and improved by the Biblical Research Institute Ethics Committee and the Biblical Research Institute. The final modified “Statement on the Biblical View of Unborn Life and Its Implications for Abortion” (October 16, 2019) was approved by the 2019 General Conference Annual can be found here: <https://www.adventist.org/articles/statement-on-the-biblical-view-of-unborn-life-and-its-implications-for-abortion> (accessed May 5, 2020).

and all believers in matters of faith, doctrine, ethical behavior, and lifestyle.

While the term “abortion” is not mentioned in Scripture, the concept appears occasionally. However, the following biblical principles and teachings provide guidance for the community of faith and for individuals affected by difficult choices.

First Principle: The Value and Sacredness of Human Life

Human life is of the greatest value to God. This is so because God created us in His image (Gen 1:27; 2:7) and has a personal interest in all people. God loves us and communicates with us, and we in turn can seek His fellowship and love Him.

Life is a gift of God, and God is the giver of life. In fact, God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are equated with life. God the Father has life in Himself (John 5:26). In Jesus is life (John 1:4). He also has life in Himself (John 5:26). He is the life (John 14:6) and the resurrection and life (John 11:25). He provides abundant life (John 10:10), and those who have the Son have life (1 John 5:12). He is also the sustainer of life (Acts 17:25–28; Col 1:17; Heb 1:1–3). The Holy Spirit is life (Rom 8:10). God deeply cares for His creation, and especially for us humans.

Furthermore, the importance of human life is made clear by the fact that after the fall (Gen 3) God gave His Son on behalf of humanity to save us and give us the possibility of gaining eternal life (John 3:16; Rom 5:6; 1 John 4:9–10). While God could have abandoned us and terminated completely life on planet earth, He opted for life. Therefore, Christ’s followers will be raised from the dead and will live as unique individuals in direct communion with God (John 11:25–26; 1 Thess 4:15–16; Rev 21:3). Thus, human life is of inestimable value. This is true for all stages of human life: the unborn, children of various ages, adolescents, adults, and seniors—independent of physical, mental, or emotional capacities. It is also true for all humans independent of sex, color, race, social status, religion, or whatever else may distinguish us from one another. This divine sanctity of life gives inviolable and equal dignity to each and every human life and requires us to treat it with the utmost respect and care.

David Gushee affirms our understanding of the value of human life with his own definition:

The concept of the sanctity of life is the belief that all human beings, at any and every stage of life, in any and every state of consciousness or self-awareness, of any and every race, color, ethnicity, level of intelligence, religion, language, gender,

character, behavior, physical ability/disability, potential, class, social status, etc., of any and every particular quality of relationship to the viewing subject, are to be perceived as persons of equal and immeasurable worth and of inviolable dignity and therefore must be treated in a manner commensurate with this moral status.⁴²

He continues to state that “the sanctity of human life is essentially a conferring of God’s holiness or sanctity onto the pinnacle of God’s creation, human beings. Humans can have sanctity because God, their Creator and Redeemer does.”⁴³ But he also wonders if such a concept and conviction “can survive on the basis of a secularized vision of the foundation of that sanctity.”⁴⁴

It has, for instance, been argued that life is not the ultimate good in itself,⁴⁵ probably implying that under certain circumstances one may take life. It is true that Jesus considered giving His life in order to save us to be more important than keeping and defending it. Martyrs are persons who are willing to lose or sacrifice their life for Jesus’ or others’ sake. John declares that true love is manifested by the willingness “to lay down [one’s] lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:16). However, it is ironic when this concept is twisted into an argument that it may be right to take someone else’s life, including the life of a fetus. To let go of one’s own life for a higher good is a decision that individuals have to make voluntarily. It is dependent on the martyr’s consent. However, an abortion happens without the consent of the unborn child. The argument of the higher good does not apply here. We have no right to decide to terminate another’s life. Giving one’s life for others must be a choice freely made by that person.

Second Principle: The Unborn Child as Fully Human

The Bible mentions prenatal life in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, and even describes God’s knowledge of people

⁴² David P. Gushee, “The Sanctity of Life,” The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity, Trinity International University, June 15, 2006, <https://cbhd.org/content/sanctity-life> (accessed March 17, 2020).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Bruinsma, 78, maintains, “We worship the Giver of life, not life itself.” This is partially true and partially not, because—as shown in this study—the Father, the Holy Spirit, and especially Jesus are identified with life. Jesus is “the Way, and the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). The problem with such a statement is that it may make human life dispensable. The author does not directly say this, although he states that “as a result of sin life has in many instances lost some of its beauty and has in some extreme cases lost virtually all of its attractiveness” (ibid.).

before they were conceived. Prenatal life is in God's hands and is led by Him. David recounts the human situation: "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. . . . Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" (Ps 139:13, 16). Samson was to "be a Nazirite to God from the womb" (Judg 13:5). The servant of God is called and formed "from the womb" (Isa 49:1, 5). Jeremiah was already chosen as a prophet before his birth (Jer 1:5), as was Paul (Gal 1:15), and John the Baptist was to "be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15). Of Jesus, the angel Gabriel explained to Mary, "Therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). In His incarnation Jesus Himself experienced the human prenatal period, and yet was recognized as the Messiah and Son of God soon after His conception (Luke 1:39–45).⁴⁶

God is not only the Creator of the unborn—even though humans precreate—but His ideal for each child is also to know Him and serve others. To each human being, including each child, is offered the opportunity to attain eternal life through faith in Christ, at least when self-awareness sets in. Therefore, God will try to influence him or her to recognize this purpose of life. In any case, the not-yet-born has a firm place with God. The Bible attributes to the unborn child joy (Luke 1:44) and even rivalry (Gen 25:21–23). It shows continuity between pre- and postnatal life. There is no break in the development of life.

Maybe here an aside is in order. In the case of abortion, that is, the death of the unborn, the problem may not only be his/her loss of life here and now—although some children survive late-term abortions and may be left dying in a morgue—but also the unborn's eternal life may be affected. "In Catholic theology, a soul is infused in the embryo . . . and it, as an inheritor of original sin, must not be allowed to perish without baptism. The matter is clear-cut. There is a soul to save as soon as the sperm fertilizes the egg. The situation in Adventist theology is far less clear."⁴⁷ Adventists do not believe in

⁴⁶ David Gunn, "The Bible on the Ethicality of Abortion," The 1024 Project, January 31, 2014, <http://1024project.com/2014/01/31/the-bible-on-the-ethicality-of-abortion/> (accessed March 17, 2020). Gunn points out that this is an insightful passage because it refers to a "post-conception meeting" of Mary and Elizabeth, in which Elizabeth's son leaps for joy, which may indicate "some level of consciousness." This is not a random movement, "but comes in direct response to Mary's arrival."

⁴⁷ Michael Pearson, "Control of the Body—Control of the Mind: Autobiographical and Sociological Determinants of a Person—Abortion Ethic in Seventh-day Adventism," in *Abortion: Ethical Issues and Options*, 150.

the immortality of the soul nor in the concept of original sin.⁴⁸ But we do not know how God will treat an aborted embryo. Will he/she just be considered by God as exempt from the possibilities either to be saved or lost or will he/she be saved automatically? Scripture does not seem to address these questions. Nevertheless, thinking about these matters should make us extremely careful. Depending on the situation, an aborted unborn child may not only be robbed of life as we experience it but may never have the option to live eternally with Jesus in His kingdom. If this should be so, abortion is a very serious issue.

Now we return to the discussion of the unborn as being fully human. Scripture is opposed to a dualistic understanding of human life. The human being is a wholistic being who cannot be divided into body and soul or body, soul, and spirit (Gen 2:7). Therefore, the question of when the fertilized egg receives the soul and thus becomes a human being is irrelevant. According to Scripture, the unborn is a human being at each and every stage.

Why is this important to the discussion? It seems that the debate about life has at least partially moved away from the question of when life begins to the question of whether or not the new life is human, and whether the fetus is a human person. It is difficult to deny that after the fusion of egg and sperm the zygote, as a new entity with a full genetic code, is alive. Certainly, it needs to implant into the uterus and thereby become a blastocyst, later an embryo, and finally a fetus in the narrow sense. But all the way through this process, we are dealing with life. Bellinger affirms, "The human embryo develops itself into a baby, a toddler, an adult, rather than into a frog or a sparrow, because its humanity is not 'potentiality' but an 'actuality.'"⁴⁹ This is so because of the human genome that the zygote possesses.⁵⁰ Therefore, as early

⁴⁸ Adventists believe that through Adam's sin all humans were corrupted. But Adam's descendants do not inherit his sin but inherit a tendency to sin which actually leads to all of them sinning eventually, with the exception of Jesus Christ.

⁴⁹ Bellinger, 85. On the other hand, Tim Crosby, "Abortion: Some Questionable Arguments," in *Abortion: Ethical Issues and Options*, 61, holds "that the very earliest line of personhood could be drawn on the continuum of life would be late in the second month of pregnancy." Until then, he argues, the organism is dead according to the Harvard criteria of death issued in 1968. But this raises the questions as to whether death should define the beginning of life, whether Harvard's definitions are the most accurate ones, and whether this one is outdated ("lack of response to external stimuli, lack to deep reflex action, lack of spontaneous movement and respiratory effort, and lack of brain activity" p. 61). Sakala, 12, suggests that implantation may mark "the beginning of potential personhood."

⁵⁰ "Human genomes include both protein-coding DNA genes and noncoding DNA. Haploid human genomes, which are contained in germ cells (the egg and sperm

as 1973 Paul Römhild maintained that there is life right from the beginning. In addition, he postulated that this life is human life:

From the fertilized egg, which, according to our current biological knowledge, must be regarded as a human being in the single cell stage, the person, the “I” is on the move. Everything that belongs to “being” is provided . . . the human does not become human, but is human, in every phase of his development . . . so in the fertilized human egg we are dealing with the “smallest form of human appearance” . . . , and from then on we must not speak of an emerging human life, but of human life that is unfolding and growing. . . . May we now presume to determine the time from which God loves or has to love the human being—from the third month onward, from the fifth month of his/her prenatal period onward or from a later date, for instance, from his birth onward?⁵¹

Robert Dunn states, “I believe that the embryo or zygote at the moment of conception fulfills this definition of a person. . . . This is a *passive* phase in the life of a person, but it makes him no less a person.”⁵²

gamete cells created in the meiosis phase of sexual reproduction before fertilization creates a zygote) consist of three billion DNA base pairs, while diploid genomes (found in somatic cells) have twice the DNA content. While there are significant differences among the genomes of human individuals (on the order of 0.1% due to single-nucleotide variants and 0.6% when considering indels), these are considerably smaller than the differences between humans and their closest living relatives, the bonobos and chimpanzees (~1.1% fixed single-nucleotide variants and 4% when including indels)” (Wikipedia, s.v. “Human genome,” last modified February 15, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_genome [accessed March 17, 2020]).

⁵¹ Paul Römhild, *Vom Ursprung des Lebens und vom Beginn des Menschseins - Auch der Ungeborene ist unser Nächster*, Die weiße Reihe 2, Beiträge zu Fragen der Lebensführung und Seelsorge (Kassel: Germany White Cross Press, 1973/74), 10–12 (translated by the author).

⁵² Robert H. Dunn, “The Nature of Man in the Early Stages of Life and Our Responsibility,” quoted in Johnsen, 159, who himself notes, “The fact that a loving Creator has given life, even personal life, and the personal destiny which inevitably goes along with that, to a human sprout, can only signify that it has exactly the same amount of humanity at every stage of its development, and exactly the same right to be granted protection and a continuation of life. . . . The creature must have been given by God the tremendous honor of possessing a human destiny. And that is certainly an attribute the foetus possesses from the very moment when the zygote is an accomplished fact.”

However, as mentioned, a number of people deny the fetus the status of full humanity.⁵³ This may be due to their acceptance of an a priori pro-abortion position. It is difficult to talk about the termination of the life of a human person. However, it is easier and more acceptable to kill “non-human” life. Their suggested criteria of self-consciousness, rationality, and the ability to feel are supposed to determine who can be called a human person and who cannot. However, are these proposed criteria the correct criteria for determining the personhood of the unborn? Carsten Johnsen has a point when he speaks about “the poor faltering human creature’s own subjective notion of right and wrong,” which “is bound to be the only judgement throne for deciding the matter in the last analysis.”⁵⁴ In the end the conclusion may be correct that

the divergent views of abortion . . . are found to be due to one thing: the lack of a consistent anthropology . . . The Bible knows when human life begins and when it ends. It knows everything worth knowing about man. And it is not stingy in setting forth its knowledge in front of you and me, in order that we may have those very clear and concise notions we need regarding essential questions for the guidance of our lives.⁵⁵

⁵³ In his interesting historical study Kapparis devotes a chapter to the question “When Does Human Life Begin?” (33-52). Before dealing with ancient history he states: “Modern medicine has not been able to provide a conclusive answer to these very old questions” (33). Then he deals with three positions: (1) “Human life begins at conception” (39-41), (2) “Human life begins at birth” (41-44), and (3) “Human life begins while the foetus is growing” (44-52). He comes to the conclusion, “in the end, the debate remained inconclusive. . . . Christianity inherited this inconclusive debate and a number of early Christian scholars moved along the same lines as their pagan predecessors” (52). He does not seem to follow “an absolute position, considering as human what was conceived and its destruction as homicide. . . .”

⁵⁴ Johnsen, 148. By the way, Bellinger, 75-76, suggests “that ‘science’ has no competence whatsoever in defining a word such as ‘person,’ any more than it has competence to define ‘liberty,’ or ‘rights,’ or ‘wisdom,’ or ‘truth,’ or ‘the Beloved Community.’ ‘Person’ is not a scientific concept, but a philosophical and religious one.” He continues, “Culturally created, the value of life rests on social meanings, and, importantly, on sexual politics. Fetal life has value when people with power value it. Thus, inquiry into the value of potential life cannot objectively resolve the question of abortion.”

⁵⁵ Johnsen, 147. When Johnsen talks about the end of human life, he may refer to death, not in the medical sense but in the sense that life does not continue beyond death in a kind of intermediate stage or as an immortal soul.

Hays makes an interesting point about the fetus as a person:

When we ask, “Is the fetus a person?” we are asking the same sort of limiting, self-justifying question that the lawyer asked Jesus: “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus, by answering the lawyer’s question with this parable [of the good Samaritan], rejects casuistic attempts to circumscribe our moral concern by defining the other as belonging to a category outside the scope of our obligation. To define the unborn child as a nonperson is to narrow the scope of moral concern, whereas Jesus calls upon us to widen it by showing mercy and actively intervening on behalf of the helpless.⁵⁶

Third Principle: The Will of God as Expressed in the Ten Commandments and Elaborated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount

The Decalogue was given to God’s covenant people and is to guide our lives and protect us even today. Its commandments are absolutes, valid for all human beings at all times. Individuals and churches have no right to change them. Scripture even warns against a power that would dare to change God’s law (Dan 7:25), while the remnant people remain faithful to God’s will (Rev 12:17).⁵⁷ The psalmist praises God’s law (e.g., Ps 119) and Paul calls it holy, righteous, and good (Rom 7:12). The sixth commandment states, “You shall not kill” (Exod 20:13). God calls for the preservation of human life. Since being human begins with the fusion of egg and sperm, and since prenatal life is of immense value to God, abortion falls under the legislation of the sixth commandment. According to the book of Exodus, the innocent and most vulnerable (Exod 22:22–23) in particular must not be abused or killed (Exod 23:7). Proverbs 6:16–17 states that God hates those who shed innocent blood; the unborn child is the most innocent and vulnerable of all, and therefore must be protected. Revelation 21:8 warns that for “the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars,” they will not have a place in the new Jerusalem (Rev 22:15).

As previously pointed out, the argument that the unborn is not yet fully human but only has the potential of becoming human because he/she has not yet self-awareness, rationality, and other traits would

⁵⁶ Hays, 450.

⁵⁷ Mark 7:9–13 presents the case in which Jesus accuses Pharisees and scribes of invalidating the fifth commandment by the use of their manmade traditions. Jesus stands for the Ten Commandments as the Word of God against human interpretations that change their intended meaning.

also apply to the newborn. Neither self-awareness nor usefulness define the value of human life. Aborting the life of an unborn child on the basis of his or her self-awareness or abilities would also allow for infanticide and the extermination of mentally handicapped people, individuals in a coma, and seniors who suffer, for instance, from severe forms of dementia. There is no significant difference between a fetus shortly before birth and a newborn after birth that would allow abortion in the first case and prohibit infanticide in the second. Once the door has been opened to the killing of unborn children, it may affect wider circles of society.

It is dangerous to let humans decide which life is valuable and which is not. History is full of horrid examples of the killing of not only unborn and newborn children, but also females of various ages, seniors and sick people, supposedly inferior races and individuals, so-called heretics, and others.⁵⁸ Their lives were deemed worthless. Andreasen points out that “when the value of life is depreciated near the borders of human existence . . . no life is really safe anywhere, even well within those borders.”⁵⁹ The cases mentioned here are not only a transgression of the sixth commandment, but also of the commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Lev 19:18; Mark 12:31), which summarizes the second table of the Ten Commandments.

Jesus has reinforced and broadened the commandment not to kill in Matthew 5:21–22. According to Him, killing is not only the taking of someone’s life, but begins even with derogatory, inflammatory speech and angry, insulting words—what we today call hate speech. If the sixth commandment can be transgressed even by how we communicate with each other, how much more is it defied by acts

⁵⁸ Here is an example from “Unworthy to Live,” in *Holocaust and Human Behavior*, Facing History and Ourselves, <https://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-and-human-behavior/chapter-8/unworthy-live> (accessed March 17, 2020): “As Adolf Hitler consolidated his power at home in anticipation of war, he moved not only against Jews, Sinti, and Roma but also against those Aryans whom he considered ‘unworthy of life’—people with epilepsy, alcoholism, birth defects, hearing loss, mental illnesses, and personality disorders, as well as those who had vision loss or developmental delays or who even suffered from certain orthopedic problems. Hitler viewed them as ‘marginal human beings’ who had to make a case for their own survival at a time when the nation was preparing for war. The first to be eliminated were too young to speak on their own behalf. In fall 1938, the parents of a severely disabled infant petitioned Hitler for the right to kill their child. He granted the petition and saw in the request an opportunity to encourage what he called ‘mercy killings’ or ‘euthanasia.’ In fact, according to science historian Robert N. Proctor, the goal was not to provide mercy to the victims but to improve the ‘Aryan’ race and make hospital beds and personnel available for the coming war.”

⁵⁹ Andreasen, 53.

of violence and actual killing? The sixth commandment is given for the preservation of human life, whether or not we consider such life worthwhile. Thus, human life is not measured by individuals' abilities or their effectiveness, but by the value that God's sacrificial love has placed on it. It is protected by God.

The English-speaking reader may wonder why cite the sixth commandment as "You shall not kill" instead of "You shall not murder," as found in most of the recent English translations. Wilma Ann Bailey⁶⁰ has examined the shift from "You shall not kill" (ASV, CEB, GNV, KJV, NAB, RSV, NJB) to "You shall not murder" (ESV, NIV, NKJV, NASB, NET, NLT, NRSV) in Protestant translations, a process that may have started approximately in the middle of the twentieth century. There is no new manuscript evidence demanding such a shift, and Bailey shows that linguistically and theologically "You shall not kill" is the better translation. But "You shall not murder" is much more limited than the broader "You shall not kill." "Murder" is premeditated killing for reasons considered unlawful by governments, but leaves the door open for killing in combat and in other cases. On the other hand, the term "killing" refers to all cases in which the life of a human being is terminated—even cases of accidental killing with no intention to hurt or take a life. The manslayer in Numbers 35:6–33 is designated with the same Hebrew term "to kill" that is used in the sixth commandment, even though in his case the issue is clearly not murder but accidental killing. Still, if a human being were to be killed accidentally, the manslayer ought to run for his life to a city of refuge, where his case would be investigated and where he would need to stay permanently if proven innocent. This case shows how serious even unintentional killing was in Israel. When in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus showed the deeper meaning of the sixth commandment, He must have had "killing" in mind and not "murdering." Jiří Moskala affirms that an English translation of the sixth commandment should use the verb "to kill."⁶¹

So why the change? In a historical section, Bailey traces several faith traditions, showing that, for evangelicals, the desire to become mainstream churches, the growing connection to militarism, and the influence of culture led to a change of the wording of the sixth commandment as well as a change in practice. Therefore, if she is right, it was not the biblical text but an implicit agenda that led to the change of translation. This change is also more favorable to

⁶⁰ Wilma Ann Bailey, *"You Shall Not Kill" or "You Shall Not Murder"? The Assault on a Biblical Text* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005).

⁶¹ Jiří Moskala, "'You Shall not Kill' or 'You Shall not Murder'? The Meaning of *Ratsakh* in the Sixth Commandment," *Reflections* 67 (July 2019): 1–6.

abortion than the prohibition of killing is. In a somewhat provocative way, Bailey states, “People want to kill people, and they want biblical permission to do so.”⁶²

But there is another issue: the question of whether or not the Ten Commandments are to be taken as absolutes, and how an absolute understanding of the sixth commandment relates to the wars and killings of the Old Testament. As we ask ourselves whether individual commandments of the Decalogue need to be kept in even exceptional cases, we have to remember that exceptions can be understood at least two ways: 1) Humans take the liberty of making exceptions that are recorded in Scripture (these are descriptive and occur often in narratives) but they are not legitimized by God. 2) God provides exceptions to some teachings of Scripture, sometimes due to the hardness of human hearts (Matt 19:3–8). They may be limited in time. Some Old Testament permissions are revoked in the New Testament so that the original will of God is evident again (e.g., Deut 24:1–4; Matt 5:31–32). In any case, the issue of killing in the Old Testament may at times be more complex than at first thought, and needs to be handled carefully. These two types of exceptions are different and should not be confused. Real exceptions are the ones permitted by God. So we will take a quick look at God’s moral law, the Decalogue:

The first three commandments (Exod 20:3–7) prohibit having rival gods to God, manufacturing and worshipping images of God, and blaspheming God. Like them, commandment five—to honor one’s parents—and seven through ten—prohibiting adultery, falsehood, stealing, and coveting—have no exceptions mentioned in Scripture. Their reinforcement in the Old and New Testaments,⁶³ and the willingness of believers to bear disadvantages or risk their lives by keeping them at all costs,⁶⁴ indicates that they have to be understood as absolutes.

The Sabbath commandment (Exod 20:8–11) differs from the other commandments. It is phrased positively as “remember,” “keep holy,” “labor six days,” and “the seventh-day is the Sabbath.” Only then comes “you shall not do any work” for God created, rested on, blessed, and made holy the Sabbath day. The issue is the definition of work. An “exception” to working on the Sabbath was made in the Old Testament for priests (Matt 12:5), although even they would be able to remember God and His mighty deeds while being involved in sacred work. Jesus also explains the Sabbath commandment in the

⁶² Bailey, 52.

⁶³ E.g., Proverbs 30:9; Hosea 4:2; Matthew 5:37; Mark 7:10–13; Acts 5:1–11; Revelation 14:5; 19:10; 21:8; 22:15.

⁶⁴ E.g., Genesis 39:6–10; Daniel 3:1–18; Revelation 13:15–17; 14:3–5.

sense that healing and doing good deeds do not militate against the prohibition of work (Matt 12:12). On the other hand, the command against buying and selling on the Sabbath is reinforced in Nehemiah 13 because these activities are considered “work.” The definitions of work and so-called exceptions were divinely given, and are not a human encroachment on God’s will.

We return to the sixth commandment and its exceptions. This topic deserves a serious and extensive treatment that cannot be pursued in this study.⁶⁵ Some preliminary answers to the question of why God allowed for killing in the Old Testament must suffice.

First, it is true that one can find expressions of stark violence as well as horrific imagery in some biblical texts. This must be acknowledged, but we must also try—as much as possible—to understand the times and culture, and to avoid using stereotypes or considering brutal and violent behavior as an excuse for our own decisions and conduct. When, for instance, in the narratives of the book of Job, his friends share with him their theology, this theology is not necessarily God’s view of reality. When people in the Bible, under distress, cry out for justice in ways we today may consider inappropriate, this is not necessarily the best possible manner to describe God’s view of justice.⁶⁶ In other words, the reader must be fair enough not to attribute to God the voice of humans portrayed in Scripture.⁶⁷ Not all human speech in Scripture reflects God’s will and His intentions. The inspired speech of God’s prophets does.

Second, Scripture has a so-called “dark side,” because it is actually humans and evil powers who have a dark side, resorting to violence and all kinds of evil. Scripture does not paint a wonderful picture of

⁶⁵ For some literature dealing directly or indirectly with the topic, see, e.g., Barna Magyarosi, *Holy War and Cosmic Conflict in the Old Testament: From the Exodus to the Exile*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2010) and Philip E. Friesen, *The Old Testament Roots of Nonviolence: Abraham’s Personal Faith, Moses’ Social Vision, Jesus’ Fulfillment, and God’s Work Today* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010). Also with some valuable insights, although we would not support his approach completely. Gregory A. Boyd, *Cross Vision: How the Crucifixion of Jesus Makes Sense of Old Testament Violence* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017).

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Ángel M. Rodríguez, “Inspiration and the Imprecatory Psalms,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 5, no. 1 (1994): 40–67, who notes, “If this is true, we could argue that in the imprecatory passages we find an example of divine condescension” (62).

⁶⁷ This is not to deny that Scripture as a whole and individual biblical books are inspired. Even difficult passages, if not just approached with a surface reading, reveal that, for instance, the authors of the Psalms did not attempt to take vengeance into their own hands.

the goodness of the human race, but honestly portrays how humans really are. Even Genesis, the first book of Scripture, is revealing: right after the fall, Cain commits the first murder. The fratricide of Abel is one of the most heinous sins, remembered negatively even in the New Testament (Heb 11:4; 1 John 3:12; Jude 11). After this bad start outside of the garden of Eden, one finds idolatry, deceit and falsehood, polygamy and incest, prostitution and homosexuality, mob violence and slavery. When it comes to killing in the Old Testament, most instances were likely not part of God's plan. God clearly disapproved of the very first murder. According to Joshua 22, a misunderstanding happened among the tribes of Israel, which almost led to a civil war. Fortunately, this was prevented by talking to each other.

Third, during the centuries before the first coming of Christ, believers in Yahweh were affected by other peoples and ancient Near Eastern cultures and customs of a violent nature. To some extent they became accustomed to the pagan lifestyle and philosophy of life—as we, unfortunately, are to our cultures today.⁶⁸ Revenge for a crime was common, the *lex talionis* prevalent. When the Babylonians smashed Jewish children against walls, the defeated Jews cried out for justice according to the *lex talionis*, which would be effected by the Babylonian children being dashed against the rock (Ps 137:8–9). While in court the *lex talionis* did not allow a crime to be avenged by a greater crime, but rather insisted that the penalty had to be commensurate with the crime, and while at least in the Old Testament the principle was intended to stop the spiral of violence, in everyday life that may not have been the case (see Matt 5:38–39).

Fourth, God made accommodations for the situations His people were in but constantly tried to elevate them to a higher level. Therefore, one finds in the Old Testament that patriarchalism is curbed by a higher view and responsibility of women in society. There are female heroes. Slavery is mitigated by relevant laws. Religious myths of ancient Near Eastern societies, often also associated with violence and killing, are criticized and rejected. The ability of the rich to oppress the poor is reduced by the introduction of the sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee. Divine accommodation can, for example, be seen with the law of divorce, which was later changed to be stricter.

Fifth, killing is, at times, also associated with God. As part of His judgment, God allowed people to die for instance, in the flood, in the catastrophe of Sodom and Gomorra and in the Red Sea.

⁶⁸ We are so used to “solutions” of problems by violence that we usually cannot see other options; consider current world politics, Hollywood movies, and even the games that our children play. The so-called “solutions” of war, oppression, threat, etc. constantly breed new threats.

However, in all these cases God gave people sufficient warning and time to abandon their evil ways and turn to Him. God's interventions may have been necessary for the fulfillment of the proto-gospel in Genesis 3:15, with the coming of the Messiah. God may have had to stop utmost corruption, otherwise all humanity would have been perverted to such an extent that God could not have revealed His true character in the incarnation of His Son. This is part of the cosmic conflict in which God functions "as the Judge of the universe" who administers justice.⁶⁹ The only one who can create life, who also has the right to take life, is God.

Sixth, at times God used human instruments for His judgments: Israel (Exod 23:23–24),⁷⁰ the Assyrians (Isa 10:12, 15), the Babylonians (Jer 25:9), Cyrus (Isa 44:28), and others. Cyrus is even called "His anointed" (Isa 45:1). Barna Magyarosi calls it "Israel's involvement as a second-best solution."⁷¹ Nevertheless, it is stressed that the battle would be the Lord's (Exod 14:14; 1 Sam 17:47; 2 Chr 20:15). Gregory Boyd notes, "Unfortunately, while the Israelites had no problem trusting Yahweh to help them use their swords to conquer enemies, they had great trouble trusting Yahweh, instead of their swords."⁷² On top of this, these human instruments, which God had to use, often went too far. Israel was engaged in wars that God did not want to happen (1 Kgs 15:6–7, 16, 32; 2 Chr 35:20–24).⁷³ The Assyrians and Babylonians came to the point where God had to judge them for their pride and blasphemy, their atrocities and excessive violence (Isa 10:12–19; Jer 51:11, 24, 47). In spite of all this, God's ideal was to give His people rest and peace (Josh 11:23; 14:25).

Seventh, the people of God during Old Testament times and after the exodus from Egypt was Israel, a nation. Today, God's people

⁶⁹ Barna Magyarosi, "Violence and War in the Old Testament," in *Adventists and Military Service: Biblical, Historical, and Ethical Perspectives*, ed. Frank Hasel, Barna Magyarosi, and Stefan Höschele (Madrid: Editorial Safeliz, 2019), 16.

⁷⁰ Still the Lord repeatedly affirmed that He would "drive out before [them] the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites" (Exod 34:11). See also Exodus 23:28; 33:2. In addition, this was not necessarily a wholesale genocide. Uriah, Bathsheba's husband and an officer in David's army, was a Hittite who obviously feared God (2 Sam 11:9–12; 23:29). Ruth as a Moabite (Ruth 4:5) was accepted in Israel and incorporated into Jesus' genealogy, although the Moabites were generally excluded (Deut 23:3). Individuals could escape by seeking God (see Rahab of Jericho, Josh 6).

⁷¹ Magyarosi, "Violence and War in the Old Testament," 21.

⁷² Boyd, 113.

⁷³ 2 Samuel 11:1 seems to imply that there was war annually in the season best suited for it. This sounds almost like today, when nations are constantly involved in some kind of warfare.

consists of all those truly committed to Jesus and following Him, a people dispersed among almost all nations and people groups. Israel was a direct theocracy and, later, a monarchical theocracy. As such, it needed state laws, order, and organization different from a worldwide church. This may, to some extent, explain the conquest of Palestine and some situations of self-defense. Nevertheless, God repeatedly promised He would protect them when they were being attacked. Thus, it was also a matter of Israel trusting God.⁷⁴

In some cases, God is shown as making less-than-ideal accommodations for His people to some extent, which may have been necessary because they were not yet where God's people ought to have been (for example, in their desire to have a visible king, a human ruler, rather than the heavenly King directly).

Eight, it would be wrong to paint only a violent picture of the Old Testament and God's people at that time. There were periods of peace, for instance, under Solomon's rule when foreigners came to learn from him. Hezekiah did not have to defend his people against the Assyrians because the Lord took care of the situation (Isa 37). When Judah under Jehoshaphat was attacked by a coalition of kings, he placed in front of his army a choir that praised God. Jehoshaphat's army did not need to engage in war (2 Chr 20). There were instances when retaliation was not sought. The Arameans, who had come for war and were struck with blindness, were not slain, but a meal was prepared for them instead. This act of hospitality prevented the attackers from coming against Israel later (2 Kgs 6).

Ninth, we notice a marked difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament when it comes to the sixth commandment. Capital punishment, occasionally executed in Israel, has no place in the New Testament church. Church members may be disfellowshipped with the purpose of finding their way back to church again, but there is no longer capital punishment.⁷⁵ Therefore, there is no mandate for the church to get involved in the death penalty. Jesus' approach to the

⁷⁴ Magyarosi, "Violence and War in the Old Testament," 35, states, "God's initial plan concerning holy war did not include involvement of Israel in warfare. Human participation in holy war should have been of a spiritual nature only, the battle belonging to God. However, on account of her unbelief, and as a result of divine accommodation, participation in war became both the test of Israel's faithfulness and the means of fostering their trust in God. . . . Israel was always reminded that the outcome of the battle was exclusively in God's hands." On page 36 he addresses the fact that Israel was a theocracy. For the latter, see also Johannes Kovar, "War and Non-Violence in the New Testament," in Hasel, Magyarosi, and Hörschle, 38.

⁷⁵ In order for Christians to kill Christian "heretics," the church had to resort to the Old Testament.

woman caught in adultery may have been programmatic. Whenever forms of violence are upheld by Christians, these are justified with the Old Testament and the New Testament is eclipsed. In the New Testament there is no place for killing, warfare, genocide, abortion, infanticide, etc.

Tenth, with the incarnation of Jesus a new eon has dawned, a new covenant was established (still in continuity with former covenants, and yet different because the Messiah had come, having revealed the true nature of God). Jesus came as the Prince of Peace. The shepherds in the fields heard the heavenly choir sing about peace. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He “had to decide whether to be the king of kings the people wanted, or the king of kings Moses’ tradition described. . . . Jesus had decided to skip the violent revolution.”⁷⁶

Jesus never courted earthly power and never needed it. This is still a lesson we need to learn as his followers. Politics is the art of the possible, and is conducted by compromise to maintain a delicate and always precarious balance of power. Faith is the art of the impossible that overturns the balance of power, and was exercised flawlessly by Jesus without compromise.⁷⁷

In the Sermon on the Mount, He blessed those who would be peacemakers (Matt 5:9). These are the true children of God. With Jesus, the kingdom of God has come. It is here among us, and yet we still expect its full revelation. But the kingdom is here. The King has been enthroned. This kingdom of Jesus is different from the world and also partially different from what we encounter in the Old Testament. In this kingdom, violence and killing no longer have a place.⁷⁸ While the two Greek terms for killing, *apokteinō* and *anairō*, appear frequently in the New Testament, nowhere are they used to indicate that Jesus’ followers are involved in killing.⁷⁹ It is time Christians stop resorting to the Old Testament in order to defend violence and death, and start recognizing that we live in the New Testament era with Christ, the Life, as Lord. Exceptions to the sixth commandment are not found in the New Testament, although worldly entities still practice killing. Rather, the vision is one in which war and killing will be abandoned.

⁷⁶ Friesen, 84–85.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 88.

⁷⁸ See Kovar, 41–50, where he discusses nonviolence in the teachings of Jesus.

⁷⁹ They occur almost a hundred times in the New Testament. A brief look at the Gospel of Matthew shows that there they are found to describe the attempt to kill Jesus, which eventually was successful, and the persecution of God’s people.

Even the prophetic visions of the Old Testament foresaw a time when military tools would be converted into agricultural instruments, swords into ploughshares (Isa 2:4; Joel 3:10; Mic 4:13). In the New Testament the commandment not to kill, as it pertains to followers of Christ, is absolute. Robert Brimlow insists, “Surprisingly again, the gospel means exactly what it says. No amount of softening or interpretation that weakens these sayings is appropriate, nor can we hide behind notions of cultural or historical differences.”⁸⁰ “We have a problem with the message of the gospel, but the problem is with us and not with the message itself.”⁸¹ Still, there is no place for abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, active involvement in warfare, and whatever actively contributes to death.⁸² The church stands for life and peace.

Fourth Principle: God as the Owner of Life and We as Stewards

Scripture teaches that God owns everything (e.g., Ps 50:10–12), but humans like to defraud and play a role that is not theirs to play. With His incarnation Jesus came to “his own” (John 1:11) but was not accepted. The context tells us that He is the real owner, because He is our Creator and Savior (John 1:3, 29). So, the Godhead has a dual claim on us: we are God’s because He has created us, and our Creator is also our owner. We are also His because He is our Redeemer, who has bought us by the highest possible price—His own life (1 Cor 6:19–20).

This means we are stewards of whatever God has entrusted to us, including our own lives, the lives of our children, and the lives of the unborn. The concept of stewardship allows us to work together with God. Ideally, the relationship between an owner and a steward is characterized by respect and trust, harmony, and a measure of freedom. It also includes responsibilities on the steward’s part. Stewards may decide to take good care of the owner’s property or, on the other hand, may waste it to their own detriment (Matt 25:14–30), but faithful stewards enjoy cooperation with the owner and some freedom in making decisions. Yet they accept that their freedom is ultimately limited by the owner’s will. Since God is the giver and owner of life, we have neither final control over ourselves nor the right to take life. It simply does not belong to us.⁸³

⁸⁰ Brimlow, 182.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁸² Unfortunately, *ibid.*, 169, mentions, “Antisemitism, violence, warfare, strife, hatred, and intolerance have been and continue to be acceptable practices for Christians—usually in the name of politics, nationalism, and even religious truth.”

⁸³ See Hays, 12.

Stewardship affects not only individuals, but also the church. The issue of abortion is a matter that involves the church in guiding people, caring for them, supporting them, and loving them deeply—not only when they make the sometimes hard decision to keep an unborn child under difficult circumstances, but also after they have made a serious mistake. Like individuals, churches can also make good and bad choices.

Since stewardship is associated with some measure of freedom, we must reflect for a moment on the freedom to choose. Freedom of choice is one of the greatest privileges God has given humanity. That this choice is not an illusion is evident when we consider the biblical imperatives—for instance, the call to repent and return to God (Matt 4:17) and the call to fear God and give Him glory (Rev 14:7)—and the conditional promises in Scripture—for instance, the promises of forgiveness (1 John 1:9) and the gift of abundant life (John 10:10) and eternal life (John 3:36; 1 John 5:12–13). Freedom of choice is also linked to our ability to love. True love presupposes free decision, and all the more so if it is not only based on emotions but on principles. Forced love is not love. We are invited to love God because He loved us first. But since God is love and He loves us, He wants us to voluntarily love Him. This makes choice a necessary given. He has given us the freedom to choose. Consequently, He did not create us as robots or mere biological machines. God does not manipulate us. We are free agents because we can reflect on Him, our lives, our future, and on other issues and then choose what to believe and how to act.

However, this also means that we can choose what is good and right or choose what is detrimental and evil. As mentioned above, with this freedom comes responsibility for our choices. We can choose to be either the wise or foolish virgins of Jesus' parable (Matt 25:1–13). We can use our talents responsibly or we can waste them (Matt 25:14–30). We can care deeply for others or we can neglect and even harm them (Matt 25:31–46), and then reap the consequences. Frank Hasel shows how far this freedom of choice reaches:

It is remarkable that the divine sacredness of life is not exempt from the power of human choice. As creaturely beings, we have the ability to actually terminate life that, biblically speaking, God has given and only God has the right to end. This pertains to our own life as well as the life of other human beings—born or not yet born. . . . There is a remarkable and fascinating paradox in our ability of choice: by choosing to terminate life, we are free to decide to eliminate even the very freedom to choose, which God has given. And the

effect of such a decision remains with us as something that is permanent and irreversible. It seems as if God knew about such drastic consequences of our creaturely freedom and therefore provided very strict boundaries to safeguard the sanctity of human life and the freedom it carries.⁸⁴

While we enjoy the freedom of choice and conscience, we are not absolutely free. Absolute freedom is a phantom—impossible in a world shared with others. Paul indicates that by nature we are slaves of sin, and our liberty is limited to the freedom of choice. Our own experience affirms this assessment. We can choose to be enslaved to sin or be servants of righteousness, servants of God (Rom 6:6–23), thereby continuing to enjoy not only freedom of choice but also freedom from sin (as master of our lives), freedom from the law (as a way of salvation that does not work), and freedom from death (in the sense that we have eternal life even if we experience the first death, which is followed by resurrection to eternal life). While choosing God brings humans the greatest possible freedom, it also brings obedience to God's will.

In 1 Corinthians Paul describes freedom in the following way: liberty includes some latitude, liberty includes limitations, and liberty means carrying responsibility. With 1 Corinthians 9 Paul provides a personal example of what real liberty is all about. In verse 1 he states the principle that he is free. And indeed, he is free in what he can eat and drink (1 Cor 9:4). He is free in regard to marrying or not marrying (1 Cor 9:5). He is free in his work (1 Cor 9:6) and he is free in regard to accepting or not accepting remuneration for his service (1 Cor 9:7–18). Yet Paul voluntarily delimits this freedom because he has a goal: serving fellow humans (1 Cor 9:19–22) and participating in the gospel (1 Cor 9:23). According to Paul, genuine liberty consists of the ability to let go. Its predominant motif is love (1 Cor 13). Liberty means living with God, doing His will, and becoming a servant for the sake of others (1 Cor 9:19). Paul does not intend to be saved by the law; neither does he negate the law.

Our true freedom does not consist of the unfettered power to direct our lives independently of God. Rather, it lies in our loving faith relationship with God as He has intended it to be. . . . For if we are free, we do not belong to ourselves (1 Cor 16:19; 9:19; 1 Pet 2:16), but to God who has set us

⁸⁴ Frank Hasel, "The Power of Choice and Life: A Short Theological Reflection," *Reflections* 67 (July 2019): 8.

free (Rom 6:18, 22; Gal 5:1). . . . Without loving relationships life would not exist, and outside a relationship with God no life will ultimately succeed. Living and existing in relationships, however, also limits the boundaries of our freedom. . . . Biblically speaking, our freedom to choose is never autonomous freedom. . . . This means that in biblical thought freedom is understood as a state of being where we are rescued from the coercive power of sin that enslaves us in order to be free to live in obedience to God.⁸⁵

So, Christians must learn what true freedom is, not what society praises as true liberty and self-determination. According to Scripture, society's concept of freedom is slavery—slavery to the fashions, fads, and opinions of certain leaders and peers, as well as slavery to one's own self.

What does this imply for our discussion on abortion? Crosby is right when he states, "However, once a man or woman has freely chosen to enter into a sexual relationship, he or she cannot freely choose to reject the responsibility that comes with that privilege."⁸⁶ But this is not the whole picture. Even when he rightly talks about disrespect, it is not all that needs to be said:

Again, why do civilized people go to such lengths to dispose of a dead body in an honorable way? Why not toss it out with the garbage? Because there is a symbolic content that goes well beyond the literal content. To treat a corpse—or a fetus—with casual disrespect is to cheapen and debase humanity. We sink to the level of savages . . . I believe that the vast majorities of abortions done today are wrong. I do not believe church institutions should have any part in this cheapening of life.⁸⁷

While we have freedom of choice and may decide to use it by taking life, we have no right to do so.⁸⁸ Life does not belong to us, but to God, and it is not up to us to terminate life. "Freedom of conscience does not include the right to physically harm, let alone kill, another

⁸⁵ Hasel, 8–9.

⁸⁶ Crosby, 65.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 65–66.

⁸⁸ Johnsen, 162, writes, "With what 'sovereign authority' does any creature in this world make decisions about his own life? We have seen what Christian ethics says about that 'sovereignty.' It is an illusion. God is the Sovereign One—nobody else."

human being.”⁸⁹ It also means that while the church must recognize and teach that humans have the immense privilege of freedom of choice and that in the end each person is responsible for how he or she lives and acts, the church must also clearly state the will of God as expressed in Scripture, and especially the Ten Commandments as they are interpreted and exemplified by Jesus. The church has the duty not to leave this issue open-ended. If the church through its teaching does not keep the delicate balance between the teaching of freedom of choice, which all humans have, and the proclamation of God’s clear will as expressed in His commandments, people may take any fuzziness in these matters as a license to do whatever they want to do, and to do this even in the name of the church. This would not only be detrimental to the individuals involved, but also to the church and her witness in the world.

Therefore, if in official documents the church speaks about freedom of choice, choice must be understood and explained in terms of how Scripture portrays it. There is personal and institutional choice, and there are clear limitations of that choice if we call ourselves Christians. Again, if choice as a concept is used in official documents but the limits of Christian freedom are not spelled out, then the concept may become misleading, because freedom of choice may—in the mind of the audience, influenced by the surrounding culture—become a license to do whatever our sinful hearts desire to do, independent of God’s will.

Fifth Principle: Care for the Weak and the Vulnerable

Scripture teaches that God cares especially for those who are disadvantaged and oppressed. He “shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing” (Deut 10:18; cf. Jas 1:27). God’s children, who are also Jesus’ disciples, have a mandate to help vulnerable and suffering people and ease their lot (Ps 82:3–4; Acts 20:35), even to “rescue those who are being taken away to death,” to “hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter” (Prov 24:11).⁹⁰ In the city of Ephesus, Paul admonished the elders of the

⁸⁹ James Standish, “Communist’s Confessions: What Adventists Can Learn About Abortion from China,” *The Compass Magazine*, October 7, 2019, <https://thecompassmagazine.com/blog/communists-confessions-what-adventists-can-learn-about-abortion-from-china> (accessed March 17, 2020).

⁹⁰ An action taken in the case of injustice and in favor of innocent people cannot be a violent action. This would be opposed to Jesus’ teachings and His own lifestyle. However, this does not mean that nothing can or should be done. We have to give up the notion that only violence can solve problems and become creative and ingenious

church with the words, “We must help the weak.” And Jesus speaks of the least of His brothers (Matt 25:40), for whom we are responsible, and of the little ones who should not be lost (Matt 18:10–14). The very youngest—namely, the unborn—are to be counted among them.

According to Ezekiel 18:20, God does not punish children for the sins of their fathers. God expects His children to do the same. The unborn child is not responsible for the way and the circumstances under which he or she was conceived, whether wanted or not. His or her life is to be protected, as is the life of an adult.

In a certain sense, we need the disabled and the sick, the young and the old, the depressed and the downtrodden. What would human society be without such people? A society consisting only of the young and beautiful, the healthy and the brilliant, the well-to-do and the famous? It is likely that such a utopic society would not understand the concepts of mercy, gratitude, sacrifice, or overcoming selfishness. Just as parents grow and mature through caring for and raising their children, so we become more mature and balanced individuals by helping and supporting these people (Isa 58:7–11).

In addition, we should never forget that one day we may be among the disadvantaged, the forgotten, and the undesirable. Life is not only about money, fame, and beauty. Life in a sinful world and with a human nature inclined to sin can be messy. Whether we like it or not, suffering is part of human life and, in spite of all human techniques and advances, cannot be completely eradicated from our lives (Rom 8:18; Jas 5:10, 13). Therefore, we are better off accepting suffering, learning to handle it with God’s help, and thus growing by alleviating the suffering of others.

However, there is a divine promise for those who get involved with and work for the weak and vulnerable. The psalmist calls “blessed” those who intervene for others (Ps 41:1), and Jesus states, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).⁹¹

Sixth Principle: God’s Grace

God’s grace promotes and protects life. But God is also willing to forgive our sins and deal with our shortcomings: our transgression of His commandments, our materialistic and self-centered attitudes, our worries about our future and the future of our children, and the inner pain that consumes us. We can bring all of this to God and find rest

in trying to solve problems. We also have to overcome cowardice (Rev 21:8) and be courageous: “Be strong and (very) courageous” as Joshua was (Josh 1:6–7, 9).

⁹¹ This is one of the so-called *agrapha*, a statement of Jesus not found in the canonical Gospels but here in Acts. It must have been of special importance to Luke, who has incorporated it in the book of Acts. This saying can be a motto for our life.

in the Lord. In gratitude we accept forgiveness, salvation, peace, and strength and decide to live according to His will.

Summary

After having discussed the biblical principles concerning the issue of abortion, we repeat them here in summary: abortion of human life militates against 1) the divinely given value and sacredness of human life; 2) the biblical understanding of the unborn child as being fully human in each and every stage of development, and therefore deserving of protection; 3) the will of God as expressed in the sixth commandment (“You shall not kill”) and elaborated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount; 4) the fact that God is the owner of life, and that we are stewards with no right to take life; 5) God’s care for the weak and the vulnerable, which is a mandate for us to do the same; and 6) God’s grace, which promotes and protects life but also grants forgiveness for sins committed, if we repent and ask for forgiveness.

Difficult Cases⁹²

There is no question that there are very difficult cases of pregnancy. Although statistically they are a small number, for mothers or parents facing one of these issues it is devastating. Difficult cases include pregnancies due to rape or incest, pregnancies that would lead to a handicapped child, and pregnancies that threaten the mother’s life.

All pregnancies involve at least two lives: the life of the mother and the life of the child (or children, if multiple eggs have been fertilized and the mother is bearing more than one child). Both lives, the mother’s and the child’s, have the right to exist and flourish. In each of these cases, as in all regular pregnancies, “the fetus has no choice than to grow, just as it had no choice in its conception or its blond hair and blue eyes.”⁹³ So the fetus’s choice is limited or essentially nonexistent because he or she just grows. The mother, however, has several choices under normal circumstances, and more limited choices in difficult cases. Under normal circumstances, she can 1) practice sexual abstinence and avoid pregnancy, or 2) use contraceptives. And once pregnant she can 3) decide to carry the child to term or allow for the newborn’s adoption. In other words, she may choose life for herself and the fetus.⁹⁴ However, she may also choose to 4) abort the child, which, according to our previous

⁹² For this section, see esp. Feinberg and Feinberg, 124–141.

⁹³ Feinberg and Feinberg, 124.

⁹⁴ See *ibid.*

discussion, would be a questionable choice, terminating human life. With difficult pregnancies, the mother's/parents' choices are more limited. For instance, in the case of rape she was violently forced to have intercourse, which led to a pregnancy. Her subsequent choice is limited to keeping or aborting the child. This is also true for the other extreme cases. On the other hand, the fetus is dependent on the mother's choice and has no choice of his or her own.

Rape and Incest

Incest can happen for two reasons. It can be consensual, and in this case it is not much different from other forms of sexual immorality. Incest can also be nonconsensual. In this case it would be incestuous rape. Therefore, incest does not need to be treated separately. However, we recognize that in the case of incestuous rape, the danger of physical or mental defects in the fetus are increased. It should be noted that "conception in case of rape is very rare" for various reasons, among them that "the emotional trauma of the act may prevent ovulation."⁹⁵

Rape is a horrible and inexcusable crime⁹⁶ that may damage the victim in many ways—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The problem of rape is even increased if the raped woman becomes pregnant. The question then arises: is abortion justified under such heinous conditions? We need to reflect on this situation for a moment without immediately following our gut feeling. In any case, the raped woman needs all our compassion and support.

Arguments put forth in favor of an abortion are the following: A pregnancy adds to the tremendous burden the abused woman is already carrying. If she is forced to keep the child, she becomes a victim at least twice. The child may also constantly remind her of the crime committed against her. She should not be forced to bear an unwanted child.

What about reasons against abortion? It is no question that a terrible crime has been committed against the victim of rape and that she needs to be able to articulate her fears, anger, and trauma with trusted persons of her choice. However, an abortion may lead to other complications for the mother, including psychological problems. The child is innocent and cannot be blamed for what happened. He or she also has a right to live. To take the child's life is to respond to one evil with another, and may lead to even more trauma for the mother. While

⁹⁵ Feinberg and Feinberg, 127.

⁹⁶ There is no excuse for a man raping a woman. There may be forgiveness, but there is no justification—no matter what the circumstances were when the rape happened.

the child may be unwanted in the beginning, this may not remain so, and he or she may become a blessing to the mother. Statistics suggest that “up to 85% of the women who become pregnant through rape or incest [in the United States] choose to have their children.”⁹⁷ Besides, the child can be put up for adoption after birth, which would be a responsible decision. It is necessary to keep the child’s best interests in mind, and not focus on the personal pain of the mother alone. Hays writes,

It is inappropriate to set up the issue of conflict of “rights”: the rights of the woman versus the rights of the unborn child. . . . No one has a presumptive claim on it. Nor, on the other hand, do any of us—male or female—have a “right” to control our bodies autonomously . . . (1 Cor. 6:19–20). We are always accountable to God for our decisions and actions.”⁹⁸

While those who might opt for abortion in the case of rape may be seeking alleviation of the pain and the shame that go along with it, they should not forget that this may not work as desired. In the past, women confronted with such a difficult situation have made different decisions. There were some who decided to abort the fetus caused by rape, and there were many others who decided to keep the child. A mother should not be forced into such a decision with irreversible consequences, but should receive all the support that would help her make an informed decision that reflects the previously discussed biblical principles. The choice to keep the child alive is a real option, even under such difficult circumstances.

Medical Conditions in the Unborn

Modern prenatal diagnostics can be a blessing in that the unborn may be treated even in the mother’s womb. It can also be a kind of curse. It forces parents to make a choice about life and death where in the past this was not possible, and nature just took its course. Some babies died right after birth, and the parents were able to say goodbye to them, mourn their death, and bury them with grief and an aching heart. Today the slightest abnormalities can be detected. Yet they are not always diagnosed with absolute certainty. Still, such a diagnosis may put a tremendous burden on the parents.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ “18 Shocking Abortion Statistics Rape Victims,” Health Research Funding, <https://healthresearchfunding.org/18-shocking-abortion-statistics-rape-victims> (accessed March 17, 2020).

⁹⁸ Hays, 454.

⁹⁹ See also *Ibid.*, 456.

How to deal with these issues? First, some of the diagnosed medical conditions are mild, and the child can live with them without major challenges. Others are moderate, and in this case it may also be possible to continue life with them—for instance, some forms of Down syndrome and spina bifida (split spine).¹⁰⁰ “Spina bifida is a birth defect in which there is incomplete closing of the spine and membranes around the spinal cord during early development in pregnancy.”¹⁰¹ Some forms of spina bifida are milder. Getting enough folate before and during the pregnancy may, in many cases, prevent such a condition. Prenatal and postnatal treatments are also available, though not all effects may disappear.

Among the severe conditions are, for example, hydrocephaly and anencephaly. “Hydrocephalus is a condition in which an accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) occurs within the brain. This typically causes increased pressure inside the skull. . . . Hydrocephalus can occur due to birth defects or be acquired later in life.”¹⁰² “Anencephaly is the absence of a major portion of the brain, skull, and scalp that occurs during embryonic development. . . . With very few exceptions, infants with this disorder do not survive longer than a few hours or possibly days after their birth.”¹⁰³

The distinction of milder and more severe cases, as well as the fact that some disabilities occur before birth or develop later in life, should make us cautious. Typically, we would not kill a person who develops hydrocephaly later in life. Why, then, should we abort an unborn child with this condition? The Feinbergs suggest,

The desire to cure or avoid diseases should not so consume us that we destroy those among us who have disabilities. . . . Self-sacrifice for the good of another is not very popular today. . . . Moreover, it is easy to forget that there at least two parties to be considered in the matter, the parents and the handicapped child. It is important not to pit the

¹⁰⁰ Sakala, 20, urges, “Abortion of the fetus with lesser degrees of abnormality should be managed as the normal fetus.” While, on the one hand, he limits abortions to threats to the mother, fetuses who cannot survive outside the mother’s body, and severely impaired fetuses with no chance of gaining self-consciousness, on the other hand, he considers abortions for psychosocial threats to the mother as legitimate (*ibid.*, 19–20). This sounds a bit ambivalent.

¹⁰¹ Wikipedia, s.v. “Spina bifida,” last modified March 12, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spina_bifida (accessed March 17, 2020).

¹⁰² Wikipedia, s.v. “Hydrocephalus,” last modified February 25, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydrocephalus> (accessed March 17, 2020).

¹⁰³ Wikipedia, s.v. “Anencephaly,” last modified February 16, 2020, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anencephaly> (accessed March 17, 2020).

parents' needs against the child's. . . . The proper response to crippling diseases and disabilities isn't eugenic abortions. Rather it is compassion on the sick and those who care for them, along with a renewed awareness of the enormity of the consequences of sin.¹⁰⁴

Ulrich Eibach is clearly opposed to the abortion of healthy children, handicapped children, and even incurable children. Yet he writes, "This is not to say that there are no serious conflict situations in which abortion is the only possible solution."¹⁰⁵

Again, there are parents who decide to abort their child who suffers from incurable disease, while others keep him or her even under these most severe conditions and allow the child to die after birth. While such decisions have to be thought through, the mother/parents need to experience the tangible love of the church family. However, abortion should not be understood as a convenient way of avoiding pain.

The Mother's Life

There are situations where it seems that only one life can be saved, either the mother's life or the child's life. These situations are heart-wrenching. The threat to the mother's life can come from the child (e.g., ectopic or tubal pregnancies) or from a disease that the mother has contracted independent of the child (e.g., late-stage cancer). Regardless of the decision made, to consider the child's life only as a potential human life and the mother's life as an actual human life can have far-reaching ethical implications. Feinberg and Feinberg warn against such an argumentation: "If the unborn baby's rights as a potential person are outweighed by those of actual persons, then regardless of the mother's situation (medical or otherwise) this line of reasoning seems to reopen the door to abortion for any reason, including convenience."¹⁰⁶

They also mention the example of a mother who decided to die so that her child may live.¹⁰⁷ This is a heroic example of how far some

¹⁰⁴ Feinberg and Feinberg, 134, 136–137.

¹⁰⁵ Ulrich Eibach, "Vorgeburtliche Diagnostik und Selektion unheilbar kranken und behinderten Lebens: Kritische Würdigung des Beitrags der 'Kammer für Öffentliche Verantwortung der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland' (EKD)," *Informationsbrief 316* (Bekennnisbewegung "Kein anderes Evangelium"), June 2019, p. 11 (translated by the author).

¹⁰⁶ Feinberg and Feinberg, 139.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. In 2004–2005 the pregnant Rita Fedrizzi, with full awareness that she may die, delayed her cancer treatment to save her child. A healthy baby was born, but it was

mothers are willing to go, but not all mothers would do that, nor can it be required. They need to be cared for by the community of believers.

Result

All difficult cases together amount to about seven percent of all abortions, representing a slim minority. Still, they have to be taken seriously. In our short deliberations we have tried to show that even difficult cases come in different categories of severity and do not automatically allow for abortion. Some of them can be treated. Actually, even in the most extreme cases abortion coincides with the commandment not to kill. While in our fallen world we may not see other options and have only partial knowledge of a situation, killing an unborn child—even for the best human reasons—incurrs guilt, just as the manslayer in the Old Testament, who accidentally killed another person, was still responsible for his act.

Remwil Tornalejo may be on target when he writes that “abortion regardless of the cause of pregnancy reason has moral and ethical culpability.”¹⁰⁸ This would mean that even in the most adverse dilemma, when abortion seems to be the only option and mothers/parents allow for it to happen, they may need to seek divine forgiveness.

Implications and Conclusion

In this article, we have shown that abortion is a serious issue. It affects at least the unborn, the mother, the father, immediate and extended family members, and the church family, often with even long-term consequences and trauma.

We have also seen that the Bible is not silent about abortion. While it does not address it with a commandment such as “You shall not abort a child,” it provides enough principles to guide us in our decisions. Scripture does not support abortion, but calls believers to trust God and follow His will for them, because He has their best interests in mind. Christianity has to do with faith in the almighty Lord and love for Him and all His human sons and daughters. Again, the issue of abortion is also a faith and trust issue. We must allow God to grow our faith and, in conjunction with it, our love.

Brimlow reminds us, “We are called to live the kingdom as he [Jesus] proclaimed it and be his disciples, come what may.”¹⁰⁹ In a prayer addressed to the Lord, he writes, “Here is the joy that is born of

too late for her cancer treatment to save her. “She literally gave her life for that of her child.”

¹⁰⁸ Tornalejo, 126.

¹⁰⁹ Brimlow, 151.

our faith, and here is the joy that underlies the hardship and distress. Your love for us is what makes all of us worthy of love. To deny it for anyone is to deny it for myself; to affirm it for everyone is also to affirm it for myself.” And later, “While I am not sure that great love brings with it a desire to suffer, I do think that great love does not count the cost and that the cost of loving greatly may well include suffering.”¹¹⁰ Faith/trust and love, active in good works, may include suffering; yet they have great rewards (Matt 10:47; Col 3:23–24; Heb 10:32–35).

Abortion also affects the community of believers. The church stands for life, not for death. As the church seeks to support women and couples who are confronted with the possibility of abortion, its members are challenged to create an atmosphere of true love, enlist the help of well-functioning and committed families, and educate them to provide care for struggling individuals, couples, and families,¹¹¹ encouraging church members to open their homes to those in need, including single parents, and supporting in various ways pregnant women who decide to keep their unborn children.¹¹² The imitation of Jesus “suggests that we should act in service to welcome children, both born and unborn, even when to do so is obviously difficult and may cause serious hardship. . . . This call is a charge laid upon the church as a whole. . . . If this proposal sounds impractical, that is merely a measure of how far the church has drifted from its foundation in the New Testament.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Brimlow, 173, 190. While he does not write directly in the context of abortion, but rather pacifism, it certainly also applies to the present issue.

¹¹¹ Seibold writes, “What I like to see? A group of people . . . who pour out their lives for at-risk-families. Who made sure that troubled families have opportunities and guidance beyond what they’d get in their own social context. As for unwanted babies: what if every church were an orphanage, rather than a gathering of the righteous” <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/column/2009/12/18/why-i%25E2%2580%2599m-neither-pro-life-nor-pro-choice> (accessed May 7, 2020)..

¹¹² Hays, 457, states, “My own judgment in this case is that the New Testament summons the community to eschew abortion and thus to undertake the burden of assisting the parents to raise the handicapped child.”

¹¹³ Hays, 452–453. On page 452, he is quite definite: “How does the story [Acts 4:32–35] illuminate the issue of abortion? It suggests that the community should assume responsibility for the care of the needy. Thus, within the church, there should be no justification for abortion on economic grounds or on the ground of the incapacity of the mother to care for her child. . . . Sharing, not abortion is the answer. . . . The church’s confusion on the issue of abortion is a symptom of its more fundamental unfaithfulness to the economic imperatives of the gospel. . . . The fact that abortion is usually treated as a ‘woman’s issue’ shows how disastrously the general culture has allowed males to abdicate responsibility for children. . . . A man who has fathered an unborn child should be required and helped, within the fellowship of the church,

Pearson observes,

If we think it morally desirable that one of our sisters should go through with an unwanted pregnancy rather than seek an abortion, then we the church have to be prepared to offer the emotional, financial and social support that would make carrying the baby to term seem a possible option. To the extent that we withhold that support, remain content to be judgmental, and fail to generate an ambience of concern, we bear some measure of responsibility for those abortions which take place in our midst.¹¹⁴

In addition, while not condoning abortion, the church still cares deeply for those who have aborted a child for various reasons, or who were forced to have it done, and may be hurting physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually. We must never forget the terrible plague of human trafficking, forced prostitution, and rape in many countries around the globe today. All those affected need the help of the church—especially women who got pregnant and had an abortion or who were forced by their husbands, male friends, or relatives to have an abortion done, whether for perceived shame upon the family or other reasons. The church must be a safe haven for those hurting and must provide the service of qualified and loving people who can listen, challenge, console, and initiate healing.

The issue of abortion challenges all believers, but it gives individuals and the church as a whole, on a local level and on a wider level, the opportunity to be what we claim to be: the fellowship of brothers and sisters, the community of believers, the family of God.

to take responsibility for supporting the pregnant woman both emotionally and financially and to assume continuing responsibility for the child after birth. . . . The community of faith should provide whatever support is necessary for both man and woman to assume their roles as parents. This would entail not only financial support but also support of friendship, counsel, and prayer.”

¹¹⁴ Pearson, 152.

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