What the Bible Says about

ABORTION, EUTHANASIA, AND END-OF-LIFE MEDICAL DECISIONS

Wayne Grudem

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This book examines the Bible's teachings on two subjects—abortion and euthanasia—that in many ways are subcategories of the same topic, the protection of human life, both at the beginning of life (in the mother's womb) and at the end of life (in a hospital bed).[1]

1. Much of the material in this section has been adapted from Wayne Grudem, *Politics—According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding*

In the Ten Commandments, we read this:

You shall not murder. (Ex. 20:13)

But this commandment is not confined to the Old Testament. It is repeated several times in the New Testament (see Rom. 1:29; 13:9; 1 Tim. 1:9; James 2:11; 4:2; 1 John 3:12, 15; Rev. 9:21; 16:6; 18:24; 21:8; 22:15; see also Jesus's teaching in Matt. 5:21–26; 15:19; 19:18). The New Testament authors frequently affirm the continuing moral validity of the commandment "You shall not murder."

God is the Creator and sustainer of human life, and human beings are the pinnacle of his creation, for only human beings are said to be created "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:26–27). Therefore, God absolutely forbids human beings to murder one another.[2]

PART 1: ABORTION

Abortion is one of the most controversial topics in society today. Differing views about this topic are related to deeply felt personal convictions about privacy, human sexual behavior, pregnancy, parenthood, and human life itself.

In this section, I will attempt to give an accurate summary of biblical teachings related to abortion and also to

Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 157–78; and *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 566–86, with permission of the publishers.

2. I have elsewhere discussed the fact that the Bible does not view capital punishment or killing an enemy in a just war or in self-defense as "murder," but uses other words to refer to these actions. See Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 505–6, and chaps. 18, 19, and 20.

represent fairly the arguments of people who disagree with my position. I will use the term *abortion* to mean any action that intentionally causes the death and removal from the womb of an unborn child.

A. BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE PERSONHOOD OF AN UNBORN CHILD

By far the most powerful argument against abortion is the consideration that the unborn child is a unique person. Several passages in the Bible indicate that an unborn child should be thought of and protected as a person from the moment of conception.

1. Luke 1:41–44. Before the birth of John the Baptist, when his mother, Elizabeth, was in about her sixth month of pregnancy, she was visited by her relative, Mary, who was to become the mother of Jesus. Luke reports:

> And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, . . . "Behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, *the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*" (Luke 1:41–44)

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth called the unborn child in the sixth month of pregnancy a "baby" (Greek, *brephos*, "baby, infant"). This is the same Greek word that is used for a child *after* it is born, as when Jesus

is called a "baby [*brephos*] lying in a manger" (Luke 2:16; see also Luke 18:15; 2 Tim. 3:15).

Elizabeth also said that the baby "leaped for joy," which attributes personal human activity to him. He was able to hear Mary's voice and somehow, even prior to birth, feel joyful about it. In 2004, researchers at the University of Florida found that unborn children can distinguish their mothers' voices and distinguish music from noise.[3] Another study, reported in *Psychology Today* in 1998, confirmed that babies hear and respond to their mothers' voices while still in the womb, and the mothers' voices have a calming effect on them.[4] More recent research (2013) has shown that babies learn words and sounds in the womb, and retain memories of them after they are born.[5]

2. Psalm 51:5. In the Old Testament, King David sinned with Bathsheba and then was rebuked by Nathan the prophet. Afterward, David wrote Psalm 51, in which he pleads with God, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love" (v. 1). Amidst confessing his sin, he writes:

3. University of Florida. "University of Florida Research Adds to Evidence That Unborn Children Hear 'Melody' of Speech," *Science Daily*, Jan. 23, 2004, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2004/01/040123001433.htm.

4. Janet L. Hopson, "Fetal Psychology," *Psychology Today*, Sept. 1, 1998 (last reviewed June 9, 2016), https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/199809/fetal-psychology.

5. Eino Partanen et al., "Learning-induced neural plasticity of speech processing before birth," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, Sept. 10, 2013, http://www.pnas.org/content/110/37/15145.full. Also see Beth Skwarecki, "Babies Learn to Recognize Words in the Womb," *Science,* Aug. 26, 2013, http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2013/08/babies-learn-recognize-words-womb.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and *in sin did my mother conceive* me. (Ps. 51:5)

David thinks back to the time of his birth and says that he was "brought forth" from his mother's womb as a sinner. In fact, his sinfulness extended back even prior to his birth, for David, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, says, "In sin did my mother conceive me."

Up to this point in the psalm, David is not talking about his mother's sin in any of the preceding four verses, but is talking about the depth of *his own sinfulness* as a human being. Therefore, he must be talking about himself, not about his mother, in this verse as well. He is saying that from the moment of his conception *he* has had a sinful nature. This means that *he thinks of himself as having been a distinct human being, a distinct person, from the moment of his conception*. He was not merely part of his mother's body, but was distinct in his personhood from the time when he was conceived.

3. Psalm 139:13. David also thinks of himself as having been a person while he was growing in his mother's womb, for he says:

You formed my inward parts;
you knitted *me* together in my mother's womb.
(Ps. 139:13)

Here also he speaks of himself as a distinct person ("me") when he was in his mother's womb. The Hebrew word

translated as "inward parts" is *kilyah*, literally "kidneys," but in contexts such as this it refers to the innermost parts of a person, including his deepest inward thoughts and emotions (see its uses in Pss. 16:7; 26:2; 73:21; Prov. 23:16; Jer. 17:10).

4. Genesis 25:22–23. In an earlier Old Testament example, Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, was pregnant with the twins who were to be named Jacob and Esau. We read:

> The children [Hebrew, *banim*, plural of *ben*, "son"] struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her,
>
> "Two nations are in your womb,
> and two peoples from within you shall be divided;
> the one shall be stronger than the other,
> the older shall serve the younger."
> (Gen. 25:22–23)

Once again, the unborn babies are viewed as "children" within their mother's womb. (The Hebrew word *ben* is the ordinary word used more than forty-nine hundred times in the Old Testament for "son" or, in plural, "sons" or "children.") These twins are viewed as already struggling together. Before the point of birth they are thought of as distinct persons, and their future is predicted.

5. Exodus 21:22–25. For the question of abortion, perhaps the most significant passage of all is found in the specific

laws God gave Moses for the people of Israel during the time of the Mosaic covenant. One particular law spoke of the penalties to be imposed if the life or health of a pregnant woman *or her unborn child* was endangered or harmed:

> When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, *but there is no harm*, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But *if there is harm*, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (Ex. 21:22–25)[6]

This law concerns a situation that arises when men are fighting and one of them accidentally hits a pregnant woman. Neither one of them intends to do this, but as they fight they are not careful enough to avoid hitting her. If that happens, there are two possibilities:

1. If this causes a premature birth but *there is no harm to the pregnant woman or her unborn child*, there is still a penalty: "The one who hit her shall surely be fined" (v. 22). The penalty is for carelessly

6. The phrase "so that her children come out" is a literal translation of the Hebrew text, which uses the plural of the common Hebrew word *yeled,* "child," and another very common word, *yātsā'*, which means "go out, come out." The plural "children" is probably the plural of indefiniteness, allowing for the *possibility* of more than one child. Other translations render this as "so that she gives birth prematurely," which is very similar in meaning (so NASB, from the 1999 edition onward; the NIV, TNIV, NET, HCSB, NLT, and NKJV use similar wording).

endangering the life or health of the pregnant woman and her child. We have similar laws in modern society, such as when a person is fined for drunken driving, even though he hit no one with his car. He recklessly endangered human life and health, and he deserves a fine or other penalty.

2. But "*if there is harm*" *to either the pregnant woman* or *her child*, then the penalty is quite severe: "Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth . . ." (vv. 23–24). This means that both the mother and the unborn child are given equal legal protection. The penalty for harming the unborn child is just as great as for harming the mother. Both are treated as persons who deserve the full protection of the law.[7]

7. Some translations have adopted an alternative sense of this passage. The NRSV translates it, "When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman *so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows* . . ." (the RSV wording is similar, as was the NASB wording before 1999). In this case, causing a miscarriage and the death of an unborn child results only in a fine. Therefore, some have argued, this passage treats the unborn child as *less worthy* of protection than others in society, for the penalty is less.

But the arguments for this translation are not persuasive. The primary argument is that this translation would make the law similar to a provision in the law code of Hammurabi (written about 1760 BC in ancient Babylon). But such a supposed parallel should not override the meanings of the actual words in the Hebrew text of Exodus. The moral and civil laws in the Bible often differed from those of the ancient cultures around Israel.

In addition, there are two Hebrew words for a "miscarriage" (*shakol*, used in Gen. 31:38; see also Ex. 23:26; Job 21:10; Hos. 9:14; and *nēphel*; see Job. 3:16; Ps. 58:8; Eccles. 6:3), but neither is used here. The word that is used, *yātsā'*, is ordinarily used to refer to the live birth of a child (see Gen. 25:26; 38:29; Jer. 1:5).

Finally, even on this (incorrect) translation, a *fine* is imposed on the person who accidentally causes the death of the unborn child. This implies that *accidentally* causing such a death is still considered morally wrong. Therefore, *intentionally* causing the death of an unborn child would be much more wrong, even according to this translation.

This law is even more significant when seen in the context of other laws in the Mosaic covenant. Where the Mosaic law addressed other cases of someone *accidentally* causing the death of another person, there was no requirement to give "life for life," no capital punishment. Rather, the person who accidentally caused someone else's death was required to flee to one of the six "cities of refuge" until the death of the high priest (see Num. 35:9–15, 22–29). This was a kind of "house arrest," although the person had to stay only within a city rather than within a house for a limited period of time. It was a far lesser punishment than "life for life."

This means that God established for Israel a law code *that placed a higher value on protecting the life of a pregnant woman and her unborn child than the life of anyone else in Israelite society*. Far from treating the death of an unborn child as *less significant* than the death of others in society, this law treated the death of an unborn child or its mother as *more significant* and therefore worthy of more severe punishment. And the law did not make any distinction about the number of months the woman had been pregnant. Presumably it applied from a very early stage in pregnancy, whenever it could be known that the injury inflicted by the men who were fighting caused the death of the unborn child or children.

Moreover, this law applied to a case of *accidental* killing of an unborn child. But if *accidental* killing of an unborn child is so serious in God's eyes, then surely

intentional killing of an unborn child must be an even worse crime.

6. Luke 1:35: The Incarnation. The angel Gabriel told Mary that she would bear a son, and that this would come about by the power of the Holy Spirit:

> And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

Then Elizabeth called Mary "the mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43) soon after Mary became pregnant. These verses are significant because they mean that the incarnation of Christ did not begin when he was a newborn baby, a small child, a teenager, or an adult man. Rather, the divine nature of God the Son was joined to the human nature of Jesus from the moment of his conception in Mary's womb. From that point on, Jesus Christ was a divine-human person, both God and man. This is significant for the discussion of abortion, because it means that Christ was a genuine human person long before his birth as a baby on the first Christmas.

John Jefferson Davis writes:

> In the New Testament, the incarnation of Jesus Christ is a profound testimony to God's affirmation of the sanctity of prenatal life. . . . His human history, like ours, began at *conception*. . . . The significant point

> is that God chose to begin the process of incarnation there, rather than at some other point, thus affirming the significance of that starting point for human life.[8]

Scott Rae agrees:

> From the earliest points of life in the womb, Mary and Elizabeth realize that the incarnation has begun. This lends support to the notion that the incarnation began with Jesus's conception and that the Messiah took on human form in all of its stages, embryonic life included.[9]

7. Conclusion. The conclusion from all of these passages is that the Bible teaches that we should think of the unborn child as a person from the moment of conception, and therefore we should give to the unborn child legal protection at least equal to that of others in the society.

8. A Note on Forgiveness. It is likely that many people reading this evidence from the Bible, perhaps for the first time, have already had abortions. Others reading this have encouraged others to have abortions. I cannot minimize or deny the moral wrong involved in these actions, but I can point to the repeated offer of the Bible that God will give forgiveness to those who repent of their sin and trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness: "If we confess our sins, he

8. John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 152, emphasis in original.

9. Scott B. Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 130.

is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Although such sins, like all other sins, deserve God's wrath, Jesus Christ took that wrath on himself as a substitute for all who would believe in him: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet. 2:24).

B. SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE FOR THE PERSONHOOD OF AN UNBORN CHILD

Alongside the biblical testimony about the personhood of the unborn child, scientific evidence also indicates that each child in the womb should be considered to be a unique human person. Dianne Irving, a biochemist and biologist who is a professor at Georgetown University, writes:

> To begin with, scientifically something very radical occurs between the processes of gametogenesis and fertilization—the change from a simple *part* of one human being (i.e., a sperm) and a simple *part* of another human being (i.e., an oocyte—usually referred to as an "ovum" or "egg"), which simply possess "human life," to a new, genetically unique, newly existing, individual, whole living human being (a single-cell embryonic human zygote). That is, upon fertilization, parts of human beings have actually been transformed into something very different from what they were before; they have been changed into a single, whole human being. During the process of fertilization, the sperm

and the oocyte cease to exist as such, and a new human being is produced.

To understand this, it should be remembered that each kind of living organism has a specific number and quality of chromosomes that are characteristic for each member of a species. (The number can vary only slightly if the organism is to survive.) For example, the characteristic number of chromosomes for a member of the human species is 46 (plus or minus, e.g., in human beings with Down's or Turner's syndromes). Every somatic (or, body) cell in a human being has this characteristic number of chromosomes. Even the early germ cells contain 46 chromosomes; it is only their mature forms—the sex gametes, or sperms and oocytes—which will later contain only 23 chromosomes each. Sperms and oocytes are derived from primitive germ cells in the developing fetus by means of the process known as "gametogenesis." Because each germ cell normally has 46 chromosomes, the process of "fertilization" cannot take place until the total number of chromosomes in each germ cell is cut in half. This is necessary so that after their fusion at fertilization the characteristic number of chromosomes in a single individual member of the human species (46) can be maintained. . . .

To accurately see why a sperm or an oocyte are considered as only possessing human life, and not as living human beings themselves, one needs to look at the basic scientific facts involved in the processes of **gametogenesis** and of **fertilization**. It may help to keep

> in mind that the products of gametogenesis and fertilization are very different. The products of gametogenesis are mature sex gametes with only 23 instead of 46 chromosomes. The product of fertilization is a living human being with 46 chromosomes. Gametogenesis refers to the maturation of germ cells, resulting in gametes. Fertilization refers to the initiation of a new human being.[10]

In other words, the distinct genetic identity of the unborn child shows that he or she is far different (in every single cell of the child's body!) from any part of the mother's own body (for every cell of the mother's body contains the mother's DNA, not the child's).

C. OTHER ARGUMENTS AGAINST ABORTION

The biblical testimony and scientific evidence argue strongly that the unborn child is a person who should be protected by law, and that abortion therefore is wrong and should not be legal. However, not all people are convinced by these arguments. What are some other ways those who accept the personhood of the unborn can argue against abortion?

10. Dianne N. Irving, "When Do Human Beings Begin?" Catholic Education Resource Center, http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/controversy/abortion/when-do-human-beings-begin.html, emphasis in original. Irving is a former career-appointed bench research biochemist/biologist (National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD), an MA and PhD philosopher (Georgetown University, Washington, DC), and professor of the history of philosophy and of medical ethics.

1. Treatment of a Baby after It Is Born. Arguments based on how we treat a child after it is born can have significant persuasive force. For example, would we think it right for our laws to allow a parent to kill a one-year-old child simply because the parent does not want the child or finds the child a difficult burden? If not, should we allow an unborn person to be killed?

2. Ultrasound Images. Modern ultrasound technology gives highly realistic images of the unborn child—images that look so much like a real human person that they have great persuasive force. So great is the resemblance to children after they are born that parents and grandparents often fasten these ultrasound images of unborn children on their refrigerators with magnets! Focus on the Family claims that 78 percent of women who see an ultrasound of their baby in the womb reject abortion.[11] The ministry's "Option Ultrasound" program has been credited with saving more than three hundred and fifty thousand lives from abortion as of 2016.[12]

Because of the powerful evidence of ultrasound images, many abortion advocates try to discourage pregnant women from seeing them. Nancy Keenan, president of the National Abortion Rights Action League Pro-Choice

11. See Adam Cohen, "The Next Abortion Battleground: Fetal Heartbeats," *Time*, Oct. 17, 2011, http://ideas.time.com/2011/10/17/the-next-abortion-battleground-fetal-heartbeats/.

12. Leah Jessen, "How This Ultrasound Program Brought Life to 358,000 Babies," *The Daily Signal*, Jan. 7, 2016, http://dailysignal.com/2016/01/07/how-this-ultrasound-program-brought-life-to-358000-babies/.

America in Washington, DC, said, "Politicians should not require a doctor to perform a medically unnecessary ultrasound, nor should they force a woman to view an ultrasound against her will."[13] Abortion advocate William Saletan, writing in *Slate* magazine, said, "Ultrasound has exposed the life in the womb to those of us who didn't want to see what abortion kills. The fetus is squirming, and so are we."[14]

3. The Loss of Millions of Valuable People. Another argument against abortion is the incalculable loss to the nation from the deaths of approximately 1 million babies per year. Since the 1973 Supreme Court decision Roe v. Wade, more than 61 million children have been put to death through abortion.[15] Some of those would now be 47 years old. Others would be 46, 45, and so on, down to approximately 1 million of them who would be in their first year of life.[16]

Many of them by now would be scientists and doctors, engineers and business leaders, entrepreneurs, artists, electricians, poets, carpenters, musicians, farmers, sports figures, political leaders, and so forth. Many of them would be mothers taking care of their own children and fathers

13. Quoted in Jennifer Parker, "Bill Would Mandate Ultrasound before Abortion," ABC News, March 16, 2007, http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=2958249&page=1&CMP=OTC-RSSFeeds0312.

14. Quoted in Parker, "Bill Would Mandate Ultrasound before Abortion."

15. As of June 28, 2019, the approximate number of abortions performed in the United States since Roe v. Wade is 61,401,741. See www.numberofabortions.com.

16. The number of abortions is decreasing. As of 2015–16, the number of abortions was approximately 926,000. See http://www.nrlc.org/uploads/factsheets/FS01AbortionintheUS.pdf. This is down from a peak of 1.6 million per year in 1990. From 1980 to 1992, the average was over 1.5 million per year.

helping to raise their children. They would be contributing to society in all areas of life—but they never had the chance to be born. They never had the chance to contribute in a positive way to this world.

4. The Instinct of the Mother. A final potent argument is simply an appeal to the instinctive sense a pregnant woman has that what is growing in her womb is not a piece of tissue or merely a part of her body, but is in fact *a baby*. Such an instinct is given even to unbelievers by God himself, for the Bible tells us, with respect to Gentiles "who do not have the Law," that "the work of the Law is *written on their hearts*, while their *conscience* also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them" (Rom. 2:14–15). This gives us some hope that arguments showing the personhood of the unborn child will eventually be persuasive to the majority of people in a society.

D. COUNTERING ARGUMENTS FOR ABORTION

Those who reject the biblical testimony and the scientific evidence that the unborn child should be treated as a person from the moment of conception present a number of arguments for the permissibility of abortion. In this section, I will summarize and respond to the most prominent of these arguments.

1. Unable to Interact with Others and Survive on Its Own. One objection is that the unborn child is unable to talk or

interact with other people or perform moral actions. In addition, it is unable to survive without its mother.

But these factors do not mean that the unborn child is not a person. A newborn is still unable to talk or perform moral actions. This is also true for a person in a coma due to a serious accident. Moreover, a newborn infant is surely unable to survive without its mother. (Some people would say that most junior high students are unable to survive without their mothers!) Such an objection is not persuasive.

2. Birth Defects. Another objection concerns unborn children who are known to have birth defects. Should parents not have the right to abort such children, thus saving themselves much hardship and sparing the child from a life of suffering?

But would we think it right to put such a child to death *after* it is born?

If we have already established that the unborn child should be treated as a person from the moment of conception, then being born or not yet being born should make no difference in our assessment of the child's personhood. If we would not think it right to kill such a child after it is born, then we should not think it right to kill the child before it is born.

Moreover, prior to birth the diagnosis of "possible" or "probable" birth defects can be in error. Sometimes a child is born perfectly normal after such a diagnosis. Many birth defects are very small and have no significant impact on the child's life. And even when a birth defect is quite significant

(for example, Down syndrome), the child can still lead a happy life and bring much joy and blessing to his or her own family and to many others.[17] In such cases Christians should be encouraged to trust in God's wise providence and his sovereign direction of their lives. The Lord said to Moses, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" (Ex. 4:11). On one occasion, Jesus saw a man who had been blind from birth:

> His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." (John 9:2–3)

Randy Alcorn quotes an example of a medical school professor who presented the following case study and asked students what they would do:

> The father had syphilis and the mother had tuberculosis. Of four previous children, the first was blind, the second died, the third was both deaf and dumb, and the fourth had tuberculosis. What would you advise the woman to do when she finds she is pregnant again?

17. Robertson McQuilkin and Paul Copan raise a point that people often overlook: "Blessing and benefit come not only to the handicapped, but also to their caregivers, many of whom deepen in their compassion and even their courage while tending to the needs of others." *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics: Walking in the Way of Wisdom*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 380.

> One student answered, "I would advise an abortion." Then the professor said, "Congratulations. . . . You have just killed Beethoven."[18]

3. Pregnancies Resulting from Rape or Incest. If a child has been conceived through rape or incest, we must recognize the genuine pain and hardship experienced by the mother, who is involuntarily pregnant, perhaps at a very young age. Christians who know of such situations should be ready to give encouragement and support in many ways.

But once again the question must be asked: Would we think it right to kill a baby conceived through rape or incest *after* it is born? Most people would say certainly not. Such a child does not lose its right to live because of the circumstances of its conception. Therefore, we should not think it right to kill the child *before* it is born either. The rape that occurred was not the fault of the child, and the child should not be put to death because of someone else's crime. "Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16; cf. Ezek. 18:20). In addition, pregnancies resulting from rape or incest are quite rare, account-

18. Randy Alcorn, *ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1992), 175. By quoting this argument, I do not wish to imply that only the lives of famous composers are worth saving, but just the opposite: all human lives are worth saving both because we are created in the image of God and because we can never know in advance how much good a child will do in his or her lifetime, if allowed to live. Beethoven, who was born in circumstances that were far from ideal, is simply a vivid illustration of the second point. (See Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 141–43, 151, on the importance of evaluating the results of our actions.)

ing for at most 1 percent of all abortions,[19] but probably much less than that.

Alcorn points out that well-known gospel singer Ethel Waters was born as a result of a pregnancy that occurred when her mother was raped at age 12.[20] There are doubtless other people today who lead useful, productive, fulfilling lives even though their births were the result of the horrible crime of rape.[21] We should not justify taking the life of the unborn child in such cases.

4. Abortion to Save the Life of the Mother. According to the Centers for Disease Control, abortion carried out to save the life of the mother is extremely rare (less than 0.118 percent of all abortions).[22] A more recent study in the United Kingdom found that only 0.006 percent of all abortions there were to save the life of the mother.[23] Such a situation is different from the others we considered above,

19. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the research arm of Planned Parenthood, less than 0.5 percent of abortions in 2004 were performed on victims of rape. See Lawrence B. Finer et al., "Reasons U.S. Women Have Abortions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 37, no. 3 (2005): 114, https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/journals/3711005.pdf.

20. Alcorn, *ProLife Answers*, 179.

21. An excellent student in one of my seminary classes confided to me privately that after he became an adult he learned from his parents that his legal father, who had brought him up from birth, was not his biological father, but had married the student's mother after she had been raped by another man. At the time the student told me this, he had already completed several years of fruitful ministry.

22. Jeani Chang et al., "Pregnancy-Related Mortality Surveillance—United States, 1991–1999," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Feb. 21, 2003, www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5202a1.htm.

23. According to The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (Earl Howe). See http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201213/ldhansrd/text/120719w0001.htm#12071972000444.

because here the choice is between the loss of one life (the baby's) and the loss of two lives (both the baby's and the mother's).

I cannot see a reason to say that abortion in this situation would be morally wrong, and in fact I believe it would be morally right for doctors to save the life that *can* be saved and take the life of the unborn child. This scenario is significantly different from most abortion cases, because in this instance removing the unborn child from the mother's body (for example, from the fallopian tube in the case of an ectopic pregnancy) results from *directly intending to save the life of the mother*, not from *directly intending to take the child's life*. If the medical technology exists to save the child's life in such cases, then of course the child's life should also be saved. But if abortion is necessary to save the mother's life, this would seem to be the only situation in which abortion is morally justified.

Therefore, it seems right to me that all mainstream pro-life proposals for legal restrictions on abortion have included an exception to save the life of the mother. But in politics, proponents of "abortion rights" too often lump together "life" and "health," and declare that they are willing to restrict abortion "except to save the *life or health* of the mother." Then in actual practice, "health" becomes defined so broadly in legal precedents that it also includes "mental health," including freedom from excessive distress; thus, "except to save the life *or health* of the mother" in

practice means abortion is allowed whenever the mother wants to obtain one.

In fact, Doe v. Bolton, the companion case to Roe v. Wade, defined maternal "health" as "all factors—physical, emotional, psychological, familial, and the woman's age—relevant to the well-being of the patient." These factors are so vague and open-ended that almost any reason can be cited to allow an abortion in the second and third trimesters. Therefore, abortion is legal—and cannot be prohibited—in the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, or ninth month of pregnancy if any of the reasons is invoked.[24]

E. WHAT LAWS SHOULD GOVERNMENTS ENACT REGARDING ABORTION?

One of the fundamental responsibilities of a government is to *protect the lives* of the people it governs, for if government is to punish those who do evil and to prevent them from harming the innocent,[25] then a government certainly must protect its people from the ultimate harm of being killed.[26] If unborn children are considered persons, then surely government should protect their lives.[27] In fact, it is *especially* the weak and helpless, those without other means of protection, who should be the objects of governmental protections:

24. This Supreme Court case is Doe v. Bolton, 41 U.S. 179, 192 (1973); see http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/410/179.html.

25. See Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 428.

26. See Grudem *Christian Ethics*, 507–8.

27. As for penalties that would apply to those who break the law, that would be determined by the legislature in each state. (Prior to Roe v. Wade, most state penalties were against the doctor who performed the abortion rather than the woman who received the abortion.)

> Give justice to the weak and fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. (Ps. 82:3–4)

Therefore, I would recommend the following governmental policies and laws regarding abortion:[28]

1. Governments should enact laws prohibiting abortions except to save the life of the mother.[29]
2. No government policies should promote or fund abortions.
3. No government policies should compel people to participate in abortions or to dispense drugs that cause abortions.
4. No government funding or support should be given to the process of creating human embryos for the purpose of destroying them in medical research.

However, we must also recognize that in the United States at the present time, the Congress *has no power* to pass a law prohibiting abortions at any stage of pregnancy.

28. Elsewhere I have discussed the current legal situation in the United States and the reasons for several specific recommendations concerning government laws about abortion. See Grudem, *Politics—According to the Bible*, 157–78. What follows in this section is a summary of that longer discussion.

29. What if a "compromise" law were proposed that would prohibit abortions except to save the life of the mother or in cases of rape or incest? I think that Christians should support such legislation, since it would prohibit roughly 99 percent of the abortions that are occurring today. After such a law is passed, perhaps modifications could be made to the law in the future, if public sentiment would support it. But even such a law would do a tremendous amount of good in protecting the lives of the vast majority of unborn children who today are being put to death.

And the fifty state legislatures *have no power* to pass any law prohibiting abortion.[30] (The prohibition on partial-birth abortion, which survived Supreme Court scrutiny, is the only exception.) This is because every law prohibiting abortion has been struck down by the Supreme Court as "unconstitutional" because the court says such laws violate the Constitution's guarantee of a right to abortion![31] And this is the decision of the court even though the Constitution itself says nothing about abortion.[32]

The blunt reality is that no laws prohibiting abortions can be enacted in the United States until the Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade. Therefore, Christians who genuinely seek significant changes in the abortion laws in the United States should support prolife candidates for office, especially for the presidency and the Senate, because the president alone nominates Supreme Court justices, and the Senate must approve those nominations before a nominee can join the court.

30. However, the situation in the United States may be changing (I am writing this note in August 2019). Several states have passed laws prohibiting abortion after a certain stage in pregnancy, such as after a heartbeat is detected. These laws have faced legal challenges and are now working their way through the courts. The recently established "originalist" majority on the Supreme Court (with the additions of Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh) is a fact that leads many court observers to expect that Roe v. Wade will be modified or overturned when these cases reach the Supreme Court.

31. Under Roe v. Wade and the companion case Doe v. Bolton, the Supreme Court allowed abortion for the mother's health, including emotional and psychological health, which effectively allows abortion at any time in the nine months of pregnancy (see the discussion earlier in this book).

32. For an explanation of why Roe v. Wade was based on an illegitimate "interpretation" of the U.S. Constitution (it was actually a rewriting of part of the Constitution), see Grudem, *Politics—According to the Bible*, 133–34.

F. OBJECTIONS TO LAWS RESTRICTING ABORTION

Here are some objections that people have raised against the idea of prohibiting abortions:

1. "These Laws Are a Wrongful Restriction of Freedom." Some people will argue that a law prohibiting abortions wrongfully restricts individual human freedom. Shouldn't the decision about whether to carry a baby to full term and give birth be made by the mother herself? How can it be right to say that the law should force a woman to endure a pregnancy and bear a child that she does not want? Isn't individual freedom a foundational principle of this country? Sometimes people will say, "I think that's a decision that should be up to the mother and her doctor, and the mother should be free to decide as she thinks best."

Individual freedom is of course important and should be protected. But the real question is not freedom in the abstract but what *appropriate restrictions* the law should place on individual freedom. Laws already restrict freedom in many ways that people accept. The law does not allow me the freedom to drive while intoxicated, to steal my neighbor's car, to beat up someone I don't like, or to fire a gun inside the city limits—and surely it does not allow parents to put their living children to death. So the question is not human freedom, but whether the law should allow people *freedom to take their child's life.* If the unborn child is considered a human person, the question is whether the

government should allow people to commit murder against their own children. Certainly it should not.

2. "All Children Should Be Wanted Children." This is another popular phrase used by politicians who advocate for unrestricted abortion. The benefit of allowing abortions, some people say, is that it gives mothers the freedom not to bear children they really don't want, children that might grow up to be neglected, abused, and poorly cared for. Why not allow abortions so that only mothers who really *want* their children will have them?

But if we consider the unborn child to be a person, then this argument is merely another way of saying that people should be allowed to kill other people that they do not want to care for. In particular, parents should be able to kill the children that they do not want to care for.

Once a child is born, would we say that a parent who does not "want" to care for that child any longer should have the right to put him or her to death because "all children should be wanted children"? Surely not. This is a horrible thought, but it is simply the logical conclusion of the "all children should be wanted children" argument. This is really a morally bankrupt argument, one that so devalues human life that it values a mother's desire for convenience more highly than the right to life of a child made in the very image of God.

3. "I'm Personally against Abortion, but I Don't Support Laws against Abortion." This argument is made by

a number of politicians who do not want to appear to be *supporting* the idea of killing unborn children, but who still are committed to protecting the *legal* right of women to have abortions if they choose. Presumably, if they were asked for advice by a pregnant woman, they would tell her that they would *personally recommend* that she not get an abortion. But the decision, of course, is still up to her.

This argument fails to understand the difference between personal moral persuasion and governmental laws. If we really believe that an action is taking innocent human lives, then we will not be content to depend on moral influence to stop it. This position would be similar to saying, "*I'm personally opposed to drunken driving, and I wouldn't personally recommend* drunken driving, but I don't support having laws against it, because I think *individual drivers should have the right to decide for themselves* whether to drive when drunk." The fact of the matter is that, apart from legal enforcement by the government, many people will foolishly decide to drive while intoxicated and will actually kill other people through their wrongful choices. Government is instituted by God to protect us from such wrongdoing by others.

This argument is, in fact, a subtle attempt at changing the subject. The subject under dispute is not *personal preferences* of individuals, but what *the laws of a government* should prohibit. Just as we would not say, "I'm personally opposed to murder, but I don't think there should be any laws against murder," so it seems naive and, I think, mis-

leading to say, "I'm personally opposed to abortion, but I don't think that there should be laws against abortion."

4. "We Should Reduce the Causes of Abortion but Not Have Laws against Abortion." A similar position to "I'm personally against abortion, but I don't support laws against abortion" is that of Jim Wallis, expressed in his book *God's Politics*. Wallis says that "the abortion rate in America is much too high for a good and healthy society that respects both women and children," and he recommends "really targeting the problems of teen pregnancy and adoption reform, which are so critical to reducing abortion, while offering real support for women, especially low-income women, at greater risk for unwanted pregnancies."[33]

But this is just changing the subject. The subject under discussion is *laws* about abortion. The specific question is: *What should the laws about abortion be?* Should laws prohibit abortion (with certain exceptions) or not? Saying we should try to reduce teen pregnancy in order to stop abortion is like saying we should support Alcoholics Anonymous in order to stop drunken driving, or we should support job creation to stop stealing, or we should support anger-management clinics to stop murder. Those are helpful social programs, but they alone will not stop those crimes.

What Wallis refuses to say in *God's Politics* is that we should have *laws* that prohibit women from taking the lives

33. Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 299–300.

of their unborn children. Our laws should protect human life. The main difference between conservatives and liberals on abortion is how they answer this question: *Should it be against the law to kill your unborn child?*

I believe it should be against the law (except to save the mother's life). Certainly we *also* should give support to low-income women who are pregnant, but both sides agree on this. The solution is "both-and"—both maternal support and laws. But Wallis will not say "both-and." When asked *what the laws should be*, he and others simply change the subject to maternal support. They will not support laws to prohibit abortion.

5. "Everyone Who Opposes Abortion Should Adopt a 'Consistent Ethic of Life.'" How can some evangelicals vote for proabortion candidates for the U.S. Senate or for president? One approach is to change the subject from discussing laws about abortion to saying we should give more support to women who are pregnant, and so reduce abortion (see discussion in the previous section). Another common approach is also exemplified by Wallis. He says that Christians should support "a consistent ethic of life," but that *neither political party* is satisfactory in this area. He defines this ethic as including "the life issues" of "abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, nuclear weapons, poverty, and racism." He calls these "critical components of a consistent ethic of life."[34] Then he says:

34. Wallis, *God's Politics*, 300–301.

> The tragedy is that in America today, one can't vote for a consistent ethic of life. Republicans stress some of the life issues, Democrats some of the others, while both violate the seamless garment of life on several vital matters.[35]

In other words, no party practices "a consistent ethic of life" (according to Wallis) on all of these issues, and therefore people shouldn't think that they should vote for Republicans because of the abortion issue, because there are other "life" issues on which the Democratic position is better.

But Christians should understand what Wallis is doing here. He is changing the subject from laws prohibiting abortion to laws about a whole range of things, and he is claiming that a *truly Christian* prolife position would include such policies as opposition to capital punishment, opposition to nuclear weapons, and increased government help for the poor (as he explains elsewhere in his book *God's Politics*). The effect of this argument by Wallis is to downplay the importance of the abortion issue by saying that these are all "life" issues.

I agree that it is important to consider all the issues that politicians in both parties stand for before deciding how to vote. But it is hard to see how any issue could be more important than stopping the wrongful murder of more than 1 million innocent unborn children year after year. I think Wallis

35. Wallis, *God's Politics*, 301.

is wrong to diminish this issue by lumping it with a whole basket of other controversial and complicated questions.

In addition, many Christians sincerely disagree with Wallis about capital punishment, national defense, and solutions to poverty. Wallis's phrase "a consistent ethic of life" is a misleading slogan that attempts to make people think that his pacifist views on capital punishment and war, his support for government redistribution of wealth, and his own solutions to racial discrimination are the truly "prolife" positions. This dilutes the argument about the biblical teaching against abortion by enlarging the discussion to include many other disputed issues. This sleight-of-hand argument should not blind us to the plain fact that every vote for every proabortion candidate for president or Congress undeniably has the effect of continuing to permit 1 million abortions per year in the United States.

6. "Christians Should Not Try to Impose Their Moral Standards on Other People." People who make this objection would usually say that it's fine for Christians to think that abortion is wrong *for themselves*, but they have no right to try to force that conviction on others who do not have a Christian viewpoint.

In response, it must be said that many of our laws are based on moral convictions that are held by the vast majority of the population. The laws against murder are based on the moral conviction that murder is wrong. The laws against stealing are based on the moral conviction that stealing is wrong. Laws against polygamy and incest are

based on moral convictions that those practices are wrong. Laws against sexual harassment or adults having sex with minors are based on moral convictions that those actions are wrong. We could multiply examples by the thousands from all areas of the law.

Which moral standards support laws against abortions? There are two: (1) people should not be allowed to murder other people and (2) the unborn child should be considered a human person and therefore should be protected as a human person. No doubt almost everyone would agree on the first point. So the question really involves the second point, whether the unborn child should be considered a human person worthy of legal protection.

In our system of government, Christians cannot *impose* their moral convictions on anyone. But everyone in the nation is free to attempt to *persuade* others about the moral convictions that should be the basis for various laws. So instead of "Christians should not try to impose their moral standards on others," a more accurate way of phrasing this objection is "Christians should not try to persuade others that the unborn child is a human person who deserves the legal protections due to all human persons."

Of course, when the objection is stated that way, hardly anyone would agree with it. Surely our nation was founded on the freedom of citizens *to speak about their convictions and try to persuade others*, and thereby to try to influence laws. In fact, the First Amendment *guarantees* freedom of speech and freedom of the press, assuring us that people of

all persuasions are free to argue and attempt to persuade others about what kinds of laws should be made.

Finally, Christians should not view their conviction about the personhood of the unborn child as "*our* moral conviction." We did not make it up out of our own minds, but found it written in the Bible. And the Bible presents it as not mere human opinion, but the moral standard of God himself, by which he holds all people in every nation accountable (see the discussion in Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 434–35).

It does seem right for Christians to attempt to persuade others that the moral standards found in the Bible are correct and should be used in human government. It was on the basis of this conviction that Paul could reason with the Roman governor Felix "about *righteousness* and self-control and the coming judgment" (Acts 24:25). It was on this basis that John the Baptist "reproved" Herod the tetrarch "for all the *evil things* that Herod had done" (Luke 3:19). And it was on this basis that Daniel warned King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon about his "sins" and "iniquities" (Dan. 4:27), and Jonah warned the entire city of Nineveh to repent (see Jonah 3:4; see also the discussion of Christian influence on government in Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 468–77).

G. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS ISSUE

The Old Testament contains sober warnings to a nation that allowed people to put their children to death. In imitation of the practices of other nations, some of the people of Israel had begun "to burn their sons and their daughters in

the fire" (Jer. 7:31), which referred to putting their live children into a fire to sacrifice them to Molech and other pagan gods. For allowing this practice to continue, God issued a severe warning of judgment through the prophet Jeremiah:

> For the sons of Judah have done evil in my sight, declares the LORD. . . . And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, *to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire*, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth, because there is no room elsewhere. And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth, and none will frighten them away. And I will silence in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, *for the land shall become a waste*. (Jer. 7:30–34)

The troubling question with regard to the United States (and many other countries today) concerns the direction the nation has taken. It has willingly chosen to be represented and governed by elected officials who resolutely champion the right of a woman to take the life of her unborn child. What will God's evaluation of our nation be in light of such decisions? Or do we not think that God is still sovereign over the affairs of nations?

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WAYNE GRUDEM (PhD, University of Cambridge; DD, Westminster Theological Seminary) is Distinguished Research Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Phoenix Seminary, having previously taught for twenty years at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is a former president of the Evangelical Theological Society, a member of the Translation Oversight Committee for the English Standard Version of the Bible, the general editor of the *ESV Study Bible*, and the author of over twenty-five books.

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