

Dr. Renwick's Conversation Outline on ABORTION

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The Bible & the Ballot: Using Scripture in Political Decisions, Eerdmans, 2020

How to Use the Bible

1. The Bible speaks to issues pertinent to today

- **Some parts – Constitution for all time,**
- **Some parts – Case Law pertain to Ancient Israel**
e.g., Ten Commandments + the legislation that flows from them

→ Prayerful Interpretation is critical

Understanding the old principles and application

i. what applies to ancient Israel

ii. Applying to the new situation

– to the lives of Christians (for whom God is King)

-- to the secular society in which we live

*Many Christians do not stop to wrestle with the Biblical foundations.
But Christians cannot apply to our present political situation
until the Biblical foundation is secure.*

(Note: The issue of the relationship and legislation of Christian values to American society is a separate and long-standing issue – e.g., Roger Williams of Rhode Island in the 1630s)

2. E.g., Acknowledging & Interpreting Genesis Creation Story

Key questions – In the Popular Mind = *How long did creation take? . . .*
Or . . . ?

i. Human Life has Sanctity (Value) from God and Responsibility to God -- Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion .. (= *power and responsibility*) ..

David Gushee, Sacredness of Human Life, 42

I claim that humanity's sacred worth is an ascribed status willed by God and communicated through God's actions, commands, and declarations, one of them being God's revelation that all human beings are made in the image of God. We can't go looking for something in humanity that *in and of itself* gains us value and worth – the sacredness of human life is God's decision, to which we human beings must accede and by which we must orient our lives.

ii. Our choices have God-ordained consequences

Genesis 2:16-17

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

iii. We Belong to God, body and soul (Re-emphasized by Christ's redemption)

1 Corinthians 6:15, 19-20

¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!

¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that *you are not your own?* ²⁰*For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.*

One Conclusion from Genesis:

- **“Pro-Choice” is not an option for a Christian if it does not address self-control, responsibility, and “to whom does our body belong?” . . . not to the state; not to us; but to God**

BUT . .

If a human being is precious (image -- Genesis 1:26)

Does the Bible answer: WHEN DOES NEW HUMAN LIFE BEGIN?

e.g., Is it when

1. A baby is **born?** (*first breath after birth*) . . Genesis 2:7 – then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, *and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.*

OR before . .

2. A fetus achieves **viability**? (*approx. 5-6 months*)
3. A fetus assumes a **human like form**? (*8 weeks?*)
4. An embryo is **implanted** on the wall of the womb? (*14 days after fertilization?*)
5. **Conception** – when the sperm fertilizes the egg and a zygote is formed?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

I. Biblical Poetry:

Powerful References about life in the womb

→ Indications that Personhood begins at or before conception; human life is of eternal interest to God?

A. Psalm 139:13-16

- ¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

B. Jeremiah 1:5

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you
Before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations

C. Psalm 51:5

Surely I was sinful at birth,
Sinful *from the time my mother conceived me*

D. Genesis 25:21-23

Issue addressed: Personhood beginning at conception is not addressed
(since we do not know how far Rebekah was into the pregnancy), but the

Passage shows that at some stage before birth there is human response of some kind in the fetus

²¹Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife because she was barren, and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ²²***The children struggled together within her***, and she said, “If it is to be this way, why do I live?” So she went to inquire of the Lord.

²³And the Lord said to her,

“Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other; the elder shall serve the younger.”

E. Luke 1

³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹**When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child** (John the Baptist) **leaped in her womb**. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit

NOTE: Logically

- You can work backward *from our actual “born human life” to God’s interest in our lives before conception and in the womb,*
- but you cannot necessarily argue forwards *to say that an aborted fetus was destined to live*

II. Biblical Legislation about life in the womb

Professor Meredith Kline:

- ***“The most significant thing about abortion legislation in Biblical law -- is that there is none.”*** (p.137)

Why? . . . *Not told . . . But we can speculate!!! . . .*

- It was unthinkable? E.g., No law on infanticide, yet it is deemed abhorrent. . . OR
- There was always a sense of Ambiguity about the beginning?

i. Exodus 20:13 (The Sixth Commandment)

You shall not commit murder/kill . . .

Question → Kill or Murder? Does it make a difference?

Is there such a thing as “the lawful taking of life”?

How does sanctity play out in a fallen world?

e.g., War?

ii. Exodus 21:22-25

Situation – a fight in which a pregnant woman is injured, and aborts.

Interpretive Problem – No specificity is given in the text as to whether the child who comes out is dead or alive.

Issue Addressed:

Personhood beginning at conception is not addressed. But one possible translation speaks of the fetus (at some stage of development) as of the same value (with the same right to justice) as a person who has been born

TRANSLATIONS OF EXODUS 21:22-25

1. ESV (most literal Hebrew Translation)

v.22: If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman so that her children come out . . .

2. NIV

²²“If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely^[a] (e.g., the fetus is alive)

- but there is no serious injury, (to the baby) the offender must be fined (for the incident as a whole) whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows.
- ²³ But if there is serious injury, (to the baby) you are to take life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

NOTE (a) OR “*she has a miscarriage*” (so NRSV)

3. NRSV

²² When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage (e.g., the fetus is dead)

- and yet no further harm follows (to the woman) the one responsible shall be fined (for the loss of the fetus) what the woman’s husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine.
- ²³ If any harm follows (to the woman) then you shall give life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

4. SEPTUAGINT (2nd century Greek translation of the Hebrew)

If two men fight and they strike a woman who is pregnant, and her child comes

- *but while not yet fully formed*, he will be forced to pay a fine' whatever the woman's husband imposes, he will pay with a valuation.
- But *if it is fully formed*, he will give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for strip.

→ Human life depends on stage of pregnancy

ii. Numbers 5:11-31

- **Situation:** Husband suspects wife of adultery. Priest makes her drink “holy water” to prove her innocence. If guilty then there is a miscarriage
- **Issue addressed:** *Personhood beginning at conception is not addressed*. But clearly, the life of the fetus is of less importance than proving adultery.

III. Other Biblical Factors

Joshua: the willy-nilly slaughter of anyone? (just Israel?)

Micah 6:8 – Mercy & Humility

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to *do justice, and to love mercy/kindness, and to walk humbly* with your God?

Matthew 23 – Mercy and the danger of Hypocrisy

²³ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin and have neglected *the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith*. . . ²⁷ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful but inside are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of uncleanness.

²⁸ So *you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness*.

John 8:10-11 – Love, Compassion

¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to (a woman caught in adultery), “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

¹¹ She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

Proverbs 19:17 – The Rich, the Poor

“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done.”

Matthew 25:40 – The Weak

As you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

In our present situation note that . . .

1. The rich can find a way to find safe abortions
2. The poor will always find it harder – God calls for “kindness”

CONCLUSION

1. The Bible makes us cautious about the taking of any human life made in God’s image and belonging to God. E.g., Even when speaking about taking life for murder, the evidence must be incontrovertible: 2 witnesses.

Longman: *“Life is precious and sacred and God-given and the potential human life should be protected and not willfully ended or cavalierly treated.”*

BUT

2. The Bible does not support the Pro-Life position that abortion is the moral equivalent of infanticide from the moment of conception (equaling the unjustified killing of a human person after birth).

And

3. The Bible does not support the pro-Choice Position that our bodies are ours to do with them as we want
4. Could there be a biblical argument for abortion
 - a. to save the mother’s life, based on the idea of self-defense. (see Longman, 123-127)
 - b. Rape?
 - c. Incest?
 - d. Finances (inability to feed?)

REFLECTIONS / CONUNDRUMS

A. from SCIENCE

When conception is chosen as the beginning of human personhood:

- a. Twins – splitting of the zygote into two embryos in 2-6 days after conception:
 - *One person at conception, or two?*
- b. Spontaneous abortions –
 - *“It is estimated that as many as 26% [36m] of all pregnancies end in miscarriage and up to 10% [14m] of clinically recognized pregnancies.” (seen on ultra-sound, etc.).*
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK532992/>
 - *Is heaven filled with the unborn?*
 - *Is God a murderer?*

B. from HUMAN (CHRISTIAN) PRACTICE with early miscarriage

1. Do we expect to be reunited in heaven with a miscarried child?
2. We generally do not name from conception
3. We generally don't we have funerals for a miscarriage
 - There is grief and in some cases the answer is “yes” to these practices. But, in general, for people on both sides of the debate, there is no great conviction to act in the same way as with those who have been born.

C. on potential SOCIETAL CONSEQUENCES

Rape

Can a man committing rape claim paternity?

Abuse:

Abused women through rape or incest suffer twice: abuse and unwanted pregnancy. *Is this right?*