



The text below is the essence of a talk delivered by Will Dobbie to the launch team of the Emmanuel church plant (see www.eknox.org), on Sunday June 26, 2023. It reflects the views of the eldership at Providence church.

Reflections on how to respond to the end of Roe versus Wade

So two days ago, after almost fifty years of America as we knew it, we got to live through something momentous in the history of this nation: the striking down of Roe versus Wade. Now I believe that's cause for relief and joy and praise to God (and more on that in a minute) – but it's also bunch of other things, some of which aren't simple. I'm also conscious that while most people in this room might agree with me that Roe versus Wade being overturned is a good thing, that might not be everyone. So I want to use our time in God's Word tonight to bring Scripture to bear on all of this. And so here, briefly, are four things to remember in the wake of the end of Roe versus Wade.

1. Be full of praise to God

Psalm 145:6-8 says this:

*They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds,
and I will declare your greatness.*

*They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.*

*The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

All human life is in God's image and is sacred. That is true from the moment a sperm fertilizes an egg resulting in a zygote, onwards. And yes, there can be tragic circumstances surrounding new life in the womb – disability for the baby, rape or incest against the mother, and other tough circumstances in the mother's life. But none of that takes away the truth that human life – *all* of it – is precious and valuable and in God's image, and that we are called to honour and protect it.

So in answering millions of prayers over five decades and ending federal abortion, God is indeed, to quote Psalm 145, being gracious and merciful. As those verses put it, he has indeed shown the might of his awesome deeds, and displayed his greatness, and demonstrated his abundant goodness, and revealed his righteousness. He is indeed slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, for he has restrained unthinkable evil. Just as David was rejoicing over God's character and deeds in Psalm 145, so can we now, in the wake of Friday's news.

So I hope you've had some joy in your heart over last forty-eight hours – even if it's been a serious, sober kind of joy, given tragedy of last fifty years – because that's right and fitting. And that's our first point: We should be full of praise to God!



2. Be pro-love as well as pro-life

Here's what Jesus says in Luke 6:

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also... Love your enemies, and do good...and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

We may claim to be pro-life. If we're truly pro-life, we'll be pro-love as well.

One of you emailed me after the news on Friday with the following words:

Will, I want to ask that on Sunday night we pray for those who are in disagreement and turmoil over the Supreme Court's decision today and that Christians do not display themselves as self-righteous. We should portray Christ as the answer and not the problem. Christ's love is the only answer.

Guys, let me say that I could not agree with that more.

Now is not the time for us to crow in the faces of those who genuinely believe that abortion isn't murder because they've been misled or confused or pressurized. Now is the time to reach out to them humbly, gently and lovingly. That's how they're going to be won over. The law doesn't change people's hearts. Only the Christ can do that. And we are his ambassadors.

Here's what another friend of mine wrote:

As we celebrate God's justice in preserving the lives of babies made in his image, let us also gladly carry the burden of pure religion by sacrificially loving the single mom also made in his image, and the orphan also made in his image.

Guys, would you consider volunteering at Hope Resource Center, three minutes' drive from us as we sit here in downtown Knoxville, as it seeks to serve and love and help women?

Guys, would you please consider fostering kids? Would you please consider adopting kids? The fostering and adoption need in Tennessee is already desperate, and Friday's news can only mean that even more precious babies in the future will be needing families. Whether you're single, or engaged, or married without kids, or married with kids, or even 'empty-nesters', would you consider doing that? Michelle and I and Nate and Teddy are thinking that through for ourselves. Would you join us? Wouldn't it be amazing if in the years to come, Emmanuel became a beautiful haven for many, many little boys and girls who would otherwise have been killed, whether because of disability or the age of their mothers or the identity of their fathers or other tough circumstances, but who instead get to enjoy the gift of life – more than that,



who get to be brought up to know and love Christ! It's we Christians who should be stepping up in compassion and self-sacrifice, and actually following through on our pro-life convictions – because this is what glorifies Christ, advances the Kingdom and points to the gospel. There is a difference between anti-abortion and pro-life.

Let's also be pro-love towards the precious, deeply-scarred men and women who've had personal involvement in abortion – whether having one or pressuring someone else to have one. They need to know the love and forgiveness and cleansing and healing and liberation available in Christ. Some of you may well have had abortions or persuaded others to have abortions. Many churches won't want to bring this up with you because they want to avoid causing you offence or shame. But what they really avoid causing you is healing! Please, please get in touch with me if this describes you. I would love to meet up with you, and listen to you, and help you. And I have good news for you – the best in the world.

Let's be pro-love as well as pro-life.

3. Be careful with our tongues.

James 3 says this:

We all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well...So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

James goes on:

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life...

The issues surrounding abortion are incredibly emotive, and that can cause people to vent. And as numerous proverbs warn about in the Bible, venting is often super unwise. And I'm talking here especially about social media. When things are said just in cold, hard print – without tone of voice, or body language, or the context of personal relationship – then the result is often ugly.

As I see it, on social media, people often assume wrong motives in others; they often talk at crossed purposes; they talk in short soundbites which sound impressive and which are designed for impact, but which lack nuance or context; they issue strong views with no conversation; and they become 'keyboard warriors'! In other words, they get far more sharp-tongued than they would ever have the courage to be if they were actually face-to-face with a real person, instead of safely hiding behind their laptop in bed at home.



On top of this, social media is often just an echo chamber where we have our existing views automatically reinforced and intensified. Meaningful debate rarely happens there, and minds are never changed because of a twitter post or Facebook update.

I'm not saying "stay off social media". It can be a powerful tool and a great tool. I know of many people who use it well. I'm just counselling us to be cautious, because social media can be toxic and counter-productive, and a shortcut to hurting relationships and damaging unity.

So as James urges us, particularly in this season with temperatures running even higher than usual, let's be careful with our tongues.

4. Be determined to stay centred on the gospel

This is my last point because it's the most important. In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul says

For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Satan would love us to define ourselves by this issue instead of by Jesus Christ. If we effectively align ourselves on the issue of abortion more than the issue of the gospel, Satan will be clapping his hands with glee. No, it's the foundation of Scripture alone, and being saved by faith alone, through Christ alone, by grace alone, for the glory of God alone, which has to be the ground on which we plant our flag. That has to be the hill to die on.

At his trial, Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." Our goal is not to rid this world of evil. Jesus will take care of that when he returns. Our goal in the brief time before then is to glorify God by making disciples of Christ – in other words by holding out the gospel and teaching those who receive it to live in the light of it. Doing this will sometimes result in things like federalized abortion being ended. We must rejoice in that. But we mustn't let it seduce us into 'mission drift'. His Kingdom is not of this world.

There will be pro-lifers who will be going to hell. There will be pro-choicers who will be in heaven. And so it mustn't be abortion that is central to our church but the gospel! It mustn't be a view on abortion that's the ground of our unity but our agreement on primary issues such as that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God! In other words, let's keep the main thing the main thing. That is what will guard our church's unity and preserve our church's health. And ironically, it's getting that right which will give us a strong theological foundation with ample theological capital for reaching out and engaging on issues such as abortion.

So: Let's be full of praise to God; let's be pro-love as well as pro-life; let's be careful with our tongues; let's be determined to stay centred on the gospel.

Let's pray.