



VFL: Understanding Abortion

Part 2: Biblical and Theological Foundations of Life and Abortion

Last week we saw that there have been complicated views on abortion since the beginning of human civilization. But we also saw that the church, from its beginning, has been consistently against it. Today we understand why. We will highlight several features of Christian teaching that uniquely impact the issue of abortion and the role disciples of Jesus play in it.

Imago Dei and Protection of Human Life

From the beginning of Scripture, we see that humanity is unique from the rest of creation in that we are made in the Image of God.

Gen 1:27, “So God created mankind in his *own image*, in the *image of God* he created them; male and female he created them.”

Because we hold this unique place in creation, there are laws created to protect the preciousness of human life.

Gen 9:6, ““Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the *image of God* has God made mankind.”

Notice how Jesus takes this command above, with its imago dei theology, and then expands it.

Matt 5:21-22; 27-30, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again,

anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Jesus' teaching against murder has a wider implication than just murder. He applies it also to people who offend their brother. Notice that Jesus does the same thing with the command against adultery.

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

The early church immediately connected the commandment against murder and expanded it to include a prohibition on the practice of abortion.

Didache and the "Two Ways" (70 AD)

Chapter 1. The Two Ways and the First Commandment. There are two ways, one of life and one of death, but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall love God who made you; second, love your neighbor as yourself, and do not do to another what you would not want done to you.....And the second commandment of the Teaching; You shall not commit murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not commit pederasty, you shall not commit fornication, you shall not steal, you shall not practice magic, you shall not practice witchcraft, you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born.

Epistle of Barnabas (80-120 AD)

19:5 Thou shalt love thy neighbor more than thine own soul. Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion, nor again shalt thou kill it when it is born. Thou shalt not withhold thy hand from thy son or daughter, but from their youth thou shalt teach them the fear of God.

Imago Dei and the Value of Human Body

Gen 2:7 *“Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”*

Gen 2:21-25, *“²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*

You are your body! Bodies are part of creation and thus there is purpose and “Teleos” in the human body itself.¹

Part of the result of the fall is the brokenness within each person. In western society we have a particular version of this inner-brokenness.

- Rene Descartes “I think therefore I am” is an example of the two story worldview. In the upper story you have the mind and in the lower story you have the body. The phrase “ghost in the machine” or “pilot operating the plane” are other examples of this philosophy. Note the relationship in society between facts and values and the relationship between secular and sacred

Upper story - values and meaning, personhood

Lower story - bodies

- According to the dominate secular worldview, “matter does not matter” (Pearcey)

¹ Charles Taylor says that if nature does not reveal God's will then it is morally neutral therefore mankind can impose its own will/value upon nature. Nancy Pearcey's excellent work, *Love Thy Body*, is an important resource for understanding the “two story” worldview and is reflected throughout in his handout.

The Christian worldview affirms creation in contrast to other pagan worldviews. It affirms creation ultimately by the incarnation and the resurrection.

Incarnation

Luke 1:26-33 ²⁶ *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed^[b] to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"^[c] ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

³⁴ *And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"^[d]*

³⁵ *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^[e] will be called holy—the Son of God."*

Resurrection

John 20:24-28: ⁴ *Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."*

²⁶ *Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"*

- A Christianity that is relegated totally to spiritual things no threat to anyone. That is why the gnostics were not persecuted but the Christians were.
- We are “citizens of heaven” here on earth which means we are to represent heaven in bodily, earthly ways which is a “threat” to local and earthly values and dominions.

The Unborn Fetus and Imago Dei

The moral disposition of the unborn child goes back to conception.

Ps 51:5-6

*“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.*

Psalm 139:13-16

*For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.^[a]
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ 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.*

Jeremiah the prophet was called into ministry while he was in the womb.

Jeremiah 1:4-5

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Mary and Elizabeth meet while they are pregnant and John, still in the womb, leaps for joy. In doing this he is already performing his role as forerunner of Jesus. He does this before he is born and so shows that he is a person.

Luke 1:39-45³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be^[a] a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

The unborn child and the mother are distinct individuals, personal, moral and physical. Advances in genetics have proven that from the moment of conception there is a totally new DNA created that comprises all what is necessary for the person to develop in an unbroken process until birth. The unborn are tiny people.

The Unborn Fetus and the Ethical Teaching of Jesus

Since the unborn fetus is a full person, then all of the ethical teachings of Jesus apply to the child while still in the womb. This is precisely what we see the early church do that makes them stand out in the ancient world.

Love your neighbor

Matt 22:34-40³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and

with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Love your enemy

Matt 4:43-46 ⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor^[a] and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

Love does no wrong to a neighbor

Rom 13:8-10 “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Unique Christian Practices that Addressed Abortion

Marriage, Family, and the Family of God

The unique practice of *fidelity in marriage*, especially as practiced by the husband provided an remarkably stable home life that reduced unwanted pregnancies (i.e. the husband was not allowed to have extra marital sex). And it created an environment where Christian family could adopt or take in unwanted children from the surrounding areas.

Beyond individual marriages and families, the church identified itself as a family with many “mothers, sisters and brothers” (Mark 10:30). This rich, full family had the resources and generosity to help any individual with unplanned pregnancies and to take in children who had been abandoned by their biological parents.

1 Cor 7:3-5 ³ *The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

Forgiveness

The Christian community never minimized the reality of the sin of taking a life but also never minimized the reality of *God's forgiveness*. The most prominent leader of the early church, especially in its mission to the gentiles was the Apostle Paul. He was already well known in the christian church because he was personally responsible for bloodshed (Acts 8). Yet, he was not only forgiven but was called to lead the early church mission. This radical forgiveness is unique to the Christian gospel in that it never minimized the horror of sin but magnified the bigness of God's grace.

1 Tim 1:15

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Conscience

Another feature of the early Christian community was the heightened role of the "conscience" in whether or not to do something that may be morally gray. So even if someone was on the fence as to whether or not abortion was wrong, if there was any doubt whatsoever, the Christian was compelled not to have an abortion. As RC Sproul has said, "When in doubt, don't."

Rom 14:23, *"But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."*