

Biblical Studies Program Spring 2012

Politics and the Bible

Lesson Four

The Protection of Life: Abortion and Euthanasia¹

I. Abortion

A. The issue

1. Should governments make laws to protect the lives of pre-born children?
2. Should the pre-born be protected from the moment of conception to the moment of birth?
3. What kind of penalties should be attached to the taking of the life of a pre-born child?
4. In addition, there are policy questions:
 - a. Should governments pay for women to have abortions?
 - b. Should physicians and other healthcare providers, who think abortion is morally wrong, be compelled to perform abortions?
 - c. Should government policies promote or encourage abortions?

B. Relevant Biblical teaching

1. In Scripture, the pre-born child should be treated as a person from the moment of conception
 - a. Lk 1:41-44 – “...the baby in my womb leaped for joy”
 - b. Ps 51:5 – David thought of himself as a distinct human being, a distinct person from the moment of conception
 - c. Ps 139:13 – David also thinks of himself as a distinct person (“me”) as he was growing in his mother's womb
 - d. Gen 25:22-23 – The pre-born children were viewed as “children” within her womb
2. Exodus 21:22-25
 - a. The penalty for harming the pre-born child is just as great as for harming the mother – both are treated as persons and both deserve the full protection of the law
 - b. God established for Israel a legal code that placed a higher value on protecting the life of a pregnant woman and her pre-born child than the life of anyone else in Israelite society
 - c. This law treats the death of a pre-born child or its mother as more significant and worthy of more severe punishment

¹These principles come from chapter six “The Protection of Life” in Wayne Grudem’s *Politics According to the Bible*, pages 1157-186.

- C. Science confirms the distinct personhood of the pre-born child
 - 1. The distinct genetic identity
 - 2. And distinct DNA of the child
- D. Objections regarding the personhood of the pre-born child
 - 1. Unable to interact and survive on its own
 - 2. Birth defects
 - 3. Pregnancies resulting from rape or incest
 - 4. Abortion to save the life of the mother
 - a. This situation is different from the others considered above
 - b. 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)
- E. Arguments from reason and evidence apart from the Bible
 - 1. The distinct genetic identity and distinct DNA of the child can be used to show that the pre-born child is far different from any other part of the mother's own body
 - 2. Arguments from how we would treat a child after it is born can have significant persuasive force
 - 3. 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
 - a. Rom 2:14-15
 - b. "*...the law is written on their hearts while their conscience also bears witness...*"
- F. Objections
 - 1. A wrongful restriction of freedom
 - a. There are appropriate restrictions that the law should place on individual freedom
 - b. The law already restricts freedom in many ways that people agree on
 - 2. All children should be wanted children
 - a. This is saying that people should be allowed to kill other people that they do not want to care for
 - b. This argument so devalues human life that it values the 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 just don't support laws against abortion"
 - a. If we really believe that abortion is taking innocent human lives, then we will not be content to depend on mere moral influence to stop it
 - b. Government is instituted by God to protect us from such wrongdoing by others

- c. The subject under dispute is not *personal preferences* of individuals, but what the laws of a government should prohibit
 - d. Like saying, “I’m personally opposed to murder, but I don’t think there should be any laws against murder”
4. “We should reduce the causes of abortion but not have laws against abortion”
- a. This is the position of Jim Wallis, in his book *God’s Politics*
 - b. This is changing the subject: The question is what should the laws about abortion be?
 - c. “We should try to reduce teen pregnancy in order to stop abortion” is like saying...
 - (1) “We should support Alcoholics Anonymous in order to stop drunk driving”
 - (2) “We should support job creation to stop stealing”
 - d. It is “both...and” not “either...or”
5. Christians should not try to impose their moral standards on other people
- a. Many of our laws are based on moral convictions that are held by the vast majority of the population
 - b. Everyone in the nation is free to attempt to persuade others about the moral convictions that should be the basis for various laws
 - c. The First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press, assuring us that people are free to argue and attempt to persuade others about what kinds of laws should be made
 - d. They are not “our” moral convictions – we find them written in the Bible

G. Recommendations for political policies

1. Government should enact laws prohibiting abortion except to save the life of the mother
 - a. One of the fundamental responsibilities of a government is to protect the lives of the people it governs
 - b. This is especially true with regard to the weak and helpless and those without other means of protection (Ps 82:3-4)
 - c. What about “compromise” law?
 - (1) To prohibit abortion except to save the life of the mother or in cases of rape or incest
 - (2) That would prohibit probably 99% of the abortions that are occurring today
2. No government policy should promote or fund abortions

- a. Government money should not be given to pay the medical cost of abortions
- b. Government money should not be given to promote abortions
- c. Nor should foreign aide be given for the purpose of abortion ("population control")
- 3. No government policy should compel people to participate in abortions or to dispense drugs that cause abortions

The Manhattan Declaration²

A Summary

"Christians, when they have lived up to the highest ideals of their faith, have defended the weak and vulnerable and worked tirelessly to protect and strengthen vital institutions of civil society, beginning with the family.

"We are Orthodox, Catholic, and evangelical Christians who have united at this hour to reaffirm fundamental truths about justice and the common good, and to call upon our fellow citizens, believers and non-believers alike, to join us in defending them. These truths are (1) the sanctity of human life, (2) the dignity of marriage as the conjugal union of husband and wife, and (3) the rights of conscience and religious liberty. Inasmuch as these truths are foundational to human dignity and the well-being of society, they are inviolable and non-negotiable. Because they are increasingly under assault from powerful forces in our culture, we are compelled today to speak out forcefully in their defense, and to commit ourselves to honoring them fully no matter what pressures are brought upon us and our institutions to abandon or compromise them. We make this commitment not as partisans of any political group but as followers of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Human Life

The lives of the unborn, the disabled, and the elderly are ever more threatened. While public opinion has moved in a pro-life direction, powerful and determined forces are working to expand abortion, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide, and euthanasia. Although the protection of the weak and vulnerable is the first obligation of government, the power of government is today often enlisted in the cause

²For more information see manhattanddeclaration.org

of promoting what Pope John Paul II called “the culture of death.” We pledge to work unceasingly for the equal protection of every innocent human being at every stage of development and in every condition. We will refuse to permit ourselves or our institutions to be implicated in the taking of human life and we will support in every possible way those who, in conscience, take the same stand.

Marriage

The institution of marriage, already wounded by promiscuity, infidelity and divorce, is at risk of being redefined and thus subverted. Marriage is the original and most important institution for sustaining the health, education, and welfare of all. Where marriage erodes, social pathologies rise. The impulse to redefine marriage is a symptom, rather than the cause, of the erosion of the marriage culture. It reflects a loss of understanding of the meaning of marriage as embodied in our civil law as well as our religious traditions. Yet it is critical that the impulse be resisted, for yielding to it would mean abandoning the possibility of restoring a sound understanding of marriage and, with it, the hope of rebuilding a healthy marriage culture. It would lock into place the false and destructive belief that marriage is all about romance and other adult satisfactions, and not, in any intrinsic way, about the unique character and value of acts and relationships whose meaning is shaped by their aptness for the generation, promotion and protection of life. Marriage is not a “social construction,” but is rather an objective reality – the covenantal union of husband and wife – that it is the duty of the law to recognize, honor, and protect.

Religious Liberty

Freedom of religion and the rights of conscience are gravely jeopardized. The threat to these fundamental principles of justice is evident in efforts to weaken or eliminate conscience protections for healthcare institutions and professionals, and in anti-discrimination statutes that are used as weapons to force religious institutions, charities, businesses, and service providers either to accept (and even facilitate) activities and relationships they judge to be immoral, or go out of business. Attacks on religious liberty are dire threats not only to individuals, but also to the institutions of civil society including families, charities, and religious communities. The health and well-being of such institutions provide an indispensable buffer against the overweening power of government and is essential to the flourishing of every other institution – including government itself – on which society depends.

Unjust Laws

As Christians, we believe in law and we respect the authority of earthly

rulers. We count it as a special privilege to live in a democratic society where the moral claims of the law on us are even stronger in virtue of the rights of all citizens to participate in the political process. Yet even in a democratic regime, laws can be unjust. And from the beginning, our faith has taught that civil disobedience is required in the face of gravely unjust laws or laws that purport to require us to do what is unjust or otherwise immoral. Such laws lack the power to bind in conscience because they can claim no authority beyond that of sheer human will.

4. No funding or support should be given to the process of creating human embryos for the purpose of destroying them in medical research
 5. Partial-birth abortions should be banned
 6. The **most important legal goal** regarding abortion is appointing Supreme Court justices who will overturn *Roe v. Wade* because no significant restriction on abortions can be made at either the state or national level until the Supreme Court overturns this decision
- H. Given the stated position of the Democrat Party (in favor of abortion), how can some evangelicals still vote for Democrat candidates for the United States Senate or for President?
1. In 2008, millions of evangelical Christians voted for Barack Obama despite the conflict between his announced views on abortion and the teaching of Scripture
 2. *"President Obama has been a consistent champion of reproductive choice and believes in preserving women's rights under Roe v. Wade"*
 3. *"It is hard to see how any issue could have more importance than stopping the wrongful murder of more than 1,000,000 innocent pre-born children every year, year after year after year."*
- I. The importance of this issue
1. The Old Testament contains sober warnings to a nation that allows people to put their children to death (Jer 7:30-34)
 2. The nation has willingly chosen to be represented by people who support abortion-rights in the United States
- II. Euthanasia
- A. Defined as "the active putting to death an elderly person or one who is terminally ill"
 - B. The question: "Should governments make laws against intentionally taking the lives of elderly or dying persons?"
 - C. The relevant Bible teaching
 1. The command against murder (Ex 20:13)
 2. The story found in 2 Samuel 1:1-16
 - D. A clear distinction must be made between "killing" and "letting die"

1. Killing is actively doing something to a patient that hastens or causes the person's death
 2. Letting die is passively allowing someone to die from other causes without interfering with that process
 3. We should intervene and try to help a person recover, *not passively allow* the person to die, when there is (a) a reasonable human hope of recovery and (b) we are able to help
 4. This would be obeying Jesus' teaching, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (Matt 22:39) and "*So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*" (Matt 7:12)
- E. If euthanasia is allowed for some patients who are suffering, then how can we prevent it from being applied to more and more patients who are suffering?
1. In fact, "nations that have allowed for physician-assisted suicide find that a society can quickly move from merely *allowing* 'the right to die' to the belief that there is '*an obligation* to die' on the part of the elderly and the very ill people who are 'draining resources' from the society"³
 2. This is the situation in the Netherlands
- F. Objections tend to focus on and emphasize (1) the value of protecting human freedom, even individual freedom to choose to end one's own life and (2) the need to alleviate pain and frustration felt by the terminally ill patient
1. But if it is morally wrong to actively murder another person, then the fact that a person would choose to be murdered does not nullify this mortal moral argument
 2. As for pain and frustration, these are not sufficient reasons for overcoming the moral prohibition against murder
 - a. A better solution is to alleviate the pain
 - b. And do what can be done to overcome the person's frustration
 3. There is an argument that since money and medical resources are limited, we should put to death elderly or very ill people so that they do not waste money or medical resources
 4. This essentially says that it is right to kill people who are costing us too much to care for
 5. All of these objections are based on a viewpoint that is contrary to a Christian worldview

³*ESV Study Bible, "The End of Life"* page 2543.

- 6. These objections do not value human life as something sacred, something that uniquely carries the image of God in this world
- G. Recommendation for political policies – Governmental laws against murder should continue to be applied to cases of euthanasia
- H. The importance of this issue
 - 1. The direction a society takes on the question of euthanasia is a reflection of how highly it values human life
 - 2. And how highly it values God's command not to murder