



gospel & culture

GOSPEL & CULTURE: ABORTION
WEEK 3 | PAIGE CUNNINGHAM, JD

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On Sunday, July 10, Paige Cunningham, JD, PhD (Cand.), Executive Director, The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity, guided us through a discussion of abortion. She considers different questions in order to guide our thoughts on how the church addresses abortion.

Introduction

Abortion has caused conflict since it was first legalized in 1973 in *Roe v Wade*. Several times since then, the Supreme Court has attempted to characterize abortion rights as settled law, as something that we should just accept and move on. We have not accepted abortion. In fact, a majority of people today identify as pro-life—more than at any time since pollsters began asking the question.

We have both good news and bad news about the state of abortion in our country.

First, the good news. The number of abortion centers is shrinking, and two hundred have closed since 2011. There are five states with only one clinic left (Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming). Twelve other clinics no longer offer medication abortions, because they consider RU 46 ineffective or too dangerous. The United Methodist denomination voted to leave the Religious Coalition for Abortion Choice in May, and, in general, the number of abortions are down.

Now for the bad news. On June 27, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Texas abortion clinic regulations were unconstitutional. This slammed the door on an effective strategy in driving shoddy abortion centers out of business, while promoting common sense regulations that required abortion centers to measure up to the same standards as all other free-standing surgery centers. The Supreme Court also refused to take a case from the state of Washington on a law that requires pharmacies to stock drugs that can cause abortion. This law prohibited pharmacies from referring women to other pharmacies for religious or moral reasons, while permitting all other pharmacies to refer for business, fraud or any other reason. (*Storman v Weisman*). These court cases demonstrate that rights of conscience (let alone religious freedom issues) are under siege.

1) The biblical theological question—How do we think about abortion as Christians?

Professor Meredith Kline argues that “The most significant thing about abortion legislation in the biblical law is that there is none. It was so unthinkable that an Israelite woman should desire an abortion that there was no need to mention this offense in the criminal code.” But, the Bible is still essential in thinking about abortion.

Reading the Bible as a coherent book makes several principles clear:

- God is the giver of life.
- God commanded his people to choose life, which would be accompanied by blessings, rather than disobedience and death, which brought curses.
- Scripture reveals God’s tender care for the most vulnerable: widows, orphans, strangers.
- There are many injunctions against harming the innocent.
- Children are regarded as gifts, and childlessness was a great sorrow.
- Jesus’ attitudes toward children and infants. They are not less than persons, but are examples of how we are to enter the kingdom of God, and live in trusting dependence upon our heavenly Father.
- Many biblical references personalize the child, even before conception, such as Psalm 139.

We also see these principles in the narrative arc of Creation/Incarnation/Resurrection. Note that this is different than the narrative arc of salvation. This is about all humankind, not just those who believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. In creation, we learn that all are made in the image of God, so we must respect fellow image bearers. In the Incarnation, we see that Jesus’ life began at conception, at the Annunciation. We also see it in the Resurrection, because it dignifies the physicality of human beings and human bodies, so our bodies are not something to be scorned. Jesus himself has a resurrected body; he didn’t transform into some other form of existence.

2) The moral/ethical question—Does the unborn child have rights we must respect?

Philosophy deals with question of moral *personhood*. In philosophy, persons are beings who have moral rights and moral obligations. In a

philosophical argument based on reason, with no reference to religious beliefs, we argue that

- A human person deserves full moral respect.
- The biological human being is the same thing as a human person.
- The human embryo is a human being.
- Therefore, the human embryo is a full person that deserves full moral respect.

Conclusion: The human embryo, a human person with full moral respect, shall not be destroyed by abortion, for research or any other purposes.

3) The biological question—Is the unborn child one of us? A human being?

Through studying nature, we see that systems biology studies organisms, with the dynamic of time and structure of growth and development. An organism is organized around at least one axis, such as right/left, front/back or top/bottom. A new human organism, which is organized by all of these axes, begins at conception.

The whole chain of events for the human organism is set into motion when the sperm penetrates the egg. On their own, neither the sperm nor the egg is a complete organism. Together, they create something—someone—completely new. The dynamic—the time frame—of that egg changes dramatically. Instead of living 24 hours, the egg now has the potential, as part of a newly formed, living human organism, to live 70 or more years.

4) The legal question—Does the unborn child have legal rights or status?

Four Supreme Court cases have addressed the question of the unborn child and his or her legal rights or status. *In Roe v Wade* (1973), abortion was legalized in all 50 states, based on woman's right of privacy. It utilized a trimester framework, with a "mother's health" exception so broad that abortion is legal throughout pregnancy, for any reason. This case decided that a fetus is not a person with constitutional rights.

Planned Parenthood v Casey (1992) reaffirmed *Roe v Wade* but ignored everything else about it. The new framework is pre- and post-viability for a fetus, not trimesters. The basis was not right of privacy, but liberty and

a woman's own ideas about the meaning of life. This case opened the door to state regulation, as long as it was not an undue burden.

Gonzalez v Carhart (2007) determined that the ban on partial birth abortion is constitutional. This case was the first time the majority acknowledged that abortion can have "adverse emotional and psychological effects," according to Justice Kennedy.

Whole Women's Health v Hellerstedt (2016), the most recent case, determined that abortion clinic regulations are unconstitutional. The "undue burden" standard is now "benefits vs. burdens," and it is more important to have access instead of safety.

Now, the legal status of the unborn child (and embryo) is that it is not a person. It is not yet property, although there are custody battles in the courts right now over frozen embryos. There is also a "special consideration" status for research, or the rights are determined by the mother, when the embryo or fetus is *in utero*.

5) The medical question—What are common abortion methods, and what are the consequences?

The methods during early pregnancy that are surgical are suction aspiration or dilation and curettage (D&C). The medical methods are RU 486 (mifepristone), "Plan B" (levonorgestrel) and "ella" (ulipristal acetate). In mid to late pregnancy, the methods are dilation and evacuation (D&E) or "partial birth abortion" (Intact D&E). The consequences of abortion are a doubled risk for breast cancer, placenta previa, preterm birth, suicide, mental disorders such as PTSD, drug and alcohol abuse or victims of violence.

6) The societal/cultural impact question—What are the broader effects of abortion?

There are negative impacts on fathers. Most relationships end less than a year after the abortion, and one study revealed that only 1% would be willing to consider abortion again. These are in addition to feelings such as grief, anxiety, guilt, helplessness and anger. There are even broader effects, such as coarsening of attitudes about children, sex selective abortion of daughters when a son is preferred (over 160 million missing

girls), genetic selection with a prenatal discrimination against disability and the use of embryos in research. There are also social issues, as women of color are far more likely to receive an abortion than white women.

7) The alternatives question—Aren't there better options?

One survey suggests that most women get abortions because the pregnancy is inconvenient, it is too expensive to have a child or the pregnancy is too difficult to cope with. But, these women did not make the decision lightly and were not happy about their decision. There are several alternatives that would make a difference to women considering abortion, such as

- Support—remind her that she is not alone
- Relationship—form a relationship with her and help her to form a relationship with her child. Ultrasound has a powerful effect on this, especially if she is carrying twins.
- Help her to envision hope.
- Provide for her practical needs like medical care and financial assistance.
- Help her to consider her alternatives. The alternatives are
 - ◆ Don't decide and continue the pregnancy.
 - ◆ Decide to raise the child and continue the pregnancy.
 - ◆ Decide to continue the pregnancy and decide about parenting later (Safe Families, temporary foster home).
 - ◆ Decide to make an adoption plan and continue the pregnancy.

8) The policy question—How should citizens (and voters) respond?

Don't give up, even when things look really, really bleak. Also, be aware of what's happening in your state legislature.

9) The personal question—What is God prompting me to do?

Suggested Resources:

Books

Beckwith, Francis. *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2007).

Beckwith, Francis. *Defending Life*. (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2007).

Forsythe, Clarke. *Abuse of Discretion*. (Encounter Books, 2013).

Gushee, David. *The Sacredness of Human Life: Why an Ancient Biblical Vision Is Key to the World's Future*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

Kaczor, Christopher. *The Ethics of Abortion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014)

Lee, Patrick. *Abortion and Unborn Human Life*. (Washington, DC: Catholic U Press, 1996).

Meilaender, Gilbert. *Neither Beast nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person*. (New York: New Atlantis, 2009).

Rae, Scott. *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

Schwarz, Stephen. *Moral Question of Abortion*. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1990).

Organizations and Web-based Resources

Americans United for Life (AUL). Website: AUL.org

American Association of ProLife ObGyns (AAPLOG). Website: AAPLOG.org

CareNet Pregnancy Services of DuPage. Website: CareNetDuPage.com

Christian Legal Society. Website: CLSnet.org

Christian Medical and Dental Associations. Website: CMDA.org

Family Research Council abortion resources. Website: FRC.org/abortion

Focus on the Family abortion resources. Website: FocusontheFamily.com

Heartbeat International. Website: HeartbeatInternational.org

Illinois Citizens for Life. Website: ICL-Life.com

SpeakOut Illinois conference – every year in January. Website: SpeakOutIllinois.org

The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity. Websites: cbhd.org, EverydayBioethics.org

