

Sound
Living

Abortion

Jerry Nelson

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Abortion

I am particularly concerned for those who read this sermon who have already had or encouraged an abortion. We believe in God's forgiveness. The grace of God is so great as to include all of us who confess and turn away from our sin. The Bible speaks of the forgiveness of all kinds of sins, even the worst (witness the experience of the Apostle Paul). God can and will forgive anyone and any sin. Many women and men have been party to abortions in the past and have already or even now seek God's forgiveness. We believe God will definitely forgive and restore. The following sermon must be understood in the light of that grace.

One woman's experience:

"Place it in a basin, cover it with a towel, move it to the utility room, and check it every five minutes until the heart stops beating," the doctor ordered over the telephone.

Marcy, seventeen years old, decided with great difficulty to go ahead with this abortion just recently, twenty weeks into an unwanted pregnancy. Usually, after several hours of hard labor caused by an injection...the fetus is stillborn, but Marcy had delivered a critically ill baby girl who weighed under a pound. The Nurse wrapped the baby in a towel, cut the umbilical cord, and headed for the utility room, agonizing over what to do.

"I can't do this," the nurse decided. "This baby is alive. I may get in serious trouble but I must give her a chance." She contacted the pediatrician on call and her response was, "I'd rather not get involved. The intent of the procedure was the death of the fetus—besides it couldn't possibly survive at this age and size. You can take it to the nursery if you want but I won't treat it." Gently the nurse placed the newborn in a bassinet, kept her warm, tried to soothe her and watched helplessly for an hour as she struggled to survive. After an hour the struggling stopped

and the child was dead. The nurse wondered, "Do we need to complete a birth and death certificate? We would have if the mother had wanted this child. In that case we would have done everything possible to save her and we would have all shared in the sorrow of her death."¹

Doctor Robert Orr asks: "What kind of societal ethic allows taking the lives of unborn babies in one room while encouraging the medical team in the next room to heroically save lives of babies the same size and age, when the only difference is that one is wanted and the other is not?"² Can both actions be right?

Private or Public Matter?

Many people try to avoid the issue by calling abortion a matter of **private** conscience or a matter of **public** politics. If they can make it only a **private** moral issue or a **public** political issue than they can justify keeping its discussion either out of the government or out of the church. If it's a **private moral** issue only then the government has no business being involved. If it's a **public political** issue only then the church has no business being involved, so they say. But abortion is a **public moral** issue also and thus it is not only permissible but also essential that both the church and government be deeply involved in it.

I will not take you to a passage in the Bible and pretend its original intent was to specifically address the issue of abortion. To my knowledge few such passages exist except possibly Exodus 21, which we will see briefly a little later, but much Scripture bears on the issue. Instead I will assume most of you have heard the biblical principles that bear on the subject of abortion. And instead of reviewing those principles in detail with supporting biblical references, I would like to spend most of my time showing you how those principles apply in a real-life situation—the situation of a nation at war over the **public moral** issue of abortion.

The Frequency of Abortion

The Alan Guttmacher Institute is an affiliate of Planned Parenthood: By their own statistics there are: 180 abortions in this country every hour. A baby is aborted every 20 seconds Over 4400 each day and over 1.5 million every year. Over 31 million unborn children have been aborted thus far in the U.S. since Roe v. Wade. (6 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust). 25 times more unborn babies have died in this country through abortion than all the deaths in all the wars of U.S. history.³

Henry Foster who was President Clinton's unsuccessful nominee for Surgeon General made a statement with which most Americans and I agree. He said, "I abhor abortions."⁴ Most Americans wish abortions didn't happen. And many Americans will join me in calling abortion an evil that must be stopped. It is evil because it is the taking of a human life. God is very clear that murdering human beings is evil. And commonsense and science are very clear about the fact that an unborn baby is truly a human being.

Something Changed in America

Up until at least the 1960's, American public opinion and American law protected the unborn: Planned Parenthood, now aggressively promoting abortions, before 1970 wrote "An abortion kills the life of a baby after it has begun."⁵ In 1971-72, 33 state legislatures independently debated the abortion issue and all 33 retained their laws making it illegal. Years before, the American Medical Association unanimously adopted a resolution condemning "the procuring of abortion, at every period of the development of the baby..." The Hippocratic Oath of medical doctors reads in part "I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy." The United Nations declaration on the Rights of a Child in 1959 declared "the child by reasons of his physical and mental immaturity needs special safeguards...**before** as well as after birth."⁶

In 30 years, that has completely changed! Now the laws and Courts of the land make it illegal to **restrict** abortion. Now the U.N. wants to pay for them. Now the AMA supports it. Now

Planned Parenthood has made abortion their number one program (In 1990 they provided prenatal care for 4,700 women and abortions for 122,000)⁷

What Happened?

Moral reasoning changed! Until recently, most believed there is a creator

God and that that God has provided rules and principles by which to live and that rightness and wrongness are measured by God's standards.

Now for many, there is no personal God—therefore we are on our own and thus we are sovereign and we set our own standards and they are relative and the morality of an act is determined by results not rules.⁸

We now have a society that has raised autonomy to the height of God. Liberty means unrestrained self-expression. And liberty trumps all other considerations. The unencumbered **self** is the highest law in the land. And so decisions on hamburgers, beverages, cars, careers, and even marriage and abortion are made on what is best for **me**! That is not an idle statement. In our country, the individual has become the court of last review on decisions. George Grant in the Nov-Dec, 1992 *ACTION* magazine wrote "Even among evangelical Christians there is only a tenuous and uncomfortable consensus on the question (of abortion) The harsh realities of living in a progressively depraved culture - with its epidemics of infidelity, divorce, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and pornography, to say nothing of a host of other modern woes - have somehow tempered our zeal. Recent surveys and polls indicate that most evangelicals hold strongly to the belief that abortion is sin - until THEIR teenage daughter gets pregnant. In the moment of crisis, abortion becomes a difficult and complex issue - even for seemingly committed pro-life believers. It suddenly becomes an issue of establishing priorities. Of protecting reputations. Of pragmatism...." —of making decisions based on self and moral relativity rather than on the standards of God.

Moral Relativism

Based on moral relativism we, Americans, have convinced ourselves of several things:

First of all we have convinced ourselves that morality, including the morality of abortion, is an individual and personal decision. A couple of years ago we surveyed our own students here at SGC and listen to their response to a question on abortion: "If a friend came to you and told you she was pregnant. What would you do: 19% said they'd tell her abortion is wrong. **but** 81% said they'd tell her how they feel personally, but tell her it's her own choice to make. Relativism is rampant even in our churches. By whose standards do we make the most important decisions of life? God's or our own sense of what it right at the moment?

Complete freedom, autonomy and choice are more precious values than someone else's life. Listen to that same moral relativism made in the statement of so many: "I'm personally against abortion but I don't object if someone else believes it is right for him or her." By whose standard is the decision made? The standard of the self. Do we actually mean that? With the same logic would we say: "I am personally against killing all Jews but I don't object if someone else believes it is right for them." Is each person truly the final judge of all his or her own actions?

Some suggest that no one has the right to impose their morality on another. They say, "since there is no agreement on this issue surely it is wrong to deny someone else the right to choose what they think is right or wrong for them." But we impose morality all the time. We have laws that impose penalties on murder, theft, tax evasion, etc. etc. And Roe v. Wade imposed a morality on this nation (it forced those who see abortion as murder to accept it for their society). The only question is whose morality will we impose. If abortion is a moral evil then we are duty bound to try to stop it.

Believing the Lie

Secondly, with this moral relativism, not only have we Americans convinced ourselves that morality is an individual decision but we have also convinced ourselves that a fetus is not a baby! Virginia

Abernethy, of the Vanderbilt School of Medicine in Newsweek Jan 14, 1985 said, "I don't think an abortion is ever wrong. As long as an individual is completely dependent upon the mother, it is not a person." Even Newsweek's Editor had the sense to see where such an argument carries us, for the editor wrote: "In this view, which is shared by other pro-choice theorists, an individual becomes a person ONLY when he or she becomes a responsible moral agent—around three or four."⁹

Listen to the words of Kathline Ragsdale, Episcopal priest and chair of the board of religious coalition for reproductive rights in Washington D.C.: "I do not think a third-trimester fetus (those are the last three months before birth) has the attributes of personhood, but it is getting closer to viability." She was then asked: "In other words it is like a sliding scale or a gradual chart that, as the fetus gets older, there needs to be a more important reason to have an abortion?" To which Ragsdale replied: "Yes, I could go with that...life does NOT begin at conception."¹⁰

In 1973, Justice Douglas of our Supreme Court wrote that the unborn has no "right" to life. But in 1972 he wrote in a Sierra Club law suit that valleys, lakes, rivers, beaches, etc. have rights—the "voice of the inanimate objects (trees, valleys, etc) should not be stilled." Unborn children have no rights but lakes and valleys do!¹¹ Our Supreme Court decided in 1973 the fetus wasn't a person and for the past 23 years we have been trying to convince ourselves that is true.

We have convinced ourselves that many women are better off through an abortion But not only have we tried to convince ourselves that morality is a personal decision and that a fetus isn't a baby **but** we have also tried to convince ourselves that for many women and the "potential life" inside them, an abortion would be better. And so the reasons why women seek an abortion are myriad:

- Surely an abortion is better than giving birth to a deformed child.
- Surely an abortion is better than seeing a child live in a abusive home.

- Surely an abortion is better than an unwanted and unloved child.
- Surely an abortion is better than a child living in poverty. Surely my need for an education, or for a job to support the children I already have are more important issues than an abortion.

And so having convinced ourselves of those and other issues we now have abortion on demand in this country!

A Common Myth

There is a common myth circulating in this country. It is that abortions can only take place in the first 23 weeks of pregnancy and after that only to save the life of the mother. That is false and anyone who will take the time to read will know it! Since the Supreme Court has added the words "health" to the exception for abortion, abortions may be performed at any stage of the pregnancy and at any stage of the child's development if in the opinion of the woman her "health" is at stake. Now that sounds reasonable until you read how the Court defines "health": All medical, psychological, social, familial, and economic factors which might cause her to want to end the pregnancy—to have an abortion—are applicable.¹² **Hence there are no more restrictions on taking the unborn child's life in the last day of gestation than in the first day.**

Dr. Francis Beckwith wrote: "So it is safe to say that in the first six months of pregnancy a woman can have an abortion for NO reason, but in the last three months she can have it for ANY reason. This is abortion on demand"¹³ Practice bears this out: 40% of the women who have abortions have more than one. 50% of the women who have abortions use it as their sole means of birth control. 42% of all baby girls are aborted whereas only 25% of baby boys are aborted. That is sex selection.¹⁴ According to an AP wire service release recently, over 13,000 abortions are performed each year during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy.¹⁵

Partial-birth Abortions

So entrenched is abortion on demand that in 1996 former President Clinton vetoed the least restrictive anti-abortion bill ever passed by Congress. Congress passed a bill that said very simply that partial-birth abortions are illegal unless they must be performed to save the life of the mother. This is graphic but important: A "partial-birth" abortion is one where the doctor delivers a live baby through the birth canal—all except the head. The doctor then inserts a suction device and sucks the baby's brains out until the head collapses sufficiently to allow it to pass through. Clinton said he rejected that bill because he had asked Congress to approve an exemption to protect women from "serious adverse health consequences." "But," he said, "my plea fell on deaf ears." Congress did approve an exception to the ban on partial-birth abortions. They said such abortions could be allowed to save the life of the mother. The president knew exactly what he was doing. That word "health"—adverse "health" consequences—is a word that the Court has already defined to mean anything a woman wants it to mean. Thus adding the word "health" as the President said he wanted told everyone that it was tantamount to making the bill hollow. Even at that it was interesting that when the President paraded five women before the cameras while he vetoed the bill, he did not, to my knowledge have a woman there who claimed to be at personal risk if a partial-birth abortion had not been available. Apparently he could find none. So he got women to come and talk about their potentially handicapped babies—who they preferred to kill rather than care for (if they had lived). Apparently in the President's thinking the mother's "health" is jeopardized if she delivers a handicapped child.

The overwhelming number of partial-birth abortions are not to protect a woman: Dr. Haskell in an interview with the American Medical Association newspaper said, "I'll be quite frank: most of my (partial-birth) abortions are elective...in my particular case probably 20% are for genetic reasons and the other 80% are purely elective." Before the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1996, Dr. Nancy Romer said several of her patients were well beyond 4 months pregnant and "none of these women had any medical

illness and all three had normal fetuses.” Dr. James McMahon before the House Judiciary Committee said nine of his “fetal indication” cases (deformed fetuses) were for cleft palate. The law of this land, supported by former President Clinton, is abortion on demand.

But the Bible and common sense say a fetus is a baby, a human being

Contrary to what we have tried to convince ourselves—the fetus **is a human being!** God's Word says it is:

- Isaiah 44:2 says, God formed you in the womb.
- Psalm 139:13-14 - God knit the psalmist together in his mothers' womb.
- Jeremiah 1:5 - God says that before I formed you in the womb I knew you.
- Of John the Baptist it says that he was filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb.

In Exodus 21 it is a capital offense, one punishable by death, to cause a woman's unborn baby to die. The same punishment applies to the death of the unborn as to the born.

Not only does God's word say abortion is evil, but for the sake of those who don't believe God's word, so do the scientists: Dr. Micheline Matthews-Roth, principal research associate in the department of medicine at Harvard Medical School said:

“So, therefore, it is scientifically correct to say that an individual human life begins at conception, when egg and sperm join to form the zygote, and this developing human always is a member of our species in all stages of its life.”¹⁶

The U.S. Senate subcommittee reporting to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee wrote: “No witness who testified before the subcommittee raised any evidence to refute the biological fact that from the moment of conception there exists a distinct individual being who is alive and is of the human species.” So from a strictly scientific point of view, there is no doubt that the development of an individual human life beings at conception.¹⁷

Not only does science confirm it but we all know it! It doesn't take a rocket scientist's brain to figure out what is so obvious to all people over all time. Dr. Anne Speckhard of the Univ. of Minnesota did a study in which 96% of the women who had had an abortion said that 5-10 years later they felt they had taken a human life. Why? Because they knew it was a baby! Dr. Dorfman writing in the *OB/GYN News* in Feb of 1986 said something that all of us know: "Seeing a blown up moving image of the embryo she is carrying can be distressing to a woman about to undergo an abortion." Some abortion clinic manuals will say, "Never let them see an ultrasound." Why? Because the mother will know it is a baby. 39,000 women who have had an abortion are members of the National Abortion Rights League **but** 245,000 other women who have had an abortion are members of the National Right to Life committee. Why? Because they know it's a baby.¹⁸

Frankly only the obscurantist, only those unwilling to study the facts any longer, reject the obvious: it is a baby! And since it is a baby, they create a huge problem: **all our arguments** in support of abortion begin to fall apart. Even Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun, who wrote the majority opinion in *Roe v Wade*, wrote this in that same ruling: "If the suggestion of personhood (of the unborn) is established, the abortionist's (appellant's) case, of course, collapses, for the fetus' right to life is then guaranteed specifically by the 14th Amendment"

How Far Will We Go?

Listen to some of the other arguments:

1. Some argue that abortion ought to be allowed in the cases of the severely deformed or mentally handicapped unborn. Even if we allowed that, it would be an argument for less than 1% of all abortions: 99% of abortions would have no such argument. But secondly it assumes we know when someone is "better off" dead. Overwhelmingly, the handicapped among us and their families do not wish they had been aborted. But most importantly, just because someone is handicapped doesn't mean they are not a person. And if they are a person, we have no right no matter how seriously impaired they may be to kill them. Think

about it—the abortionist's logic would allow us to kill any handicapped or mentally impaired person.

2. Another argument that falls apart is that babies would be better off dead than born into abusive situations. Actor Robin Williams once joked, "I wonder how pro-life all these pro-lifers would be if someone were to say to them, 'OK, here's your very own crack baby!' " Frederica Mathews-Green, of the organization called *Real Choices* responded by saying, "That's an astoundingly vicious joke! What he's saying is, 'You see these disabled babies? If you don't take them I'm going to kill them. I wish I had killed them. If I had caught that baby in the womb before it came out and drew its first breath, I would have (killed it). Since I wasn't able to do that, now it's your responsibility. You have to raise it.' "¹⁹ But since when did whether a person was wanted or not or whether they might be abused become the criteria by which it is judged that they should live or be killed? And not so incidentally the reports of child abuse have gone up dramatically since abortion was legalized in this country and 91% of abused children are from planned, not unplanned or crisis pregnancies.²⁰

No, stop and think about it, we can't kill our unborn children because they might be in an abusive situation or they might be unwanted. Killing the unwanted or abused people will mean many people will die.

3. What about women who just can't afford another baby? If it **is** a baby then we would never say "hardship justifies homicide."

4. Some would argue that rape is reason for an abortion. There is time after a rape for conception to be prohibited. But once conception takes place, difficult as the situation is, once another person, the baby, is involved, the rules change. At no other time in a child's life do we kill it simply because its father was a deviate.

5. Still others will argue that the rights of the mother supersede the rights of the baby. That if her life will be miserable because she gives birth to this child then she has the right to abort it.

That might be true if the fetus wasn't a baby. But it is a baby, a human being. And none of us would justify Susan Smith drowning her two young sons because life was hard. In fact the nation rose up in horror at what she did. Where's our consistency, our logic, our values?

So What Do We Do?

For 23 years pro-life and pro-choice people have been squaring off against each other in angry discourse and it hasn't gotten us very far. I suggest seven actions to attempt to turn this nation around:

1. Admit the truth to ourselves: it is a baby!

Stop trying to pretend that maybe abortion is okay. If you doubt it is a human being then read the literature, study the facts, and listen to the experts. Naomi Wolf, a radical pro-choice advocate has admitted what many are unwilling to admit, "I maintain that we need... to defend abortion rights within a moral framework that admits that the death of a fetus is a real death."²¹ Let's stop pretending it's not a baby.

2. Let's tell the truth.

This means learning the truth and then patiently telling it to friends, family, schoolmates, and co-workers. Never with anger but always with a prayer that they will see and understand. There is a lot of material available. Abraham Lincoln wrote, "We know that in the final analysis, durable judicial rulings on major issues must be rooted in the soil of American opinion. Public sentiment is everything in this country. With it nothing can fail; against it, nothing can succeed."²² We must change public opinion by telling the truth everywhere we can. It is a baby and that does make a difference.

3. Join with women to find a real solution to problem pregnancies - solutions that fit for both the mother and the baby. The pro-choice people keep saying they want "choices" for women. Let's give them choices. The research shows that women in this culture often find that they don't have choices—the pressure of family, friends, boyfriends and husbands is for one

choice only—abortion. That has to stop. We must stop pitting the mother against the child and the child against the mother. Most of those mothers, evidently, sooner or later, desperately want or wish they had had an alternative to abortion. Again I quote from Matthews-Green: “It’s insane to think that mothers and their children need to compete and only one can survive.”²³ Let’s put as much effort into finding a way to save both mother and child as the pro-lifers put into saving the child and pro-choicers put into “saving” the mother.

4. Let’s work to reduce abortion.

70% of Americans dislike or detest abortion.²⁴ Then let’s join hands even with pro-choicers to make abortion “rare.”

- Let’s put effort into changing the culture that has a higher teen-pregnancy rate than any other civilized nation.
- Let’s make certain our Alternative Pregnancy Centers have the funds to advertise and provide alternatives to abortion.
- Let’s work at making certain families and fathers of the unborn support the choice of birth instead of abortion.
- Let’s invest in strengthening marriages, teaching parenting, and guarding our students and young adults during their most vulnerable years.
- Let’s get serious about reducing the cheap and even perverted sexuality that floods our media—a perversion that is contrary to life as we want it for our children.
- Let’s get serious about setting standards for ourselves—standards that our children can profitably emulate.

5. Let’s nominate and elect politicians who are as concerned for the unborn as they are for the voting public.

Again it is not an either/or: Either pro-child or pro-woman but **pro** woman and child. Let’s elect men and women who believe that and act on it.

6. Let’s pray!

How long since you or I have prayed that God would change the culture of this nation? How long since we have pleaded with God to change people’s minds and hearts to stop the killing and

change our society? Change is possible; it happened before. Slavery was the law of this land for years. Segregation was the law of this land for years. That has changed.

7. And just as importantly, let's seek conversions.

Not conversions to Pro-life but conversions to Jesus Christ. People need a change of world-view; they need to know there is a God and He matters. They need to know and receive Jesus Christ as saving-Lord. A person who is following and trusting Christ will find other ways to deal with life's difficulties rather than killing the children. Never give up on winning this community, this city and this country to Jesus Christ. Even though not all will follow Christ, enough will so together we can change the culture!

Recommended Reading:

Politically Correct Death: Answering Arguments for Abortion Rights by Francis J. Beckwith 1993 Baker Book House. BEST SINGLE SOURCE for answering pro-abortion arguments.

Real Choices by Frederica Mathews-Green 1994 Questar Publisher

Ethics for a Brave New World by John and Paul Feinberg 1993 Crossway Books Chapters 2 & 3. Especially helpful translation and interpretation of Exodus 21

Bioethics and the Future of Medicine by Kilner, de S. Cameron and Schiedermyer 1995 Paternoster and Eerdmans Chapters 15 & 16

Especially helpful chapter on the shifting legal focus in the abortion debate

VIDEOS:

"The Hard Truth" a 7 minute video by The Center for Bio-Ethical Reform (714) 632-7520 Dr. Nelson has a copy This video will leave you with no doubt that a "fetus" is a human being.

ARTICLES:

"Why Women Choose Abortion", Frederica Mathews-Green in *Christianity Today*, Jan 9, 1995

"On Abortion: A Lincolnian Position" by George McKenna in the Sept 1995 *Atlantic Monthly*. An interesting discussion of the parallels between the modern abortion debate and the pre-Civil War debate on slavery.

"Our Bodies, Our Souls: Rethinking Pro-Choice Rhetoric" by Naomi Wolf from Oct 16, 1995 *The New Republic*. This pro-choice activist is calling for changing the pro-choice language and terminology to regain the high moral ground that she believes is lost to the pro-lifers. Be careful with this argument - she still misses the point: the sanctity of human life.

DATA:

D. C. Metro ProLife News/Events Line on the Internet - FactBot Database

National Right to Life Committee, Inc. (202) 626 8820

This sermon was originally preached at Southern Gables Church on April 14, 1996

End Notes

¹ *Life and Death Decisions*, Robert Orr, MD et al., p. 48

² Ibid

³ FACTBOT Database of D.C. Metro ProLife internet here after referred to as Factbot

⁴ quoted in McKenna in *Atlantic Monthly*, Sept 95

⁵ FACTBOT p3

⁶ FACTBOT

⁷ FACTBOT

⁸ *Life and Death Decisions*, p 52

⁹ FACTBOT p. 16

¹⁰ *THE DOOR*, March/April 95

¹¹ Francis Beckwith, MD, *Politically Correct Death*, p. 29

¹² See Doe v. Bolton Supreme Court decision

¹³ Francis Beckwith, MD, *Politically Correct Death*, p. 34

¹⁴ FACTBOT

¹⁵ April 11, 1996 AP release re. Clinton veto of partial-birth bill

¹⁶ Francis Beckwith, MD, *Politically Correct Death*, p. 43

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ FACTBOT

¹⁹ *THE DOOR*, Mar/April 95

²⁰ Francis Beckwith, MD, *Politically Correct Death*

²¹ *New Republic*, Oct 16, 1995

²² McKenna, *The Atlantic Monthly*, Sept. 1995

²³ Frederica Matthews-Green, *THE DOOR*

²⁴ Ibid

