



ISSUE

24.31

July 31, 2022

Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
THE OL-
SEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McNear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

Questions about Abortion

By Kyle Pope

On June 24, 2022, the US Supreme Court issued a ruling in a case known as *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* that overturned its previous rulings in two prior cases: *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) and *Roe v. Wade* (1973). *Roe v. Wade* had ruled that the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of inferred a “right of privacy” that granted to women the right of abortion with no restriction in the first trimester and only limited restrictions during the second and third trimesters. *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* had upheld this ruling while acknowledging the rights of states to limit abortions in consideration of the viability of the unborn child. The 2022 case ruled that the Constitution had never granted a right to abortion, leaving it to the states to regulate its practice. As the nation confronts the impact and debates that will come from this ruling Christians must be prepared to answer a number of questions about this controversial issue.

What Does the Bible Teach? Although the Bible does not directly address abortion, it is not because it is a new practice. The Egyptian Ebers Papyrus (ca. 1550 BC) detailed the preparation of drugs used to induce abortion. The Assyrian Code of Assura (ca. 1075 BC) mandated capital punishment for some types of abortion. The original version of the Hippocratic Oath (ca. 400 BC) taken by physicians, included a promise not to aid a woman in inducing an abortion. The ancient world as a whole held human life (in or out of the womb) of little value apart from one’s economic and social status. Within this cultural context, the Holy Spirit revealed to mankind in Scripture the universal value of all human life—a principle that has influenced law within Western culture for centuries.

After the flood, God declared, **“Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man”** (Gen. 9:6). In Mosaic Law, God declared, **“you shall not murder”** (Exod. 20:13; Deut. 5:17). In the record of the Hebrew midwives defying the command of Pharaoh to kill the Israelite children (Exod. 1:15-17), we see a recognition of the life of the unborn. One cannot **“kill”** (v. 16) what is not first **“alive”** (v. 17)—they refused to kill them because they **“feared God”** (v. 17). This demonstrates an awareness of accountability before God for treatment of human life. This high valuation of human life has lain the groundwork for all modern legal concepts that criminalize murder.

From a biblical standpoint conception is not a mere biological process. David understood that God had formed him within the womb (Ps. 139:13-16). God told Jeremiah, **“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you”** (Jer. 1:5). God is involved in every human conception. From a biblical standpoint there is no distinction between human life within the womb and outside of the womb. Job acknowledged in his conception he was **“a male child”** (Job 3:3). When both John and Jesus were conceived the same word was used for a

child in the womb or out of the womb (Luke 1:26, 31, 36, 41; 2:12). One Mosaic law is especially informative. It taught:

If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Exod. 21:22-25).

Some versions have mistranslated this **“miscarriage”** (RSV, NASB), but it is literally **“her children come out”** (YLT; cf. KJV, ASV, NIV, NKJV, ESV) describing premature live birth. Thus the **“harm”** that could follow, if it included death of the child or mother, demanded a penalty of **“life for life.”** So, while the Bible may not directly prohibit abortion its teaching against murder and on the value of human life clearly condemn its practice.

Is This Just a “Theological Issue”? The concern Christians should have for biblical teaching matters little to pro-abortion proponents. Some who oppose the court’s ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson* have accused the justices of reaching a decision based upon theology rather than law. That is a curious claim, given that the words *God, Bible, soul, or theology* are never used in the 213 pages of the court’s opinions on the case. In fact, the legal issue is not one of theology but of life. *Roe v. Wade* ruled that **“the word ‘person,’ as used in the Fourteenth Amendment, does not include the unborn.”** That bizarre conclusion is strikingly similar to the horrific concepts expressed in the court’s infamous decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandeford* (1857) which ruled, **“A free negro of the African race, whose ancestors were brought to this country and sold as slaves, is not a ‘citizen’ within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States.”** While unlike *Roe*, that case at least acknowledged those of African descent as **“persons”** it argued that the Constitution considered them **“as persons whom it was morally lawfully to deal in as articles of property.”** Sadly, as a result of *Roe v. Wade* our country has now seen the sale of body parts of unborn children and the slaughter and dismemberment of millions of babies in the womb. How could this happen? Because our culture does not see these precious lives as **“persons”** but **“property”** to be used and thrown away as we choose.

Can Christians Support Abortion? In the days following the ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson* it was shocking to hear some Christians voice opposition to the court’s action. This came in the form of statements affirming a woman’s right to control over her own body or in appeals to

extreme examples of pregnancy under abusive circumstances. This ruling did not outlaw abortion but simply returned the issue to the states, concluding that previous courts had erred in reading a right into the Constitution that had never been explicitly stated. The result may be that some states will write laws codifying what *Roe v. Wade* had imposed. If Christians oppose the ruling because they wish it had gone further by affirming the right to life of the unborn and recognizing them as “persons” rather than some sub-human class of property I would agree. If instead, Christians parrot the worldly values of a culture addicted to immorality and convinced that one has the “right” to murder innocent life created by God because that life will cause too many hardships—*shame on them!*

There is no question how Christians from the earliest times have interpreted biblical teaching on this issue. A Christian text known as the *Didache* (ca. AD 80-180) commanded, “you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is begotten” (2). The *Epistle of Diognetus* (ca. AD 80-160) taught that Christians “marry, as do all. They beget children, but they do not destroy their offspring” (5). A work known as the *Epistle of Barnabas* (ca. AD 80-130) declared, “You shall not slay a child by procuring an abortion, nor shall you destroy it after it is born” (19). Athenagoras (ca. AD 177) asked, “And when we say that those women who use drugs to bring on abortion commit murder, and will have to give an account to God for the abortion, on what principle should we commit murder?” (*A Plea for the Christians* 35). Tertullian (ca. AD 210) wrote, “For us, since we have forbidden murder once and for all, we may not even destroy the fetus in the womb” (*Apology* 9). While these are not inspired texts, they clearly demonstrate that early Christians understood the teachings of Scripture to condemn abortion. Modern Christians who support abortion, praise the work of its proponents, or rationalize away the wickedness of this practice because of difficult circumstances reject both scriptural teaching and the efforts of Christians for centuries to oppose it.

Is This Only a Woman’s Issue? Many have argued that men should have no voice in this issue because “it is a woman’s right to control her own body!” Jesus was a man. He taught “**do not murder**” (cf. Mark 10:17-21). Does He have no voice in this issue? Certainly, both men and women should exercise control over his or her “**own vessel**” (i.e., one’s own body) “**in sanc-**

tification and honor” (1 Thess. 4:4), yet when conception occurs (regardless of the circumstances) it is no longer simply a woman’s body, but a separate body that is distinct from the body of the mother. Isaiah wrote, “**The LORD called Me from the womb; from the body of My mother He named Me**” (Isa. 49:1, NASB). In the body of his mother, he was a distinct person. Modern technology has allowed us to view and understand the very beginnings of human development in all of its beauty and complexity. Surgeries have now been performed on the bodies of unborn children in the womb. Babies as young as 21 weeks old have survived premature birth. Gone are the days in which it was imagined that women were simply receptacles for the development of a man’s seed. Regardless of the circumstances that cause conception, when it occurs the man’s seed and the woman’s ovum combine genetic material to become a distinct and unique form of life. Certainly, this life is dependent upon the body of the mother during the term of gestation, but the dependency of vulnerable life upon the care of another does not surrender or forfeit its existence as “life” any more than a patient in a coma ceases to be a “life” while dependent upon others for his or her care. Though unseen and wholly dependent upon others, the life of the unborn is a matter

that concerns us all. A culture that devalues life in the womb will quickly devalue all human life.

What about Rape, Incest, or to Save the Life of the Mother? Rape and incest are sins for which the abuser will face judgment before God (Deut. 22:23-29; 2 Sam. 13; Lev. 18:7-18; 20:11-21). No efforts to oppose abortion should ever minimize the horror of these terrible sins. Statistically, the trauma of rape seldom allows conception to take place, but sometimes it does. I personally know someone who was conceived in that way. Was that person not a human being within the womb? Was God not involved in that conception as He was in all others? Should that innocent life have been taken because of the sin of the abuser? Other sins can also result in conception—do they change the reality of the life that has been created? I recognize how difficult bringing to full term a life must be that is a constant reminder of such an assault. We should honor, praise, and support the dignity of those who value life

even in the face of such evil. The answer is not to **“proceed from evil to evil”** (Jer. 9:3). Even if the woman chooses not to raise the child herself, scores of Christians the world over are ready and willing to adopt. We must encourage these responses by which souls seek to **“overcome evil with good”** (Rom. 12:21).

The issue is, does the horror of these sins make the taking of innocent life no longer murder? The Bible teaches that capital punishment for certain crimes is not murder (Gen. 9:6; Exod. 20:10, 21:12, 16). This is not the taking of innocent life. It is punishment. In some cases, the Bible authorizes the principle of self-defense (Exod. 22:2-3; Luke 22:36; 1 Tim. 5:8) but the gospel also teaches **“do not resist an evil person”** but turn the other cheek to the one who would abuse us (Matt. 5:39). The principle of self-defense has led some to argue that abortion to save the life of the mother is acceptable. The issue is not that easy. Childbirth has always been a life-threatening prospect for both the mother (cf. Rachel: Gen. 35:16-19) and the child (cf. the stillborn: Job 3:16; Ps. 58:8; Eccl. 6:3). Often, even when the best efforts are made mother or child can die. Doctor and patients can face difficult choices in an instant of time but the life of both mother and child should be valued and all efforts to save both should be put forth.

Sources

- Dobbs v. J.W.H.O. (2022): https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf
- Dred Scott v. Sandeford (1857): <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service//usrep/usrep060/usrep060393/usrep060393.pdf>
- Planned Parenthood v. Casey (1992): <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service//usrep/usrep505/usrep505833/usrep505833.pdf>
- Roe v. Wade (1973): <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service//usrep/usrep410/usrep410113/usrep410113.pdf>

