

# The Abortion Quagmire

Two unmarried teenagers agonize about the girl's pregnancy. Afraid to confide in their families, the couple manages to deliver the baby in a motel room. They wrap the newborn in plastic and throw her in a trash bin. They are convicted of manslaughter. If they had procured an abortion just a few weeks—or even a few days—earlier, they would not have faced a trial and jail terms. This is just one of hundreds of news stories appearing over the past few years in a nation mired in the moral quagmire of abortion.

by Gary Petty

Since the *Roe vs. Wade* Supreme Court decision in 1973, the abortion issue in the United States has been a political hot potato polarized into two camps stamped pro-choice and pro-life. Fundamentally, pro-choice proponents claim that a woman has the right to determine what happens inside her own body, including the right to destroy an embryo. Pro-lifers make their stand on the rights of the unborn child as a human being. Both sides claim that their respective platforms rest on an ethical foundation of basic human rights.

Government legislation on this issue often takes the so-called middle ground: that abortion can be legally sanctioned in early pregnancy but forbidden after a specified number of weeks of the development of the fetus in the mother's womb.

The stakes are high. After all, the line between murder—the unlawful taking of a human life—and legal abortion hinges on the question of when human life begins.

## Debate over when life begins

The arguments center on the criteria that determine when an embryo or fetus can be called human. Most pro-lifers claim human life begins at conception. Many pro-choice proponents claim that abortion is acceptable only in early stages of pregnancy.

Some argue that human life begins with brain activity, while others claim that abortion should be legal during any stage of pregnancy. This last position has led to procedures such as partial-birth abortions, in which a partially delivered fetus has its skull punctured and collapsed to make the remains easier to remove from the mother's body.

A professor at Princeton University has taken the debate even farther. Dr. Peter Singer, a professor of bioethics, maintains that mothers should have the right to kill any baby that is physically or mentally disabled for up to 28 days after birth. His rationale is that a baby isn't a thinking, self-aware person at this time.

Even most pro-choice proponents would find Professor Singer's position repugnant. Yet the all-important question remains: Who and



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what determines the point when an embryo or fetus is no longer considered mere tissue but a distinct life with the moral right to live?

The question is vital to the more than 3,000 babies who will be aborted in the United States in the next 24 hours.

The ripple effect of *Roe vs. Wade* has dramatically changed American society. A 1998 *U.S. News & World Report* article concluded that, at current rates, more than four in 10 American women may have an abortion in their lifetime.

"The statistic is astonishing: 43 percent of American women will have an abortion in their lifetime, if current rates are sustained. That would mean, for better or worse, abortion is as common a life experience for women as divorce—and more than three times more common than breast cancer. It would mean that more than twice as many women have abortions as get college degrees.

It would mean that 25 years after *Roe v. Wade* abortions are safe, legal, and *not* rare.

"Yet the statistic, gathered by the pro-abortion-rights Alan Guttmacher Institute, holds up to scrutiny. (In any given year, the odds a woman will have an abortion are small but since women have about 30 reproducing years, the odds of having one at some point in life are far greater)" (Steven Waldman, Elise Ackerman and Rita Rubin, "Abortions in America," *U.S. News & World Report*, Jan. 19, 1998).

## When does life begin?

At conception a sperm impregnates an egg about the size of the period at the end of this sentence. Growth and development are immediate and remarkable.

The new life has a heartbeat around the age of 18 days. At around three weeks, usually even before the mother knows she's pregnant,

the tenth-of-an-inch-long embryo is already forming eyes, a spinal cord and a digestive system. Forty days after fertilization brain waves can be recorded. Delicate, tiny toes and fingers are beginning to show by the eighth week. By the 18th week the fetus is moving, punching and kicking.

In the United States, during the 18th and 19th centuries, it was a common belief that life started when the baby could be felt moving around in the mother's womb. Abortions before this time, called "the quickening," were accepted by some, even in religious circles. The American Medical Association was instrumental in changing attitudes towards the unborn, and by the early 1900s virtually all states had passed laws outlawing abortion.

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the case of *Roe vs. Wade* overrode all state laws. But the court avoided the critical issue by stating that it could not resolve the difficult problem of when an unborn child becomes a human person. Thus the court's decision was to err on the side of *taking* life rather than to err on the side of *saving* life.

When, then, does life begin? And when can it be considered *human* life?

James Drumme in *The New American* urges us to consider this perspective: "One of the key elements in the abortion debate is the true nature of the victim. If the unborn child is a human being, then he or she deserves the full protection of the law. Though it still may surprise some, there are few things more certain . . . than that the unborn are human beings.

"It is a biological and scientific fact that human life begins at fertilization, when the sperm cell of the father impregnates the egg cell of the mother. That unique genetic package, something that each of us was, contains everything that a person will become—

the color of her eyes, the size of his feet, even whether he or she will contact diabetes at age fifty" (James Drumme, "Abortion: The Other Holocaust," *The New American*, Jan. 20, 1986, pp. 21-26).

The fertilization of a human egg, uniting the chromosomes that determine human traits, marks the beginning of a life. If it isn't a human life, what is it?

### Is it a legal or religious matter?

Pro-abortion factions argue that abortion is a secular and legal matter rather than a religious one. But is the value of human life simply a legal matter?

"Not since slavery has an issue so polarized American society—and perhaps never has an issue posed a greater moral dilemma. The modern debate over abortion, as it is played out in the nation's courts and legislative halls, is a conflict of competing moral visions and of fundamental human rights: to life, to privacy, to control over one's own body.

"Yet when stripped of the political rhetoric and entangling legal arguments, it is an issue that rests on basic theological questions. What is human life? When does it begin? What is its value and source?" (Jeffrey Sheler, "The Theology of Abortion," *U.S. News & World Report*, March 9, 1992).

This issue is hotly debated even among church denominations. For Christians the final authority is the Bible. Although God's Word doesn't specifically mention abortion, it does have much to say about the underlying principles and the value of human life.

Genesis 1:26-27 tells us that God made humanity *in His image*. This statement is profound in that it gives us insight into the purpose of human life. God reveals the potential of human beings when He declares, ". . . I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Revela-

tion 21:7). God created humanity because He wants children of His own!

By creating man and woman, God chose the method for human reproduction. He told Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth . . ." (Genesis 1:28).

Human sexual reproduction, sanctified in marriage, is a beautiful expression of the love of two people committed to each other in a lifelong relationship. The children of this union are a blessing from God (Psalm 127:3). Though parents are responsible to rear and nurture their offspring, ultimately the children belong to God as His sons and daughters.

### God's view of the unborn

Since God created man and woman, and the method of sexual reproduction, does the Bible reveal His perspective on the unborn?

King David, writing under God's inspiration, said of His Creator: "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

"My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed" (Psalm 139:13-16, New Revised Standard Version).

God even told the prophet Jeremiah that He knew him before he was formed in his mother's womb: "Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations'" (Jeremiah 1:4-5).

These passages show that the formation of the unborn in the womb is part of God's creative work. The Bible is clear not only

## A Gory Harvest

Technology has inspired and made possible a nightmarish controversy over the use of aborted embryonic and fetal parts in medical research.

*World* magazine reports that researchers can even place orders for body parts: "Most researchers want parts harvested from fetuses 18 to 24 weeks in utero, which means the largest babies lying in lab pans awaiting a blade would stretch 10 to 12 inches—from your wrist to your elbow. Some researchers append a subtle 'plus' sign to the '24,' indicating that parts from late-term babies would be acceptable. Many stipulate 'no abnormalities,' meaning the baby in question should have been healthy prior to having her life cut short by 'intrauterine cranial compression' (crushing of the skull)" (Lynn Vincent, "The Harvest of Abortion," *World*, Oct. 23, 1999, pp. 16-19).

Although some medical researchers claim they are merely making the best of a bad situation, with the high demand for fetal tissue the moral implications are dismaying.

"Ironically, it is the babies themselves who are referred to as 'donors,' as though they had some say in the matter. Such semantic red flags—and a

phalanx of others—have bioethicists hotly debating the issue of fetal tissue research: Does the use of the bodies of aborted children for medical research amount to further exploitation of those who are already victims?

"Will the existence of fetal-tissue donation programs persuade more mothers that abortion is an acceptable, even altruistic, option? Since abortion is legal and the human bodies are destined to be discarded anyway, does it all shake out as a kind of ethical offset, mitigating the abortion holocaust with potential good?" (same source).

Some biomedical research companies circulate brochures showing what they will pay for aborted body parts. One such list in *World* offered the following: Spinal column \$150. Spinal cord \$325. Limbs (at least two) \$150. Eyes \$75 (\$50 if older than eight weeks). Brain \$999 (if up to eight weeks old; 30 percent less if significantly fragmented).

The human condition being as it is, we may soon see the day when people will put in orders for needed tissue, women seeking abortions will be contacted or even impregnated, and at the suitable time the unborn child will be aborted for medical use by another human being. The reasoning that medical researchers are just making the best of a bad situation rings hollow.

about the value of human life, but also that human sexual reproduction is the method God created to begin the process of bringing into existence His own family.

### The real issues

The abortion issue is most hotly debated when discussing whether a pregnancy is dangerous to a mother's health. The truth is that abortions involving cases where the mother's life is at stake are a small percentage of all abortions. Most abortions are simply a method of birth control.

According to *U.S. News & World Report*: "The basic facts are these: Roughly 1.4 million women have abortions each year—89 percent before the 12th week of gestation. Eighty-two percent are unmarried or separated, and 44 percent have had at least one previous abortion . . .

"Fewer statistics exist illustrating *why* women get abortions. In the last survey, in 1987, 76 percent said they were concerned about how having a baby could change their lives, and 51 percent had problems with a relationship or wanted to avoid single parenthood. Thirteen percent cited health of the fetus; 7 percent the health of the mother; 1 percent rape or incest. A *U.S. News* survey found, surprisingly, that even for most abortions occurring in the 20th week or later, the health of the fetus or mother was a relatively minor factor in the decision to have an abortion" (Waldman, Ackerman and Rubin, "Abortions in American," *U.S. News & World Report*, Jan. 19, 1998.)

If life begins at conception and gestation is the method by which God begins the process of creating His children, then virtually all the abortions committed constitute murder in the Creator's sight. Worse yet, it is killing *for the sake of convenience*.

That may sound like a harsh verdict in our pluralistic society. We are used to thinking in shades of gray rather than in terms of black and white or absolute right and wrong. The Bible, however, spells out *absolute* moral values—not a decide-for-yourself, if-it-feels-good-do-it morality.

The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Rome some poignant words about society in his day. He described the process that takes place in our thinking when we reject the source of absolute moral authority:

"Thus, because they have not seen fit to acknowledge God, *he has given them up to their own depraved way of thinking, and this leads them to break all rules of conduct*. They are filled with every kind of wickedness, villainy, greed, and malice; they are one mass of envy, murder, rivalry, treachery, and malevolence; gossips and scandalmongers; and blasphemers, insolent, arrogant, and boastful;



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they invent new kinds of vice, they show no respect to parents, they are without sense or fidelity, without natural affection or pity. They know well enough the just decree of God, that those who behave like this deserve to die; yet they not only do these things themselves but approve such conduct in others" (Romans 1:28-32, Revised English Bible, emphasis added).

The act of terminating the life of an unborn child doesn't proceed out of a vacuum. Abortion is a *symptom*. Along with divorces, broken homes, mental anguish and the physical suffering of venereal diseases, abortion is one of many symptoms of a society that has a selfish, misguided and even perverted view of the sexual relationship God Himself designed for human reproduction, which God meant for human beings to enjoy as an expression of love within the bounds of marriage.

Every effect has a cause. The cause of growing societal tragedies is our willful disregard of our Creator's instructions, given for our good (to better understand their benefits, be sure to request your free copy of *The Ten Commandments*). The healing solution is to return to marriage as the only acceptable environment for a sexual relationship and conception of children.

### What if I've had an abortion?

Many women suffer emotional scars from having an abortion. Some describe waking at night hearing a baby cry. They experience

pangs of guilt when seeing a mother playing with her child and sometimes fear that God won't forgive them.

It's easy to fall into the trap that our sins are so terrible that even a merciful God won't forgive us. Paul writes that God forgives even though "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), but often it is easier to apply such statements to others.

Jesus was condemned by the religious leaders of His day because He ate meals with people who were obviously sinners. He told the leaders a parable about a man who had 100 sheep, but one wandered off and became lost. The shepherd, He said, would naturally search for the lost sheep until he found it, then hoist it to his shoulders and carry it home.

Jesus concludes the parable with the statement: "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

If you've had an abortion, turn to your Father in heaven and repent. Ask Him to apply the sacrifice of His Son in your stead and help you have a Father-daughter relationship with Him. If you continue to suffer from guilt, seek counsel.

Likewise, if you have fathered a child and participated in the decision to abort it to avoid your parental responsibility, you should repent of your part in the taking of an innocent human life.

In either situation, remember the words

Jesus spoke to a woman caught in the act of adultery: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:11). God forgives, but He expects us to stop sinning.

### One last case

A man and wife who thought they could never have children sat anxiously while a doctor explained the dangers of her pregnancy. The young woman had undergone a series of X rays before she knew she was pregnant. The doctor explained that there was little hope for the fetus and recommended an abortion. A second doctor concurred.

The pair never doubted their course of

action. They prayed for a miraculous healing, prepared to accept God's will and went through with the pregnancy.

Their son, the baby the doctor recommended be aborted, was valedictorian of his high-school graduating class this spring. An athlete with a winning personality, my nephew's major problem is trying to decide which college to attend.

Just in the past hour some 150 unborn children were killed in the United States. Those 150 children will never laugh, attend school, discover the cure for cancer, fall in love, see a sunset, squeeze sand between their toes or write a symphony.

### The ultimate solution

God will send Jesus Christ back to earth to establish His Kingdom, to build a new world governed by a higher law. He will create an environment of peace and harmony, a world that is safe for children. It will be a world safe for the unborn.

The prophet Zechariah was inspired to write of this time when the Messiah will reign: "Old men and old women shall sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets" (Zechariah 8:4-5).

Pray for that day.

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