

Theology Matters

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Created, Loved, & Called: Looking at the Issues of Life From the Perspective of Christian Faith Part 2

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This curriculum is based on the reformed conviction that faith and practice are and ought to be related. All of our lives we are busy developing our view of the world—of what we regard as reality and truth. Often that development takes place without our conscious involvement. Because we Christians live our lives immersed in messages from a wide variety of sources, we often adopt both beliefs and practices without careful scrutiny. And, without a thorough knowledge of Scripture and careful application of it to our modern situations, we are often unaware that some of the beliefs held by Christians are not necessarily Christian beliefs.

Becoming increasingly like Christ, the goal of the Christian life, includes a matter of replacing false beliefs and understandings with true beliefs and understandings, and replacing practices that do not comport with the will of God with those that do. Becoming disciples of Jesus Christ is basically a matter of living increasingly repentant lives, of becoming increasingly obedient to Jesus.

That is why this series begins with an exploration of how we go about developing a worldview and how we can consciously begin to have our view of the world and of truth shaped by the Scriptures, so that our minds better conform to Christ and we know what obedience requires.

Content of the Series

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 - Session 2: Seeing Through the Spectacles of Scripture (Nov/Dec 2004 issue of TM)**
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Session Four The Unborn

An Outline of Session #4

- A. The beginning of a human life
 - 1. development of the unborn in the womb
 - 2. the biological fact of a new human life at fertilization
 - 3. significance of disagreement about when a new human life begins (who was tenth president?)
- B. The significance of a human life
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 - Isaiah 44:24
 - Job 10:8-12
 - Isaiah 44:2
 - Jeremiah 1:4,5
 - (b) continuity of person before and after birth
 - adult same personal identity as before birth
 - same Greek words refer to humans before and after birth
 - same word for unborn child and young children
 - (c) covenant
 - created in God's image for relationship with God
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 - Westminster: "to glorify God and enjoy him forever"
- C. Witness of church throughout history (not one dissenting voice in over 3,000 years until very recently)
 - 1. Judaism, Didache, Tertullian, Augustine, Chrysostom
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 - 3. recent theologians, Presbyterian Church through 1960
- D. Contrasting perspectives
 - 1. arbitrary definition of humanness (e.g. birth, 3 days old)
 - 2. Christian alternative (value of all human life and example of early church in caring for vulnerable)
- E. Application to abortion today
 - 1. abortion is direct violation of commandment not to kill, denial that life is a gift from God, denial of value God places on our lives, denial that death is the last enemy, declaration of hopelessness, giving up on God's promises

- 2. Christian imperative to show mercy through acts consistent with God's commands, protect every innocent human being (Prov. 24:10-12)

Introduction and Review

What we believe to be true affects our values and the choices we make. Christian discipleship requires renewed minds and transformed lives. Our thinking and behavior, our values and our choices, are informed and influenced by the truth of God's Word.

In our last session we saw that the Christian understanding of what it means to be human stands in sharp contrast to some of the prevailing views in modern society. The Bible shows humanity, on the one hand, to be a part of creation. On the other hand, the Bible distinguishes humans from other parts of creation because unlike any other part of creation, we are made in the image of God. We aren't products of chance, as some world views teach. We are created by God to be in relationship with Him. We belong to our loving, heavenly Father who made us, sustains us, and redeems us.

Human beings are indeed a very special creation of God. And we are created for relationship not only with God but also with each other. The Bible tells us that every human being is our neighbor. And we have certain neighborly obligations to each other. Our love for each other begins on a very basic level such as not stealing or slandering our neighbor or committing adultery. And our love for each other includes the injunction against killing and the warning against shedding innocent blood.

In this session we are going to examine how understanding God's love for us, and in turn our love for our neighbor, apply to the unborn.

Let's take a look first at the unborn by listening to a doctor's explanation of the development of the unborn in the womb. And then let's consider what the Bible has to say about what we hear.

Doctor Ralph Hellems:

Human life is fragile. Human life is unique. Human life begins from a single cell, called the zygote.

A zygote originates from the two gametes, which are sex cells from the mother and father. From the mother comes the ovum. From the father comes the spermatozoon. The spermatozoon or sperm develops from inside the male. The ovum or egg develops from inside the female. Interestingly, by themselves, the gametes will perish within a relatively brief time—but when brought together through the process of fertilization, the ontogeny, or life story, of that individual begins.

When the male ejaculates sperm into the female vagina during sexual intercourse, the sperm travels a

phenomenal distance from the vagina, into the uterus, and finally through the fallopian tube. Once a sperm penetrates the awaiting ovum, the process of fertilization begins, and the zygote is formed.

The fertilized ovum, or zygote, has the capacity to form an entire individual: eye color, skin, hair color are all obtained from information contained within the zygote.

Recall the two gametes, the spermatozoon and the ovum. Each of these gametes contains 23 chromosomes. The zygote therefore contains 46 chromosomes.

Each chromosome contains literally thousands of specific subunits of genetic information called genes. Furthermore, these genes are composed of Deoxyribonucleic acid, commonly known as DNA. There are four of these nucleic acids: Adenine, Thymine, Guanine, and Cytosine. These nucleic acids always bind in pairs, and these pairs always occur in some combination of three's—known as triplets. Varying numbers of these triplets of DNA pairs comprise a gene and again, there are thousands of genes in a single chromosome.

The incredible spatial arrangement of these genes, and the complex, specific order of these DNA pairs which compose the individual gene is an absolute wonder. The combinational possibilities existing in the genetic makeup of the fertilized egg containing approximately 100,000 genes is in the billions.

Some genes communicate with other genes about when to turn on or turn off, sometimes days or months later, sometimes years or decades later. There are genes which act as repair systems; some genes which destroy, then correct DNA systems.

All of this occurs at the moment of fertilization, when the sperm penetrates that egg forming the zygote. At this moment of fertilization, human life begins.

The beginning of new human life is a well established biological fact. Nevertheless, arguments over the beginning of human life abound.

Suppose a group of people were asked to name the tenth president of the United States. Depending on the level and type of education of the members of the group, they may give many different answers. They may even disagree.

What would such a disagreement show? Would it mean that no one knows who was the tenth president? Could it be that there is disagreement among historians and it's impossible to determine? Of course not. It would mean that some members of the group were simply mistaken. Physician Wil Roese notes that disagreement doesn't really change the fact.

Dr. Wil Roese:

I've assembled fourteen citations on when human life begins from textbooks on medical embryology in the Health Sciences Library at the University of Maryland. The teaching about when human life begins is consistent in each of them.

Not one states that human life begins at birth, the third trimester, or viability, the eighth week, or at ovulation. Not a single text states that when a human life begins is unknown, disputed, or even uncertain.

The lack of agreement about when human life begins is not because scientists have been unable to determine when human life begins, but because some are simply mistaken.¹

The unborn: The view of Scripture

Bearing the likeness of God, we have dignity and significance by virtue of our origin. Science can tell us whether an embryo is human. But only the Scriptures can reveal to us the significance of those tiny human beings and our obligations to them.

One of the most familiar passages on God's relationship to us in the womb is found in Psalm 139. In that passage the human person, including the unborn child, is seen in terms of creation, continuity, and covenant.² The Psalm shows us the unborn child first in terms of *creation*. God himself fashions each child in the womb.

For you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. 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.³

This is what the Lord says, "Your redeemer who formed you in the womb, I am the Lord who has made all things."⁴

Your hands shaped me and made me. You molded me like clay.⁵

This is what the Lord says. "He who made you, who formed you in the womb and who will help you."⁶

The word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. Before you were born I set you apart. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."⁷

This is revelation in the form of poetry of what cannot be seen in the study of embryology. What we witness with our eyes is enhanced by the knowledge that God is active in each child's life, even as he or she is being formed in secret.

Psalms 139 also views the unborn child in terms of *continuity*. A human being is the same person before birth and after. Read the Psalm and observe how the writer refers to himself in terms of his past (v. 1), his present (vv. 2-6), his future (vv. 7-12), and before he was born (vv. 13-16). In each case, the psalmist refers to himself with the same personal pronouns.

Anglican theologian Dr. John Stott concludes that he who is thinking and writing as a grown man has the same personal identity as the child in the womb. He is aware of no discontinuity between his antenatal and postnatal being.⁸

That is a pattern throughout Scripture. We find the same words used to refer to human beings both before and after birth. For example, the Greek word “brephos” is used in Luke 1 to refer to the unborn John the Baptist, and in Acts 7:19 to refer to young children. And again in 2 Timothy 3:15, to refer to the young Timothy.⁹

Psalms 139 also speaks of the unborn child in terms of *covenant*. The unborn child is created in God’s image for a relationship with God. The psalmist uses personal pronouns to refer to his relationship with God.

Dr. John Stott writes, “God, our creator, loved us and related himself to us long before we could respond in a conscious relationship to him.”

There is a similar emphasis in God’s call to the prophet Jeremiah, and to the apostle Paul. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you,” the Lord told Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5). “Before you were born, I set you apart.” Paul testified in Galatians, “For even before I was born, God had chosen me to be his and called me.” (Gal. 1:15) God’s knowledge was active in forming, sanctifying, equipping, and appointing Jeremiah and Paul for their callings.

Parents have hopes and dreams and plans for their children, but in the biblical view, God creates each of us for his own purpose. For any of us to be “wanted” is first of all God’s prerogative.

The first and most familiar question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism answers that “Our principle purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” That is a purpose that the least among us can fulfill, and it is our chief purpose.

The Bible describes the unborn John the Baptist leaping with joy at the voice of the mother of his Lord in Luke 1 (41,44). The Scripture teaches us that God is our creator. And it teaches us that we belong to him, long before we are born. We may run from him in rejection, like the prodigal son, but no action of ours changes the reality that our lives are a gift from God, from the very beginning.

God himself is the reason for our existence. We must ask how the deliberate killing of any innocent human being

could be justified in the face of this witness of Scripture. Certainly the Church, throughout its history, found no justification and has been steadfast in its defense of the unborn, just as it has defended every innocent and vulnerable person.

The unborn: The witness of the Church through history

Let us look at the witness of the Church throughout history. Until very recently, the Christian Church spoke with one voice, both in opposition to abortion and for the value of the unborn child. “Abortion is, in fact, one of only several moral issues on which not one dissenting opinion has ever been expressed by the church fathers,” says orthodox priest and scholar Alexander Webster.¹⁰

The teachings of Judaism through the centuries present stark contrast with the permissiveness of the pagan world. “It was a given of Jewish thought and life,” Michael Gorman writes, that “abortion like infanticide was unacceptable, and this was well known in the ancient world.”¹¹

The Sentences of Pseudo Phocylides is a collection of ethical maxims from Alexandrian Judaism, written probably between 50 BC and 50 AD. In its section on sexuality, marriage and the family, it says, “A woman should not destroy the unborn babe in her belly, nor after its birth throw it before the dogs and the vultures as a prey.”¹²

The Didache, an early second century code of Christian morality, says: “Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion.”¹³

A prominent church father wrote around the end of the first century AD that abortion kills not only the child, but also the “human feelings” of the parents.¹⁴

Theologian and apologist Tertullian, writing around the same time, was the first Christian thinker to draw an explicit link between the Christian prohibition of abortion and the scriptural teaching that God formed, knew, and called Jeremiah before birth. He summarized the Christian ethic and equated abortion with infanticide and every other unjust killing.¹⁵

Augustine, the great systematic theologian of the Western Church, and his contemporary, John Chrysostom, the great preacher of the Eastern Church, both condemned abortion.¹⁶

The Reformation in the sixteenth century did not alter the Church’s view of life. Luther called abortion “murders and infanticides.”¹⁷ In his commentary on Exodus, John Calvin specifically condemned abortion. He regarded killing an unborn child as worse than killing a child already born. In the case of a pregnant woman who is struck and prematurely delivers her baby, he specifically commented, “If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house

than in a field, because a man's house is his most secure place of refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy the unborn in the womb before it has come to light."¹⁸

More recently, such prominent theologians as Karl Barth, Helmut Thieleke, and Paul Ramsey have repeated the Church's historical opposition to abortion. Lutheran pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book entitled *Ethics*, defines abortion as a sin against God, against marriage, and against the human race.¹⁹

The Presbyterian Church, as recently as the 1960's, pronounced that, "The fetus is a human life to be protected by the criminal law from the moment when the ovum is fertilized."²⁰

Today, in many quarters of the modern Church, this long, unbroken stand of the Church has been reversed. Abortion has only recently become a controversial issue in the Church. The biblical norm, accepted for more than 3,000 years, that every innocent human being is to be protected from harm, has been replaced by the norm of a society which has adopted a quality of life ethic.

The value of human life and the afflicted

Nobel prize winner, James D. Watson, representative of this new "quality of life" ethic, once suggested that we agree to define as human only those individuals who are more than three days old. The reason, he said, is so parents will have adequate time to determine whether the child should be allowed to live.²¹

Watson's suggestion is essentially identical to those of Fletcher and Pinker presented in the last session.²² Their view is a logical extension of the belief that human beings confer humanness on others and especially where the defenseless are concerned. This line of thinking asserts that subjective judgment about humanness may be used to justify decisions to kill.

Today the legal line is birth, but since the decision about when life begins has already been shifted in our culture from the physical reality of fertilization to personal opinion, there is really no reason why it shouldn't be moved from the time of birth to some later time.

Richard John Neuhaus wrote that the moral implications of human life become clearer if we speak not so much about sanctity of life as about our responsibilities of stewardship and love for the neighbor, especially for the least and most vulnerable.²³

The value of human life and the sentence of death

Death is not Scripture's means of care for needy neighbors. The early Christians astounded the Roman world by their compassion. They cared for all who were

disadvantaged or afflicted, pagan and Christian alike. This countercultural activity by Christians was not a purely humanitarian act. The Church then, and for centuries after, heard Jesus say that inasmuch as they ministered "unto the least of these, my brothers," they were ministering to Jesus Himself.²⁴

Christians followed the example of their Lord, who ministered to the neediest members of his own society throughout his own life. Through his care and love, our Lord reinforced the worth of disabled, diseased, and disadvantaged individuals. Jesus did not minister a merciful death to those suffering from afflictions; he ministered life and health, and grace to them. In the hard work of ministering to the afflicted and in resisting their deaths, the Church is being faithful to the model of servanthood established by her Lord.²⁵

What does this mean in relation to abortion? It means that the choice of death, besides being a direct violation of the commandment not to kill, is a denial that life is a gift from God. It is a denial of the value that God places on our lives. It is a denial that death is the last enemy.²⁶ It is a declaration of hopelessness, and not of hope. It is a giving up on the promises of God to be with us in our infirmities and our adversities.

Death at the hands of human beings, as mercy, is an illusion, both for the person who is killed, and for those responsible for the deaths of others. Mercy is shown through acts that are consistent with God's command.

Making decisions about a human life

The Christian belief that every human being is created in God's image has been a powerful force for good in a world in which human life is too often treated cheaply. The idea that every innocent human being is to be protected is a biblical imperative.

Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say "oh, we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done? (Proverbs 24:10-12)

Summary

In summary then, we have seen in this session that both the Scripture and 3,000 years of Church history have, with one voice, insisted that each person is fully human before, as well as after, birth and have always regarded the unborn as God's creation in his own image.

We have seen that Scripture teaches that we have a particular responsibility to the innocent and the vulnerable among us, and special needs pose special responsibilities for protection and care of those created in God's image.

But arguments are often raised against this position which has been held by Christians throughout the centuries.

There are arguments that defend reasons to end the life of an unborn child, or to euthanize a person who is not considered to have an adequate quality of life. In our next session we will hear some of those objections and respond to them.

Endnotes

1. Three examples of Dr. Roese's search of the medical literature are:
 "A zygote is the beginning of a new human life," in Keith L. Moore, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology* (Philadelphia, PA: W.B. Saunders Company, 1988) p. 13.
 "At the moment of fertilization there has been determined not only the existence of this new human being, but also his individuality," in Margaret Shea Gilbert, *Biography of the Unborn* (Baltimore, MD: The Williams & Wilkins Co., 1939), p. 5.
 "Human development begins at fertilization (conception) when an oocyte (ovum) from a woman is fertilized by a sperm (spermatozoon) from a man," in Keith L. Moore, T.V.N. Persaud and Kohei Shiota, *Color Atlas of Clinical Embryology* (Philadelphia, PA: W.B. Saunders Co., 1944), p. 1.
2. These themes are adapted from John R. W. Stott's *Involvement: Social and Sexual Relationships in the Modern World* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell; 1984, 1985) pp. 196-199.
3. Psalm 139: 13-16.
4. Isaiah 44:24.
5. Job 10:8-12.
6. Isaiah 44:2.
7. Jeremiah 1:4,5.
8. *Involvement* (II) p. 197.
9. Presbyterians Pro-Life has a list of eight examples of words in the Bible used clearly to refer both to children in the womb and to those who are born. The additional words are *Huios, BEN, Olal, Yeled, Yatsa, Shakol, and Nepel*. The resource, called "Scripture makes no distinction between born and unborn human beings" gives the words and their various Scripture references, and may be obtained from PPL, P.O. Box 11130, Burke, VA 22009.
10. "An Orthodox Word on Abortion" by Fr. Alexander F. C. Webster, an unpublished paper given at the Consultation on the Church and Abortion held at Princeton Theological Seminary February 28-29, 1992. Michael J. Gorman points out that the early Christians separated their views on contraception from their views on abortion: "Early Christian opposition to abortion, then, did not arise because abortion was seen as a means of interrupting the natural course of sexual relations but because it was viewed as murder." For treatment of the distinction, see his chapter "Abortion and the Early Church: The Wider Context," in *Abortion and the Early Church* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1982), p. 75ff.
11. *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* by Michael J. Gorman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1982) p. 33-34.
12. Quoted in *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* by Michael J. Gorman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1982) p. 37.
13. Quoted in *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* by Michael J. Gorman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1982), p. 49.
14. Clement, in *The Tutor (Paedagogus)*, quoted in *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* by Michael J. Gorman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1982) p. 52-53. Mother Teresa repeated the same conviction regarding the spiritual state of those who commit abortion when she said, "Abortion kills two: the child and the conscience of the mother."
15. Tertullian summarized the Christian ethic, and equated abortion with infanticide and every other unjust killing:
In our case, murder being once for all forbidden, we may not destroy even the foetus in the womb, while as yet the human being derives blood from other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to the birth.
 Quoted in *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* by Michael J. Gorman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1982) p. 55-56.
16. Chrysostom spoke out against transforming the womb into "a chamber for murder." Gorman, p. 72.
17. *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, compiled by Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), vol. 2, No. 2826, p. 905.
18. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), pp. 41-42.
19. In his book titled *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:
Marriage involves acknowledgment of the right of life that is to come into being, a right which is not subject to the disposal of the married couple. Unless this right is acknowledged as a matter of principle, marriage ceases to be marriage and becomes a mere liaison.... Destruction of the embryo in the mother's womb is a violation of the right to live which God has bestowed upon this nascent life.
 (New York, NY: Macmillan; 1955) pp. 176-177.
20. From a report entitled, "Responsible Marriage and Parenthood," adopted by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, 1962 and reaffirmed in 1965. A clear distinction was drawn between contraception and abortion. The report went on to say that "...as Christians, we believe that this should not be an individual decision on the part of the physician and couple. Their decision should be limited and restrained by the larger society."
21. In *Idols for Destruction* by Herbert Schlossberg (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson; 1983) p. 80.

22. The supplementary session for session three includes an essay by Peter Singer in which he makes the statement:

If we compare a severely defective human infant with a nonhuman animal, a dog or a pig, for example, we will often find the nonhuman to have superior capacities, both actual and potential, for rationality, self-consciousness, communication, and anything else that can plausibly be considered morally significant. Only the fact that the defective infant is a member of the species homo sapiens leads it to be treated differently from the dog or pig.

Singer's essay in *Pediatrics*, July 1983, was an explicit attack on the "sanctity of life" ethic which he called the "religious mumbo-jumbo" of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

23. From "Abortion: Christian Doctrine and Public Policy," by Richard John Neuhaus, *The Forum Letter*, Sept. 21, 1988, vol. 17, no. 8 (The American Lutheran Bureau, New York). Neuhaus says,

It is enough that they are members of the human community and God's children in need. If we do not care about every human life, it is doubtful that we really care about any human life. In biblical language, of course, the question is: Who is my neighbor? If by some measure we can exclude the unborn as neighbor, can we not by the same or similar measure exclude, for example, the emaciated victims of Ethiopian famine or the 'vegetables' in our state hospitals?

24. Matt. 25:31-46.

25. Mark 10: 43-45.

26. 1 Cor. 15:26.

Questions for reflection and discussion

Question 1

When the term "the unborn" is mentioned, what is your immediate reaction? How do you react to the word, "foetus"? Is there a difference in your reaction to the two words? Why?

Question 2

Dr. Hellams says in the video: "Human life begins from a single cell, called the zygote.... At this moment of fertilization, human life begins."

A. Do you agree? Why or why not?

B. If you disagree that a human life begins at conception, when would you say it begins? What is the basis for your belief? What evidence from the science of biology or from the field of medicine or related fields would you give for picking that point? What biblical evidence would you give for picking the point at which you believe a human life begins?

Question 3

"Not one [textbook] states that human life begins at birth, the third trimester, viability, the eighth week, or ovulation," Dr. Roeser reported in the video, and continues:

"Not a single text states that when a human life begins is unknown, is disputed, or is even uncertain."

Was this statement a surprise to you? Why or why not?

Question 4

"Science can tell us whether or not an embryo is human," the narrator said, "but only the Scriptures can reveal to us the significance of those tiny human beings and our obligations to them."

A. Do you agree? Why or why not?

B. How would you express the significance of the human embryo using the Scripture as your point of reference?

Question 5

Read Psalm 139:1-24 aloud. Then reread verses 13-18.

(vs. 1-12) O LORD, thou hast searched me and known me! Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; thou discernest my thoughts from afar. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou dost beset me behind and before, and layest thy hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to thee, the night is bright as the day; for darkness is as light with thee.

(vs 13-18) For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works! Thou knowest me right well; my frame was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. When I awake, I am still with thee.

(vs 19-24) O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God, and that men of blood would depart from me, men who maliciously defy thee, who lift themselves up against thee for evil! Do I not hate them that hate thee, O LORD? And do I not loathe them that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

A. What phrases reveal that the Scripture views the unborn child in terms of creation (God himself fashions each child in the womb)?

B. What phrases reveal that the Scripture views the unborn child in terms of continuity (a human being is the same person before birth and after)?

C. What phrases reveal that the Scripture views the unborn child in terms of covenant (the unborn child is created in God's image for a relationship with God)?

Question 6

Were you surprised to learn that the Church has spoken with one voice, until very recently, concerning the humanity of the unborn and against the practice of abortion? Why might this be a surprise to modern churchgoers?

Question 7

"In his commentary on Exodus," the narrator said, "John Calvin specifically condemned abortion. He regarded killing an unborn child as worse even than killing a child already born." Calvin's comment is made in relation to case law elaboration on the commandments where various circumstances are cited, among which are several in which premeditated or accidental killings might occur. The case in reference is Exodus 21:22-24, where an accidental blow results in premature delivery by a pregnant woman. Calvin comments on the possibility that the blow results in the death of the child. He says, "If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man's house is his most secure place of refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy the unborn in the womb before it has come to light."

Are you surprised by Calvin's statement? Why or why not?

Question 8

A. As you have listened to arguments supporting the right to abortion, what is the worldview or worldviews on which the arguments have been based?

B. What biblical texts have you heard used in defense of abortion? How would you assess the use of those texts using the principles of biblical interpretation from session 2?

Question 9

How would you reply to Dr. Watson's suggestion that only infants over three days old be considered "human" in

Session Five But What About....?

An Outline of Session #5

What are the assumptions behind these statements?

order to give parents time to determine whether the child should be allowed to live? What reasons would you give for your position?

Question 10

"Death is not Scripture's means of care for needy neighbors," the narrator said. The conclusion drawn by this session is that death as a mercy is an illusion, both for the person who is killed and for those responsible for the deaths of others.

Do you agree? Why or why not?

Further reading if you want to dig deeper

Bioethics and the Future of Medicine: A Christian Appraisal, ed. John F. Kilner, Nigel M. De S. Cameron, and David Schiedermayer (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Publishing House, 1995).

Bioethics: A Primer for Christians, by Gilbert Meilaender (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996).

Dignity and Dying: A Christian Appraisal, edited by John F. Kilner, Arlene B. Miller, and Edmund D. Pellegrino (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996).

Not My Own: Abortion and the Marks of the Church, by Terry Schlossberg and Elizabeth Achtemeier (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1995).

Life and Death Decisions: Help in Making Tough Choices about Infertility, Abortion, Birth Defects, and AIDS, by Robert Orr, David Biebel, and David Schiedermayer, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books & Bristol TN, Christian Medical and Dental Society, 1990, 1996).

The PCUSA medical benefits plan covers abortion for any reason at any time during pregnancy. The plan is mandatory for all clergy installed as pastors of our churches. Church members pay the dues of the plan with their tithes and offerings. For information on the Relief of Conscience provision that sessions may request, contact PPL at (703)272-3489 or at ppl@ppl.org

What perspective does biblical truth bring to addressing each concern?

A. "It's my body.... I don't think I would ever choose abortion for myself, but I wouldn't presume to tell another woman what to do. That's her decision."

B. "I don't know anybody who thinks abortion is a good thing. But there are circumstances where abortion is the

necessary lesser of evils in an imperfect world...back alleys...poor quality of life...burden on society...babies having babies...merciful, if serious handicaps.”

C. “If we don’t pay attention to overpopulation in our own country, we too will leave a legacy of suffering for our children and their children.”

D. “But what about when the woman is raped, or when the pregnancy is the result of incest? Since the woman did not get pregnant willingly, she should not have to pay for another’s crime, or shoulder the burden of a child she does not want.”

E. “But sometimes abortion is the only way to save the life of the mother.”

Introduction and review

In this series we have talked about what a challenge it can be to see the world around us from a truly biblical perspective, and how easy it is to go along with the assumptions of the society in which we live. It’s especially easy if we haven’t thought through an issue completely, or if the assumptions of the society are largely unstated; therefore difficult to measure against biblical teaching.

We have tried to show that all these difficulties come to bear on issues of life and death, and abortion in particular. It is our objective in this series to help Christians think through the matter of abortion by applying Christian faith to the issue of life.

In this session we are going to respond directly to some of the reasons people give in support of abortion. The people you will see are actors. Their statements do not represent every argument in support of abortion. However, most discussions of abortion include one or more statements, which are drawn directly from viewpoints expressed by people in the church. We’ll hear some brief statements and then examine them with the biblical understandings we have already explored in this series.

Argument #1: An argument of individual rights. “It’s my body.”

After all, it is my body. Nobody has a right to make decisions for me. It’s my own decision and my own responsibility. I don’t think I would ever choose abortion for myself, but I wouldn’t presume to tell another woman what to do. That’s her decision. Nobody knows the particular circumstances a woman is facing except the woman herself.

What are the unspoken assumptions being made by that speaker? It’s the woman’s own body. There should be no restraint on her decision. The decision is hers alone to make. Circumstances determine the best decision.

How do those assumptions compare with the convictions of Christian faith? Let’s look at some of these

assumptions, beginning with the belief that she is alone in this dilemma, and the decision is hers alone to make.

This is the voice of individual autonomy and it is a lonely voice. Against the despair that underlies it, Christian faith proclaims the good news that God, who created us in his image, made us to live in relationship with him and with one another. These relationships are intended to have real significance for our living.

Every debate about abortion must include the relationship to our Creator or the discussion is not dealing with reality. Psalm 139 tells us that there is nowhere we can go to escape from God’s presence; He is there in every possible circumstance of our lives. In the New Testament with Jesus’ words, “I am with you always,” the promise of God’s unending presence with us is made more explicit. In addition, as the sons and daughters of God we are valued members of a beloved family. He calls us to love one another and gives us the Holy Spirit so we can be empowered to care for all his children. There is the clear obligation in the Scripture to care for each other.

Therefore, no woman should have to look at the circumstances and become despondent because she is left alone to deal with the harsh realities of life. She should be surrounded by disciples of Christ who will support and help her in making godly decisions.

The numerous “pregnancy care” ministries demonstrate the desire and willingness of Christians to provide this tangible help and support. What about the assumption that “It’s my body?” This false premise fails to acknowledge that there are two bodies involved—the mother’s and the child’s.

From a biological standpoint it is obvious that two separate individuals are present. The child is not a part of the mother. He or she is a genetically distinct individual often with a different blood type and gender from the mother. A woman’s decision to abort affects her own body and it also affects the child’s body, ending the child’s life.

Besides the biological inaccuracy, this claim of radical autonomy is very different from a Christian stewardship understanding of our bodies in which we acknowledge that our bodies and all that we are belong not to ourselves but to God. We have a responsibility to care for, nourish, provide for, and preserve our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. As Christians we are responsible to God for our actions, for what we do to and with our bodies. Radical autonomy is a declaration that says I am ruler of myself. In contrast, Scripture tells us, “You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”¹ Part of what it means to be purchased by Christ’s blood is that Christ’s decision about his body was to act in obedience to God and lay his own body down for us. Jesus also said, “This is my body.”² But the end of his sentence had to do with God’s will and not his own; “This is my body, broken for you.”

Christian faith proclaims we are not our own and we are not alone.

**Argument #2: Arguments of compassion.
“Nobody likes abortion, but....”**

Listen, I don't know anybody who thinks abortion is a good thing. But there are circumstances where abortion is the necessary lesser of evils in an imperfect world, and I wouldn't want to see women have to return to the back alleys and have illegal and unsafe abortions.

Unwanted children lead miserable lives. They are a burden to their families and to the whole society. Those that want children can have them, but those who are saddled with unwanted pregnancies should be allowed to terminate them. Most of those children have poor prospects for a good quality of life. If they are unwanted before they are born, they are likely to be abused and neglected after they are born. The society should not have to carry the burden of other people's unwanted babies.

There are too many babies having babies. The teenage pregnancy problem is out of hand. Pregnancy destroys the future of these young women; they are too young to be mothers. The babies end up with no fathers, and both young girls' and their babies' prospects for the future are dim. It is unfair to expect grandparents or other family members to raise these babies, and they overwhelm the foster care systems of our country.

Abortion is never a good thing, but in the case where a baby has no chance to live or is destined to be handicapped all his or her life, it is merciful for the baby and the parents to let the life come to an end before it is born. If we care for the unborn, we must care about the quality of their lives, and the cost of dealing with the medical problems that they create.

A variety of assumptions were included in those vignettes. What were some of the most important? Abortion is the lesser of two evils. Some children are unwanted. Unwanted children will be abused. Abortion is better than teenagers giving birth. Some children should not be born.

The statement that abortion is the lesser of two evils is based on the assumption that something about abortion makes it undesirable: the first woman made what she believes is a universal assessment of abortion: Nobody she knows thinks it is a good thing. But what she pairs with this dislike for abortion is the belief that it is sometimes the less evil decision.

What about abortion makes it something that nobody considers a good thing? It is, of course, that uneasiness that, in spite of all the denials and rationalizations, the unspoken reality is the deliberate death of a human being. It's that reality that necessitates the belief that abortion is the lesser of two evils. And the greater evil usually is some condition of a fallen world. In some cases it will be the perceived tragedy of a child who seems destined to abject

poverty or abuse. In other cases it will be the prospect of a lifetime of responsibility for a child born with a deformity, illness, or other handicapping condition.

If some people fear that children will be unwanted, by whom are they unwanted? And is abuse a result of the lack of availability of abortion? Is it better for unmarried teenagers to have abortions rather than to give birth? Arguments related to unwanted children and to teenage pregnancies have a lot in common. One implies children who are not wanted by their parents. The other further implies children who may not be wanted by the parents of the mother or by the baby's biological father or his parents. Babies of unwed teenagers may be seen as unwanted because of the burden they place on the society.

Situations of abuse and neglect have been shown to be related more to lack of a stable two-parent home than to any other single factor. Abortion has been a complete failure as a solution to child abuse. There are no reliable predictors to show which children will be abused after they are born; however, the incidence of child abuse has soared since the legalization of abortion.

All families need loving communities with strong moral codes such as the church. Families with a history of abuse may need the intervention of police and courts as well. Abortion is not an intervention of compassion. It has no deterring effect on abuse. Abortion is not a solution to child abuse.

We are increasingly able to see that neither abortion nor contraception is a solution for unwed teen sexual activity. Neither is a biblical solution, and they have not been effective as a societal solution either.

Dealing with the guilt of abortion only further complicates the struggles a young woman already faces. Real help is provided when the teenager can be helped to commit herself to making choices that honor God in all aspects of her life, either by marrying and providing a stable home life for her child or by planning for her unborn child's adoption.

The term “unwanted” raises the question, “unwanted by whom?” Even in circumstances in which the biological mother cannot or does not want to raise the child, there are hundreds of thousands of childless couples eager to welcome children into their homes through adoption where the children would become very much wanted and loved members of families. Adoption provides a young woman with a godly option that offers care and Christian nurture in a two-parent family for her baby.

What about those cases in which prenatal tests show the child will have a serious medical problem? Shouldn't we use abortion to prevent suffering for that child and his family? The idea that abortion is a lesser evil than giving birth to a severely handicapped child is a quality of life argument. This view of the world encourages us to make judgments and develop criteria for a good quality of life,

and then decide that it is an act of compassion to terminate the lives of those who do not measure up to the criteria.

Generally, when this sort of decision is made, it is not the cold, calculating argument of a James Watson who wants to wait three days after birth to call a baby human. It isn't the argument of a Peter Singer who regards some animals more human than some human beings. It is rather some tragic reality that tempts us to want relief from an overwhelming fear that we cannot handle the needs or demands of a particular situation. And death seems to be a compassionate option.

Biblical teaching may surprise us by its resistance to reduce the burdens we carry in this life. We learn that God is committed to carrying our burdens with us. Jesus gave direct instruction to those who want to be his disciples to take up their own crosses and follow him. "Bear one another's burdens,"³ we are told, further expanding our understanding of how we are to deal with difficulties and suffering. Suffering is not the goal of the Christian life. But it is the reality of earthly life in a fallen world.

Opening his little book on *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis quotes George Macdonald: "The Son of God suffered unto the death, not that men might not suffer, but that their sufferings might be like his."⁴

Can Christians welcome seriously ill or genetically flawed children into their lives and their homes? They can, and they can teach the whole world how it is done, if the church will stand with them and support them. Such circumstances can place tremendous stresses on marriage and family relationships, and these words about the ministry of the church are not spoken lightly. Faithfulness to God may require sacrificial involvement in encouraging and providing practical help for those families which face a level of challenge most of us will never know. But God is trustworthy and God is good. His commands are for our own welfare and the welfare of our children. Our response as his children is to obey him and rely on him and the community of the church he has placed around us for spiritual strength and practical help.

Baptism is the Christian sacrament that affirms and promises that every child is wanted. The sacrament is a sign of God's claim on that child and calls us to vow that we will share in raising each child up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Baptism contradicts the belief inherent in abortion that some lives don't matter or should not be born. Baptism is God's affirmation of the value he places on each life and baptism includes the Christian community's vow to support children and their families.

Argument #3: "Too many people"

I've seen too much suffering in the world. Children in overpopulated countries are dying in squalor because the resources just simply are not adequate to sustain the high birth rate. We have to support measures that will reduce the populations where people are suffering, and if we

don't pay attention to overpopulation in our own country, we too will leave a legacy of suffering for our children and their children.

What are the hidden assumptions here? There are too many people. People live in poverty and starvation because of overpopulation. Eliminating excess people is the solution to conditions of poverty, starvation, and suffering.

First, the assumption that large populations in themselves are the cause of serious problems is highly questionable, and there is inadequate evidence to support those conclusions. This argument for abortion bypasses the question of the humanity of the unborn. If the unborn are human beings, population figures become a rationalization for killing human beings in order to solve problems of poverty or disease or other perceived problems.

One author has pointed out that underlying this argument is a fundamental confusion over "finding a solution" and "eliminating a problem."⁵ In fact, that confusion runs as a thread through many of the arguments for abortion. This is exactly the place where the Christian Church historically has answered the argument with a counterculture of beliefs and actions. The Church has transformed cultures by refusing to meet problems of disease, poverty, and oppression by killing, or supporting the killing of, those who suffer.

The Church focuses on loving care and Jesus' teaching that what we do to the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to Jesus himself. At the same time, those motivated by Christian faith historically have been in the forefront of finding solutions in medicine, in social services, in economics, in government, and in other areas. Efforts to "find solutions" motivated by the ethic of Christian faith, leads to benefits for whole societies.

Argument #4: "In cases of rape or incest"

But what about when the woman is raped or when the pregnancy is the result of incest? Surely abortion is justified in these cases. Rape and incest are examples of pregnancies not intended by God. Since the woman did not get pregnant willingly, she should not have to pay for another's crime or shoulder the burden of a child she does not want.

It is not difficult to understand why people feel this way about rape and incest. The women abused are victims of heinous crimes. Incest may even be worse than rape, because it is such a terrible violation of trust within a family, and sometimes persists for years.

Nonetheless, there is the unspoken assumption at work here that aborting the baby somehow will help bring justice to the situation. The trauma and destructiveness of these crimes of violence must not be ignored—they produce deep and long-lasting scars: physically, emotionally and spiritually. The church ought to be

compassionate, understanding, and ready to offer both emergency and long term spiritual and tangible help in these cases.

While only a small percentage—fewer than 5%—of forcible rapes end in pregnancy, such pregnancies nonetheless do occur. The usual assumption of our culture is that every child conceived by rape should be aborted, and often such procedures are initiated almost automatically.

But many women, when given the choice, choose to bear their children. Some express the conviction that the rape was an act of violence perpetrated against them, but in an abortion they would be the perpetrators of violence against the unborn child, an innocent party.⁶

The crimes of rape and incest are not solved by abortion, nor is justice achieved when the life of the child is ended. The crime does not change the reality that a human being, a person made in God's image, has been conceived.

Christians must be willing to intervene with the offer of counsel, support and tangible help if there is to be any hope of healing and the preservation of a child's life. These too are instances where adoption may be an option that offers women a way to provide lifelong loving care for their babies in stable two parent homes.

The Heidelberg Catechism expresses the church's message of God's faithfulness in every kind of adversity. "I trust (God) so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul, and he will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me in this sad world. He is able to do this because he is almighty God; he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father."⁷ These statements echo the Scripture that "...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."⁸

Armed with confidence in God, the family of God can be his instrument to restore hope to the victims of rape and incest with love and support. The children of those pregnancies can be welcomed with warmth and acceptance by the Body of Christ that seeks God's help and glory in adversity rather than resistance to adversity.

It will take more than pious words, but with the power of God's Spirit the church can become what Christ meant it to be, a place of healing and a family for those who are most in need.

Argument #5; "When the mother's life is threatened"

But sometimes abortion is the only way to save the life of the mother.

Here, a woman is facing a dire medical situation. The pregnancy introduces a complicating factor, and the

unspoken assumption is that abortion is the only way to eliminate the complication.

A reformed understanding of what the Scripture teaches is that there are limited circumstances in which the killing of another human being may be allowed or is necessary. The Westminster Catechism limits those circumstances to public justice, lawful war, and necessary defense.

"Necessary defense" means killing because there is no other way to ward off a life-threatening attack. Applied to pregnancy, these would be circumstances in which both mother and baby will die if nothing is done and the intent of the intervention therefore is to preserve life. On this basis, pregnancies have been ended, even before the Supreme Court decision that liberalized abortion.

As medical science advances, these occasions become increasingly rare. The fact that they occur at all is a reminder that the church needs to care about the physical as well as the spiritual needs of its members. Still, the aim in such cases is to do no harm and to preserve life.

Preserving the life of the mother may require termination of the pregnancy, but very often that can mean an early delivery of a live baby with a good chance for survival. With continuing medical advances, an increasing number of options are available that enable both lives to be preserved. The death of the baby need not ever be the objective in any of these situations—the objective is to preserve both lives.

Whenever a life is lost, the church is called upon to affirm the value of each life, to surround the family with its love and tangible support, and to pray for comfort from our merciful Father in the lives of the bereaved. Arguments for abortion are much more an expression of hopelessness than they are an affirmation of women's rights, and they entirely misperceive Christian compassion.

Far from aiding a woman's well being, abortion expresses despondency about situations that seem to overwhelm people's lives. Christian faith stands in utter contrast to that view of the world. Christian faith affirms a good God with good purposes—even when they may be completely hidden from our understanding. It holds that affirmation high even in the midst of the greatest of adversities. Trusting God has never been for good times only—it has always been a way of overcoming. Historically, those who trust God marched boldly into conditions of squalor, or abuse, or life-threatening situations and delivered a saving ministry of real help to individuals and even changed conditions of whole societies. The visible adverse conditions that lead to abortion decisions are not the final reality of a world where God is sovereign. The Bible proclaims, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith!"⁹

In our next and final session, we will hear the testimonies of women who have made decisions that illustrate this victory of faith.

Endnotes

1. 1 Cor. 6:19,20.
2. 1 Corinthians 11:24
3. Galatians 6:2. *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*
4. Frontispiece, quoted in C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, (Macmillian Publishing, New York, 1962).
5. Frances Beckwith, *Politically Correct Death: Answering Arguments for Abortion Rights* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), p. 62.
6. *Not My Own* p. 78.
7. Question #28.
8. Romans 8: 28.
9. 1 John 5:4.

Questions for reflection and discussion

There is a lot of material for discussion in this session. You may wish to divide it into two and delve more fully into the worldviews reflected in statements both pro and con on abortion.

Question 1

Why is it sometimes easier for Christians to adopt, perhaps inadvertently, the values and assumptions of the surrounding secular society rather than develop a distinctly biblical world and life view?

Question 2

Have you heard the argument "It's my body" argument for abortion before? In what context and form?

Question 3

Autonomous individualism is a stance many Americans are proud of, believing it guarantees personal freedom and reflects the rugged self-determination that made our country great.

A. Why might they fear the vision of community and interconnectedness the Bible presents as normative for the people of God?

B. To what extent have you experienced a loving, supportive, accountable relationship with other believers? What were its benefits? What were its problems?

Question 4

Reflect on Jesus' statement, "This is my body, given for you" in relationship to the pro-abortion declaration, "It's my body, and I make my own decisions about it."

What are the similarities? The differences? Is there any way in which the two can be reconciled? Why or why not?

Question 5

A. Have you ever met anyone who has argued that abortion, in itself, is a positive good, and not merely a necessary evil?

B. Are there ever times, in a biblical view of things, when a Christian must be willing to accept a "necessary evil" or the "lesser of two evils?" Why or why not? If yes, why could abortion not be one of those admittedly unfortunate, yet necessary, times?

Question 6

Have you ever met and known an "unwanted" child who would have been better off dead? Have you ever met anyone who has known such a child? Why is it this category of child, apparently so numerous in society, is only known as a "class" and never as actual individuals?

Question 7

A. What definitions of "quality of life" are proposed as minimum criteria to determine whether a child should be allowed to live? Considering each with care, why are these inadequate in the biblical worldview?

B. What is the danger that, once adopted, a "quality of life" notion about "life not worthy to be lived" is simply the beginning of a slippery slope into totalitarianism?

Question 8

Were you surprised to learn that abortion does not solve the problem of child abuse, and that, in fact, the incidence of abuse has risen rather than declined since abortion has been made readily available? Why do you think that is?

Question 9

Is it valid to refer to a child as "unwanted" as long as there are families willing to adopt it into their families? Why or why not?

Question 10

"The biblical teaching," the narrator said, "surprises us by its resistance to reducing the burdens we carry in this life."

A. Is that, in fact, surprising to you? Why or why not?

B. Though the Scriptures clearly call Christians to embrace suffering following Christ's example, it does not endorse foolishly wallowing in unnecessary pain. How do we distinguish between the two?

Question 11

Define the two biblical phrases: "take up your cross and follow me" and "bear one another's burdens." What might these be or look like in practice?

Question 12

Have you ever known anyone who suffered greatly but who showed not only great perseverance in the midst of the suffering, but great growth in godliness as a result of it?

Question 13

"I've been a pastor for 35 years," Presbyterian minister Eugene Peterson writes, "and I don't trust people one inch in defining what they need. We don't know ourselves. We

need God to tell us what we need.... I know this is a mixed-up, difficult, damaged generation. But it's arguable that the main difference today is *not* how much people are hurting, but how much they expect to be relieved from their hurting. The previous century suffered just as much—in fact, probably much more. Just think of all the illness, death in childbirth, infant mortality, plagues. The big difference today is that we have this mentality that if it's wrong, you can fix it. You don't have to live with any discomfort or frustration." [Source: "The Subversive Shepherd: Eugene Peterson Calls Pastors to Return to the Hard Work of Making Saints" in *Christianity Today* (July 14, 1997) p. 48.]

How do you respond to Rev. Peterson's statement? Why?

Question 14

Some people assert that Christians who do not adopt seriously ill or genetically flawed children are hypocritical in raising this as a valid alternative to abortion.

Do you agree? Why or why not?

Question 15

"Baptism is the Christian sacrament that affirms and promises that every child is wanted."

A. Is this how you have normally understood the sacrament of baptism? Why or why not?

B. Is this equally valid for Christians who reject infant baptism for adult "believer's baptism"? Why or why not?

Question 16

Here is one woman's experience with pregnancy as the result of violent rape. She was attacked in a dark parking lot on a wintry night. Every one of her close counselors—doctor, co-workers, and family members—urged abortion. These are the actual words of the woman who had this experience.

My sister chided me for "not getting rid of the problem;" my own mother actually told me I was out

*of my mind to have this baby. "If you **really** were raped, why don't you just have an abortion?" she asked. Her insinuation wounded me deeply.*

This woman's decision was based partly on the trauma of an earlier abortion. But, more importantly, her husband supported her decision to accept the baby as a member of their family.

*My worst fear during the whole ordeal was that my husband would not be able to accept and love her. Nothing could be further from the truth. He's crazy about her! As soon as he gets home from work, he scoops up Hannah in his arms.... I'm not glad I was raped—not for a minute. But I am glad that we have this precious new life in our family. People ask me how I could bear to keep my rapist's baby. I tell them that I don't see her as **his** baby. She's **my** baby. God has a plan for her, In spite of how her life began. He has a special reason for this child.... Through this whole experience, I've learned that God can bring good out of the most terrible situations—even something as terrible as rape.¹*

A. How do you respond to this testimony? Why?

B. How would you respond to someone who says this may be okay for this particular woman and child, but shouldn't be extrapolated beyond this situation?

Endnotes

1. This testimony was published in *ALL About Issues*, published by the American Life League (July-August, 1993) and retold in *Not My Own*, pp 81-82.

Further reading if you want to go deeper

Politically Correct Death: Answering Arguments for Abortion Rights by Francis J. Beckwith (Baker; 1993).

Study of the Heidelberg Catechism

Study 4: Questions 20-23: The Nature of True Faith

By Rev. Stephen Eyre, College Hill Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati, OH

The Reformation gained its direction and energy by means of Luther's clear grasp and proclamation of "justification by faith." The Reformers, with Luther, rediscovered from the Scriptures that the salvation they longed for came, not by means of good works and efforts to become holy, but as a gracious gift of God, given to those who exercised faith in Christ's redeeming work on the cross.

Augustine, one of the great teachers of the church in the 5th Century struggled for years before he became a Christian. His mother Monica prayed for years that he would come to faith. Augustine thought long and hard about God and what trusting him required. One day meditating in a garden he heard a child's voice say over and over "Take up and read." Opening up a Bible Augustine rediscovered the text that contained the phrase, "The just shall live by faith." Something happened inside him and that which had seemed previously unbelievable now made sense. He was grasped by an inner conviction that transformed his heart and life.

Faith is central to Christianity and has a definite meaning and a very special role. The Heidelberg Catechism explores the meaning of faith in questions 20-23.

Question 20: “Will all, then, be saved through Christ as they became lost through Adam?”

The answer: “No, only those, who by true faith, are incorporated into him and accept all his benefits.”

Question 21: “What is true faith?”

The answer: “Not only a certain knowledge by which I accept as true all that God has revealed in his word, but a wholehearted trust which the Holy Spirit creates in me through the gospel, that not only to others, but to me also God has given forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, out of sheer grace solely for the sake of Christ’s saving work.”

The Heidelberg Catechism is articulating a “true faith.” True faith is more than a feeling or a perspective. True faith is more than a positive mental attitude. True faith is more than a predisposition to be optimistic. True faith is more than a general belief in God. True faith, has content: the Scriptures. True faith has power: to incorporate us in to Christ and all he benefits; to assure us of God’s grace; to connect us to God’s love, and to confirm that what we believe is true.

These questions and answers, like so many others in the Heidelberg, warm my heart even as they shape my thinking. In reading them I grasp afresh the power of faith with heartfelt insight. The Christian faith is not only a universal faith, it is a personal faith. Faith takes what is true and makes it true for me. Faith takes what is true outside of me and by means of the Holy Spirit brings that truth inside of me.

By means of Questions 20 and 21, the Heidelberg Catechism prepares us for an extended reflection on the content of true faith as expressed in the Apostles’ Creed.

Question 23: “What then must Christians believe?”

The answer: “All that is promised in the gospel, a summary of which is taught us in the articles of the Apostles’ Creed, our universally acknowledged confession of faith.”

The next forty one questions will then explore the content of faith as expressed in Apostles’ Creed.

As a boy I used to yawn when my church weekly recited the Apostles’ Creed—boring. Now I have a different attitude. I miss it. In churches that I both attend and serve, the Apostles’ Creed is recited only occasionally. I find myself, however, using it (and the Nicene Creed) as regular part of my personal worship in my quiet times.

I wonder, is it possible that one of the reasons for the loss of the power of faith for so many in the church is because we are not regularly reminded of its content? In the face of our secular pluralistic culture, it becomes imperative

that we reach back both to the Reformation and to the Post-Apostolic Church for the power of faith and its content. The Heidelberg Catechism is a great tool to help us do both.

Study Questions

1. Genesis 15 is one of the seminal Scripture passages on faith. Read Genesis 15:1-6. Describe the interaction between God and Abraham.
2. Abraham wants a son and gets a deeper relationship with God. What challenges to trusting God have you experienced and how has it affected you?
3. Romans 4 is another significant Scripture passage concerning faith. What does Paul have to say about the faith of Abraham in verses 13-25?
4. How does he apply his understanding of the faith of Abraham to faith in Jesus Christ, verses 23-25?
5. How would you define “true faith” from Questions 20-23 of the Heidelberg Catechism?
6. What is the knowledge that true faith requires?
7. What is the personal engagement that true faith requires?
8. What are the personal benefits that true faith brings?
9. Is there a point or time in your life when you moved from “faith” to “true faith?” What happened to bring about the change?
10. How would you explain true faith to a friend?
11. What benefits do you think come from regularly reciting the Apostles’ Creed?

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The Rev. Dr. Kari McClellan is President of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry (PFFM). Rev. Susan Cyre is Executive Director and Editor of *Theology Matters*. The Board of Directors of PFFM includes 12 people, clergy and lay, women and men. PFFM is working to restore the strength and integrity of the PC(USA)'s witness to Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior, by helping Presbyterians develop a consistent Reformed Christian world view. *Theology Matters* is sent free to anyone who requests it.

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