



What About . . .

Abortion

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Abortion is one of the most significant moral issues of our day. Emotions run very deep when it comes to this issue. It is tempting to consider this issue from the perspective of our culture's standards. Christians want to be informed about abortion based on the Word of God.

What does God's Word say about abortion?

God's Fifth Commandment is clear, "You shall not murder." This means, in the words of the Small Catechism, that "we should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need." God forbids us to take the life of another person, and this most certainly includes abortion.

God's Word also says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart" (Jer. 1:5). Psalm 139:16 says, "Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be."

Our church's explanation of the Small Catechism puts the matter well when it says, "The living but unborn are persons in the sight of God from the time of conception. Since abortion takes a human life, it is not a moral option except to prevent the death of another person, the mother." The sin of willfully aborting a child, except in those very rare situations where it may be necessary to save the life of the mother, is a sinful act, totally contrary to the will of God.

If abortion is legal in the United States, how can the church oppose it?

Just because something happens to be legal does not make it moral, ethical or right. Abortion is perhaps one of the most dramatic examples of a situation where something is legal, but is very much a sin against God. Since 1973, abortions have been legal in the United States. Abortion remains a sin against God, whether or not it is legal in our society; therefore, we must "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The church needs to inform its members that abortion is sinful and then encourage them, as Christian citizens, to use available legal means to change the law. Christians do not resort to illegal activities to change our nation's laws.

Why is the church involving itself in a personal decision?

A personal decision is not necessarily a private decision. The church, and the church's ministers, have God-given responsibilities to warn, exhort and rebuke from the Word of God with all authority (2 Tim. 4:2). The church is very concerned when Christians make decisions that are contrary to the Word of God and thus place themselves outside the will of God. Living in a state of unrepentant sin is a very serious situation. Thus, the church must warn its members against the temptation of abortion. The church also must minister to those who have had abortions. Furthermore, the church needs to speak out against the sin of abortion, since it is widely presented in our culture as perfectly acceptable.

Has the Christian church always been opposed to abortion?

Abortion was a common practice in the ancient Roman empire. The very fact that the Son of God was conceived in the womb of Mary was a powerful reason for Christians to hold a high view of all human life. The unborn Christ was not merely a blob of cells, but was in fact the very Son of God, who had assumed a human nature in order to save and redeem human beings from their sin. Early Christian writers make it clear that abortion was abhorrent to the first Christians. The early Christians understood their views on marriage, women and family to be unique. One church father said it quite plainly, "The hair-splitting difference between formed and unformed makes no difference to us. Whoever deliberately commits abortion is subject to the penalty for homicide." From its earliest days, the Christian church has been opposed to abortion, regarding it as infanticide and homicide.

Why do some churches take a weak position on abortion?

Abortion is an emotional issue and one that is very upsetting to many people. It is easier for a church to take a weak position and not speak out clearly against abortion. However, a church body that wishes to be and remain faithful to the Holy Scriptures cannot remain silent but must clearly indicate that willful abortions are sinful. Many mainline, liberal denominations, which tolerate doubt and indifference in their churches about many teachings of the Bible, also tolerate and even defend abortion. It is often confusing to Missouri Synod

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Lutherans when they hear that some other Lutheran churches have not taken a strong stand against abortion. It is important for us to make clear that our church does not share the position of those church bodies that do not speak clearly against the sin of abortion.

Isn't abortion acceptable in the case of rape or incest?

While the emotional arguments for abortion in these situations might seem compelling, the fact of the matter is that it is wrong to take the life of one innocent victim (the unborn child), and further burden the life of the other victim of these horrible situations, the mother. It is indeed a strange logic that would have us kill an innocent unborn baby for the crime of his father.

What can we do for people considering abortion?

It is a sin for parents to counsel their children to have abortions. This is not an option for Christian parents. An unplanned pregnancy comes as a shock to all involved and abortion may be seen as a "quick and quiet" way to move past the problem, but it is not. It merely compounds an already sinful situation with another sinful choice.

A woman who is considering an abortion has the option to keep her child or to give it up for adoption. Adoption is a noble choice, for it allows a child who otherwise may not be well cared for to receive the love and attention he needs in a family that is able to care for him. Our pastors are aware of the various agencies that deal with adoptions.

How can the church minister to those who have had an abortion?

A woman who has had an abortion may feel at first that she is free of her "problem." Her partner, either a boyfriend or a husband, may also feel that he is "off the hook." It may be soon after, or perhaps not until years later, that they realize what they have actually done: destroyed the life of their unborn child. Perhaps this realization comes as they hear God's Word correctly explained on this point. The Law of God reveals their sin to them and they feel guilt and great sorrow, and they begin to wonder what can be done about it or if there is any hope at all.

The woman who has had an abortion needs to hear that for this sin too the blood of Jesus Christ was shed, and that there is in Him now full and free forgiveness. This assurance needs to be given over and over; namely, that in Christ Jesus, there is forgiveness—complete and total forgiveness. This is how the church best ministers to those who continue to feel the burden of the sin of abortion, by again and again pointing them to the cross of their Lord Jesus Christ and assuring them

of the full and free forgiveness He won for them there, for all sins, for each and every one.

It is important then that people who have repented of their sin continue to remain close to their Lord through regular and faithful church attendance where they will continue to hear the Gospel proclaimed and where they will receive the Lord's Supper regularly. Private confession and absolution with their pastor is another powerful means by which God gives His grace, pardon and peace to a person feeling guilty over the sin of abortion. The grace and love of God is stronger than any human weakness and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). This is truly good news and the good news that can and must be shared with those feeling guilty.

What resources are available?

There are many worthwhile resources available. Our church has a commission on the sanctity of life that has produced a number of helpful materials.

That They May Have Life is a useful summary of how Christians reflect and think about life issues. *Real and Abundant Life* is a broad theological overview of God's gift of life and the eternal life He offers to us in Christ our Lord. Both of these documents are available from Concordia Publishing House by calling 800-325-3040.

There is a video aimed directly at young people that helps them think about life issues. It is a movie titled, *Life: It's A Class Project*. You may obtain a copy of this video by calling Lutheran Visuals at 800-527-3211.

Lutherans For Life is an organization that also provides numerous resources to help Christians understand better a wide range of life issues. They may be contacted at their Web site: <http://www.lutheransforlife.org>.

You may write them at LUTHERANS FOR LIFE, 1229 South "G" Avenue, Building B / Suite 100, Nevada, IA 50201-2778 or call, toll-free, 888-364-LIFE.

— Dr. A. L. Barry
President
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod