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CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Lesson 23

Abortion: Biblically and Theologically Considered

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. It has been shown (cf. Lesson #23) that scientifically the evidence that life and personhood beginning at conception is very convincing. The secular world has only science and philosophy to determine when life and personhood begin, but Christians must look to God for their ultimate answer.
- B. Christians must turn to the Bible for their final authority as to when life and personhood begin and hope that philosophy and science will support the teaching of the Bible. If they do not, the Christian must obey God rather than men.
- C. The Bible does not speak out as clearly as we would like on the subject of abortion. In fact, the word “abortion” or any like concept is not used in the Bible at all. As Christians, however, we must build our convictions on Biblical principles and assumptions from scripture. We often must make decisions in cases where we do not have absolute certainty concerning the right course. Where absolute proof is not available, we must think about possibilities and probabilities. We must ask where the burden of proof lies. We must ask what assumptions we should make in arriving at a decision.
- D. In the case of abortion, the Bible is silent on the issue, but the assumptions are relatively clear. NOTE: The Bible is silent on abortion because abortion was not practiced by Old Testament or New Testament saints.

II. THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE BEGINNING OF LIFE AND PERSONHOOD

- A. Introduction. While it cannot be proven dogmatically from scripture when a person becomes a human being with full value, there are verses and principles that support the idea that it occurs at conception.
- B. The Image of God (Gen. 1:26-27).
 1. Man is indelibly stamped with the image of God. While animals and vegetables live (possess life), God sovereignly chose to make man in His image and after His likeness.
 2. The “image of God” is moral and spiritual, for God does not have a human body because He is Spirit (John 4:24). God is a personality with will, mind and feeling (volition, intellect and sensibility). Man was created in God’s image in that he was created with will, mind and feeling. While this image was and is badly marred and corrupted by the Fall, man never lost this image (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9; 1 Cor. 11:7).
 3. Every human being, deformed or healthy, bears the image of God. Man’s life is therefore sacred and endowed by his Creator with certain inalienable rights. One of these rights is the right to life.
 4. Man’s value is so great that those who take a man’s life in premeditated murder are

to have their own lives taken by death (Gen. 9:6).

5. We can assume that the image of God is stamped on a human being at the moment of conception. Science has proven that to a limited degree a fetus can think, feel and express will.
- C. Conception Begins Man (Gen. 4:1; 29:31; Ruth 4:13; Job 3:3; Gen. 25:21-24). The term “man” is not reserved just for those who have been born. Each individual man has a historical beginning as man at conception. The place to start talking about man, as does the Bible, is at conception, not birth.
- D. God Deals with Men Before Birth. Jeremiah declared that he was set apart to God and ordained a prophet before he came out of the womb (Jer. 1:4-5). Isaiah was called by God from the womb and was named by God while in the womb (Isa. 49:1). The Apostle Paul had the same sense of being known by God while in the womb (Gal. 1:15-16). These individuals were dealt with as persons before birth when they were in the fetal stage.
- E. God Values the Human Fetus (Psa. 139:13-18). This verse states that before the psalmist knew God, God knew him while he was being wondrously formed in the womb. The psalmist regards himself as having been a self even before he was conscious of himself. This psalm tells us that God watches as the fetus grows and makes a record of this growth. The Bible, then does place high value on the fetus because the fetus has God’s image stamped upon it. It is obvious that the psalmist did not think of his humanity and personhood as just tied to his birth. The events, therefore, leading up to birth are a kind of primal history of the self.

It is significant how Psa. 139 speaks about the origin of a human being. From the very start God is at work: “Thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother’s womb” (vs. 13). The least we can say is that from the moment of conception we have to do with a potential human being. If one wants to differentiate between the rights of a human being and of a potential human being, for a Christian the line of demarcation can be only very thin. (Eternity, “Fetal Life”)

- F. Christ Was a Person at Conception (Matt. 1:20,23; Luke 1:31; 2:5).
1. The birth of Christ is unique. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. This birth is unique because Christ somehow became fully man without sin even while remaining fully God.
 2. Jesus became fully man at conception or He would not have been truly human and if not truly human then He could not have been the Savior. The gift of life and personhood did not have to wait until He was born. Christ came into the world through a human fetus.
 3. If God had waited until the 21st Century to bring His only begotten Son into this world, that Son may well have been aborted.
- G. Miscellaneous Verses (Luke 1:13-15; 41-44; Job 3:11; 10:1, 18). These verses are all open to interpretation but many feel they prove the personhood of the fetus.
- H. Conclusion. The fetus of a human being has individuality, dignity and value before God. The fetus is either a full person or destined to be a full person. God did not create man because he is so valuable. Man is so valuable because God created him. The Biblical evidence favors the creation of man beginning at conception, not birth.

III. THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE BEGINNING OF LIFE AND PERSONHOOD

- A. Introduction. For theologians the real issue is when does the soul (life principle) enter the human fetus? Is it at birth? Is it at conception? Is it at the time of viability (when the fetus can live outside the womb)? There is no easy solution to this problem. The Bible offers no clear cut evidence when man receives a soul so this issue must be solved on Biblical principles and assumptions.
- B. Creationism. The proponents of this view suggest the soul is created by God by an immediate, sovereign act sometime between conception and birth. While there are various opinions on creationism, the general view is that the parents propagate the body only and the soul is given at the moment of birth. This view was held in church history by Jerome, Pelagius, Aquinas and the most notable recent Protestant theologian to hold this was Charles Hodge.
1. Support for Creationism
 - a. God is said to be the “Father of spirits” indicating that He is the creator of each individual soul (Heb. 12:9).
 - b. Man is made up of two parts - material and immaterial (body and soul). God created Adam by two separate and distinct acts. God first made Adam’s body and then made Adam’s soul and put it into his body (Gen. 2:7) and then Adam became a “living soul.” It is, therefore, affirmed that the same procedure is used for all other men, and man becomes ensouled at birth when he takes his first breath.
 - c. Some creationists believe that the soul may be given sometime immediately after conception because the sin nature, which is part of man’s soul or immaterial make up, is present at or around conception (Psa. 51:5). According to Leviticus 17:11, 14 and Deuteronomy 12:23, “the life of all flesh is in the blood.” This context is referring to animal sacrifices but theologians have also carried this over into the human realm and state that the human fetus is ensouled, not at the moment of birth but when the blood system begins to develop. Scientifically we know blood cells begin to form after 17 days in the fetus’ life.
 2. Objections to Creationism
 - a. In the creation theory, the soul must be created perfect and that soul must fall into sin either before entering the body or at the time of entering the body.
 - b. The Biblical evidence favors the idea of human life and personhood beginning at conception (cf. above II).
 - c. The creation of Adam and Eve was unique in that it was direct and instantaneous. After Adam and Eve all men come about because of conception through sexual intercourse of a male and female. It seems more likely that the soul is somehow part of the conception process.
 - d. What about children aborted by a hysterectomy? They move, breathe and cry. Are they not souls even though they are at least fourteen weeks old or older?
 - e. What is the difference in a child one minute before birth and one minute after birth? Does the soul-life exist before? Many Protestants attach some kind of mystical significance to the child’s first breath and say that this is the magical bridge from potential human life to actual human life.
 - f. Creationists think of a person as truly existing only when he can think, feel and

will. Medieval scholars, following Aristotelian reasoning, concluded that the fetus was informed by a rational soul shortly before birth. The Roman Catholic scholars distinguished between a vegetative soul at the moment of conception, an animal soul at a later stage of the embryo's development and a rational soul imparted as the moment of birth drew near.

The uncertainty still prevails among many modern thinkers, and perhaps it always will. The phenomena of self-consciousness--the rational, ethical and religious experience of the human I--are not in evidence prior to birth; but to say they do not exist, even in the earliest stages of fetal development, is to say more than we know. A person who is sleeping or unconscious is a person still, though he gives no express evidence of it. And so it may be with the fetus. At least we can say that a fetus is a potential person, and maybe a primordial person, that is, a person in the most elementary form. We do not judge that a person who is in a coma has ceased to be a person. If we have doubts about terminating the life of one who has lost the ability to live and act as a human subject, because he may still be a human subject, should we not hesitate just as much to terminate the life of one who does not yet have the ability to live and act as a human subject? In fact, it would seem that the ability lost, the "human vegetable," can make less claim to respect and reverence than ability in prospect, the "human fetus." (Christianity Today, Paul K. Jewett, "The Relation of the Soul to the Fetus," November 8, 1968.)

- g. Creationism has a difficult time explaining heredity, especially IQ.
- A. Traducianism ("to lead or pass along"). The advocates of this view suggest that the souls of all men were created in Adam and that these souls are passed along through natural generation just as the physical body is passed in natural generation. According to this view, the soul is present at the very moment of conception.. This view in church history was strongly supported by Tertullian, Augustine, Luther, Calvin and in more recent times by the Protestant theologians Shedd and Strong.
 - 1. Support for Traducianism
 - a. Adam was told to propagate "after his own kind," which included body and soul (Gen. 1:26-27).
 - b. According to Genesis 2:1-3, God rested on the seventh day because all creation was finished. Therefore, we must conclude that the souls of all men must have been created prior to the seventh day. It is logical to conclude that all souls were created in Adam.
 - c. The Bible speaks of all men being in Adam (I Cor. 15:22). Men were in Adam and died in Adam because their souls were in Adam at the time Adam was created.
 - d. The scriptural evidence favors man beginning at conception (cf. II above).
 - e. Hebrews 7:10 teaches that Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Abraham paid tithes to Meichizedek. Levi did a responsible act of paying tithes in Abraham. Why then could not all the souls of all men be in Adam and passed down from father to children?

1. Objections to Traducianism

- a. This view has a difficult time explaining how Christ could not have a sin nature. For if the soul (immaterial part of man) which includes the sin nature is passed on, then how is it that Christ did not have a sin nature. Answer: The answer may be that the sin nature is passed from Adam to fathers to children. Christ had to be born of a virgin and conceived by the Holy Spirit in order not to have a sin nature. Christ's birth and conception was supernatural in every way.
- b. Adam's body and soul were created in separate acts.

A. Combination Theory

1. This theory combines traducianism and creationism, but for all practical purposes it is just another form of creationism. This view is espoused by R. B. Thieme, Jr. He believes that the fetus has a "format of a soul" or a pattern of a soul but not a soul. This format-soul inherits mentality from the genes of its parents and a sin nature from the father. He dogmatically asserts that the format-soul is not life and any bodily movement of the fetus in the womb is not life. He claims it is the muscular response to the development of the functional state of the fetus. Sensory, intermediary and motor nerves combine to stimulate muscular action.
2. This movement indicates function but there is a difference between function and the spark of life. He then speaks of the "life of the soul" or the spark of life that begins at birth. Soul-life only has its beginning at birth.
3. The essence of the soul includes mentality and the sin nature which are inherited and part of the format of the soul. Out of the mentality factor of the soul come the remaining ingredients of soul-essence, which are self-consciousness, volition (will), emotion and conscience. These all begin to operate and develop from the moment soul-life is introduced into the child at birth. His conclusion is that the embryo is not life nor is the fetus a human being (living soul) until he receives soul-life at birth.
4. Objections
 - a. Thieme makes the dogmatic statement, "A baby does not experience misery or love or joy or anything else until after birth; it experiences nothing pertaining to life until the fetus is born and becomes what we would technically call "a child" (R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Origin of the Soul*). Thieme's answer, of course, is not scientifically accurate for a child does will, think and feel to a limited degree in the mother's womb (cf. Lesson #23).
 - b. Thieme makes an arbitrary distinction between soul-format (blue print) and soul-life (house). Scientifically we know that life is present to some degree in the womb of the mother.
 - c. Thieme's concept of creationism and all other forms of creationism open the door wide to wholesale abortion.

IV. THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF TRADUCIANISM

- A. My own theological understanding leans towards traducianism as the right concept of the origin of a person's soul. I also realize the theological implications of traducianism as it relates to infant (fetal) salvation. Will the fetus which is a person when naturally or unnaturally aborted be saved? Will every miscarriage be a child in heaven?
- B. The purpose of this study is not to discuss infant salvation or in this case fetal salvation. Since the fetus is real life and a real person, it must be dealt with in the same way as

infant salvation(cf. Dr. Jack L. Arnold, “Why I Believe,” Lessons #23-25).

1. It may be that all infants (fetuses) are lost whether they die in infancy or are aborted before birth. This position would be consistent with original sin and total depravity, for all men are lost because they are sinners and not because they have not trusted in Christ. We know that a fetus has a sin nature (Psa. 51:5). NOTE: The problem with this position is that there are a few verses that may indicate that some infants who die are saved (2 Sam. 12:23; Job 3:11-13; Luke 18:15-17; Matt. 19:13,14; Mark 10:13-16; Acts 2:39).
 2. Many traducianists believe that all infants (fetuses) who die are saved because they are not accountable to God. NOTE: This position is difficult to sustain in light of the fact that even a fetus is a sinner (Psa. 51:5) and this began at conception. All men are lost because they are sinners. To believe that all infants (fetuses) who die are saved may cause some to reason that it might be better to kill all infants (fetuses) so they will be saved rather than let them grow up and be lost. This view could give support to the inhuman act of infanticide. Furthermore, abortion would be no great moral problem to those who held this view, for they would actually be doing the fetus a favor by killing him or her.
 3. The best position(and this is my own conviction) is that infants (fetuses) of covenant families (Christian parents) who die are saved. All the references to infant salvation in the Bible refer to children of saved parents. We can make no dogmatic statements about the infants (fetuses) of unsaved parents, but we may well assume that they are lost. NOTE: Since infants (fetuses) of covenant families are saved if they die, then some may reason that it is all right for Christians to use forced abortion techniques. Not so, for Christians alone know the value and dignity of the human fetus because he or she is a creation of God. For them abortion would be the taking of a human life which alone belongs to Almighty God. Furthermore, the Christian understands that every fetus, even those of their own family, are potential Christians who will glorify and honor God on this earth.
- C. Creationists do not have the problem with fetus salvation because they do not see a true person coming into being until the moment of birth. However, they then have the same problems if a child dies in infancy that a traducianist has about the death of a fetus. Creationism may solve the sticky problem of fetus salvation but it creates the bigger problem of fetus murder. As for me, I will take the problems of fetus salvation (which are clouded in scripture) over the problem of fetus murder (which is clearly taught against in scripture).

V. CONCLUSION

- A. Any form of creationism opens the door to abortion. We dare not be so presumptuous as to say that because we do not know for sure when God creates the soul that a fetus during the early stages of its development does not have a soul.
- B. The safest position is to say that the soul came into the person at conception. Any other position leaves too much room for speculation and for man to play god.

But when does the developing embryo become a completely human being in the fullest and biblical sense of the term? No absolute answer can be given to this question at present and several opinions prevail. This means that there is no fixed

point in embryonic development before which one could kill the fetus and safely say he had not thereby extinguished a human life. (Nicholas and Howe, Moody Monthly, "Abortion," September, 1971)