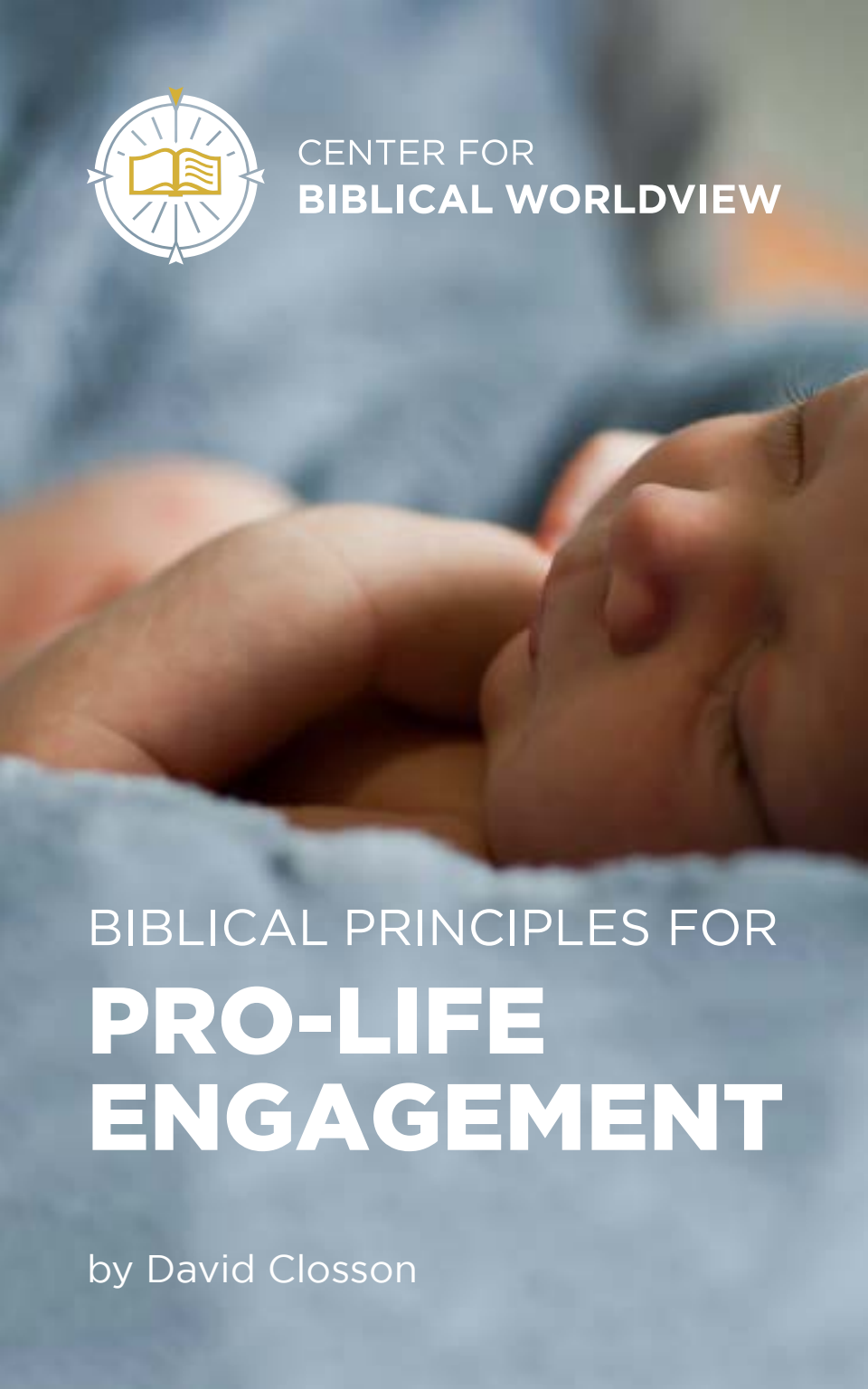


CENTER FOR
BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR

PRO-LIFE ENGAGEMENT

by David Closson

CENTER FOR
BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Center for Biblical Worldview is to equip Christians with a biblical worldview and train them to advance and defend the faith in their families, communities, and the public square.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe that Jesus Christ created all things and rules all things and that He Himself is truth. We believe the Bible is God's inerrant, infallible, and authoritative Word and that submitting our lives to it should be the goal of everyone who seeks to follow Christ. Furthermore, we believe that the Bible offers the most rational and satisfying answers to life's most fundamental questions, including:

- Why are we here?
- What has gone wrong with our world?
- Is there any hope?
- How does it all end?

We believe a person exhibits a biblical worldview when their beliefs and actions are aligned with the Bible, acknowledging its truth and applicability to every area of life.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR PRO-LIFE ENGAGEMENT:
PERSONHOOD, SCRIPTURE, AND CHURCH HISTORY
BY DAVID CLOSSON

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR PRO-LIFE ENGAGEMENT:

PERSONHOOD, SCRIPTURE, AND CHURCH HISTORY

by David Closson

Abortion is one of the most contentious and sensitive moral and political questions in America. Instead of settling the issue once and for all, the U.S. Supreme Court inflamed the debate when it decided in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) that abortion was protected in the U.S. Constitution by an implied "right to privacy."[1] Although the Court reversed course 49 years later in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), declaring that "[t]he Constitution does not confer a right to abortion,"[2] even after the overturning of *Roe*, abortion continues to be a mainstay in American public discourse and a decisive issue in political campaigns.

On this issue, most people fall into one of two camps. There are those who believe a woman's bodily autonomy and "right to choose" whether to carry a pregnancy to term are paramount. This is often characterized as the "pro-choice" position.[3] In the other camp are those who believe that the unborn are full human persons with the same right to life as anyone else. Supporters of this view are called "pro-life."

RECENTLY, THERE HAS BEEN AN EFFORT IN THEOLOGICALLY LIBERAL CHRISTIAN CIRCLES TO ARGUE THAT THE BIBLE DOES NOT OPPOSE ABORTION.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision in 2022, there has been a flurry of new state laws related to abortion. Although many states have passed or begun enforcing previously unenforceable laws protecting unborn life, other states have pressed for even fewer limits on abortion.[4] Along with changes in the composition of the Supreme Court and the leftward lurch of the national Democratic Party, these new laws have ensured that abortion remains at the fore of the national conversation.

Additionally, there is an ongoing effort in theologically liberal Christian circles to argue that the Bible does not oppose abortion. These arguments, often asserted with passion and energy, require Christians to think seriously about the Bible's teaching on abortion. For example, one high-profile proponent of the view that the Bible supports or allows for abortion is Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-Ga.), who has pastored for decades and regularly invokes his faith to support abortion. As a candidate in 2020, Warnock tweeted, "I am a pro-choice pastor."[5] As a senator, he condemned the Supreme Court for overturning *Roe*, saying, "*Roe v. Wade* should not have been overturned. […] I am a man of faith, and as a person of faith, as a father myself, I have a profound reverence for human life, and I have a deep and abiding respect for choice."[6]

Other theologically liberal leaders have also argued that Christianity is compatible with support for abortion. For example, in August 2019, one pastor argued, "There is nothing in the Christian scripture that condemns abortion—it just ain't in there."[7] Likewise, in September 2019, then-Mayor Pete Buttigieg (D), while running for president, invoked Scripture to support his pro-abortion views, claiming that there are "a lot of parts of the Bible that talk about how life begins with breath."[8]

THE BIBLE HAS A CLEAR WORD ON THE ISSUE OF ABORTION.

The Bible is meant to guide Christians' beliefs and actions in every area of life. Given the contentious and morally consequential nature of the abortion debate, it is vital that Christians know what the Bible actually has to say on this issue. This has recently become even more true for Christians in the United States now that *Roe* has been overturned and the American people can once again enact meaningful abortion laws through their elected representatives.

Does the Bible teach that life begins at conception or birth? Is abortion murder? On these questions and others, we believe the Bible has a clear word. Furthermore, and perhaps surprising to many, the church has grappled with this debate for centuries and thus has resources today's Christians can use to articulate a faithful response.

What follows, therefore, is an examination of the relevant passages in the Bible that inform how a Christian should think about abortion and a survey of how prominent church leaders have interpreted these passages throughout history. The question of personhood will also be discussed.

DEFINING TERMS AND LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Before discussing specific passages, it is important to define terms and lay the groundwork for our discussion.

What Is Abortion?

When we say "abortion," we are referring to what is medically known as an "induced abortion" or "the purposeful killing of the unborn in the termination of a pregnancy."[9] We are not referring to miscarriage. Although the medical term for miscarriage is "spontaneous abortion," a miscarriage is not the purposeful killing of an unborn child. Also, when we say "abortion," we are not referring to ectopic pregnancy treatment; even though an unborn child's chances of surviving treatment are considered nonexistent under current medical technology, the treatment is not intended to end the unborn child's life.

Elective abortions are the most common form of induced abortion, comprising 92 percent of them.[10] In the case of an elective abortion, the mother's life is not threatened, and the baby is otherwise healthy. In other words, elective abortions are done on healthy women and terminate pregnancies that would naturally lead to the birth of healthy children. Elective abortions are sought for a variety of reasons such as relationship issues, financial hardship, parents saying they are not ready for children, career concerns, or physical and/or mental strain on the parents.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, a pro-abortion research organization named after a former president of Planned Parenthood, only seven percent of women report their abortion was because of health complications (for the mother or baby), and only 0.5 percent of abortions are sought because of rape.[11]

What Is Personhood?

A crucial part of the abortion discussion is the issue of "personhood." In fact, the conversation boils down to this: Is the developing baby a person? In other words, does being biologically human qualify one as a person, or is there additional criteria that must be met to be counted as a person? If so, what is the criterion for personhood?

THE YOUNGEST HUMAN EMBRYO FULFILLS THE FOUR CRITERIA NEEDED TO ESTABLISH BIOLOGICAL LIFE: METABOLISM, GROWTH, REACTION TO STIMULI, AND REPRODUCTION.

Embryology has advanced to the point where no one disputes that a newly formed zygote (fertilized egg) has its own genetic composition and is therefore a biologically unique individual. In fact, a comprehensive study in 2018 showed that 95 percent of biologists affirmed the biological view that a human's life begins at fertilization (5,212 out of 5,502 of biologists surveyed).[12] Moreover, the youngest human embryo fulfills the four criteria needed to establish biological life: metabolism, growth, reaction to stimuli, and reproduction.[13]

However, pro-choice supporters are now arguing that being biologically human is something distinct from personhood. In other words, they claim that merely being alive in a biological sense does not have moral standing that warrants legal protection. According to this view, moral standing, i.e. personhood, is a quality or status that emerges or is achieved at some point after conception. This view is what Nancy Pearcey describes as "personhood theory," a two-tiered view of the human being that separates the physical body from the immaterial mind or soul. In Pearcey's words, personhood theory "sees no value in the living human body but places all our worth in the mind or consciousness."[14]

A significant problem with personhood theory is that there is no consensus on what criteria we should use to determine personhood. Bioethicists have suggested widely divergent and somewhat arbitrary criteria for establishing personhood: neural activity, reasoning ability, self-motivated activity, and/or self-awareness. Joseph Fletcher, a bioethicist who taught at Harvard

Divinity School for 26 years, proposed 15 qualities to define when human life is worthy of respect. His list included minimum intelligence, self-control, a sense of the past and future, capability of relating to others, curiosity, and neocortical function.

However, the lack of agreement on how to define personhood, suggested by this wide range of proposals, raises significant concerns. In fact, a host of questions immediately arise if personhood is determined by the presence or deficiency of various cognitive functions. For example, how developed must the functions be to count? Who or what process determines this? On these questions no one agrees. This points to the reality that personhood—as it is commonly defined and understood—is an anthropological and philosophical concept rather than a biological one. Thus, fundamentally, attempts to define personhood without the insights of biology are arbitrary.

On this point, Pearcey notes that most characteristics like intelligence exist on a quantitative scale. That is, they emerge gradually.[15] Fully developed adults possess traits like self-awareness, reasoning ability, and intelligence in varying degrees. Does a deficiency in self-awareness or self-control mean someone is not a person? Is someone with Down syndrome not a person because their capacity to relate with others is limited? Does someone with dementia who no longer remembers the past cease being a person? What about those who are comatose? These questions point to the ethically problematic nature of adopting a view of personhood that is not based on biology and genetics.

Simply put, the category of "human non-person" does not exist and implying otherwise has insidious implications for those who fail to meet an artificially contrived definition.

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF PERSONHOOD

How should Christians think about personhood and what it means to be human? What does a biblical worldview contribute to this conversation, and how does this connect with the morality of abortion?

WHEN HUMAN LIFE IS PRESENT, THERE IS A PERSON WITH MORAL STANDING DESERVING OF LEGAL PROTECTION.

First, as already discussed, attempts to define personhood based on subjective and arbitrary criteria are ethically unsatisfactory. Therefore, Christians should be leery of defining personhood in a way that bases such a determination on a cognitive or developmental view of humanity. The concept of "human non-persons" cannot be supported. When human life is present, regardless of the many variables and complexities attendant to our existence, there is a person with moral standing deserving of legal protection. Again, the objective basis for determining personhood is biology and genetics.[16]

However, as Christians we have additional resources that inform our understanding of human personhood. Specifically, we have the Bible, God's authoritative word. In fact, as theologian John Jefferson Davis argues, "Perhaps the most crucial question for a Christian regarding abortion is whether God considers the unborn child a person… If the Scriptures clearly imply the personhood of the unborn, then Christians have an obligation to seek the protection of the unborn through educational, religious, and legislative action."[17]

This leads to the unavoidable question: Does the Bible prove the personhood of the unborn? If it does, then Christians are morally obligated to oppose elective abortions, the intentional killing of unborn children for the sake of convenience.

What follows is a consideration of important passages that speak to the personhood of the unborn. Based on what the Bible says on this issue, Christians should adopt a pro-life, anti-abortion ethic.[18]

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT ABORTION

Genesis 1 teaches that everyone is made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). Although theologians debate the exact meaning of what it means to be made in the image of God, at the very least it means that man represents God to the rest of creation in a unique way.[19] This means every human being is an image bearer of God and possesses inherent dignity. The truth that everyone is made in God's image has implications for the personhood debate. In fact, the most powerful argument against abortion is that the unborn child is a unique person. There are a number of passages in the Bible that underscore this truth. Taken together, they make a powerful case that unborn children should be thought of and protected as persons from the moment of conception.[20]

Psalm 139:13-16

The most well-known passage in the Bible pertaining to the personhood of the unborn is Psalm 139:13-16 where King David describes God's dealings with him in utero:

> For you formed my inward parts;
> you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
> Wonderful are your works;
> my soul knows it very well.

My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them. (Ps 139:13-16)

In this passage, David refers to his unborn life as fully personal. The person in his mother's womb was not an impersonal fetus with no moral value; it was David, whom God was forming and knitting together. Clearly, there is continuity from the prenatal person to the adult person writing the psalm. As John Jefferson Davis explains, "David's praise, spoken from a postnatal perspective (v.14), assumes his identity with the prenatal individual described in verses 13, 15, and 16."[21]

The personal identity of the unborn child is also highlighted by the repeated use of the personal pronouns "I" and "my." This language assumes personal identity in the womb and affirms continuity from the earliest time in the womb through adulthood.[22]

GESTATION IS NOT A BLIND, HAPHAZARD PROCESS. RATHER, SCRIPTURE SHOWS THAT GOD IS ACTIVELY INVOLVED WITH THE SMALLEST DETAILS.

Finally, God's work of creation in the womb is praised as "wonderful," as David reflects on his prenatal development. Gestation is not a blind, haphazard process. Rather, Scripture shows that God is actively involved with the smallest details. Moreover, God has knowledge of and relates to David while the future king was still in utero. From God's perspective, David was not an inconsequential, non-moral entity in the womb.

Rather, he was the personal object of God's creative work. David cannot help but praise God in song as he considers how he has been "fearfully and wonderfully made."

Regarding the relevance of Psalm 139 for determining personhood, some scholars like Richard B. Hays call for caution, arguing the passage must be interpreted within the poetic genre. While Hays is right to remind readers to pay attention to hermeneutics (the discipline of properly interpreting texts), it is unfair to say the passage's "bearing on the abortion issue is very indirect indeed."[23] In contrast to Hays, theologian John Frame argues that Psalm 139 is representative of how the Bible refers to the unborn, i.e. as persons possessing moral value.[24] Further, Frame makes the obvious point that the Bible never speaks of the unborn as anything other than persons.

Psalm 51:5-6

The next passage that deepens our understanding of how the Bible sees the unborn is Psalm 51:5-6. David writes:

> Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
> And in sin my mother conceived me.
> Behold, you desire truth in the innermost being,
> And in the hidden part you will make me know wisdom.
> (Ps 51:5-6)

In these verses David is confessing his adultery with Bathsheba. In the process of asking for forgiveness, David acknowledges the

profound depth of his own sinfulness. In fact, in verse five, he traces his sinfulness to the very beginning of his life—to the very hour of his conception.

As David traces his sin to its origin, he recognizes he has always been a sinner before God. This is significant because it shows that David recognizes himself as a sinner in utero. While some have argued that the phrase in verse five translated "in sin" refers to David's mother, the entire context of the passage precludes this interpretation. Psalm 51 is clearly about David and his sin; no one else is in view.

Another significant aspect of these verses is that David uses personal pronouns to refer to himself in utero. The entity in the womb is not impersonal; the psalmist consciously personalizes the unborn and sees the baby as a morally significant entity.

But not only is the unborn David a sinner, he is also the recipient of God's moral instruction in utero. Old Testament scholars agree that the Hebrew words rendered "innermost being" and "hidden part" do not refer to David but rather his mother's womb.[25] Old Testament scholar Peter Gentry translates verse 6 as follows: "You desired truth in the smeared over place, you make me to know wisdom in the bottled-up place." According to Gentry, the Hebrew words rendered "smeared over place" and "bottled-up place" are obvious references to the human womb.[26]

IN HIS MOTHER'S WOMB, DAVID WAS A MORAL BEING WHOSE RELATIONSHIP TO THE MORAL LAW OF GOD HAD ALREADY BEGUN.

Gentry argues that the literary structure of verses 5-6 teaches the following: First, David confesses the actual sin. Then he acknowledges his own impotence—or moral inadequacy—that

has been part of his nature since before birth. Next, he prays for forgiveness of the sin. And finally he prays for power to overcome the moral impotence. Gentry concludes: "Apparently the divine image is there in the womb so that moral factors are entailed in the fetus."[27] In other words, David, even in his embryological state, by virtue of his status as a moral being (distinct in his own personhood from the moment of conception), has the moral law already inscribed within his being. In his mother's womb, David was a moral being and an inheritor of Adam's sin whose relationship to the moral law of God had already begun.[28]

Luke 1:39-45

Perhaps the clearest affirmation of the personhood of the unborn is the narrative of Luke 1. At the beginning of this passage, the angel Gabriel tells the virgin Mary she will bear a son through the power of the Holy Spirit:

> And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. (v. 35)

Upon hearing this news, Mary immediately goes to visit her relative Elizabeth who was herself six months pregnant. Luke relates their meeting in verses 39-45:

> In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby

> leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Several details of this passage reveal a remarkable affirmation of the personhood of the unborn.

From the language of verse 39, there is good evidence that Mary journeyed as quickly as possible to Elizabeth after receiving the angel's message. Thus, she is very early in her pregnancy when she arrives at Elizabeth's house. In fact, scholars believe Mary had been pregnant for less than a month and perhaps for only a week or two when she visited Elizabeth.[29] This fact is very significant considering the following conversation between the two women.

The text says that when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, "the baby leaped in her [Elizabeth's] womb." Elizabeth then exclaims, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Three details of this exchange underscore the profoundly pro-life perspective of this passage. First, John the Baptist "leaped" upon hearing Mary's voice. This is evidence of personal human activity in utero. Through Elizabeth we learn that the motive for John's response is joy, an emotion ascribed to persons. Moreover, John's leaping response is his acknowledgement of Jesus. Very significantly, this was John's mission in life—to be the forerunner of the Christ (see Luke 1:17; John 1:6-8, 19-23, 3:28, 30). Thus, although still in utero, John's ministry of heralding the arrival of the Messiah has begun![30]

PRENATAL JESUS IS NOT AN IMPERSONAL, NON-MORAL ENTITY; RATHER, HE IS HONORED RIGHTLY AS LORD BY BOTH ELIZABETH AND HER UNBORN BABY.

Second, Elizabeth refers to Mary as a mother at a time when most women do not even know they are pregnant.[31] Incredibly, she acknowledges that Mary is the "mother of my Lord." Jesus, in His embryonic state—perhaps even prior to the time of implantation in the uterus at approximately two weeks—is recognized as Elizabeth's "Lord."[32] Prenatal Jesus is not an impersonal, non-moral entity; rather, He is honored rightly as Lord by both Elizabeth and her unborn baby.

Third, Elizabeth's choice of words is significant. Notably, she says that "the baby in my womb leaped for joy" (v. 44). The Greek word βρέφος (brephos) is used to refer to her unborn child. This is the same Greek word used for children after they are born (the word is used when Jesus is called a "baby lying in a manger" in Luke 2:16). [33]

A final observation about this passage is that both Elizabeth (v. 41) and the unborn John (v. 15) are filled with the Holy Spirit. By noting this detail, Luke wants his readers to perceive that the reactions of Elizabeth and John are appropriate; they are fitting responses to being in the presence of Jesus, who although in utero, was the Son of God. The important theological point is that Jesus' incarnation did not begin at birth. Rather, it began at conception. Scott Rae concludes his reflection on these verses by making the same point. He writes, "The significance of the incarnation though likely not grasped in its fullness, is nonetheless recognized, not at Jesus' birth, but far earlier…That is, the incarnation is recognized as having begun months prior to Jesus' actual birth."[34]

Jeremiah 1:4-5 and Isaiah 49:1b

Another set of verses that confirm the personhood of the unborn are Jeremiah 1:4-5 and Isaiah 49:1b. In both passages, major Old Testament prophets provide a high view of human life from conception. Jeremiah writes:

> Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying,
>
> "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
> and before you were born I consecrated you;
> I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer 1:4-5)

In Isaiah, the second of four "Servant Songs" about the future Messiah affirms the Servant was destined for His ministry even before His birth:

> The Lord called me from the womb,
> from the body of my mother he named my name.
> (Isa 49:1b)

Notably, both Jeremiah and the Servant of the Lord are "consecrated," "appointed," or "called" to their respective vocations while in utero. In Jeremiah's case, God explains to the prophet that He "formed" and "knew" him prior to his birth. The passage reveals that God had a personal relationship with the unborn prophet, similar to how He relates to the prophet as an adult. There is a clear continuity between prenatal and postnatal Jeremiah; the unborn prophet possesses the same calling he will exercise later in life.

JEREMIAH AND THE SERVANT OF THE LORD ARE FORMED AND CALLED BY GOD TO SERVE HIM AS PROPHETS WHILE STILL IN THEIR MOTHER'S WOMBS.

The same is true for the Servant of the Lord, who receives His prophetic calling while in His mother's womb. Significantly, the Servant says that God named Him while in utero. The idea is that God is setting the Servant apart for special service before He is even born. This is confirmed a few verses later when the Servant explains that God formed Him in the womb "to be his servant" and bring a specific message to the nation of Israel (v. 5).

Jeremiah and the Servant of the Lord are formed and called by God to serve Him as prophets while still in the womb. God's personal relationship with them in utero is further evidence that unborn children possess full personhood.

Additional Passages

Other passages that reiterate the Bible's view that the unborn possess personhood include Job 3:3. In this verse, it says: "Let the day perish on which I was born, and the night that said, 'A man is conceived.'" Intriguingly, birth and conception are used interchangeably. As Scott Rae observes, "The child who was born and the child who was conceived are considered the same person."[35]

Another passage along the same lines is Job 10:8 where Job laments, "Your hands fashioned and made me, and now you have destroyed me altogether." Again, the same person who was fashioned in the womb is the man who is now undergoing difficult trials.

Judges 13:3-5 contains the announcement to Manoah's wife that she will conceive and have a son. The angel instructs the woman to "be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for behold you shall conceive and bear a son… for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb" (vv. 4-5). The angel repeats the prohibition against drinking wine or eating unclean food in verse 14. Notably, Samson's mother must keep the Nazirite restrictions because her son is a Nazarite even before he is born. In other words, the restrictions apply

from conception and he would be defiled if his mother disobeyed the angel's order.

Reflecting on this passage, John Frame notes, "Thus, Samson, like David, is a person from conception. As there is no reason to think that Samson and David are exceptions to the general rule, we should conclude that all unborn children are persons from conception."[36]

Genesis 25:22-23 is another passage that continues the theme. Here, the reality that unborn children can be the subjects of God's election and calling is revealed. While pregnant with twins, Rebekah is told: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger" (Gen 25:23). By God's sovereign choice, Jacob, while still in utero, is chosen over his brother to be the bearer of God's special covenant promises. This is further evidence that God relates to the unborn in a personal way.

Reflecting on this passage from Genesis centuries later, the apostle Paul marvels at God electing the unborn Jacob as a covenant heir. Paul writes, "though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she [Rebekah] was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved but Esau I hated'" (Rom 9:11-13). As Paul makes clear, the usual marks of personhood are absent in Genesis 25; Jacob and Esau are in utero and have had no opportunity to do anything good or bad. However, in order to demonstrate that election is God's

sovereign choice, God elects Jacob prior to the patriarch's birth.[37] This is yet again a remarkable glimpse into how God Himself views the unborn; Jacob is not an impersonal amalgamation of human tissue. He is a moral being capable of being chosen by the God of the universe for a personal relationship.

SAMSON, DAVID, JACOB, JOB, AND PAUL ARE ALL SPECIFICALLY CALLED TO THEIR MISSION BY GOD WHILE STILL IN THE WOMB.

Other verses include Psalm 22:10, where David says, "On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God." David confesses his dependency on God from the very beginning of his life and recognizes that his personal relationship with God began in utero. And in Job 31:15, Job defends the way he has treated his servants by noting: "Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb." Job understands that unborn life—his own and his servants—has great value to God.

Another passage is Exodus 21:22-25. Although there is ongoing extended debate involving Hebrew grammar and syntax, the thrust of the passage is that unborn children were valued under the Mosaic covenant:

> When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.
> (Ex 21:22-25)

This law lays out the penalties for harming a pregnant woman and her unborn child. The context is a situation where two men are fighting and accidently hit a pregnant woman. If a woman is hit and premature birth results but there is no harm to the woman or child, the man at fault will incur a fine. But if there is harm, to either the woman or child, the penalty is the application of the law of retaliation (lex talionis), whereby a punishment resembles the offense committed in kind and degree. This means that both the mother and child are afforded equal protection under the law.

Notably, the application of lex talionis in this situation is unique. Under similar circumstances—where someone unintentionally caused the death of another person—the penalty was not "life for life." Rather, the person at fault could flee to a city of refuge where they had to wait until the death of the high priest. Thus, as theologian Wayne Grudem remarks, "This means that God established for Israel a law code that placed a higher value on protecting the life of a pregnant woman and her unborn child than the life of anyone else in Israelite society."[38]

A final verse worth noting is Galatians 1:15. Here, as in the passages from Jeremiah and Isaiah, Paul says that God set him apart for service before he was born. He says:

> And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. (Gal 1:14-17)

In context, Paul is giving a brief biographical sketch explaining his conversion to Christianity. In verse 15, he says that God set him apart "before I was born." He then describes his call to preach the gospel. Significantly, the "me" in utero is the same "me" who is subsequently called by grace, encounters Jesus ("was pleased to reveal his Son to me"), preaches to the Gentiles, goes into Arabia, and returns to Damascus. This is yet another example of Scripture affirming that there is continuity from the prenatal person in the womb to the adult who is writing the epistle.[39]

WITHOUT QUESTION, THE BIBLE PRESENTS A CLEAR PRO-LIFE ETHIC BY AFFIRMING THE PERSONHOOD OF THE UNBORN.

Thus, without question, the Bible presents a clear pro-life ethic by affirming the personhood of the unborn. From verses that portray God's creative power in the womb (Ps 139:13-16) to passages where prophets and apostles are called and set apart for ministry while still in utero (such as Jeremiah, the Servant of the Lord, and Paul), the Bible sees all life as precious and possessing inherent worth and dignity.

THE CHURCH: PRO-LIFE FROM THE BEGINNING

Often in discussions about abortion and how Christians should respond, it can seem like believers are standing alone. This sense of aloneness is amplified when professing Christians in theologically liberal denominations claim that the Bible does not say anything about abortion, or even go so far as to commend the procedure.

NEARLY EVERY PROMINENT LEADER AND AUTHORITY IN THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY—WHETHER THEOLOGIANS, PASTORS, OR CHURCH COUNCILS—HAVE PUBLICLY OPPOSED ABORTION.

Yet the understanding of the Bible's teaching on human life discussed in the first part of this publication is not a minority opinion or the view of an isolated denomination or sect. Indeed, a brief survey of church history reveals that the church has been clear and consistent on abortion since the first century. For 2,000 years, Christians have interpreted the Bible consistently on the value of unborn human life, and nearly every prominent leader and authority in the history of Christianity—whether theologians, pastors, or church councils—have publicly opposed abortion.

It is quite significant that despite varying circumstances, pressures, and disagreements on other significant theological issues, the Christian church has spoken with one voice when it comes to affirming the personhood of the unborn and condemning abortion. What follows is a survey of what Christian leaders have said throughout the ages on this issue.

Early Church

The Bible's teaching on the sanctity of life, and specifically the personhood of the unborn, contradicted the practices of the Greco-Roman culture in which Christianity arose. In fact, abortion was widely accepted and practiced in Roman society during the first three centuries after Christ. Soranos (c. A.D. 98-138), a second century gynecologist, explained that Roman women sought abortion for three main reasons: a desire to conceal the consequences of adultery, to maintain feminine beauty, and to avoid danger to the mother when her uterus was thought too small to accommodate the full embryo.[40] Reasons not too different from some given today—overpopulation and a desire to be childless—were also frequently cited as reasons for abortion.[41] In summary, the average Roman had such a low view of fetal and infant life that infanticide, child abandonment, and abortion remained common in the Roman Empire until these practices were outlawed, at the urging of Christians, in 374.[42]

It was against this morally dark backdrop that the first generation of Christians opposed abortion out of a conviction that the Bible expressly condemned it. Two themes impressed early Christians.[43] First, the priority of love in Jesus' teaching exercised a tremendous influence. In John 15:12-13, Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." According to Jesus, second only to love for God

was loving one's neighbor (Mark 12:31). The emphasis on love motivated Christians to care for society's vulnerable, including children (pre-born and discarded infants).

Jesus' high view of children was the second theme in Scripture that informed the church's view on abortion. In fact, it is almost surprising to see how many times Jesus included children in His ministry (Mat 19:14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16). Often to the chagrin of His disciples, Jesus wanted children present for His teaching. At one point, referring to those who tempt children to sin, He said, "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin" (Luke 17:2).

These themes, combined with the Bible's teaching on the personhood of the unborn, motivated strong reactions from early church leaders against abortion. To faithfully instruct Christians in a society with a low view of life, the first generation of pastors and theologians were forceful in condemning abortion because they believed it was an unbiblical and sinful practice.

IN THE *DIDACHE*, AN EARLY CHRISTIAN TEXT (AD 50-120), "KILLERS OF THE CHILD, WHO ABORTION THE MOLD OF GOD" WERE CONDEMNED AS SINNERS.

For example, in the *Didache*, an early Christian text (AD 50–120), abortion was listed among sins that Christians should avoid. One list of prohibited behaviors in the *Didache* read: "Thou shalt do no murder; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not commit sodomy; thou shalt not commit fornication; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not use magic; thou shalt not use philtres; thou shalt not procure abortion, nor commit infanticide; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods."[44] Later in the *Didache*, "killers of the child, who abortion the mold of God"

were condemned as sinners.[45] A commentary of the *Didache,* the *Epistle of Barnabas* (written between AD 70-132), said, "You shall love your neighbor more than your own life. You shall not slay the child by abortions. You shall not kill what is generated."[46]

Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria (155–215) explained that Christians do not, in order to hide sexual sin, "take away human nature, which is generated from the providence of God, by hastening abortions and applying abortifacient drugs to destroy utterly the embryo and, with it, the love of man."[47]

Athenagoras

Athenagoras (133–190) wrote, "We say that women who use drugs to bring on an abortion commit murder… [for we] regard the very foetus in the womb as a created being, and therefore an object of God's care."[48] Elsewhere, Athenagoras explained to the emperor that Christians did not condone violence. In the course of his defense, Athenagoras explained, "How can we kill a man when we are those who say that all who use abortifacients are homicides and will account to God for their abortions as for the killing of men. For the fetus in the womb is not an animal, and it is God's providence that he exist."[49]

Tertullian

Toward the late second century, Tertullian (155–220) responded to pagan critics who alleged that Christians practiced infanticide. In his rebuttal, Tertullian explained, "For us, indeed, as homicide is forbidden, it is not lawful to destroy what is conceived in the womb while the blood is still being formed into a man." He added, "To prevent being born is to accelerate homicide, nor does it make a difference whether you snatch away a soul which is born or destroy one being born. He who is man-to-

be is man, as all fruit is now in the seed."[50] Not mincing words, Tertullian equated abortion with murder. In his view, aborting an unborn child and killing an adult were morally equivalent acts.

In another insightful passage, Tertullian appeals to mothers for clarity on whether the unborn child is a morally valuable person. He writes, "In this matter the best teacher, judge, and witness is the sex that is concerned with birth. I call on you, mothers, whether you are now pregnant or have already borne children… Tell us: Do you feel any stirring of life within you in the fetus? Does your groin tremble, your sides shake, your whole stomach throb as the burden you carry changes its position? Are not these moments a source of joy and assurance that the child within you is alive and playful? Should his restlessness subside, would you not be immediately concerned for him?"[51]

By the fourth century, not only do we find statements from individual pastors and theologians on abortion, but the church collectively spoke out against the practice. In the West, abortion was strongly condemned in the Synod of Elvira (305/6), and in the East, the Council of Ancyra (379) solidified the church's opposition to the practice.

John Chrysostom

In the fourth century, John Chrysostom (c. 349-407) preached against abortion, telling men who engaged in extramarital affairs and sought abortion as a means to cover up their indiscretions: "You do not let a harlot remain only a harlot but make her a murderess as well."[52] In the same century, Basil of Caesarea (330-379) stated his opinion succinctly: "Whoever deliberately commit[s] abortion [is] subject to the penalty of homicide."[53]

In short, by the fifth century the teaching on abortion had been set out with clarity and consistency. Abortion was a form of murder and Christians stood solidly on the side of life.

In fact, the strong pro-life position articulated by the early church continued uninterrupted for centuries and was endorsed by more and more governments as the church's influence spread. For example, in the eighth century, the Frankish kingdom of Charlemagne adopted the decision of the Council of Ancyra (314) as the law of the land. Ancyra had prohibited abortion and prescribed the death penalty for those who administer abortion-inducing drugs.[54]

Thomas Aquinas

Further discussion of abortion occurred in the Medieval Period. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) discusses the moral status of the embryo and the act of abortion in his *Summa Theologica*. Of concern to Thomas was the question of ensoulment (when human beings receive a soul). Although he is unclear when ensoulment occurs—following Aristotle, Thomas believed the rational human soul is not present in the first few weeks of pregnancy—he says that once it occurs, it is homicide to kill the unborn baby.[55] Notably, Thomas never offers a defense for abortion at any stage of pregnancy and says it is a sin "against nature" to reject God's gift of new life.[56]

Post-Reformation

EVEN FOLLOWING THE REFORMATION, THE DIFFERENT THEOLOGICAL CAMPS REMAINED PRO-LIFE.

Even following the Reformation, the different theological camps remained pro-life. In the sixteenth century, both Catholic and Protestant leaders continued to champion the rights of the unborn. For example, John Calvin explained, "The unborn child… though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a

human being… and should not be robbed of the life which it has not yet begun to enjoy."[57] In the sixteenth century, Pope Sixtus V reiterated the longstanding view of the Roman Catholic Church on abortion. In 1558, in a papal bull titled *Effraenatam*, Pope Sixtus V said, "Who will not abhor the cruelty and unrestrained debauchery of impious men who have arrived into such a state of mind that they procure poisons in order to extinguish the conceived fetuses within the viscera, and pour them out, trying to provoke by a nefarious crime a violent and untimely death and killing of their progeny."[58] The Catechism of the Council of Trent (1566) describes abortion as a "heinous crime."[59]

The Modern Church

Christian opposition to abortion remained unbroken into the twentieth century. In 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "To kill the fruit in the mother's womb is to injure the right to life that God has bestowed on the developing life."[60] This remained the view of every Christian denomination until around the 1960s. Only then, at the height of the sexual revolution, did many mainline Protestant denominations such as the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), and United Methodist Church change their view on abortion.[61] Significantly, the churches that changed their view on abortion during this time were the same churches that since the 1920s had increasingly embraced theological liberalism. The correlation between rejecting the Bible

as God's infallible and authoritative Word (which also means rejecting the Bible's account of miracles, the deity of Christ, and the historical reliability of the Bible) and the acceptance of abortion is striking, given that denominations that continued to believe the trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible remained committed to the church's historic teaching on the personhood of the unborn.

For example, the Roman Catholic Church[62] and theologically conservative Protestant denominations such as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod,[63] Presbyterian Church in America (PCA),[64] Assemblies of God,[65] the Southern Baptist Convention,[66] and many others, stand with their theological forebearers and remain committed to the Bible's teaching on abortion.

The same is true for the Orthodox Church which has consistently opposed abortion. This is seen in the 1976 Christmas encyclical of former Archbishop Iakovos who described abortion as a "moral alienation."[67] The view of the Orthodox Church is summarized by Greek Orthodox priest Rev. Dr. Stanley Harakas who says, "The Orthodox Church brands abortion as murder; that is, as a premeditated termination of the life of a human being. The only time the Orthodox Church will reluctantly acquiesce to abortion is when the preponderance of medical opinion determines that unless the embryo or fetus is aborted, the mother will die."[68] The Orthodox view abortion as immoral because it ends the life of unborn children and attacks the institution of marriage and the family.

GOSPEL HOPE FOR THE CHURCH'S FUTURE

As the church looks at the way ahead, Christians must speak with courage and conviction and counter anyone who suggests there is another way to interpret the Bible when it comes to abortion. At the same time, we must present our position

with kindness and love, recognizing there are many for whom abortion is a personal, rather than theoretical discussion. The gospel is good news for all people, even those who have had or performed abortions.

Stories from those who have left the abortion industry are examples of how the gospel is at work. Dr. Kathi Aultman, a former Planned Parenthood medical director, is an example.[69] Dr. Aultman was an abortionist who had an abortion herself. After years of working in the abortion industry she found redemption through a relationship with Christ and now testifies at the state and national level on pro-life legislation.[70] Other examples of abortion workers who left the industry include Dr. Bernard Nathanson, the co-founder of NARAL Pro-Choice America and Abby Johnson, a former Planned Parenthood clinic director. Both became convinced that abortion was morally wrong, repented of their prior work, and found forgiveness through a relationship with Christ.[71]

THE TRANSFORMATION OF FORMER ABORTION ACTIVISTS AULTMAN, NATHANSON, AND JOHNSON UNDERSCORES THE FORGIVENESS THAT IS POSSIBLE FOR THOSE WHO REPENT OF THEIR SIN AND TURN TO CHRIST.

The transformation of Aultman, Nathanson, Johnson, and others, underscores the forgiveness that is possible for those who repent of their sin and turn to Christ. This truth is taught in passages such as 1 John 1:9 where it says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Likewise, Ephesians 1:7 promises, "In him [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." God's forgiveness is highlighted in the Old Testament as well, where the writer reflects: "If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities

Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared" (Ps 130:3-4). Abortion is a serious sin, but God is fully forgiving.

For those who repent of their sin, including the sin of abortion, God promises redemption. God's heart for forgiveness is evident when He tells Israel, a nation that had sinned against Him repeatedly, "I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist, return to me, for I have redeemed you" (Isa 44:22). The apostle Peter, who himself was the recipient of remarkable grace (John 21:15-25), explained, "The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Elsewhere, Peter urged his hearers to repent of sin and turn to God "so that your sins may be blotted out" and "that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). Finally, in Romans 10:13, Paul promises, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

CONCLUSION

The Bible's teaching on life is clear. It is not a selective reading of Scripture to suggest that the Bible unequivocally affirms the personhood of the unborn. This has been the unchanging position of the church from the beginning, and means that the unborn child has moral standing and should be considered a person from the moment of conception. The Bible teaches this truth in passages that show God personally relating with unborn children such as David, Jeremiah, and the Servant of the Lord, but also in texts such as Luke 1, where personal attributes and emotions (such as joy) are ascribed to the baby in utero. The united witness of the church—Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox—has upheld this view.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY FINDS ITSELF CONFUSED AND IN DISARRAY OVER THE ISSUE OF ABORTION, BUT THE BIBLE HAS CLEAR ANSWERS.

Thus, those who argue that the Bible supports abortion or that the biblical witness is vague or unclear on personhood are mistaken. As demonstrated, the Bible teaches that all human life is precious. All people—born and unborn—are made in the image of God and possess inherent dignity and value. Abortion, which is the intentional destruction of human life, is immoral and sinful. At the same time, the Bible makes clear that God provides the grace to walk free from the destruction of abortion. On these questions on which contemporary society finds itself confused and in disarray, the Bible has clear answers.

David Closson, M.Div., *serves as the Director of the Center for Biblical Worldview at Family Research Council where he researches and writes on life, human sexuality, religious liberty, and related issues from a biblical worldview. Currently, David is completing a Ph.D. in Christian Ethics from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.*

Special thanks to Laura Grossberndt for editorial assistance.

1 The primary holding of the *Roe v. Wade* decision was: "A person may choose to have an abortion until a fetus becomes viable, based on the right to privacy contained in the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Viability means the ability to live outside the womb, which usually happens between 24 and 28 weeks after conception." See *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973). It is important to note that the U.S. Supreme Court's decision made abortion legal at any point in the pregnancy if a "doctor deems abortion necessary to protect a woman's health." "Health" was defined broadly by the Court in *Doe v. Bolton*, a decision released the same day as *Roe*, to include "physical, emotional, psychological, familial, and the woman's age" as factors. See *Doe v. Bolton*, 410 U.S. 179 (1973). For an analysis of the Court's decision in *Roe*, see Mary Szoch, "The Best Pro-Life Arguments for Secular Audiences," Family Research Council, 2021, https://www.frc.org/brochure/the-best-pro-life-arguments-for-secular-audiences.

2 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. ___ (2022).

3 It is worth noting that abortion advocacy groups and providers are moving away from characterizing themselves as "pro-choice." For example, in September 2022, the Women's March tweeted, "We're not just pro-choice. We are proudly, unapologetically pro-abortion. RT if you agree." See Women's March, Twitter post, September 29, 2022, https://twitter.com/womensmarch/status/1575498637764808705. Additionally, in 2022, Planned Parenthood published a language guide that suggested abortion supporters say, "I support a person's right to access safe, legal abortion" instead of "I am pro-choice." See "Keeping Activism Positive: A Guide to Busting Stigma, Avoiding Myths, and Being Inclusive," Planned Parenthood, August 26, 2022, accessed September 29, 2022, https://www.plannedparenthood.org/blog/keeping-activism-positive-a-guide-to-busting-stigma-avoiding-myths-and-being-inclusive.

4 For an up-to-date overview of the status of pro-life laws in each state, see FRC.org/ProLifeMaps.

5 Reverend Raphael Warnock, Twitter post, December 8, 2020, https://twitter.com/reverendwarnock/status/1336490801413632002.

6 The View, "Sen. Raphael Warnock Says He Stands With Women of Georgia After Roe v. Wade Overturn," YouTube video, July 18, 2022, https://youtu.be/xuR0NB2wiDw.

7 Sophie Novack, "My Congregation Trusts Women: Progressive Faith Groups Counter Anti-Abortion Narratives," *The Texas Observer*, August 28, 2019, https://www.texasobserver.org/my-congregation-trusts-women-progressive-faith-groups-counter-anti-abortion-narratives/.

8 Will Maule, "Buttigieg Justifies Late-Term Abortion Stance By Saying Life Starts 'With First Breath,'" CBN, September 10, 2019, https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/politics/2019/september/buttigieg-justifies-late-term-abortion-stance-by-saying-life-starts-with-first-breath.

9 What is AAPLOG's Position on 'Abortion to Save the Life of the Mother?," AAPLOG, accessed October 5, 2022, https://aaplog.org/what-is-aaplogs-position-on-abortion-to-save-the-life-of-the-mother/.

10 Other types of induced abortions are therapeutic and eugenic abortions. Therapeutic abortions are performed for the mother's health, and eugenic abortions are performed when a baby has or is at risk for some physical handicap, such as Down syndrome. Definitions modified from the abortion discussion in Paul D. Feinberg and John S. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, Second Edition (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2010), 73–75.

11 Fisher B. Lawrence, "Reasons U.S. Women Have Abortions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 37 (2005): 113–14, https://www.guttmacher.org/journals/psrh/2005/reasons-us-women-have-abortions-quantitative-and-qualitative-perspectives.

12 Steven Andrew Jacobs, "Biologists' Consensus on 'When Life Begins,'" SSRN, 2018, https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3211703.

13 Carl Sagan, *Billions and Billions* (New York: Random House, 1997), 163–79.

14 Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2018), 20.

15 Pearcey, *Love Thy Body,* 53.

16 As John Jefferson Davis argues, "A person in the proper sense exists from the earliest moments of human existence. Personhood denotes not merely conscious, postnatal humans, but all members of the human species, those who are genetically distinct human entities with their own unique life trajectories and development futures. Rather than saying that the unborn represent 'potential human life,' it is more accurate to say that the unborn represent actual human life with great potential." See John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics, Issues Facing the Church Today,* Third Edition (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2004), 155–56. On the question of personhood, Nancy Pearcey has this insightful comment: "A Christian concept of personhood depends not on what I can do but on who I am—that I am created in the image of God, and that God called me into existence and continues to know and love me. Human beings do not need to earn the right to be treated as creatures of great value. Our dignity is intrinsic, rooted in the fact that God made us, knows us, and loves us." See Pearcey, *Love Thy Body,* 55.

17 John Jefferson Davis, *Abortion and the Christian: What Every Believer Should Know* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1984), 40.

18 As John Feinberg and Paul Feinberg note in their discussion on abortion, non-Christians will reject appeals to Scripture prima facie. However, since those who appeal to something other than Scripture as source and support for their views on human personhood do so unashamedly, Christians should not be embarrassed to appeal to the Bible for formulating their view of human personhood. See John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World.*

19 David Closson, "What Does It Mean to Be Made in God's Image?," Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, May 4, 2016, https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/what-does-it-mean-to-be-made-in-gods-image/.

20 This point is made by Wayne Grudem in his chapter on abortion in *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*. Grudem uses Luke 1:41-44, Psalm 51:5, Psalm 139:13, Genesis 25:22-23, Exodus 21:22-25, and Luke 1:34 to argue for the personhood of the unborn and the immorality of abortion. For Grudem's exegesis on these passages, see Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2018), 566-71.

21 Davis, *Abortion and the Christian: What Every Believer Should Know*, 42. In his reflection on Psalm 139, Davis also writes, "His [David's] language suggests that his personal identity is not restricted to his conscious memory, but extends back beyond conscious recollections, to the earliest time of God's creative control of his prenatal development. These verses strongly imply that personal identity is a continuum, beginning in the womb and extending naturally into postnatal life."

22 Ken Magnuson, *Introduction to Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Academic, 2020).

23 Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 148.

24 John Frame cites Job 31:15-18, Psalm 22:9, and Hosea 12:3 as other examples where the Bible speaks of unborn children as persons. John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, *A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2008), 722.

25 Davis, *Abortion and the Christian: What Every Believer Should Know*, 51.

26 Personal correspondence with Peter Gentry, August 22, 2019. Peter Gentry serves as the Donald L. Williams Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

27 Personal correspondence with Dr. Peter J. Gentry. For the full exegesis and proof of Gentry's argument on the literary structure of Psalm 51, see the exhaustive treatment in Edward R. Dalglish, *Psalm*

Fifty-One in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 1962), 121.

28 Some have asked what sin the unborn David could have been guilty of. According to John Frame, it is in these verses that the Christian church has found one of the chief Old Testament witnesses to the doctrine of original sin: that each of us inherits the guilt of Adam's sin and his sinful nature. For the full discussion, see Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 723.

29 Davis, *Abortion and the Christian: What Every Believer Should Know*, 55–56.

30 Darrell Bock argues that John's response "suggests that he has initiated his work as the forerunner" of the Messiah. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (ECNT)* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1994), 135.

31 Scott Rae makes this point while highlighting the significance of Christ's incarnation for the question of personhood and the unborn. See Scott Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Academic, 2009), 130.

32 Davis believes Jesus' prenatal personhood which is taught in this passage carries significant implications for understanding the personhood of the unborn. See Davis, *Abortion and the Christian: What Every Believer Should Know*, 55–57.

33 Other passages include Luke 2:12, 18:15; Acts 7:19; and 2 Tim. 3:15. See Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 183–84.

34 Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*, 130.

35 Ibid, 128.

36 Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 723.

37 Davis develops this point carefully in Davis, *Abortion and the Christian: What Every Believer Should Know*, 47.

38 Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*, 570.

39 Special thanks to Rodney Closson for referring me to this passage.

40 John T. Noonan, ed., *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 4.

41 Alvin J. Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 2001), 56.

42 Schmidt notes that Basil of Caesarea was active in the fourth century in mobilizing Christians to minister to women facing unwanted pregnancies. He also notes that Basil's "efforts reportedly inspired Emperor Valentinian to outlaw abortion, along with infanticide and child abandonment, in 374." For a brief study on Roman culture and the wide acceptance of abortion during the first three centuries of the church, see Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization*, 55-60.

43 Noonan highlights both themes in his discussion of the early church's attitude toward abortion. See Noonan, *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives*, 7–8.

44 Noonan, *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives*, 10.

45 Ibid.

46 *Barnabas* 19.5. Cited in Noonan, 10.

47 *Pedagogus* 2.10.96.1, *Die grieschen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhundert* [The Greek Christian Writers of the First Three Centuries]. Cited in Noonan, 11.

48 Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 68.

49 Athenagoras, *Embassy for the Christians, Patrologia graeca* 6.919. Cited in Noonan, *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives*, 11.

50 For a brief discussion on Tertullian's view on abortion see Noonan, *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives*, 12-13.

51 Tertullian, *De Anima* 25. 3. Cited in Michael J. Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish and Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Pub, 1998), 55–56.

52 Chrysostom, *Homily 24 on the Epistle to the Romans*, PG 60.626.27. Cited in Noonan, *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives*, 17.

53 Basil, *Letters* 188, PG 32.672. Cited in Noonan, *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives,* 17.

54 Noonan, *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives*, 14, 18.

55 Katherine Brind'Amour, "St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225- 1274)," The Embryo Project Encyclopedia, November 11, 2007, accessed September 13, 2019, https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/st-thomas-aquinas-c-1225-1274.

56 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Respect for Unborn Human Life: The Church's Constant Teaching," fact sheet, accessed September 13, 2019, https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/abortion/respect-for-unborn-human-life.

57 John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. Charles Bingham (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981), 3:42. Cited in Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization*, 59.

58 Pope Sixtus V, "Apostolic Constitution 'Effraenatam,'" trans. Antonio Trimakas (November 29, 1558). For a summary of this document, see https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/effraenatam-1588-pope-sixtus-v.

59 "The Catechism of the Council of Trent," The Catholic Primer, 212, https://www.saintsbooks.net/books/The%20Roman%20Catechism.pdf?bcs-agent-scanner=2fdf10f8-fcf3-e449-8f6b-3e0314628084.

60 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Volume 6, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2009), 206.

61 Historically, the following denominations have been considered to belong to Mainline Protestantism: the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Churches, the United Church of Christ, and the Disciples of Christ. Some of these denominations, such as the Episcopal Church (TEC), Presbyterian Church (USA), and United Church of Christ, are decidedly pro-choice (demonstrated by their membership in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice). Others, such as the United Methodist and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, support abortion rights with some limits. For a full discussion, see David Masci, "Where Major Religious Groups Stand on Abortion," Pew Research Center, June 21, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/21/where-major-religious-groups-stand-on-abortion/.

62 The official position of the Roman Catholic Church on abortion is articulated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In Part 3, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 5, line 2271, it states: "Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law." See http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P7Z.HTM.

63 Rev. Dr. Matthew Harrison, the president of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, released the following statement in 2019 after governors in New York and Virginia expanded abortion in their states. Harrison said, "The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod advocates strong citizenship and active participation in government. We obey the laws of our land and encourage those around us to do so. We are, however, bound by our conscience to speak against those laws that are unjust and, especially, those laws that violate God's

law and the natural law that binds all mankind. Abortion and other means through which humans kill humans violate these natural and moral laws that form the foundation of society." See Matthew Harrison, "LCMS President's Statement Regarding Gubernatorial Actions Expanding Abortion in New York, Illinois," *Reporter*, January 24, 2019, https://blogs.lcms.org/2019/lcms-presidents-statement-regarding-gubernatorial-actions-expanding-abortion-in-new-york-and-illinois/.

64 The official position of the Presbyterian Church (PCA) is presented in TE Carl Bogue, "Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Abortion," PCA Historical Center, 1978, http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/studies/2-015.pdf.

65 Assemblies of God, "Sanctity of Human Life: Abortion and Reproductive Issues (Adopted by the General Presbytery in Session August 9-11, 2010)," accessed September 12, 2019, https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Abortion-Sanctity-of-Human-Life.

66 Admittedly, this has not always been the position of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). While the SBC formally maintained the position that the Bible is trustworthy, there was a time when it adopted the pro-abortion view. Yet the SBC's position on abortion has evolved from being pro-choice in the 1970s to decidedly pro-life by the mid-1980s. The latest resolution, passed in 2018, says, "We affirm the full dignity of every unborn child and denounce every act of abortion except to save the mother's physical life." For the text of this resolution, see "On Reaffirming the Full Dignity of Every Human Being," Southern Baptist Convention, June 12, 2018, http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2289/on-reaffirming-the-full-dignity-of-every-human-being. For a history of the Southern Baptist Convention's position on abortion, see David Roach, "How Southern Baptists Became Pro-Life," *Biblical Recorder*, January 19, 2015, https://www.brnow.org/news/How-Southern-Baptists-became-pro-life/.

67 Stanley S. Harakas, "The Stand of the Orthodox Church on Controversial Issues," Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, August 12, 1985, https://www.goarch.org/-/the-stand-of-the-orthodox-church-on-controversial-issues.

68 Ibid.

69 "Kathi Aultman, M.D.," Charlotte Lozier Institute, accessed September 12, 2019, https://lozierinstitute.org/team-member/kathi-aultman-m-d/.

70 Alexandra DeSanctis, "House Republicans Hold a Hearing on the Born-Alive Bill," National Review, September 11, 2019, https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/09/born-alive-bill-hearing-house-republicans/.

71 See Lauren Kaylor, "Pro-Life Converts: Dr. Bernard Nathanson," Family Research Council, August 14, 2019, https://www.frc.org/blog/2019/08/pro-life-converts-dr-bernard-nathanson. For a discussion of Abby Johnson's conversion, see Benjamin Mann, "Abby Johnson Reveals Details of Pro-Life Turnaround and Catholic Conversion," Catholic News Agency, January 13, 2011, http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/abby-johnson-reveals-details-of-pro-life-turnaround-and-catholic-conversion/.

OUR PARTNERS

State family policy councils accomplish at the state level what Family Research Council does at the national level—shape public debate and formulate public policy. These organizations share our commitment to life, family, and religious liberty. We are honored to co-publish this resource with the following partners:

alaska
FAMILY ACTION | FAMILY COUNCIL

AKFamily.org

CENTER FOR ARIZONA POLICY

AZPolicy.org

FAMILY COUNCIL

FamilyCouncil.org

CaliforniaFamily.org

Family Institute of Connecticut

CTFamily.org

DelawareFamilies.org

FLFamily.org

HawaiiFamilyForum.org

KentuckyFamily.org

LAFamilyForum.org

CCLMaine.org

MAFamily.org

MFC.org

NebraskaFamilyAlliance.org

NHCornerstone.org

NewYorkFamilies.org

NCFamily.org

CCV.org

PAFamily.org

FamilyHeritageAlliance.org

TXValues.org

FamilyFoundation.org

FPIW.org

WIFamilyCouncil.org

How's Your View?

FRC'S BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW SERIES

exists to help Christians apply a biblical worldview to today's most pressing cultural and political questions.

Find these resources and more at frc.org/worldview

CENTER FOR
BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

FRC Presents

CENTER FOR
BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

Engaging Culture Through a Biblical Lens

The Center for Biblical Worldview exists to provide resources for individuals, families, churches, and pastors who desire to grow and strengthen their biblical worldview.

Our mission is to equip Christians with a biblical worldview and train them to advance and defend the faith in their families, communities, and the public square.

Visit us at frc.org/worldview

to view the latest CBW videos, articles, publications, and interviews

NOW WE LIVE

How Your Faith Can Restore a Broken World

WHAT'S THE POINT OF OUR FAITH IF WE CAN'T RELATE IT TO THINGS EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT TODAY?

The Center for Biblical Worldview presents *Now We Live*, a six-week video series created in partnership with Summit Ministries. This free worldview Bible study will spark rich discussions about some of life's most foundational questions and challenge you to think about topics you see every day in a whole new way!

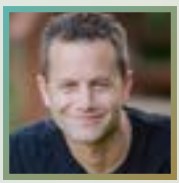
FEATURING

TONY PERKINS

JEFF MYERS

LEE STROBEL

ALISA CHILDERS



KIRK CAMERON

SEAN MCDOWELL

Visit us at frc.org/worldview

to access the *Now We Live* video series

SUMMIT MINISTRIES

What does the Bible say about abortion and the personhood of the unborn?

Does the Bible teach that life begins at conception or birth? Is abortion murder? On these questions and others, the Bible is clear. By surveying key passages of Scripture and consulting the wisdom of theologians throughout church history, "Biblical Principles for Pro-Life Engagement" helps Christians think and engage biblically about abortion and the question of personhood.

frc.org

BC19I05