

Abortion: Is It Murder?

Psalm 51

(The following is the substance of an address given by David Silversides at an after-church meeting at Loughbrickland Reformed Presbyterian Church on 28th June 1998.)

This question is a question of great gravity. That infants could be routinely and legally murdered in a supposedly civilized society is a sign of great ungodliness and must surely be offensive to the Most High God.

Let us get some idea of the size of the question. Of course, any murder is serious but multiple murder is more so. In England and Wales according to figures that I have at least, the number of abortions in 1995 was 162,447, and in 1996 it was 177,225. Also in England and Wales in 1995, 90,000 embryos were generated by in vitro fertilization and disposed of immediately without use. This is, then, an immense question of immense proportion.

We might be confused into thinking that this has something to do with saving the lives of mothers from certain death. This is not the case. Even if it could be shown biblically that a mother has a greater or prior claim to preservation over the child, (we have not seen this done,) and therefore ground could be given for medical interference resulting in the death of a child to save the life of the mother, that would presuppose that doctors are in a position to infallibly determine that the death of the mother will certainly result if the abortion does not take place. Yet there are many cases where the doctors

who predicted certain death to the mother if she does not have an abortion have been proved wrong. The mother has lived and the child has lived. I know of one case personally in England where a Christian mother refused to have an abortion. She was told that if she did not she would die. She was harassed throughout her time in hospital to try to persuade her to have an abortion. She consistently refused. She lived and the child lived and they were both healthy thereafter. So let us not think that this really has anything to do with saving mothers' lives from certain death. Not many claims are even made for that because these figures that I quoted to you have nothing to do with preserving mothers from certain death and scarce ever is that even claimed.

The breakdown of the 1995 figures which I mentioned is as follows. There are several legal categories that doctors can mention as the reason for the abortion. Sometimes they give more than one reason but let me give you the 1995 figures broken down.

1. Risk to the mother's life: 127.
2. To prevent grave permanent injury to the mother: 2,353.
3. A risk to the mother's physical or mental health: 156,721.
4. A risk to existing children's health: 13,482.
5. A substantial risk of serious disability of the child: 1,828.
6. In emergency to save the mother's life: nil.
7. In emergency to prevent grave permanent injury to the mother: nil.

So the abortion movement really has nothing to do with saving mothers from certain death even if that could be justified. It has to do with the desire to pursue by means of selected killing of infants in the womb the futile quest for risk-free, disability-free, and even inconvenience-free childbearing – the futile pursuit of what God has never promised.

The trend in Northern Ireland is not as far behind England and Wales as is generally imagined. The law is not that much tighter. In 1995, for example, 1,545 women from Northern Ireland went to England for abortions, but abortions are taking place in Northern Ireland as well. Occasionally this comes to light in particular instances. There was the Kay case in 1993 where a mother threatened suicide, and as I understand it, the abortion was allowed on the ground of a threat to the mother's life. But the only threat was that she said she would commit suicide. There was the case in 1994, a mother with learning difficulties which received some public attention. Public opinion in Northern Ireland has tended to check a liberal interpretation of the existing laws but this is changing, and there are strong attempts to change the law in Northern Ireland which does not even outlaw abortions as rigorously as people imagine. There are attempts to change those laws anyway and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission proposed under the Stormont agreement is well-placed to bring this about. The Stormont agreement has an effect on a whole range of things that people do not realize. Dr Jenny Tonge, the liberal Democrat MP, has already raised this matter in the House of Commons that women in Northern Ireland have the same access to abortion as in England and Wales.

So then, is this legitimate progress or is it legalized wholesale murder? If abortion is murder, then doctors and mothers are killing more people than all the terrorists put together. It is less obvious, the pain caused by it less apparent, but if abortion is murder, then far more human beings are being murdered by the abortionists than by the gunmen. One thing should be clear, if the infant in the womb is a human being, then these abortions do amount to murder. So the question we must ask is: do the Scriptures teach that the child in the womb from conception onwards is a human being and to be treated as such? So we turn to the Scriptures. I do not want to spend a lot of time on facts and figures and cases and so on. I particularly want to stick close to the Scriptures.

1. God is Made Known to us in General and Special Revelation.

This may seem a strange point to start at but you will see the relevance as we go on. God is made known to men in general revelation and in special revelation. By general revelation we mean God's works of creation and providence which tell us of his eternal power. Romans 1:20, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." That means there is no excuse for the pagans thinking of God as they do in verse 23 when they "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things." Even without a Bible or any part of the Bible, the

creation declares that God is not like birds and four-footed beasts and man and so on.

Psalm 19 speaks of this general revelation in creation and providence. Psalm 19:1-4, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun." In verses 1 through 6 this Psalm we are being told that God's glory is displayed in the creation and that we see God's handiwork and his government of it. We ought to know that God is eternal and Almighty and so the pagan who worships that which is finite in the image of creatures as if they were God is without excuse for that sin.

Although this general revelation tells men that God is Almighty and eternal, it does not tell men how to be saved from their sin. General revelation, the glory of God in the creation, does not tell sinners how to be forgiven so in Romans 10:13-15 the Apostle Paul says, "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" There must be special revelation, that is, the revelation of God in Holy Scripture, the written word. We need biblical truth to know the way of salvation.

So Psalm 19, having spoken of general revelation in the creation, moves on in verse 7, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple." We need the written word of God, it is often called 'special revelation', in order to know the way to heaven. The glory of God in the creation does not tell us how to find forgiveness of sin. It is God speaking "at sundry times and in divers manners ... unto the fathers by the prophets [and] in these last days ... by his Son," that tells us the way of salvation, Hebrews 1:1-2.

2. Science is the Detailed Study of General Revelation.

When we go into the countryside, we are amazed at the beauty of it. We see the beauty of the handiwork of God and if we are Christians, we rightly see in the creation as we look at it in the light of the Holy Scriptures, the glory of God displayed in it. Now the unbeliever sees something of the beauty of it but he holds down the truth in unrighteousness. He does not glorify God when he sees God's glory displayed in the creation. He finds an alternative explanation for that glory and that beauty. What the non-scientist sees in this general simple way, the scientist explores in great detail. The scientist is studying general revelation in all its immense detail and intricacy and complexity which the rest of us only have a vague and general appreciation of. So the glory of God displayed in the creation which we see only in general, the scientist sees in its detail under the microscope and with all the equipment and his careful study of the created world. If the scientist is a Christian, then he will do this in submission to the written word of God, and he will do so to the glory of God, and as he discovers more and more

of the intricacy of the things that God has made, his admiration for God will increase.

3. Scripture, not Science, Teaches us Concerning the Presence of the Soul.

From the outset, we must not concede too much to the scientist. We are not to be cowed because we are not scientists. He may be able to declare when he can detect physical life but he cannot without the written word of God either define a human life or declare when there is human life in the full sense of the word. He can only look at the physical side of human life. In other words, the presence of a soul is not something that can be scientifically detected. It is not the province of the scientist to say when the soul is present or not present. We are to turn to the word of God to understand what a human being is and when human life begins. The scientists can tell us when there is physical human life but the Scriptures tell us when the soul of man is present in that life.

Under this consideration let us learn the Christian view of human life differs from that of the atheist. For the atheist, human life is purely physical, man does not have a soul – the physical is all that there is. That is why for the atheist his view of death is completely different from ours. For him, death is merely the absence or the end of physical life and so for the atheist, the difference between an unconscious and apparently irrecoverably unconscious person on the one hand, and a dead person on the other, is minimal. For the atheist, the man who is unconscious and apparently will remain so is very little

different from the man who is dead. But for the Christian, that is not the case. This man is still living and his soul is still in his body. The man who is dying, his soul at the point of death departed from the body. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it," Ecclesiastes 12:7. So the Christian and the atheist have a different view of what man is. They have a different view of human life. They have a different view of what death is. And so the atheist feels free in his desire to be as God and in the place of God as Genesis 3 tells us, to define meaningful human life and when there is valid human life worthy of protection.

The atheist starts with a completely different standpoint. Human life is simply physical and whether it is worth preserving is a matter of his judgment. So with the infant, the atheist arrogantly asserts at what point in the pregnancy the child shall be treated as a human being and protected accordingly. The Christian must reject that. The Christian does not admit for one moment that man has the right to draw a line on the basis of his own invention as to when in a pregnancy the child shall be treated as a human being. The Bible tells us when human life begins and so we reject the idea of even some professing Christians that we can determine by scientific observation when the soul becomes present. We cannot. It is not the function of a scientist by observing the physical form of a child to determine when the soul begins. It is not within his competence to do that. God alone can tell us when the soul, which is invisible, is present. Only God can tell us. That is why in the case of twins, even before there is a difference in the womb that is detectable by man, God knows what he is doing. God

knows there will be twins. God can cause there to be two souls even though there is no discernible indication to man that twins are present.

4. The Bible Tells us that the Infant in the Womb is to be Treated as Fully Human from Conception Onwards.

I want to expound the biblical teaching because I am not a scientist, I am not a doctor, but a minister of the word of God. The word of God answers this question, not scientific inquiry.

The Bible nowhere sets before us the concept of a soulless but living human body. The only bodies that are without a soul in Scripture are the bodies of those who have died. Even in the case of Adam, his creation was not a staggered two-stage affair. Genesis 2:7, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." The word 'soul' there is a Hebrew word, 'nephesh,' that is not always easy to define exactly. It does not always refer to the spirit as distinct from the body, but it does refer to the person. So in Psalm 103:1, "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name." There you have standard Hebrew parallel lines. The Hebrew poetry often expresses the same idea twice in different forms. "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name." So 'my soul' is equivalent to 'all that is within me.' The point is that Adam though not conceived and born like us, was a complete human being from the start.

Then moving to Exodus 21:22-25, "If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." Going back to verse 22 in this place "so that her fruit depart from her." What does this phrase mean? Does this refer to a miscarriage and the mischief envisaged only relates to the mother? Is it saying, "Well, if she had a miscarriage but the mother is all right, then all is well." Does the life for life, tooth for tooth, and so on only apply to something that might happen to the mother as a result of the miscarriage, or does it mean if the child is born prematurely and the child and mother are all right, then all is well, but if there is damage to the child or the mother, then life for life, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and so on, because of injury done not simply to the mother but to the child?" Does the 'fruit departing' mean a miscarriage which is not regarded as a death, or is it referring to the birth of the child and to the state of the child – living, dead, harmed or injured – as well as the mother as being something for which the man responsible in this brawl between two men must give account?

There is a Hebrew word for miscarriage but that is not the word used when it says "her fruit depart from her." Some of the modern translations actually render it miscarriage but they have no business doing that. The New American Standard Bible, the Revised Standard Version, the Living

Bible, the New English Bible, all translate it miscarriage but there is a different word in Hebrew for miscarriage. It does not say that. That is an interpretation imposed in the translation which is wrong. The word "depart from her" is used of childbirth elsewhere in Scripture. Genesis 25:25, the birth of Esau and Jacob, "And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel." The phrase, 'came out' in verse 25 and in verse 26, is the same Hebrew word translated 'go forth' in our text, and here it is referring not to a miscarriage but to a birth. The same is true in Genesis 38:29-30, the birth of Pharez and Zarah, "And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? this breach be upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez. And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zarah." Again the phrase 'came out' is the same word rendered 'departed from' in our text. The word is used of a stillbirth in Numbers 12:12 where Aaron speaks for Miriam and says, "Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb." In other words, the phrase 'come out' or 'depart from' simply implies birth, not a miscarriage.

Going back to our text in Exodus 21:22, when we read there, "if men strive and hurt a woman with child so that her fruit depart from her and yet no mischief follow," it is not talking about a miscarriage and no mischief to the mother. It is saying if the child is born and there is no mischief to the child or the mother, he shall surely be

punished according as the woman's husband will lay upon him. But then in verse 23, "And if any mischief follow," that is, not just to the mother but to the child as well, "then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." So if the mother dies, the man who injured her is responsible for the death of the mother as a human being. If the child dies, then the man who wounded her is responsible for the death of the child as the death of a human being. It is the loss of a life.

So the infant in the womb in that passage is being treated as a human being as well as the mother. There is no distinction in the text after the point in the pregnancy that is in view. It does not say after so many weeks then the child is treated as a human being. It simply speaks of a woman with child. The implication is that if the woman is pregnant, then the child in the womb is a human being all through the pregnancy and is to be treated as such if a man injures a woman and there is harm to her or the child.

Then let us consider, we are sinners from conception. Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." The word 'conceive' here is a word that definitely refers to conception as we understand it. It is actually a word connected with the procreative act. So there is no question that it is referring to conception, to the very beginning of the embryo. It is used elsewhere in Scripture of cattle in Genesis 30:41 who, of course, have no souls so it cannot refer to any later point. Yet David says that he was a sinner at conception. Now if he was a sinner at conception, he must have been a person at conception. Sin cannot exist

without sinners and people and persons. There is no such thing as sin without persons. The uniqueness of the sinlessness of Christ's human nature is traced back to his conception by the Holy Spirit, Matthew 1:18-22 and Luke 1:26-38. It was because of the uniqueness of his conception that he was free from both original guilt and corruption.

In Psalm 139, David speaks of himself as a person as he developed in his mother's womb. Psalm 139:13, "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb." He says "covered **me**," not just that which became me. "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." It was him. It was David, the person, who was in his mother's womb.

To sum up then, the Scriptures speak consistently of the child in the womb as a person, as a sinner though capable of being filled with the Holy Spirit while in the womb like John the Baptist, Luke 1:13-17, and they do so from conception onwards. The Scriptures speak of a woman being with child. That is all. She is with child from conception to birth. No distinction is made regarding any point in the pregnancy to give any indication of any sort that the child only becomes a human being at some point subsequent to conception.

To kill the unborn child is to kill a human being. Abortion and all birth control that involves the destruction of a conceived embryo is killing a human being. Should this, then, be classed as murder? The answer is very simple: to kill a human being in order to avoid risk to another human being is murder, is it not? To kill a human being to prevent injury or risk of injury to body or mind to another, that is murder, is it not? To kill a human being because he is or may be disabled is murder. We use the term 'disabled' to describe above average disability. Because of the fall of man and the curse of God, there is a sense in which we are all disabled. The fall affects all of us in different ways but to kill someone because their disability is greater than average is murder and to kill someone because of a risk of the mental health of another is also murder. Even that has been interpreted to mean nothing more than that the mother is upset and does not want the child and that has often been enough to say, "Well, there is a risk to her mental health. She is upset. She does not want the child." So the child must be killed and that is murder.

Even within murder, some sins are more heinous than others. One of the worst cases I heard of apparently took place just a few years ago. It was of a professional couple, who had three children and they did want a fourth child and the woman became pregnant but it clashed with a skiing holiday that they had arranged. It was not that they did not want a fourth child, they did, but not so as to clash and spoil their arranged skiing holiday. The doctor refused to help them have an abortion and the General Medical Council apparently criticized the doctor for his interfering attitude.

The abortion clinic is just a human abattoir for the destruction of children. That is all. It is a sophisticated human abattoir to slaughter unborn children. But it has to be said that the debate is shifting. We have shown from Scripture that a child in the womb is a human being from conception onwards and, of course, to us that means the child must not be killed. And much of the debate with the pro-abortion people in the past has been from that place. They claim that at an early stage the child is not viable and so on, and is not a real human being. The vanguard of the pro-abortion movement are not even saying that anymore. They are not even bothering to say that in the early stages of pregnancy the child is not a human being. The pretence is gone. The humanists are coming out in their true colours. They are now starting to say not just at the grassroots level but in certain circles, "We know fine well it is a human being, but the mother still has the right to kill it."

In the Evangelical Times recently, it mentions a new book which has been praised by some of America's leading feminists and abortion crusaders which says even in a medically normal pregnancy, the foetus massively intrudes on a woman's body and expropriates her liberty. If the woman does not consent to this transformation and use of her body, the foetus's imposition constitutes injuries sufficient to justify the use of deadly force to stop it. The book called "Breaking Abortion Deadlock: From Choice to Consent," is by Eileen McDonagh, who accepts the humanity of the unborn child and says just as a homeowner concedes the humanity of a thief in the night but shoots him dead. What McDonagh is saying is, if the woman is pregnant, yes, the infant is a human being but

it is an intrusion and though human, she has the right to kill it. This is the height things have reached in wickedness. And the comparison with the thief breaking in at night is outrageous. The thief is there by his own choice. He should not be there. He is there with harmful intent. The infant is in the womb because of the mother's activity either lawfully with her husband or unlawfully with a man she is not married to, and with no malicious intent on the part of the infant. The thing is outrageous but sin is outrageous, wickedness is outrageous, pride, arrogance, the desire of man to be as gods, and this is that wickedness reaching a height. The idea is that a woman has an absolute right over her own body. She does not. She is a creature of God and God tells her what she can do and what she cannot do with her body. If she is expecting a child, God holds her accountable for how she treats that child.

The state has authority from God to put murderers to death. The state does not have authority to legalize the killing of the child in the womb. The child in the womb is a sinner but has committed no crime with which the civil magistrate must punish that child with a death sentence, and for a government to legalize the murder of thousands of infants in the womb is framing mischief by a law, Psalm 94:20, and it will not be overlooked by God. The rulers have accommodated the maternal and medical murderer instead of protecting the unborn child and attaching the death penalty to those who kill children in the womb. The abortionist should be told that the moment he kills a child, he will be treated as a murderer and be put to death.

Psalm 106:37 says of Israel, "Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood." The humanist worships himself. He worships man and he wants the rights of God to be transferred to man, and he sacrifices the children in the womb to gratify that wicked rebellion against God and desire to displace God. That is what the abortion movement is all about. We have become like Israel, as a people our hands are full of blood even of the sons and daughters of this people. "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" We ought to cry mightily to God that he would not stir up all his wrath but rather pour out his Spirit that the abortionist, mother and doctor, would be brought to repentance and that the people would be brought to repentance of this great wickedness in the sight of God, and may the Lord have mercy upon our nation. Amen.