

## Abortion and Women's Rights Psalm 139:13-16

Rev. Carter Sanger, Cornerstone Church, 2/12/2017

In years past many people in support of a mother's right to choose firmly believe that the fetus inside the mother is not the same as a baby. It's just a fetus – a living blob of tissue. If that is indeed the case, then that tissue is simply a part of the woman's body and abortion is simply the removal of an unwanted growth. There is no moral issue. When people argue that the fetus is a human being and that abortion is thus wrong, it often falls on deaf ears because the argument is assumed to originate from a religious doctrine. Since religious doctrine is personal and private, it shouldn't be forced upon someone else. The Supreme Court decision of *Roe vs. Wade* concluded that since no consensus view on when a fetus becomes a person exists, abortion falls within the realm of the protected privacy of a mother, at least until the fetus is viable (in their view, 6 months). After that, a state can make laws to restrict abortion. The *Roe. Vs. Wade* decision came in January, 1973.

Today is a different story. “due to advances in genetics and DNA, virtually no ethicist denies that the fetus is human: biologically, genetically, scientifically human.”<sup>1</sup> And yet, this has not stopped others from continuing to support the right of a woman to choose an abortion.

British broadcaster Miranda Sawyer is blonde, beautiful, and a self-proclaimed liberal feminist. She had always been proudly pro-choice . . . until she became pregnant with her first child. Then she began to struggle.

“I was calling the life inside me a baby because I wanted it. Yet if I hadn't, I would think of it just as a group of cells that it was okay to kill.” That did not make sense.

Yet Sawyer could not imagine herself becoming...anti-abortion. “I spent some time thinking about the precise point when our baby came into existence. Was he there before I did the [pregnancy] test? Something was, or the test couldn't have come up positive. But what? A person? A potential person? Life? What was life exactly?”

What indeed? Sawyer met “Snowflake” children born from frozen embryos. “If an embryo can survive being artificially created [in a laboratory], being frozen, being FedExed hundreds of miles and then implanted into someone else's womb, then surely the anti-abortionists were right? Life does begin at conception.”<sup>2</sup> So, I agreed with two conflicting arguments. Life begins when a sperm hits an egg, but women should have the right to abortions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pearcey, Nancy (2010-09-01). *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, and Meaning* (p. 53). B&H Publishing. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Pearcey, Nancy (2010-09-01). *Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, and Meaning* (pp. 48-49). B&H Publishing. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/apr/08/usa.world>, accessed 2/11/2017.

What is driving such a conflict and how can we answer it? We must answer with truth and grace. As image-bearers of God, we must pursue the sanctity of life.

This morning we will look at the first of several issues that are present sources of great division in our country: abortion and women's rights. I put them together only because the argument in support of abortion flows out of the argument for women's rights. As we look at this issue, our goal is threefold. One, we need to understand why this is an issue. Abortion is an ugly thing – it is the destruction of a fetus before it is born. So why is it that some argue so vehemently for it? Two, we need to know what the Bible says about it. Three, we need to understand how truth and grace can open the door to discuss the issue.

## Women's rights

There is a vocal segment of our society that longs for women's rights. The recent Women's March on Washington is evidence of such. But looking to the Women's March for help in understanding the fight for women's rights isn't helpful. It tries to bring together every voice that doesn't like Trump under the banner of women's rights. So don't associate the Women's March with women's rights or you'll get lost.

Instead, we need to recognize *and appreciate* the women's rights movement throughout history, otherwise it is too easy to take for granted some of the freedoms that women enjoy today in the USA. For example, when our country was first founded, women could not own property. It was Mississippi, in 1839, that first allowed women to own property – as long as they had permission from their husbands. Before 1920 women could not vote in National elections. Susan B. Anthony famously cast a vote in the 1872 election to test whether or not the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment, which extended the right to vote to all male citizens (including former slaves), would also extend to women. She was convicted of "unlawful voting." It wasn't until 1963 that Congress passed the Equal Pay Act promising equal pay for equal work. Each of these milestones was a significant step in women's rights.

To appreciate women's rights, we need to ask why they *didn't* have these rights before. Nancy Pearcey, in her book *Total Truth* provides insight.

In the colonial period, families lived much the way they have lived for millennia in traditional societies. The vast majority of people lived on farms or in peasant villages. Work was done not by lone individuals but by families or households. A household was a relatively autonomous economic unit, often including members of the extended family, apprentices, servants, and hired hands... Stores, offices, and workshops were located in a front room, with living quarters either upstairs or in the rear. This meant that the boundary between home and world was highly permeable: The "world" entered continually in the form of clients, business colleagues, customers, and apprentices...

What did the colonial integration of work and life mean for family relationships? It meant that husband and wife worked side by side on a daily basis, sharing in the same economic enterprise. For a colonial woman, one

historian writes, marriage “meant to become a co-worker beside a husband . . . learning new skills in butchering, silversmith work, printing, or upholstering—whatever special skills the husband’s work required.” . . . Now, the fact that all this took place in the home meant that mothers were able to combine economically productive work with raising children. It also meant that fathers were much more involved in raising children than they are today. In fact, we cannot understand changes in women’s roles unless we consider changes in men’s roles at the same time. . .

In the colonial period, the husband and father was regarded as the head of the household...defined as a divinely sanctioned office that conferred a duty to represent not his own individual interests but those of the entire household. This was an extension of the classical republican political theory . . . in which a social institution (family, church, or state) was regarded as an organic unity where all shared in a common good . . . [which] was the responsibility of the one in authority.

He was called to sacrifice his own interests—to be disinterested—in order to represent the interests of the whole. Husbands and fathers were not to be driven by personal ambition or self-interest but to take responsibility for the common good of the entire household . . . he was to fulfill himself through “publick usefulness” more than through economic success.<sup>4</sup>

She continues . . .

All of that changed with the Industrial Revolution. The main impact of the Industrial Revolution was to take work out of the home. This apparently simple change—in the physical location of work—set off a process that led to a sharp decline in the social significance accorded the home, drastically altering the roles of both men and women. . .

The old pattern was based on personal relations between a farmer and his sons and hired hands, or between craftsman and apprentices. In the Industrial Revolution, that gave way to impersonal relations based on wages. . . In the traditional agrarian society, farming and handcrafts were “task-oriented,” structured by human need and seasonable requirements. But in an industrial society, factory work was “time-oriented. . .

The new workplace fostered an economic philosophy of atomistic individualism, as workers were treated as so many interchangeable units to be plugged into the production process—each struggling to advance himself at the expense of others.

It was not long before a great social outcry was raised against this new and alien work style, while large-scale efforts were mobilized to restrict its dehumanizing effects. . .

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<sup>4</sup> Pearcey, Nancy R. (2005-09-02). Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity (Study Guide Edition) (p. 327-328). Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.

... laws were passed limiting the participation of women and children in the factories... The public sphere of business and finance was to be cordoned off from the private sphere of home and family—so that the home would become a refuge, a haven, from the harsh and competitive world outside, a place of solace and spiritual renewal.<sup>5</sup>

How did these changes affect men and women? The most obvious change is that men had little choice but to follow their work out of households and fields, and into factories and offices. As a result, their physical presence around the household dropped sharply. It became difficult for them to continue acting as the primary parent. Fathers simply no longer spent enough time with their children to educate them, enforce regular discipline, or train them in adult skills and trades...

The impact on women was, if anything, even more dramatic. After the Industrial Revolution, the home eventually ceased being the locus of production and became a locus of consumption—which meant that women at home were gradually reduced from producers to consumers... Instead of enjoying a sense of economic indispensability, women were reduced to dependents, living off the wages of their husbands. Instead of working in a common economic enterprise with their husbands, women were shut off in a world of private “retirement.” Instead of working with other adults throughout the day—servants, apprentices, clients, customers, and extended family—women became socially isolated with young children all day.

The good man was one who exercised self-restraint and self-sacrifice for the sake of the common good. But the emerging world of industrial capitalism fostered a new definition of virtue. The capitalist world seemed to require each man to function as an individual in competition...

At the same time, political theory was shifting from the household to the individual as the basic unit of society. Classical republican political philosophy—with its organic view of an overarching, unifying common good—gave way to an atomistic view of society as an aggregate of warring, self-interested individuals. *There emerged a new vision of the individual as free from settled social bonds, free from generational ties to the past, free to find his own place in society through open competition.*<sup>6</sup>

What was happening? The view of significance was shifting from one derived from the larger society to individual economic success. Whereas the household unit shared significance together, it was now derived at an individual level. This left women out, making it easier and easier to think less and less of her. So, as our world is today, the women’s right movement was a needed corrective.

How does this relate to abortion? Child-rearing was the main activity in the home, that place that kept women from engaging in the public sphere, the place that had

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 329-330.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 330-332.

become the measure of worth and significance in society. As divorce became easier, women were put into a difficult position. As culture values shifted to the freedom of the 60s, women again were left with the burden of carrying babies that were unplanned without any fathers to help in the responsibility. It was one-sided shackling of women. And so abortions became more and more viewed as the escape route for this shackling.

So when someone with this mindset hears arguments against abortion, they hear it not as an argument for the baby, but as an argument against women.

## **What does the Bible say about abortion?**

The Bible doesn't directly address abortion, but it does address the sanctity of life AND specifically references time in the womb. This is the basis of the Christians' view of life.

We first look at the high value of human life. Man, i.e. male and female, are made in the image of God.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them. (Ge 1:26-27)

The reason it is such a high crime to take the life of another is because it is a direct assault against the image of God. This is the reason for capital punishment.

"Whoever sheds the blood of man,  
by man shall his blood be shed,  
for God made man in his own image. (Ge 9:6)

When does this life begin? It begins long before birth, as we find in Psalm 139.

<sup>13</sup> For you formed my inward parts;  
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.  
<sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
my soul knows it very well.  
<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
<sup>16</sup> 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)

While someone who doesn't accept the Bible as an authority, we find that biology also demonstrates that conception is the beginning of a human being's life, as the fetus already has its own unique genetic fingerprint.

## **The Sanctity of Life and the gospel**

So how does someone like Miranda Sawyer get past her moral dilemma? She writes "In the end, I have to agree that life begins at conception. So yes, abortion is ending that life. But perhaps the fact of life isn't what is important. It's whether that life has...[become] a person."

This "personhood theory" has become popular among liberal bioethicists<sup>7</sup> that allows them to justify the taking of a human life. While we might argue against this, let's run with it for argument's sake. For it is associating the value of a human life as something outside of its biological essence. When does a human life become a person? That is a question that has no consensus. Even the Supreme Court states as much in its famous Roe v. Wade decision. When does a human life have value and what gives it this value? That's the question that we have to ask – as does Miranda Sawyer.

The justification for abortion is that an unwanted baby impedes the "value" of the mother's life. What does that say about the place she is seeking value? She is seeking it from a certain level of quality of life, from what she can achieve in the marketplace or the public square. The problem is that the marketplace can never deliver on giving the level of value that she desires. This is why we still see a women's movement determined to press forward, no matter what the cost, to "break the glass ceiling" as it were. Though there are remarkably accomplished women in the world, there is still this sense that the top of the mountain has yet to be reached. But what there will they find? Recognition and fame? Admiration? Yes, but also emptiness.

King Solomon, believed to be the writer of Ecclesiastes reaches the top of every pursuit and finds it, in the end, to be a chasing after the wind. It doesn't yield the fulfillment that he desired. It was a "vanity of vanities."

Ultimately, she too is after that which sanctifies life. The gospel holds out a brighter picture than the quality of life a woman might gain by loosening the shackles that society has placed on her, particularly by an unwanted pregnancy. The gospel points to Jesus, who came to seek and the save the lost. Jesus announced his ministry like this,

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.

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<sup>7</sup> Pearcey, Nancy (2010-09-01). Saving Leonardo: A Call to Resist the Secular Assault on Mind, Morals, and Meaning (p. 53). B&H Publishing. Kindle Edition.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Lk 4:18-19)

Jesus accomplished this by restoring you to a right relationship with God, in whose image you were made. He died on the cross to pay for your guilt – even the guilt of abortion. And he invites us to live self-sacrificial lives of compassion and mercy for the hurting and the oppressed in our society.

### **Practical steps: Understand the plight of the oppressed**

How does the gospel offer hope for the particular oppression women face today? It invites us to understand the plight of the oppressed. Jesus did this. The writer of Hebrews says,

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Heb 2:17-18)

### **Practical steps: Take an active role against oppression**

It invites us to take an active role against the oppression that women face and caring for the victims of such oppression.

Men, this includes being Godly husbands and fathers.

It means saying no to objectifying women. That means turn off the porn, look away from the magazine covers, and turning your eyes away from women that are not your wife.

It also means fighting against standing against sex traffickers, and coming alongside poor communities where we find the highest rates of unwanted pregnancies.

It means caring for the victims: those who struggle with guilt over past abortions, single moms, girls with unwanted pregnancies.

It might mean opening your home to adoption – particularly of biracial and minority babies.

It means praying and striving for God's Kingdom to come to our nation.