

Murder?

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Make a chain, for the land is filled with crimes of blood, and the city is full of violence. Therefore I will bring the worst of the Gentiles, and they will possess their houses; I will cause the pomp of the strong to cease, and their holy places shall be defiled. Destruction comes; they will seek peace, but there shall be none. Disaster will come upon disaster, and rumor will be upon rumor. Then they will seek a vision from a prophet; but the law will perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders.

When you read the title and then this quote from Ezekiel 7:23-26, your mind probably leaped to murders that result from family fights, drug deals gone sour, armed robberies, gangs fighting for supremacy in a ghetto, jealousy-inflamed love triangles, bitterness over the loss of employment and drive-by shootings of innocent bystanders. Maybe you thought of an unemployed, pistol-toting man, lashing out in bitterness and frustration in a darkened back alley at anyone he thought hindered the gratification of his passions. If you did, you couldn't be more wrong!

How many absolutely proved willful murders were committed in 1991, the most recent year the FBI Uniform Crime Statistics are available? The answer is 24,703. Many of us would find it charming to live in a small city of that size. At first glance 24,703 seems like a large number, and indeed it is 24,703 too large. But in reality, when you think of how much murder is covered by newspapers, radio and television, that number seems small. Many more murders occurred in the United States that year, but their statistics appear under different categories.

The key to this statistic is the four words "absolutely proved willful murders." This statistic helps us when we compare it with another category of murder that never appears in the FBI Uniform Crime Statistics because under United States law, it is not considered murder. We, though, would certainly think of it as the taking of human life. It is called abortion.

In the same year (1991) 1.6 million fetuses were surgically aborted! It is not considered murder because the Supreme Court ruled that in the first trimester the fetus is not human, but merely an "unviable tissue mass"! The "murderers" are not in a back alley, they are not unemployed, frustrated, inflamed with passion or carrying a gun. Some are dressed in white and are spotlessly clean. The accomplice is—surprisingly—a woman.

This 1.6 million is an incredible figure when we consider that abortion is the deliberate taking of human life. On a smaller scale, that is 4,383 abortions per day or 182 per hour or one every 19.7 seconds! According to the July 1993, North Carolina Right To Life, Inc. newsletter, almost one in three babies conceived in the U.S. is killed by abortion!

No ethical issue since the Civil War has so disturbed the social fabric of this nation. People almost instinctively know that abortion is not morally neutral, nor does it fall within a gray zone to which one can be indifferent. It cannot be both right and wrong for abortion on demand to be legal.

"Murder" is a strong word and "willful" makes it even stronger, but that is the way we tend to perceive abortion. However, the laws of most nations—and God's Word (Deuteronomy 19:4-13)—

recognize degrees of responsibility for taking human life. Murder, homicide and manslaughter are familiar terms, all indicating the taking of human life but implying different degrees of responsibility. "Murder one," or "first-degree murder," the terms used to indicate the most responsibility, incorporates within its definition the idea of premeditation or malice aforethought. Thus, not only is the act of killing in view, but also the motive and intent.

This becomes important because the issue at the heart of the turmoil over abortion is the answer to "Is abortion a form of murder?" Is it the willful taking of human life? No one denies that the fetus is alive in the womb or that abortion is a choice one makes in the exercise of his will. But those desiring the freedom to have an abortion have convinced themselves that surgical abortion is not the taking of human life. The same people who vociferously lobby for "freedom of choice" to abort fetuses would shrink in horror at killing that same life after it was born. It is as though after birth a connection is somehow realized between the baby just born and the fetus in the womb, and suddenly a different set of rules apply as to whether its life is allowed to continue.

Here is the issue: What is a fetus? This question is objective, not subjective; that is, our opinion makes no difference as to what a fetus is. What we think changes nothing. A fetus is either alive or it is not, either human or it is not, either a person or it is not. If a fetus is not any of these, what one thinks will not change it into a living, human person. Much like the question of whether God exists or not, what one thinks about it changes nothing.

When does life begin? Does it begin at conception? At birth? Or at a point between conception and birth where some kind of "quickening" takes place? The answer to this question determines one's position on the abortion issue.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that human life begins at some point in between conception and birth. A woman therefore has the lawful right to abortion on demand at any time during the first trimester of pregnancy. During that time the fetus is considered to be an "unviable tissue mass," and the mother is not subject to prosecution for breaking laws regarding the taking of life.

Is not one of the chief functions of law to protect the rights of individuals? Here in America our government is supposed to provide for all the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Does that apply to all but the unborn?

This raises the issue of just laws. For a nation to function without tyranny, its laws and government must be just. Justice, a subject about which God has much to say in Isaiah 59 and Amos 5, is right moral law and its practice. The issue of whether a law is just or unjust is directly tied to ethics, so abortion is an ethical question. By its ruling, the Supreme Court has declared that it is legal, just and ethical in the United States to end the life of a fetus in the first trimester.

But is what they have done moral? Who decides what is moral? We believe God does and what He has stated is the guide for our lives. Human societies pass unjust laws, making it legal to do something immoral, or making it illegal to do something God requires (like keeping the Sabbath) or that is morally permissible by Him. This lack of a final authority is a major reason why the public is so confused about abortion: neither the lawmakers nor the public agree on a final, authoritative arbiter in this matter. Will it be God, natural law, science or peoples' "gut-feeling" about it?

In the Supreme Court's decision, the abortion question hinged on when human life begins. The Bible makes no explicit statement that life begins at a certain point, but it does make very clear that life

continues unbroken from before birth to after birth. It also shows God's involvement in a person's life extends back to conception, and in some specific cases, even before conception!

For You have formed my inward parts; you have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. (Psalm 139:13-16)

The psalmist gives God credit for preparing him in the womb. He uses the personal pronoun "me" to refer to himself while still in the womb, and the Hebrew word for embryo appears as "substance, being yet unformed" (verse 16).

Jeremiah 1:4-5 adds more proof: "The word of the Lord came to me, saying: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; and I ordained you a prophet to the nations.'" Jeremiah had a history even before he was born! Before Jeremiah's conception, God had a plan for him. Then He formed him and set him apart as a prophet while still in the womb. God clearly implies personal human life in Jeremiah going all the way back to conception, though he was unaware of God's activity.

Jeremiah's is not the only example, for Isaiah was similarly prepared: "And now the Lord says, who formed [m]e from the womb to be His [s]ervant to bring Jacob back to Him . . ." (Isaiah 49:5). The NIV says, "Who formed [m]e in the womb." These scriptures clearly show the unborn distinct from the mother: it has a unique personal identity and God can actively work on its formation to produce what He desires.

More interesting is a way in which some have translated Psalm 51:5: "From my birth I have been evil, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (*Revised English Bible*, NIV). "But I was born a sinner, yes, from the moment my mother conceived me" (*Living Bible*). This great psalm of repentance recounts David's personal moral history, and in these translations, it goes all the way back to the moment of conception! An unviable tissue mass or a blob of protoplasm is not—indeed cannot be—a moral agent. These translations indicate a *moral disposition* of a moral agent at conception!

Finally, God included an interesting law in the Old Covenant:

If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no lasting harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any lasting harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. (Exodus 21:22-24)

To whom does the "lasting harm" refer, the mother, the fetus or both? If it refers to the fetus or both, then the Word of God recognizes the personhood of the fetus. Regardless of its age, if the fetus dies as a result of the fight, its death becomes a capital crime, just as punishable as if the mother had been killed.

Though no "thus says the Lord" ends all debate on the subject of when human life and personhood begins, the clear implication from these scriptures is at conception.

Why have so many embraced the pro-choice position when seemingly all common sense dictates that a direct and unbroken line of life and personhood exists between conception and birth? In the late '60s, when the pro-abortion forces were plotting their strategy, they shrewdly decided to deflect attention from the killing aspect of abortion to one emphasizing "free choice" and "rights." Do all Americans have the inalienable right of free choice?

Laws determine the limits of our choices and rights. No one has the right to enter your home and take your possessions. Nor does anyone have the right to rape or kill. But people want the right to kill what is obviously alive in the womb and is eventually born as another human! Their attitudes toward life seem to change as soon as they can literally see, hear, touch and experience the personality of the infant.

Is abortion murder? Everybody agrees the taking of life and premeditation are involved, so we must consider two additional factors that bear on this.

1. People have been deceived by their leaders, the ones they look to for authority. Theologians, scientists and politicians all bear major responsibility. Scientists seem ambiguous in their answers and politicians mostly follow along with what seems popular.

When the pro-abortion leaders laid their plans, they knew their major opponent would be the Catholic Church, so they aimed their appeals toward liberal, mainline Protestant denominations, where the bulk of America's religious people are. It proved to be another shrewd move because these denominations embraced the choice and rights concepts as more important than life. It is reminiscent of Jeremiah 5:30-31:

An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?

Within the teachings of these churches, abortion does not stand alone as a single issue but as an integral part of a liberal theology which shuns the teaching of moral absolutes. This theology emphasizes moral relativism, very seriously blurring the connection between cause and effect in social areas.

2. Many peoples' minds were already prejudiced toward a pro-abortion stance and their leaders merely reinforced their opinion, which can also be seen in the above verse: "My people love to have it so." Whether married or not, many do not want to take responsibility for their actions. They do not want to change their lifestyle or habits. Offspring, a constant responsibility and expense for many years, severely cut into one's time and curtail our freedom. If one regards the embryo or fetus as a living human, the moral implications are enormous. But if one can convince himself that it is not human until birth, he is relieved of the responsibilities its birth imposes.

Every man and woman with any intelligence knows that what will come out of the womb is a human baby. Before God and natural law, the Supreme Court's opinion is no better than anybody else's. It cannot change reality. ***People have abortions because they don't want the baby and what comes with it—they cut short its life before they have to face the personality and the responsibility!***

Jesus' expounding of the spirit of God's law in Matthew 5 shows that the slander or anger that leads to murder and the lust that leads to adultery are also sins. People guilty of these sins leading to murder and adultery are not obedient to the whole law.

God's laws have positive and negative aspects. For instance, they not only require refraining from adultery, but also that one practice purity and chastity. They not only require we not murder, but that we do all we can to protect life and promote its quality. Abortion destroys the life of the unborn. Whether the person thinks the fetus is not a child does not alter the reality that another child will not be born. A life has ended, not an animal life, but the life of a human child with unlimited potential.

The opinion that the embryo and fetus are not human is a vacuous dodge that ignores the Word of God, the sanctity of life, natural law and the scientifically proved unbroken connection between the conception and birth of a human child. No human egg and sperm has ever produced anything except a human baby.

God says in Job 41:11, "Who has preceded Me, that I should pay him? Everything under heaven is Mine." He gives nations the right to execute those guilty of capital crimes, but He gives neither the state nor individual citizens the right to execute the unborn. Those lives are His. He wants godly seed (Malachi 2:15).

Abortion vividly illustrates the power of deception. Whether abortion would ever be judged first-degree murder is moot at this point. But judged by God's standard, abortion is murder regardless of the degree of guilt one might place.

Though the "killing field" of abortion is worldwide (the U.S. abortion figure is only 16% of Russia's!), we pay tragic consequences for it daily. In the near future, God will severely punish America in measure (Isaiah 40:2; Amos 3:2) for what they should know from His Word, available in this nation as it is in no other. "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48).