

Abortion Is About God
Reframing a Moral Issue



INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

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Instructor's Introduction

It is our hope and prayer that God would be pleased to use this curriculum for his glory. Thus, the intention of this curriculum is to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ by equipping men, women, and young adults to serve as family, business and community leaders, full-time Christian workers, missionaries, pastors, and teachers. This curriculum is guided by the vision and values of Bethlehem College & Seminary, which are more fully explained at bcsmn.edu. At the Bethlehem College & Seminary website, you will find the God-centered philosophy that undergirds and motivates everything we do. May God be glorified in us as we are satisfied in him alone!

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Abortion Is About God: Reframing a Moral Issue is a six-week course advancing the truth that the deepest evil of abortion is that it defies God's supremacy over life in the womb. The course will assert that abortion is fundamentally an offense to the glory of the Creator, and will seek to provide a biblical and theological grounding for the pro-life cause from a God-centered perspective. Students will gain a deeper understanding of this issue by closely examining the key biblical passages regarding the issue of abortion, answering provocative questions, and considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper.

🔗 OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student successfully completing this course should be able to:

- ▷ magnify the worth of the life-giving God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ understand the Scriptures—especially the passages pertaining to the issue of abortion—more fully as a result of studying them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be “Bereans” (cf. Acts 17:11).
- ▷ comprehend and thoughtfully interact with five of John Piper’s sermons on the topic of abortion. To this end the student will fill out note-taking sheets for every sermon they are assigned to listen to or watch.
- ▷ set forth a basic defense for the pro-life position, emphasizing how abortion relates to the glory of God.
- ▷ discuss with others the biblical vision of God’s sovereignty over all of life and make appropriate application.

🔗 IMPLEMENTATION

As the instructor of this course, it is imperative that you are completely familiar with the curriculum. We therefore recommend that you read this entire section carefully and then skim through the rest of what is contained in this binder.

This course is designed to be taught in 6 lessons. Ideally there should be one hour of in-class instruction and approximately one hour of homework for each lesson. We urge you to establish an expectation among your students that this course will require more concentration and commitment than a typical Sunday School course would. A tone of serious and earnest study should be set by the instructor before the course even begins.

Before the first session, you will need to decide when and where this course will be offered. Record this information on the syllabus in the box labeled: “Course Information.” You may also want to include your contact information in this box. The schedule incorporated in the syllabus does not have assigned dates. Please write the intended dates for each lesson in the corresponding column or boxes. Once you have completed filling out the syllabus, photocopy it so that you may distribute one copy to each student enrolled in the course. The *Student’s Workbook* does not include a syllabus, so your students will not have a syllabus until you distribute one. Photocopying the syllabus is the only photocopying that is required of you by this curriculum.

During the first lesson, we recommend the following outline to structure your time:

Welcome / Prayer (5 min): Greet the students as they arrive. Open the lesson by exalting God in prayer.

Personal Introductions (15 min): Ask each student in the room to introduce themselves briefly by answering the following questions (and answer these questions yourself): What is your name? Can you tell the class a little about yourself? Why are you enrolled in this course and what are you hoping to gain from it?

Syllabus Review (5 min): Distribute your customized course syllabus and then guide the class through it, reading each item and answering any questions that the students might have.

Abortion in the Modern Secular World (30 min): Guide the class through Lesson 1, reading each section together until a question is reached. After allowing a few minutes for the students to answer each question, pause to discuss their answers. You may also choose to discuss each question immediately with the class (and not allow time for individual reflection) in the interest of time.

Lesson 1 is the only lesson you will take your students through without their prior preparation. For all subsequent lessons, students will work through the lesson on their own before coming to class. To prepare for Lesson 1 as the instructor, you should attempt to answer the questions yourself before consulting the suggested answers (where given) in the *Instructor’s Guide*.

Please note that the Teaching Notes for Lesson 1 suggest that you read to your class a description of abortion or (if you have the capability) actually show visual footage of an abortion. See the Teaching Notes for discussion of these suggestions.

Overview of the Next Lesson / Closing (5 min): Ensure that your students understand what is required of them in preparation for the next class session. Then thank them for coming to the class and dismiss in prayer.

Subsequent Lessons

As the instructor, you will be expected to do all the preparation for each lesson that is required of the students and more. We strongly recommend that you obtain a *Student's Workbook* and attempt to complete the homework on your own before consulting this *Instructor's Guide*. The *Instructor's Guide* provides our suggested answers. Some questions in this curriculum are open-ended and could be answered in different ways. You may find that the answers contained in this manual may not be the clearest or most accurate answers possible. Therefore, we encourage you to improve upon our answers if you can. **It is essential to understand that this *Instructor's Guide* is meant to be a resource; the real authority is God's Word.**

Furthermore, we have deliberately omitted lesson outlines for Lessons 2–6. Our recommendation is for you to open the class in prayer and then immediately proceed through each day's study, discussing how the students answered the three lesson questions and reflecting on the biblical passages. You then might want to cover the sermon or discussion questions. You will notice **that the material in each lesson should provide you with much more material than you can cover in an hour of thoughtful interaction.** This is not an oversight in design and you should not feel obligated to provide the students with answers for every question. Rather, as the instructor, your responsibility should be to focus on areas where students have questions or interest.

You will also notice that the *Instructor's Guide* has material that is not included in the *Student's Workbook* in the form of Teaching Notes. Consult these notes after thoroughly reviewing the lesson on your own, but before you meet with the class.

It is our conviction that the best teachers foster an environment in the classroom which engages students. Adults learn by solving problems or by working through things that provoke curiosity or concern. Therefore, we discourage you from lecturing for the entire lesson. Although an instructor will constantly shape conversation, clarifying and correcting as needed, they will probably not talk for the majority of the lesson. This curriculum is meant to facilitate an investigation into biblical truth—an investigation that is shared by the instructor and the students. Therefore, we encourage you to adopt the posture of a “fellow-learner” who invites participation from everyone in the class.

It might surprise you how eager adults can be to share what they have learned in preparing for each lesson. Therefore, you should invite participation by asking your students to share their discoveries. Here are some of our “tips” on facilitating discussion that are engaging and helpful:

- Don't be uncomfortable with silence initially. Once the first student shares their response, others will be likely to join in. If you cut the silence short by prompting the students, they are more likely to wait for you to prompt them every time.
- Affirm answers whenever possible and draw out the students by asking for clarification. Your aim is to make them feel comfortable sharing their ideas and learning, so be extremely hesitant to “shut down” a student's contribution or “trump” it with your own. This does not mean, however, that you shouldn't correct false ideas—just do it in a spirit of gentleness and love.
- Don't allow a single student or several students to dominate the discussion. Involve everyone and intentionally invite participation from those who are more reserved or hesitant.
- Labor to show the significance of their study. Emphasize the things that the students could not have learned without doing the homework.
- Avoid talking too much. The instructor should not monopolize the discussion, but rather guide and shape it. If the instructor does the majority of the talking, the students will be less likely to interact and engage, and will therefore not learn as much. Avoid constantly adding the “definitive last word.”
- The instructor should feel the freedom to linger on a topic or question if the group demonstrates interest. The instructor should also pursue digressions that are helpful and at least somewhat relevant. The instructor, however,

should attempt to cover the material. Avoid the extreme of constantly wandering off topic, but also avoid the extreme of limiting the conversation in a way that squelches curiosity or learning.

- ▷ The instructor's passion, or lack of it, is infectious. If you demonstrate little enthusiasm for the material, it is almost inevitable that your students will likewise be bored. But if you have a genuine excitement for what you are studying, and if you truly think inductive Bible study is worthwhile, your class will be impacted positively. Therefore, it is our recommendation that before you come to class, you spend adequate time working through the homework and praying, so that you can overflow with genuine enthusiasm for the Bible and for God in class. This point cannot be stressed enough. Delight yourself in God and in his Word and in how he has revealed to us his personal involvement in creating each one of us!

It may be necessary to again stress that **this curriculum is a resource**. As the instructor, you should feel the freedom to structure the class time and to discuss through the material in a way that promotes the maximum learning and enjoyment of your students. Linger on certain questions, pursuing *helpful* digressions, examining relevant portions of Scripture, adding other supplemental material, and customizing the curriculum to fit your situation are all heartily approved.

Questions or Comments?

If you still have questions after reading this introduction and surveying the curriculum, you may contact Bethlehem College & Seminary at info@bcsmn.edu. We are also eager for your comments and suggestions! Thanks!



Abortion Is About God

Reframing a Moral Issue

SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Abortion Is About God: Reframing a Moral Issue is a six-week course advancing the truth that the deepest evil of abortion is that it defies God's supremacy over life in the womb. The course will assert that abortion is fundamentally an offense to the glory of the Creator, and will seek to provide a biblical and theological grounding for the pro-life cause from a God-centered perspective. Students will gain a deeper understanding of this issue by closely examining the key biblical passages regarding the issue of abortion, answering provocative questions, and considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper.

OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student successfully completing this course should be able to:

- ▷ magnify the worth of the life-giving God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ understand the Scriptures—especially the passages pertaining to the issue of abortion—more fully as a result of studying them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be “Bereans” (cf. Acts 17:11).
- ▷ comprehend and thoughtfully interact with five of John Piper’s sermons on the topic of abortion. To this end the student will fill out note-taking sheets for every sermon they are assigned to listen to or watch.
- ▷ set forth a basic defense for the pro-life position, emphasizing how abortion relates to the glory of God.
- ▷ discuss with others the biblical vision of God’s sovereignty over all of life and make appropriate application.

🔗 REQUIRED BOOK (TEXTBOOK)

- ▶ An English version of the Bible, preferably the *English Standard Version* (ESV) or *New American Standard Bible* (NASB)

Please note that in addition to inductive study of the Bible, students will be required to listen to four sermons and a conference message preached by John Piper. This will require Internet access to the *desiringGod* website (www.desiringgod.org).

(NOTE: *desiringGod* permits the reproduction and distribution of any of its material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of production. If you lack internet access, talk to your instructor about the possibility of receiving a CD with the sermons copied onto it.)

🔗 REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to prepare for Lessons 2–6 by completing the lesson pages in a sequential order. Therefore, for each lesson a student should read the Introduction and the Lesson Objectives. Then the student should read the remainder of the lesson, answer the three questions contained therein, and listen to the assigned Piper sermon. As the student listens to the Piper sermon, they should take notes on the corresponding sheet included in each lesson. The student may then review the discussion questions and record their own discussion question.

🔗 SCHEDULE

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title
1		Abortion in the Modern Secular World
2		The Supremacy of God and the Right to Life
3		God's Sovereignty over Life in the Womb
4		Abortion, Murder, and the Image of God
5		Sin Gives Birth to Abortion
6		Imitating God in the Pro-Life Cause

Abortion in the Modern Secular World

1

📖 INTRODUCTION

Perhaps it is human nature to be unaffected by raw statistics. Without a personal connection, such information is cold and lifeless. Thousands of babies are aborted *every day* in the United States. Such figures are rarely considered news, let alone tragedy. Even for those within the church it is difficult to comprehend the sheer magnitude of abortion in America today and, indeed, the world. John Jefferson Davis reminds us not to view the issue in the abstract:

*Abortion in America today is not just a mass of statistics or a massive social problem, but an intensely personal reality that profoundly affects the lives of countless individuals. . . . The debate is not a theoretical one, but is daily being played out in abortion clinics, intensive care units, and legislative halls across the nation.*¹

This lesson will present a brief overview and history of abortion in the modern world with a focus on abortion in America. Before offering a biblical response to this great tragedy we must first try to come to grips with it.

📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▶ relate some of the key events in recent history in the legalization of abortion.
- ▶ recite some of the statistics demonstrating the magnitude of abortion as a social issue.
- ▶ answer the question of whether abortion is an issue within the Christian church and why.

¹ *Evangelical Ethics* (3rd ed.; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2004), 138.



TEACHING NOTES

From the start you, as the instructor, should strike the balance between declaring forgiveness and declaring outrage, as John Piper explains in his sermon “The Darkness of Abortion and the Light of Truth” (available online at the [desiringGod](#) website):

Such statistics make it possible (even likely) that there may be someone in your class who has undergone, encouraged, or performed an abortion in the past. A person in this situation may now feel the weight and horror of what they’ve done. Therefore, it is vital that you, as the instructor, seek to be pastorally sensitive to all of the students in your class without minimizing the biblical reality that abortion is an offense against God and an assault on those made in his image. Pray for the grace and wisdom to sensitively and humbly set forth the truth in these lessons.

It is also important to clarify what this course is and what it is not. This course is not a course focusing on apologetics, political action, or legal reasoning. Undoubtedly, Christians need to speak about this issue in ways that will be accepted by the general population. Therefore, there is room for many pro-life resources which do not reason from biblical grounds. An example of such a resource is Francis Beckwith’s book *Defending Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). He says in the introduction to this book:

I do not argue for the pro-life position by appealing to theological reasoning or the authoritative writings of any particular religious tradition. The main thrust of this book is philosophical and juris-prudential. Hence, if my arguments are sound, an atheist, agnostic, or humanist is intellectually obligated to become pro-life. (xiv)

By contrast, this course is explicitly based on God’s revelation in the Bible. We will argue that it is important not only to argue in ways that an atheist, agnostic, or humanist will appreciate, but that a Christian is obligated to speak the truth from God’s Word even if it is rejected outright by those who are rebelling against their Maker. Much of Beckwith’s book argues from analogies grounded in “our deeply held intuitions about human equality” (xi). So, for example, if there is almost uniform consensus in American society that it is wrong to kill someone in a comatose state, certain pro-abortion arguments unravel. These intuitions, however, may disappear in the future. Even some ethicists, such as Peter Singer, are even now arguing that parents should have the right to kill their born infants. Therefore, while the effectiveness of our cultural argumentation might

ebb and flow, our theological task remains. We must say, as Christians, that the abortion issue is not fundamentally about the sanctity of life or human equality, but about the glory of the God who created us and to whom we owe ultimate allegiance.

Richard Hays, in his book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), warns us not to let our secular American society dictate the terms of this debate:

Our deliberation about these matters should not be constrained by the categories and norms of a secular pluralistic society. Stanley Hauerwas describes the reasons for the futility of the usual debates about abortion:

“ . . . Christian opposition to abortion on demand has failed because, by attempting to meet the moral challenge within the limits of public polity, we have failed to exhibit our deepest convictions that make our rejection of abortion intelligible. We have failed then in our first political task because we accepted uncritically an account of “the moral question of abortion” determined by a politics foreign to the polity appropriate to Christian convictions.”

We must not get trapped by the way the world defines the issue, by the questions that pollsters are likely to ask. Instead, the church must seek to frame its moral reflection within the categories offered us by Scripture. (445–446)

(Please note that by quoting Hays and Hauerwas we do not thereby signal complete agreement with either of their perspectives on the abortion issue.)

In addition to taking your students through the first lesson’s material, you might also choose to invest some of the class time in describing either prenatal development or abortion procedures or both. Randy Alcorn, in *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments* (rev. ed.; Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2004), describes a baby’s development in the womb:

At eighteen days after conception the heart is forming, and the eyes start to develop. By twenty-one days the heart is not only beating, but pumping blood throughout the body. By twenty-eight days the unborn has budding arms and legs. By thirty days she has multiplied in size ten thousand times. She has a brain and blood flows through her veins.

By thirty-five days, mouth, ears, and nose are taking shape. At forty days the preborn child’s brain waves can be recorded. The child’s heartbeat, which began

three weeks earlier, can already be detected by an ultrasonic stethoscope. By forty-two days the skeleton is formed, and the brain is controlling the movement of muscles and organs. The unborn reflexively responds to stimulus and may already be capable of feeling pain. This is before the earliest abortions take place.

By eight weeks hands and feet are almost perfectly formed, and fingerprints are developing. Already, "Mother's movements stimulate the fetus's balance and motion detectors." By nine weeks a child will bend fingers around an object placed in the palm. Fingernails are forming, and the child is sucking his thumb. The nine-week baby has "already perfected a somersault, backflip and scissor kick."

By ten weeks the child squints, swallows, and frowns. By eleven weeks he urinates, makes a wide variety of facial expressions, and even smiles. By twelve weeks the child is kicking, turning his feet, curling and fanning his toes, making a fist, moving thumbs, bending wrists, and opening his mouth.

All this happens in the first trimester, the first three months of life. In the remaining six months in the womb nothing new develops or begins functioning. The child only grows and matures. (65-66)

As far as descriptions of abortion procedures (and there are a few different kinds), many resources exist from which you may draw. John Piper offers a description of partial birth abortion in his online sermon "Be Strong and Fervent in Spirit in the Cause of Truth and Life." There is also a description of abortion in "Abortion: You Desire and Do Not Have, So You Kill."

If you have the technical capability to access and project the internet in your classroom, we suggest that you show one of the videos at www.abort73.com. If you click on the tab labeled "I. THE CASE AGAINST ABORTION" a video should automatically load which graphically portrays the human remains from abortion procedures. If you choose to show this video, we recommend that you warn your students first, and allow visually-sensitive members of the class to leave the room. We believe, however, that showing a graphic video such as this one is helpful because it accurately presents what happens in abortion.

John Piper responds to those who would object to such pictures or video in his sermon, "Abortion: Shall We Listen to Men or God":

If showing pictures of mutilated babies threatens your desire for abortion on demand, then the pictures are emotionally manipulative or in bad taste or irrelevant. But if showing dead sea otters or oil slicked cranes or mutilated seals

helps your cause, then this is simply telling it like it is and forcing people to come to terms with what is really happening.

Piper also urges Christians to use their imagination to comprehend the evil of abortion in his sermon, “Abortion: You Desire and Do Not Have, So You Kill”:

Third, use your imagination to see what abortion really is! Fight against the kind of social stupor that gripped Nazi Germany—the feeling that the problem is so huge and so horrendous and so out of our control that I just can’t be wrong to let it be. Use your imagination to see and feel what is really happening behind those sterile clinic doors.

If you could see each little handiwork of God and what it looks like when it is being crushed or poisoned or starved, you would say, this can’t be happening. Civilized people do not do this! The children will not be saved and God’s work will not be revered without an act of sustained sympathetic imagination. Otherwise it is out of sight, out of mind—just like Dachau, Buchenwald, Belsen, and Auschwitz. It just couldn’t be happening. And so we act as if it isn’t.

As suggested in the Instructor’s Introduction, make sure your students understand what is required of them in preparation for the next lesson. If they do not properly prepare for Lesson 2, the discussion in the class session will not be as profitable as it could be.

Also, make clear to the students that the direction this curriculum is taking is to argue that abortion is about God and his glory. Therefore, we need to determine the relationship between the supremacy of God and the right to life.

In his new book from Focus on the Family, Answering the Call (2003), John Ensor points out that one in six abortions are done on women identifying themselves as “born again” Christians: and 31% are done on women who say they are Catholic. When he was a pastor in Boston in 1989 he was shocked, he said, to discover that 30% of the women in his church had had an abortion (pp. 21-22). Ensor concludes, “Indeed, the abortion industry could not survive financially without paying customers drawn from the church (pp. 21).”

Which puts me, as always, in the position of needing, on the one hand, to declare forgiveness and hope to dozens of men and women in this church who have had and have approved abortions, and, on the other hand, to declare the outrage of abortion as something we should oppose with all the wisdom and courage and perseverance and sacrifice that God will give us.



HOW WE GOT TO WHERE WE ARE

It may surprise some to know that the practice of abortion is thousands of years old. It has never been as prevalent as it is today, however, because social pressures and medical complications made abortion socially unacceptable and dangerous.

Since the earliest days of the church, Christians have stood against abortion. Randy Alcorn explains:

Christians throughout church history have affirmed with a united voice the humanity of the preborn child.

... New Testament scholar Bruce Metzger comments, "It is really remarkable how uniform and how pronounced was the early Christian opposition to abortion."²

Although other countries legalized abortion before the United States did, and abortions in America represent only a fraction of the abortions performed in the world annually (see below), this course will mainly focus on abortion as a contemporary moral issue in the United States. John Piper relates some of the recent history of abortion in this country:

When the American Medical Association was formed in 1847, abortion was commonly practiced "before quickening." But through the efforts of the AMA and anti-obscenity crusaders and (ironically) feminists, abortion became illegal everywhere in the U.S. by 1900. Abortions went underground or out of the country.

*The key reversal of this legal situation came on January 22, 1973, when the Supreme Court in *Roe vs. Wade* made the following rulings:*

- *that no state may make laws regulating abortion during the first three months*

² Excerpt(s) from *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Questions* by Randy Alcorn, copyright© 1992 by Eternal Perspective Ministries. Used by permission of WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

- *of pregnancy except to provide that they be done by licensed physicians;*
- *that laws regulating abortion between the third month and the time of viability are constitutional only in so far as they are aimed at safeguarding the health of mothers;*
- *that laws relating to the time from viability (6–6 1/2 months) until the end of the pregnancy may not prevent abortion if it is “to preserve the life or health of the mother”;*
- *that the “health” of the mother includes “all factors—physical, emotional, psychological, familial and the woman’s age—relevant to the well-being of the patient.”*

Then on July 1, 1976, the Court extended its original decision to affirm:

- *that abortions may be performed on minor daughters without the knowledge or consent of their parents, and*
- *that women (whether married or unmarried) may obtain abortions without the knowledge or consent of the baby’s father.*

In effect, therefore, the law of our land today is that any abortion is legal in America until birth if the mother can give reason that the pregnancy or the child will be an excessive burden or stress on her well-being.³

Roe v. Wade was a case in which “Jane Roe” (a.k.a. Norma McCorvey) sued the state of Texas to obtain the right to an abortion, since abortion at that time was illegal in Texas if the life of the mother was not threatened. Here is some of the actual wording from *Roe v. Wade* regarding the legalization of abortion:

A state criminal abortion statute of the current Texas type, that excepts from criminality only a life-saving procedure on behalf of the mother without regard to pregnancy stage and without recognition of the other interests involved, is violative of the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

³ “Abortion: You Desire and Do Not Have, So You Kill,” an online sermon at the desiringGod website (www.desiringgod.org). Throughout this curriculum we will only provide titles (and not the full web addresses) for online sermons and articles at the desiringGod website. Use the Title Index of the Resource Library to locate these resources. The definition of the mother’s “health” was actually given in a companion decision of the Supreme Court also made in 1973—*Doe v. Bolton*.

- *For the stage prior to approximately the end of the first trimester, the abortion decision and its effectuation must be left to the medical judgment of the pregnant woman's attending physician.*
- *For the stage subsequent to approximately the end of the first trimester, the State, in promoting its interest in the health of the mother, may, if it chooses, regulate the abortion procedure in ways that are reasonably related to maternal health.*
- *For the stage subsequent to viability the State, in promoting its interest in the potentiality of human life, may, if it chooses, regulate, and even proscribe, abortion except where necessary, in appropriate medical judgment, for the preservation of the life or health of the mother.*⁴

1. After reading this portion of the Supreme Court's decision, what is your opinion of it?

• **ANSWER.** *Student answers will vary.*

Careful readers will note that this ruling allows individual States to “proscribe” (that is, outlaw) abortions after the unborn becomes viable (that is, able to live outside the womb) if they so choose, except when the “life or *health*” of the mother would not be preserved. Does this last section, therefore, represent a meaningful restriction on a woman's right to abortion? Francis Beckwith answers,

But this restriction is a restriction in name only. For the Supreme Court so broadly defined health in Roe's companion decision, Doe v. Bolton (1973), that for all intents and purposes Roe allows for abortion on demand. In Bolton the court ruled that health must be taken in its broadest possible medical context and must be defined “in light of all factors—physical, emotional, psychological, familial, and the woman's age—relevant to the well-being of the patient. All these factors relate to health.” Because all pregnancies have consequences for a woman's emotional and family situation, the court's health provision has the practical effect of legalizing abortion up until the time of birth if a woman can convince a physician that she needs the abortion to preserve her emotional health. This is why in 1983 the U.S.

⁴ *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973), 164–165, as quoted by Francis Beckwith, *Defending Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 19.

Senate Judiciary Committee, after much critical evaluation of the current law in light of the Court’s opinions, confirmed this interpretation when it concluded that “no significant legal barriers of any kind whatsoever exist today in the United States for a woman to obtain an abortion for any reason during any stage of her pregnancy.”⁵

WHERE WE ARE

This, then, is where we are: abortion laws in our country could hardly be more permissive and less restrictive. Francis Beckwith states the matter plainly:

The public does not seem to fully understand the scope of what the Court declared as a constitutional right on that fateful day in 1973. The current law in the United States, except in a few states, does not restrict a woman from procuring an abortion for practically any reason she deems fit during the entire nine months of pregnancy.⁶

The blatant disregard for unborn human life has resulted in catastrophic loss. It has been estimated that since the ruling made in Roe v. Wade more than 44 years ago, more than 60 million abortions have been performed in America alone. About one in four pregnancies end in abortion.

The numbers are truly staggering.

American War Casualties

Number of Abortions Annually

Revolutionary War	25,324	Annual Abortions	approx. 1,000,000
Civil War	498,332		
World War I	116,708		
World War II	407,316		
Korean War	54,246		
Vietnam War	58,655		
Gulf War	79		
Total:	1,160,660	Total (every year):	1,000,000

⁵ *Defending Life*, 20–21.

⁶ *Ibid*, 19.

2. Why might it be helpful to compare the number of abortions to American war casualties?

- **ANSWER.** *Such a comparison highlights a few points: (1) the comparison gives us some sense for just how many babies have been killed by abortion; (2) the comparison suggests how reprehensible abortion should be—for if war claims these many victims fighting for a just cause (presumably), then what about all of the victims who have died needlessly in a totally unjust cause like abortion? (3) the comparison is also a rebuke to the church since such carnage has not often stirred up such passions and protest as the anti-war movement can sometimes muster.*

And this is not all. The total number of abortions committed worldwide every year is about 40 million! That is about seven times the total number of people killed in the Holocaust—*every year!* In China, about 9 million babies are aborted every year. In Eastern Europe, the number of abortions has exceeded the number of live births for decades. Abortion has become deadlier than any plague or war ever has been.

ABORTION IN THE CHURCH?

Has the church been spared abortion's sweep of death? Unfortunately, it has not. Randy Alcorn gives us the grim news:

A quarter of a million babies [in America] are aborted each year by women who describe themselves as “evangelical” or “born again.”⁷

Alcorn then offers a first step to ending, or at least significantly reducing, abortion:

Since 18 percent of women getting an abortion identify themselves as an evangelical or born again Christian, this means that if there are 1.3 million abortions in a year, 234,000 are performed on Christians. Add chemical abortions and the figure would be much higher. This means that the church is killing its own children at an alarming rate. Our congregations are filled with single girls and boys, young

⁷ *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, 285.

couples, parents, grandparents, sympathetic friends, and even pastors, elders, and deacons who, through their counsel or lack of counsel, have innocent blood on their hands.

*Pro-life Christians have believed too long that our primary job is to convince the world of what we already know to be true about the unborn. In fact, the church has failed to educate its own people about abortion. If the church is to stop the killing in society, it must start by stopping the killing in its own midst. "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God" (1 Peter 4:17). If the church does not stand up for the unborn, surely the world never will.*⁸

The primary purpose of this course is to address the need that Alcorn identifies: to educate *the church* about abortion. To that end this course will seek to provide a biblical and theological grounding for the pro-life cause. There are many helpful resources that aim to provide the biblical teaching about abortion, but this course is different, perhaps, in one respect: we will argue our case from a God-centered perspective. Abortion is about God and his glory, first and foremost. Abortion is detrimental and sinful in many respects, but it is fundamentally an offense to the glory of the Creator.

And now, to supplement that gospel declaration – and I pray with your heartfelt support – I want to go on record again, as I have each January for the last 17 years, that I believe abortion is morally outrageous:

*fatal for children,
damaging to women,
corrupting to men,
debasing to culture,
mangling to human reason and language,
and an assault on Jesus Christ, through whom all things are made.*⁹

When seen as an assault on Jesus Christ, abortion should become (if it is not already) a vital concern to the mission of the church.

⁸ *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, 293–294. These numbers are based on statistics from the year 2000.

⁹ Piper, "The Darkness of Abortion and the Light of Truth," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

There are many hindrances to establishing a prolife emphasis in the church. One is the deeply held conviction of some members that prolife work distracts us from the main thing.¹⁰

3. Will pro-life work distract Christians from the main thing—the gospel of Jesus Christ?

· **ANSWER.** *It is possible for pro-life work to distract us from the gospel, especially when the pro-life cause is disconnected from Jesus Christ and his glory. If we can regain, however, a sense of how abortion relates to God and his glory, then it is much more likely that all of our pro-life work will be an expression of our love for God and his gospel. This course aims to establish a pro-life emphasis in the church without displacing the “main thing.”*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ▷ John Piper, “Jesus Christ and the Fight for Life,” an online conference message at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website
- ▷ www.abort73.com
- ▷ www.str.org (see the “Resources on Bio-Ethics” page)

¹⁰ *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, 299.

The Supremacy of God and the Right to Life

2

§ INTRODUCTION

The starting point for theological reflection on abortion must be the supremacy of God. A core conviction of this curriculum is that God reigns supreme over all human life, and indeed, all creation.

As Abraham Kuyper used to say, “there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’” and rule with absolute supremacy. And though it may not seem so now, it is only a matter of time until he is revealed from heaven in flaming fire to give relief to those who trust him and righteous vengeance on those who don’t.

Oh, that the almighty God would help us see and savor the supremacy of his Son. Give yourself to this. Study this. Cultivate this passion. Eat and drink and sleep this quest to know the supremacy of Christ.”

Proclaiming God as the Creator, Author, Sustainer, and Owner of all human life is the first building block in a Christian response to abortion. This lesson will revel in the supremacy of God while showing how a woman’s so-called right to choose is actually an attempt to seize God’s throne and rule in his place.

§ LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- cite biblical texts which communicate God’s supremacy over all human life.
- explain why abandoning God results in moral chaos.
- perceive that claiming the right to abortion elevates human beings to the place of God.

11 Piper, “Sex and the Supremacy of Christ, Part 2,” an online conference message at the [desiringGod](#) website.



TEACHING NOTES

As mentioned in the Instructor’s Introduction, this curriculum does not specify how the class discussion time should be invested. You, as the instructor, are allowed the freedom and flexibility to cover the material in whatever way you think is most appropriate.

One possibility would be to move through the lesson sequentially by reading the introduction aloud, examining the various biblical texts, facilitating discussion on the questions, reviewing the sermon, and discussing the discussion questions. The possibility on the other end of the spectrum would be to open the discussion time immediately to student questions and comments.

In the sermon for this lesson, Piper describes the sin of abortion as “insurrection against the Almighty” and the human will in choosing abortion as “an imperial assault on the authority of Heaven.” Remember throughout this course to stress abortion as a sin against God himself.

This lesson and the course in general assume a certain vision of God. We believe that God is absolutely sovereign over all things. If this is a belief that is not universally shared by your students, you may want to invest some of the discussion in discussing this doctrine. When a belief in God’s sovereign and active interest in governing, the world begins to erode, the Christian’s footing on which they stand against abortion also begins to erode.

Please note that the humanity and personhood of the unborn will not be defended until the next lesson. The main point of this lesson is simply that God is supreme—not us—and that he ultimately determines what’s right and wrong—not us. We argue in this lesson that abortion assumes prerogatives that God reserves for himself. Therefore, you will want to ensure that this basic point is covered in the discussion even if you anticipate the next lesson somewhat in asserting the humanity and personhood of the unborn.

Alert your students that the next lesson, Lesson 3, is the longest lesson in this curriculum. Their preparation may take longer than one hour.



LIFE AND DEATH BELONG TO GOD

At the heart of the abortion debate is the question of whether or not a mother has the right to take the life of her unborn child. Even if advocates of abortion dispute whether the embryo or fetus may legitimately be called a “child” or “human person,” it is undeniable that from the moment of conception, a biological life belonging to the species *Homo sapiens* has been created.

Do humans have the right—the prerogative—to tamper with human life? Or is tampering with human life trespassing on holy ground which belongs exclusively to the Creator God?

The following biblical texts express a foundational biblical doctrine: God created everything and therefore owns, or has authority over, everything.

Deuteronomy 10:14

¹⁴ *Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.*

Psalm 24:1–2

¹ *The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,* ² *for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.*

Ezekiel 18:4

⁴ *Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine . . .*

Acts 17:24–25

²⁴ *The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,* ²⁵ *nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*

As the one who gives, sustains, and owns all human life, God alone has the right to take human life away. Notice the assumption that lies beneath the following texts.

2 Kings 5:5-7

⁵ And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So [Naaman] went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. ⁶ And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." ⁷ And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me."

Job 1:18-22

¹⁸ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house," ¹⁹ and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you." ²⁰ Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. ²¹ And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." ²² In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

1. What do the king of Israel and Job ascribe to God? Underline phrases in the passages above that support your answer.

- **ANSWER.** *The king of Israel recognizes that it is not within his power to cure Naaman's leprosy. Only God has the power to heal and to afflict, to "kill and to make alive" (2 Kings 5:7). Likewise, Job confesses that he cannot lay an authoritative claim upon anything in life. Everything he has (including the lives of his children!) is given to him by God and therefore God retains the right to take those things away. Rather than God's supremacy over human life causing bitterness, resentment, or despair in Job, Job's contemplation of God's prerogatives causes him to bow down in worship.*

The next two passages push this idea even further. Not only does God have the right to kill and make alive, but this divine prerogative is closely joined to God's absolute uniqueness. There is no other god besides our God! He *alone* has the power and the right to give and take human life.

Deuteronomy 32:37–39

³⁷ Then [the LORD] will say, “Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge, ³⁸ who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise up and help you; let them be your protection! ³⁹ See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.”

1 Samuel 2:2, 6

² There is none holy like the LORD; there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. . . . ⁶ The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

Thus, to understand ourselves and God in terms of the Bible’s story is to know that we are God’s creatures. We neither create ourselves nor belong to ourselves. Within this worldview, abortion . . . is wrong for the same reason that murder and suicide are wrong: it presumptuously assumes authority to dispose of life that does not belong to us.¹²

MORAL DISORDER WHEN GOD IS REJECTED

God stands at the center of reality. He brings order, stability, and goodness to all that he has made. Our lives are in his wise care and powerful hands.

Tragically, humans have denied the Author of Life. By rejecting God, the moral order of the universe has been infected with sin. The story of mankind’s fall into sin is told in the third chapter of Genesis. This passage will be expounded in the assigned sermon for this lesson.

Genesis 3:1–6

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” ² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, ‘You shall

¹² Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 450. Please note that although Hays remains ambiguous on whether Christians should call abortion murder, this curriculum unambiguously asserts that abortion is murder. By citing Hays, we do not thereby signal complete agreement with his perspective on the abortion issue.

not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.”⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

2. What similarities might exist between the woman’s sin described above and the sin of choosing to have an abortion?

- **ANSWER.** *God clearly drew boundaries beyond which the man and woman were not to go. Eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and becoming like God was expressly forbidden. The woman, however, chose to decide for herself what was right and wrong. She (and her husband who was with her) wanted to become like God. The choice to have an abortion is similar in that it assumes rights and powers that are the sole domain of God. We become “like God” when we attempt to decide what human life is and do with it whatever we please.*

The moral chaos following that fateful bite is reflected in the book of Judges. In the period between Moses and David, Israel denied the lordship and benevolent rule of God, wanting instead to take matters into their own hand. The result was predictable. Some of the most horrific and grotesque sins in Israel’s history are related toward the end of this book. The reader gains the impression that Israelite society is unraveling at the seams.

Here is the theological pronouncement upon this turbulent period of human history.

Judges 21:25

²⁵ *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

The same moral disorder is evident in our own day, as people do what is right in their own eyes. Declaring that women have “a right to abortion” is an inevitable result of abandoning God and the moral order which he has established.

Richard Hays reminds us that to frame the abortion issue as a conflict of “rights” is misleading. While everyone does what is right in their own eyes, Christians must be persistently bearing witness to the King and Judge to whom

we must one day give an account.

It is inappropriate to set up the issue as a conflict of “rights”: the rights on the woman versus the rights of the unborn child. In Scripture, there is no “right to life.” Life is a gift from God, a sign of grace. No one has a presumptive claim on it. Nor, on the other hand, do any of us—male or female—have a “right” to control our own bodies autonomously. . . . We are always accountable to God for our decisions and actions.¹³

ADVOCATING FOR ABORTION IS “PLAYING GOD”

Jim Newhall, an abortionist in Portland, Oregon, expresses the mentality of abortion:

Not everybody is meant to be born. I believe, for a baby, life begins when his mother wants him.¹⁴

This shocking and audacious claim is repeated in the following pro-abortion sentiments:

Writing in the New York Times, prochoice Barbara Ehrenreich says, “A woman may think of her fetus as a person or as just cells depending on whether the pregnancy is wanted or not. This does not reflect moral confusion, but choice in action.”

. . . Ms. Ehrenreich goes on to say, “Moreover, a woman may think of the fetus as a person and still find it necessary and morally responsible to have an abortion.”¹⁵

3. How might you respond to the assertions made in the citations above?

• **ANSWER.** *Though student answers to this question will vary, one response*

13 *Moral Vision*, 454.

14 Jim Newhall, as quoted by Randy Alcorn in *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, 81.

15 *Ibid*, 103.

should be that humans do not have the power to pronounce judgment on human life or personhood. Asserting that personhood is somehow a subjective human judgment made by the strong has resulted in some of the greatest evils of the last century. Furthermore, elevating a woman's so-called freedom to choose above the value of a fetus even when considered to be a person reveals that abortion attempts to invest the woman with divine power.

This final quotation from Randy Alcorn introduces a question which we will consider as we listen to the sermon assigned for this lesson.

In the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision the Supreme Court questioned whether the unborn had “meaningful” lives. But meaningful to whom, and when? Is the fact that your life was not taken from you as an unborn meaningful to you now? If a mother wants her baby, his life is highly meaningful, which is why she mourns if there is a miscarriage. If the mother doesn't want her baby, then his life is not meaningful to her. But does the worth of a human being depend upon whether others think his life is meaningful?¹⁶

Do mothers—or fathers, or judges, or any human—decide whether a human being is a person and a meaningful life?

🔗 LISTENING TO A SERMON ABOUT ABORTION

Listen to the sermon “**Abortion and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringgod.org) website (www.desiringgod.org). Clicking on the sermon title will allow you to watch or listen to the sermon. You may also download the sermon onto your computer.

16 *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, 81-82.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. In what ways does abortion challenge the supremacy of God?
2. Why should Christians start their response to abortion with God's supremacy and not the "sanctity of human life"?

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- "The Sovereignty of God," a category in the Topic Index of the *desiringGod* website
- Francis Beckwith, *Defending Life*, Chapter 1

Abortion and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

JOHN PIPER, 2004

Opening prayer.

The world in which man is god.

“The modern, secular world—the world that tries to remove _____ from his all-creating, all-sustaining, all-governing, all-defining place—has no choice but to make itself _____ and create its own _____.”

Genesis 2:16–17

What’s the meaning of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

Genesis 3:1–7

“The essence of the fall of Eve and Adam is the supreme _____ we get in being _____ and deciding for ourselves what is true and right and beautiful.”

Implications for abortion.

Statistics:

The link between abortion and the modern, secular world:

The most powerful sentence spoken in America: “I do not _____ this baby at this time.”

“The [fetal homicide] law makes it _____ to kill an embryo or fetus intentionally, except in cases of _____.”

“ . . . in a world without God, the _____ of the strong creates the _____ of the weak, or not.”

The remedy.

Genesis 3:15; Galatians 4:4; 1 Timothy 1:15–16 (cf. Acts 9:1)

God's Sovereignty over Life in the Womb

3

§ INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the first lesson of this course, the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* granted Jane Roe (a.k.a. Norma McCorvey) the right to have an abortion and overturned the existing legislation against abortion in Texas and in every other state. In that decision Justice Harry Blackmun, who authored the Court's opinion, stated that resolving the question of when life begins was unnecessary in determining the case. Francis Beckwith explains:

Confronting, though not disputing, Texas's evidence for the unborn's humanity, Justice Blackmun replied: "We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate." Hence, the state should not take one theory of life and force those who do not agree with that theory to subscribe to it, which is the reason Blackmun writes in Roe, "In view of all this, we do not agree that, by adopting one theory of life, Texas may override the rights of the pregnant woman that are at stake."¹⁷

Is the "difficult question of when life begins" not necessary to answer in granting women the right to have abortions? We would contend that it is necessary to answer this question and that the Supreme Court in effect did adopt a theory of life. Moreover, in this lesson we will examine how the weight of biblical evidence addresses this question.

§ LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ cite biblical texts which communicate God's intimate involvement in the creation of children in the womb.
- ▷ defend the idea that John the Baptist's and Jesus' prenatal history informs our understanding of human personhood.
- ▷ explain why the weight of the biblical evidence inclines us to view personal identity as starting with conception.

¹⁷ *Defending Life*, 29.



The position of this curriculum is that human life and personhood begins at conception. It may be appropriate, however, to preserve some of the mystery of exactly how the human spirit is joined with the physical body. God's work should cause us to wonder and worship. The following verse testifies to the limitation of human knowledge:

Ecclesiastes 11:5

⁵ As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

Davis, commenting on this verse in *Abortion and the Christian* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1984), says:

This verse indicates the sense of wonder felt by the Hebrews in connection with God's creative activity in the womb (113n13).

We must not let human limitation, however, lead us into a fatal agnosticism. Wondering at the intricacies of God's mysterious work in the womb does not grant us a warrant for terminating what God is knitting together. In the class discussion, you should allow students to expose the flawed logic in Blackmun's reasoning, as presented in the introduction. Here is John Piper's response in his sermon "The Darkness of Abortion and the Light of Truth":

When the editors at the Minneapolis Star Tribune this past Wednesday celebrated the abortion rights decreed by Roe v. Wade (January 22, 2003, p. A14) they raised the question when "incipient life becomes 'protectably human,'" and said that no better answer has been given than Justice Harry Blackmun's when he wrote:

"We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate."

What's the flaw here? The flaw is that, while claiming to withhold judgment, the judiciary not only speculated but authoritatively decreed on the issue: namely, it

is not murder or manslaughter to destroy the unborn. That is not a suspension of judgment. That is a decisive judgment: namely, in the womb there is nothing worth protecting by law. To portray this as a sensitive suspension of judgment about the status of unborn life is false and deceptive.

How do you get from, “We do not know whether this is protectable human life,” to “Therefore, we will not protect it”? Wouldn’t the logic just as likely (some would say far more likely) be, “Since we do not know whether this is protectable human life, therefore we will protect it.” Why does the judicial uncertainty about the humanity of the unborn lead to unbridled license to destroy it?

We therefore agree with Francis Beckwith’s assessment in *Defending Life*: “the Court’s admitted ignorance of not knowing when life begins *undermines* the right to abortion” (30). See his devastating critique of Blackmun’s argument on pages 29–31.

As our suggested answer to Question 1 in this lesson states, the poetic genre of Psalm 139 should factor into our interpretation of it. It is possible to draw inferences from this psalm too hastily, but we would suggest that an unwarranted, minimalist reading of the psalm is also a possibility. For example, Richard Hays, who is opposed to abortion in general, says “One should be careful, however, not to read too much into this text. It must be interpreted within the poetic genre to which it belongs, not as a scientific or propositional statement” (*Moral Vision*, 447). This caution leads Hays to conclude that “[Psalm 139’s] bearing on the abortion issue is very indirect indeed” (448). Davis also alerts us to the danger of over-reading Psalm 139:

Two possible objections to this prenatal “personalization” may arise. The first is that David’s language is merely poetic and therefore precludes strict conclusions concerning the personhood of the unborn. The second objection is that verses 13–16 deal solely with divine foreknowledge and have nothing to say on the personal character of prenatal life. Since these objections are not without weight, one must be cautious in drawing inferences from such personal pronouns. (Abortion and the Christian, 43)

Despite these cautions, however, we believe that Psalm 139 does have an important contribution to make to a theological response to abortion. We would note that the presence of poetic features does not negate the fact that theological truth is being conveyed by the psalm. Therefore, even though David does not

literally ascend to heaven (v. 8), descend to Sheol (v. 8), or “take the wings of the morning” (v. 9), verses 7–12 nevertheless do communicate truth about God’s presence with David wherever he might go. Likewise, though God’s “knitting” of David should be understood as a metaphor and the language of being woven “in the depths of the earth” may reflect an Israelite pre-scientific understanding, verses 13–16 nevertheless do communicate the tenderness and intimacy of God’s involvement in creating and caring for David before he was born. Even though the psalm does not offer a scientific account of biological development that meets Western “standards,” this does not mean that these verses can be dismissed in the debate over human personhood. The intention of these verses is to assure God’s people of his continual and intimate presence with them—a knowledge too wonderful and too high to be attained fully. If verses 13–16 say nothing about God’s creative activity in the womb, the intention of those verses is completely undermined.

In building a cumulative case for human personhood from the time of conception, there are too many texts to consider in the space of this lesson. We have deliberately limited the number of texts reproduced in the *Student’s Workbook* so as not to overwhelm the student. The lesson, as it stands, is already the longest in the course.

During your class discussion, you may choose to introduce some of the biblical texts we excluded. We have included below some of these texts and corresponding commentary from secondary sources. Use them as you will. Even if you cannot cover all of them during the discussion you may choose to return to these texts in later lessons.

Our survey begins with Psalm 51.

Psalm 51:4–5

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Randy Alcorn comments on the significance of this text:

As a member of the human race that has rejected God, each person sinned “in Adam,” and is therefore a sinner from his very beginning (Romans 5:12–19). David says, “Surely I was sinful at birth.” Then he goes back even further, back before birth to the actual beginning of his life, saying he was “sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). Each person has a sinful nature from the point of conception. Who but an actual person can have a sinful nature? Rocks

and trees and animals and human organs do not have moral natures, good or bad. Morality can be ascribed only to a person. That there is a sin nature at the point of conception demonstrates that there is a person present who is capable of having such a nature. (Pro-Life Answers, 314)

R. C. Sproul, in *Abortion: A Rational Look at an Emotional Issue* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1990) concurs with this assessment:

In Psalm 51, David recounts his personal moral history to the point of conception. An impersonal being, a “blob of protoplasm,” cannot be a moral agent. If David’s moral history extends back to conception, then his personal history also must extend to the same point. It is not merely David’s biological substance that dates back to conception, but his moral disposition as well. (56)

The next passage from Judges is another example of a person’s personal history reaching back before his birth to his time in the womb. In this case Samson is declared to be a Nazirite to God even before his birth. God is personally involved in his birth and even in his conception.

Judges 13:2–7

² There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. And his wife was barren and had no children. ³ And the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, “Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. ⁴ Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, ⁵ for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” ⁶ Then the woman came and told her husband, “A man of God came to me, and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. I did not ask him where he was from, and he did not tell me his name, ⁷ but he said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. So then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.’”

An admittedly indirect, but nevertheless suggestive, passage to consider is one of Paul’s vice lists in the book of Galatians.

Galatians 5:19–21

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery [Greek: pharmakeia], enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

John Jefferson Davis, in *Evangelical Ethics* (3rd ed.; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2004), remarks on a word in this passage:

It is also of interest to note that among the sins of the flesh listed by Paul in Galatians 5:20 there appears the term pharmakeia, usually translated as “sorcery,” but more adequately translated as “medicine” in the sense in which a North American Indian medicine man makes “medicine.” The term refers to the use of drugs with occult properties for a variety of purposes, including sorcery, but also including abortion. “Paul’s usage here cannot be restricted to abortion, but the term he chose is comprehensive enough to include the use of abortifacient drugs,” notes Professor John T. Noonan Jr. The term pharmakeia is specifically used of abortifacient drugs in a second-century A.D. text of Soranus of Ephesus, an early Greek gynecologist. (158–159)

The next passage (with cross-references) is considered by some to be totally irrelevant to the abortion debate. We believe that Jesus’ rebuke to his disciples, who presumably regard these children as an inconvenience and unworthy to receive Jesus’ attention, would certainly fall on those preventing children from coming into the world.

Mark 10:13–16 (cf. Matthew 19:13–15; Luke 18:15–17)

¹³ And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Davis, in *Abortion and the Christian*, comments on this passage:

While his disciples felt that the young children and infants brought to him (Matt 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17) were not important enough to demand his

time and attention, Jesus' actions proved otherwise. The disciples apparently did not regard the young children and infants as persons "in the whole sense." But Jesus did, and all three Synoptic writers included the incident in their accounts, which were intended to shape the thoughts and attitudes of the church. (38)

We believe that the truth taught in these Synoptic passages may be legitimately extended to a concern for the unborn. Jesus does not value persons as the world does. While even his disciples were apparently prejudiced against the very young, Jesus bestowed attention and care upon these little ones. Jesus' example should challenge us to reevaluate our attitude toward those the world tends to regard as unimportant or unwanted.

The next text is one that was included in the lesson, but we wanted to add Alcorn's commentary on it to these teaching notes.

Job 10:8–12

⁸ Your hands fashioned and made me, and now you have destroyed me altogether. ⁹ Remember that you have made me like clay; and will you return me to the dust? ¹⁰ Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? ¹¹ You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. ¹² You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit.

Alcorn, in *Pro-Life Answers*, observes, "The person in the womb was not something that might become Job, but someone who was Job, just a younger version of the same man" (313). This observation about personal pronouns can be made of all the prenatal formation accounts.

And here is another passage that was included in the lesson but was missing commentary from a secondary source.

Luke 1:39–45

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Alcorn, again in *Pro-Life Answers*, makes an intriguing suggestion based on the timing of Mary's visit. Notice that Elizabeth was in her sixth month when the angel spoke to Mary (Luke 1:36) and that Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months (Luke 1:56). Mary left to go home before John the Baptist was born. Therefore, Mary must have traveled to Elizabeth immediately after being told that she would conceive.

After the angel left, Mary "hurried" (v. 39) to get to Elizabeth. Unborn John the Baptist (in his sixth month after conception) responded to the presence of unborn Jesus inside Mary. Allowing for travel time, Jesus was no more than eight to ten days beyond conception when they arrived. Implantation doesn't begin until six days after conception and isn't complete until twelve. Most likely Jesus was not yet fully implanted in his mother's womb when unborn John responded to his presence. (320, italics removed)

The view of the Old Testament concerning God's formation of the unborn was continued in the Jewish intertestamental literature. In 2 Maccabees 7:22–23 a mother is encouraging her son in the face of torture and martyrdom. She says to him,

²² I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. ²³ Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws. (Revised Standard Version)

Another concept which you might choose to explore with your class is the biblical concept of the unity of a person. Though distinct in this life the body and spirit seem always to act together as one human person. To have a genetically distinct human body (no matter how undeveloped) without a human spirit cuts across the grain of how Scripture portrays our essential nature. Davis, in *Abortion and the Christian*, discusses this concept:

The older questions concerning the time of ensoulment and whether the child receives his soul from his parents (traducianism) or by the immediate creative activity of God (creationism) have their secular counterparts in the contemporary abortion debate. They now reappear as questions about the time at which the unborn child becomes a "person," whether at conception, implantation, formation

of the cerebral cortex, “quickening,” viability, or birth. All but the first of these suggestions, conception, separate to some degree personhood from biologically human existence. They suggest a dualistic understanding of man that has more kinship with Greek and certain modern European philosophies than with the biblical outlook. (52–53)

. . . The biblical conceptions of the goodness of human bodily life and man’s essential unity should make us very suspicious of attempts to restrict human personhood—and hence moral and legal protection—to those among whom man’s “higher,” rational capacities are evident. Man is to be valued not merely as a “thinking substance,” but as the bearer of the transcendent image of God—an image that includes the bodily aspects of life. In biblical thought, man’s “personal” life is not separated from his bodily life. (54–55)

Alcorn, in *Pro-Life Answers*, agrees: “The Scriptures teach the psychosomatic unity of the whole person, body, soul, and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Wherever there is a genetically distinct living human being, there is a living soul and spirit” (315).

For a refutation of some of the many bizarre arguments for abortion from the Bible, see Francis Beckwith, *Politically Correct Death* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 141–150, among others.



THE UNIQUE PERSON-FORMING WORK OF GOD

In reflecting on what is happening in the womb, Christians have rightly turned to Old Testament descriptions of God's creative work. One of the lesser known accounts is in the book of Job, thought by some to be the earliest written book of the Bible.

Job 10:8–12

⁸ Your hands fashioned and made me, and now you have destroyed me altogether. ⁹ Remember that you have made me like clay; and will you return me to the dust? ¹⁰ Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? ¹¹ You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. ¹² You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit.

A biblical passage describing God's formation of a child in the womb that is better known is Psalm 139. The psalm rejoices over God's intimate knowledge of the psalmist—a knowledge which is not bound by time or physical location. The verses most relevant to the issue of abortion are as follows:

Psalm 139:13–16

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

Having earlier in the psalm spoken of God's omniscience (vv. 1–6) and omnipresence (vv. 7–12), David now focuses on God's intimate knowledge of and creative involvement with his prenatal development. David's praise, spoken from a postnatal perspective (v. 14), assumes his identity with the prenatal individual described in verses 13, 15, and 16. . . . David naturally acknowledges his personal history and identity to have begun in the womb. His 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.¹⁸

1. How would you respond to someone who said that Psalm 139 is poetry and therefore is not relevant to the question of human personhood?

· **ANSWER.** *For a more complete response to this question, please see the discussion in the teaching notes to this lesson. In brief, we would say that Psalm 139:13–16 communicates God's intimacy and care in the creation of the unborn through the use of metaphor and other poetic features. Recognizing the poetic genre of the psalm prevents us from making direct inferences, but does not imply that the psalm has nothing to contribute to the abortion issue.*

Returning to the book of Job, consider another passage which makes an interesting argument for the fundamental equality of human persons. We will learn more about this passage when it is discussed in the sermon assigned for this lesson.

Job 31:13–15

¹³ *If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant, when they brought a complaint against me, ¹⁴ what then shall I do when God rises up? When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him? ¹⁵ Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?*

The conviction that God is intimately involved in the formation of children in the womb is not defended but *assumed* in the biblical worldview. The following references to God's prenatal activity, almost made in passing, support the notion that the biblical authors understood God to be involved in every stage of human development from conception to birth.

Jeremiah 1:4–5

⁴ *Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁵ "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."*

¹⁸ John Jefferson Davis, *Abortion and the Christian* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1984), 42–43.

Isaiah 44:1–2

¹ But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! ² Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you: Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen.

Isaiah 49:1, 5

¹ Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. . . . ⁵ And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him

This curriculum argues that the overwhelming weight of biblical evidence—to which we might add tradition and reason—points to conception as the point at which a new human person comes into existence. There is no biblical evidence to suggest any other conclusion.

The OT does not debate in any theoretical way whether a fetus is a “person,” but it does depict the fetus as the work of God and the object of his knowledge, love, and care, and hence its destruction must be considered contrary to the will of God.¹⁹

But even if we cannot thereby settle the argument with Christians who disagree, common ground might be claimed on this point: abortion is never morally justified from a biblical perspective because it is an attack on God’s work of forming a person. John Piper explains:

So both Psalm 139 and Job 31 emphasize God as the primary workman—nurturer, fashioner, knitter, Creator—in this time of gestation. Why is that important? It’s important because God is the only One who can create personhood. Mothers and fathers can contribute some impersonal egg and some impersonal sperm, but only God creates independent personhood. So when the Scripture emphasizes that God is the main nurturer and shaper in the womb, it is stressing that what is happening in the womb is the unique work of God, namely, the making of a person. From the biblical point of view gestation is the unique work of God fashioning personhood.

We can argue till doomsday about when this little being becomes “a whole person.” That argument will probably never be settled. But this we can say, I think, with

¹⁹ Charles H. H. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2003), 801.

great confidence: what is happening in the womb is a unique person-forming work of God, and only God knows how deeply and mysteriously the creation of personhood is woven into the making of a body. And therefore it is arbitrary and unwarranted to assume that at some point in the knitting together of this person its destruction is not an assault on the prerogatives of God the Creator. Let me say that again positively: the destruction of conceived human life—whether embryonic, fetal, or viable—is an assault on the unique person-forming work of God.

And therefore to the degree that we recognize even in fallen personhood a unique value, because of its potential to glorify God with conscious obedience and praise, to that degree will we shrink back with reverence and fear from assaulting or obstructing the divine work of God fashioning such a person in the womb.²⁰

JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS IN THE WOMB

Additional evidence for the humanity and personhood of the unborn is found in the beginning chapters of Luke and Matthew. Notice how the unborn John the Baptist is described in the following verses.

Luke 1:13–15

¹³ But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.”

The personal identity of John the Baptist is established even before his birth because the angel tells Zechariah that John will be filled with the Holy Spirit “even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15).

God’s involvement in the conception and birth of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, however, is the most powerful testimony to God’s interest in what happens in the womb.

²⁰ “Abortion: You Desire and Do Not Have, So You Kill,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

Matthew 1:18–21

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Luke 1:30–31, 35

³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. . . . ³⁵ . . . 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.”

The inspired account of the Messiah’s personal history includes the prediction not only of his birth, but also of his conception. As in other biblical texts, conception is treated as the time at which one’s personal history begins. The mention of human conception some forty times in the Scripture indicates in itself the significance of this event in God’s dealings with his people.²¹

Finally, please consider the following account of the prenatal encounter between John the Baptist and Jesus. These verses immediately follow the angel’s announcement of Jesus’ conception and birth.

Luke 1:39–45

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

²¹ Davis, *Abortion and the Christian*, 55.

2. List all the indications in Luke 1:39–45 that could be used to support the idea that John the Baptist and Jesus were both considered human persons while in the womb.

· **ANSWER.** *Textual indications that could be used to support the prenatal personhood of John the Baptist and Jesus might include the following:*

- A1. *John the Baptist's leap in the womb (vv. 41, 44) suggests his personal reaction to the voice of Mary.*
- A2. *John the Baptist is said to be the personal subject of the human emotion of joy (v. 44).*
- A3. *The phrase "fruit of [the] womb" appears in the LXX in passages which associate the phrase with born children. See Genesis 30:2, Psalm 131:11 (132:11 in the Hebrew and English), and especially Micah 6:7 and Lamentations 2:20.*
- A4. *Jesus is already called "my Lord" by Elizabeth although he had only recently been conceived (v. 43).*

Jesus' incarnation is the greatest possible affirmation of human dignity in the womb. His conception, prenatal formation, and birth sanctifies the entire process of a child's earliest development.

PERSONAL IDENTITY IN THE WOMB

There is biblical warrant for applying what we learned to be true of John the Baptist and Jesus to the personal identity of every child in the womb. Davis explains with regard to Jesus:

While Jesus' conception was certainly unique, it does not follow that his prenatal existence offers no parallels to our own. As to his human nature, the New Testament expressly declares that he was made like his brethren in every respect (Hebrews 2:14, 17), sin excepted. The Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45) is the archetype of the human race. While the mode of Jesus' conception was unique, the results of that conception, as regards the integrity of the human nature, were identical to our own.²²

²² *Abortion and the Christian*, 40.

The Bible speaks in a personal way about the conception and prenatal development of a child in numerous passages. Notice even the account of the first conception in human history.

Genesis 4:1

¹ Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD."

In a number of texts the biblical writers freely apply personal language to the unborn child. Genesis 4:1 says that "Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain." The writer's interest in Cain extends back beyond his birth, to his conception. That is when his personal history begins. The individual conceived and the individual born are one and the same, namely Cain. His conception, birth, and postnatal life form a natural continuum, with the God of the covenant involved at every stage.²³

This observation is supported by the terminology that the Old Testament uses to refer to the unborn. Alcorn notes the following:

The Hebrew word used in the Old Testament to refer to the unborn (Exodus 21:22–25) is yeled, a word that "generally indicates young children, but may refer to teens or even young adults." The Hebrews did not have or need a separate word for unborn children. They were just like any other children, only younger. In the Bible there are references to born children and unborn children, but there is no such thing as a potential, or "almost" child.²⁴

Some who have attempted to defend abortion from the Bible have relied on the passage that Alcorn mentions above, Exodus 21:22–25. Since the discussion of this text is somewhat complex and lengthy, we thought it best to address it in an appendix. If you are interested in learning more about the interpretation of Exodus 22:22–25, please see Appendix B.

Terminology for the unborn in the New Testament confirms what we've seen in the Old Testament. The Bible makes no distinction between a child in the womb and out of the womb.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, 313.

Luke 1:41

⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby [Greek: brephos] leaped in her womb. . . .

Luke 1:44

⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby [Greek: brephos] in my womb leaped for joy.

Luke 2:12

¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby [Greek: brephos] wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

Luke 2:16

¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby [Greek: brephos] lying in a manger.

Luke 18:15

¹⁵ Now they were bringing even infants [Greek: brephos] to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

Therefore, we have woven at least three strands of biblical evidence together in our defense of the humanity and personhood of the unborn: (1) personal language is applied to the unborn from the point of conception; (2) the unborn are called children; and (3) the unborn are known by God in a personal way.

You may have noticed that this curriculum has referred to the unborn as “children” in the womb. Though this move is obviously disputed, we are simply following biblical precedent (cf. Genesis 25:22).

Examine the following two texts for a description of how God relates to the unborn Jacob and Esau. How might God’s activity inform a God-centered view of human personhood?

Genesis 25:21–24

²¹ And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²² The children struggled together within her, and she said, “If it is thus, why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the LORD. ²³ And the LORD said to her, “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.” ²⁴ When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb.

Romans 9:8–13

⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ 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— ¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

The usual marks of “personhood” are here absent: physical development, speech, social relationships, ability to work, relative independence. In spite of this, however, in order to display all the more clearly the sovereign initiative in election, God chooses to establish the most crucial of all personal relationships—the one between a man and his Creator—prior to Jacob’s birth.

. . . God’s election of the weak and the dependent challenges us to reevaluate our culturally determined views of the unborn in the light of divine revelation. Even the unwanted child can be the object of an everlasting covenant love. God’s electing love, not the shifting sands of cultural convention, should constitute the basis for defining human personhood.²⁵

It seems as if the world defines human personhood either in the subjective judgment of the mother (as we saw in the previous lesson) or in some arbitrary step in the process of human development, such as the presence of a certain level of brain activity or responsiveness. What if our definition of personhood, however, was not rooted in any intrinsic quality or capacity of man, but in the initiative of God? Would this lead to a God-centered rather than a man-centered definition of personhood?

3. Reflect on the definition of human personhood. Can human personhood be separated from life that is biologically human? In what should our definition of personhood be rooted?

· **ANSWER.** *A God-centered definition of human personhood is something that deserves extended and thoughtful theological reflection. We are merely raising the issue here. In the teaching notes, however, we argue that the*

²⁵ *Abortion and the Christian*, 47, 48.

Bible does not sharply divide the human person into spiritual and physical components. Furthermore, Piper's suggestion in one of the preceding citations that "God creates independent personhood" combined with Davis's provocative reflections below suggest to us that personhood is rooted not in a scientifically identifiable point in human development but with the sovereign person-forming work of God. The Bible does not consider humans as persons in themselves apart from God, but persons are always thought of in relation to their Creator.

Davis injects some provocative thoughts into our reflections here:

Just as in the redemptive sphere God's sovereign work of regeneration logically precedes the response of faith and repentance, so in the natural sphere God's creative and providential work in the womb is the precondition for life itself. Personhood, whether "natural" or redeemed, is not a possibility intrinsic to man, but comes from God's sovereign initiative. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28)—both prenatally and postnatally. If it is true that "we love, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19), it seems reasonable to say that we are persons because God first related to us in a personal way. Human personhood is rooted in the creative and providential care of God, which begins in the womb.²⁶

A more adequate approach to understanding "personhood" defines it not in terms of the human being in isolation, or merely in terms of qualities immanent within the individual, but in terms of relationship to God. A "person" is a being to which God relates in a personal way; it is God's initiative in relationships that "personalizes" the creature. This definition includes our common usage, but it is also broad enough to include texts such as Jeremiah 1:5 and Psalm 139:13–16, which speak of unborn human life.²⁷

In conclusion, then, it is the responsibility and privilege not only to defend the humanity of the unborn, but to celebrate children as a *gift* and as a gift *from God*. Alcorn agrees:

The biblical view of children is that they are a blessing and gift from the Lord

²⁶ *Abortion and the Christian*, 45.

²⁷ John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics* (3rd ed.; Philipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2004), 162.

(Psalm 127:3-5). Society is treating children more and more as liabilities.²⁸

Children and child-bearing are from the hand of God. God is the one who “opens the womb” of every mother and presides over the development of the unborn child. Children are to be celebrated and cherished, not discarded.

Christians have both a “negative” and a “positive” task in proclaiming the humanity of the unborn. While defending the unborn as God’s creation and therefore worthy of protection, we must also uphold the goodness of human life as granted, sustained, and nourished by the sovereign God.

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🔗 LISTENING TO A SERMON ABOUT ABORTION

Listen to the sermon “**God at Work in Every Womb**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the desiringGod website (www.desiringgod.org).

²⁸ *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, 318

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. How might you now respond to Justice Blackmun's comments as quoted in the introduction?

2. How would you respond to Christians who argue that the Bible never explicitly settles the question of when human life or personhood begins?

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- John Jefferson Davis, *Abortion and the Christian*, Chapter 4
- Randy Alcorn, *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, Part One and Appendix B
- John Piper, "Abortion: You Desire and Do Not Have, So You Kill," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website

God at Work in Every Womb

JOHN PIPER, 2001

Opening prayer.

“Quiet” times in terms of abortion.

A massive movement of compassion.

Jesus Christ: not a politician, but a Savior.

Luke 14:14; Psalm 82:3-4

Job 31:13-15

Slavery.

“To be a Christian is to come to know that . . . everything in life has to do with _____.”

Observations on verse 15:

1.

2.

3.

The bottom-line reason why abortion is wrong: “Abortion is an assault on the person-forming work of _____.”

4.

What you can do:

1.

5.

2.

6.

3.

7.

4.

Abortion, Murder, and the Image of God

4

INTRODUCTION

Is the sixth commandment of Exodus 20:13, “You shall not murder,” applicable to abortion? This question has been debated even within Christian circles. We agree with the conclusion of Randy Alcorn when he says,

There is a small but influential circle of prochoice advocates who claim to base their beliefs on the Bible. They maintain that “nowhere does the Bible prohibit abortion.” Yet the Bible clearly prohibits the killing of innocent people (Exodus 20:13). All that is necessary to prove a biblical prohibition of abortion is to demonstrate that the Bible considers the unborn to be human beings.²⁹

This lesson builds upon the previous lesson in which we argued that the Bible does consider the unborn to be human beings. We saw that the Bible makes no distinctions between unborn and born children, and, more significantly, that the Bible bears remarkable witness to the work of God in the womb. To abort a baby is to assault the person-forming work of God, to defy his sovereignty over life in the womb.

Therefore, this lesson will argue that abortion can legitimately be considered murder and therefore expressly forbidden by Scripture. Furthermore, we will look at how the early church interpreted the practice of abortion. We will conclude by asking whether there is even a more specific category of sin under which abortion might be denounced.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- defend the assertion that abortion is murder.
- articulate how the early church interpreted the practice of abortion.
- draw parallels between abortion and another sin that the Bible strongly denounces.

²⁹ *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, 313.



Throughout your facilitation of this course, we would ask you, as the instructor, to be sensitive to those in your class who may have had an abortion in the past, encouraged someone to have an abortion, or has in some way experienced the many harmful effects of abortion. Equating abortion with murder and associating it with child sacrifice is shocking, and can certainly be done in a harsh and merciless way. Therefore, we would encourage you to proclaim repeatedly the forgiveness offered in the gospel through the death of Jesus. Model for your students the balance between clearly and boldly proclaiming the wickedness of abortion without compromise while simultaneously showing mercy, patience, and kindness in the name of Jesus. This balanced disposition has been called “compassionate outrage.”

Please note that the connection between racism and abortion which is raised in Piper’s sermon for this lesson will be further developed in the next lesson. You may choose to delay discussion of this connection until then.

The logical argument offered in this lesson for identifying abortion as a sin of murder was presented without much comment. Therefore, we have included a more technical discussion of this argument in these teaching notes. You may share some or all of these nuances and clarifications with your students if you decide that it would be helpful or if student questions lead the discussion in this direction. We have reproduced each of the premises and the conclusion of the argument and have inserted commentary.

1. Murder may be defined as the unwarranted and intentional killing of one human being by another.

This definition would therefore exclude unintentional killing (manslaughter) and warranted or justified killing, as in cases of self-defense or just war. By specifying that murder is the killing of a human being by another human being, this definition would exclude labeling the killing of animals as murder and likewise not call an animal’s killing of a human being murder.

2. A human embryo or fetus is an unborn human being.

The terms “embryo” and “fetus” are intentional. This curriculum uses the term “zygote” to describe the human life resulting from conception. The term “embryo” identifies this human life from the point of implantation (6–14 days

after conception) until the end of eight weeks. After eight weeks, the human organism is called a “fetus” until the time of its birth.

By using the term “human” embryo or fetus we simply mean that this is an organism that belongs genetically to the species *Homo sapiens*. We are not assuming what we are trying to prove but rather are distinguishing human embryos and fetuses from other biological forms of animal life. The definition of murder and this second premise could substitute the term “human person” for “human being.” We are using the two interchangeably.

As we asserted in Lesson 3, we believe that human life and personhood begins at conception. Therefore, we would also call a human “zygote” an unborn human being.

3. Abortion is the unwarranted and intentional killing of a human embryo or fetus.

By specifying that abortion is unwarranted and intentional killing, we thereby exclude cases in which the killing of a human embryo or fetus is either warranted or unintentional. As we specify in the lesson, we believe the killing of a human embryo or fetus is only warranted in those cases where the life of the mother is threatened and there is a reasonable possibility that the unborn child and the mother cannot both be saved. John Piper, in his sermon “The Innocent Blood of Our Sons and Daughters” (available online at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website), concurs:

If God is already taking a baby's life inside his mother—through some catastrophic anomaly or mishap, and if it is clear that the baby cannot live outside the womb and that leaving the child will imperil the mother's life—under those circumstances I do not think we sin against the baby or God by taking the baby and saving the mother. But that is not the case in 99+% of the abortions.

The unintentional killing of a human embryo or fetus would include cases of non-induced miscarriage, accidental forms of killing, or cases in which an abortion is performed on a woman without her consent. (In cases of the latter, the abortion would be viewed as murder committed by the abortionist but not by the mother. In all other cases, we would view the abortion as murder committed by an abortionist with the equally culpable mother being viewed as a willing accomplice to murder.)

Careful readers will note that we have not defined abortion as the unwarranted killing of a human zygote (whether unintentional or not). The

position of this curriculum is that any form of birth control that is capable of acting as an “abortifacient” should be avoided by Christians. This would include virtually all oral contraceptives used in America today. For more information, we would refer you to Randy Alcorn’s book *Does the Birth Control Pill Cause Abortions?* or his summary of that research in Appendix E of *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*. Also see the relevant material on birth control on the *desiringGod* website.

The reason, then, that this curriculum words this third premise in the way that it has is because we are using the term “abortion” more narrowly to refer to those medical and chemical procedures employed by medical personnel at abortion clinics and hospitals (cf. Beckwith, *Defending Life*, 83). The issue of birth control, though certainly a related issue, is simply outside the scope of this course. You may, however, address birth control in this lesson if you so choose.

4. Therefore, abortion is murder.

The argument, as it stands, is valid: the conclusion would necessarily follow if the premises were true. We also believe the argument to be sound—that is, a valid argument with true premises.

It is often mentioned that abortion is never explicitly addressed in the Bible. Sometimes this observation is used to support either the idea that the Bible permits abortion or that abortion is a matter of biblical indifference. As we assert in the introduction to this lesson, however, we believe that abortion is prohibited by the sixth commandment after it has been established that the unborn embryo or fetus is a human being. Harold O. J. Brown, in *Death before Birth* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1977), expresses this perspective:

The Bible does not deal specifically with abortion. For that matter, it does not deal specifically with infanticide, the killing of babies. Nor does it talk about parricide, fratricide, uxoricide (killing of one’s wife), nor genocide (the killing of a whole race). . . . If the developing fetus is shown to be a human being, then we do not need a specific commandment against feticide (abortion) any more that we need something specific against uxoricide (killing of one’s wife). The general commandment against killing covers both. (118, 119)

We believe that abortion is not morally justified in cases of rape or incest. Pregnancy in cases of rape and incest are tragic and deeply reprehensible. One sin does not justify another, however. As Randy Alcorn says,

In those rare cases when a pregnancy is the result of rape, we must be careful who gets the blame. What is hard about this hard case is not whether an innocent child deserves to die for what his father did. What is hard is that an innocent woman has to take on childbearing and possibly mothering—if she decides to keep the child rather than choose adoption—for which she was not willing or ready. This is a very hard situation, calling for family, friends, and church to do all they can to support her. But the fact remains that none of this is the fault of the child. (231–232)

For additional discussion of this topic see Alcorn, *Pro-Life Answers*, 231–235, and Beckwith, *Defending Life*, 105–108 and 194–199.

Alcorn, in *Pro-Life Answers*, has asserted that “Christians throughout church history have affirmed with a united voice the humanity of the preborn child” (316). For his supporting evidence, see pages 316–318. If you so choose, you might read some of this additional evidence to your class during your discussion of this lesson.

The tone of this lesson is predominately “negative.” We recognize this and urge you to address the abortion issue from a more “positive” angle as well, celebrating God’s good gift of life. George Grant, in *Third Time Around* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), describes the broadly pro-life stance of the early church:

Thus, the early Christians not only valiantly stood against the tide of abortion, infanticide, abandonment, and exposure; they stood with the victims of brutality. To them, to be pro-life meant not only exposing the evil deeds of manipulators and oppressors; it also meant sheltering the suffering, caring for the homeless, and giving refuge to the unwanted. They self-consciously lived lives of service, compassion, and charity. (31)

Finally, here are some further comments from John Piper, in his sermon “Abortion: You Desire and Do Not Have, So You Kill,” about the satanic nature of the abortion industry:

Why has abortion on demand reached such awesome proportions in our land? Because beneath all the rhetoric is the agenda of Satan, who, according to Jesus, has been a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). The apostle Paul said that when we love the world and follow its desires, we are following the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2–3).

Many of you know Steve Calvin, a physician with a specialization in obstetrics. He was a member of our church until he took an appointment in Tucson at the University of Arizona alongside his involvement in a Hispanic HMO and a Crisis Pregnancy Center. He is an articulate opponent of abortion-on-demand.

He wrote me a letter a couple years ago and said,

“To better know the opposition, I checked out the book _____ by _____ (1983), the premier text on the medical, social and logistical aspects of this grisly business. After two days of reading and analysis . . . I’m convinced we are dealing here with forces of spiritual darkness that enslave men’s minds.”

Use these comments as you will.



ABORTION IS MURDER

Since equating abortion with murder is somewhat controversial, let us begin by clearly outlining in logical form our rationale for calling abortion murder.

1. Murder may be defined as the unwarranted and intentional killing of one human being by another.
2. A human embryo or fetus is an unborn human being.
3. Abortion is the unwarranted and intentional killing of a human embryo or fetus.
4. Therefore, abortion is murder.

Obviously, the second and third premise of this argument are controversial. We attempted to establish the truthfulness of the second premise in the previous lesson—Lesson 3. The third premise was addressed, at least indirectly, in Lesson 2. All the common arguments that are given for abortion are not, in our opinion, sufficient warrants for abortion. Emotional “health,” economic hardship, inconvenience to the mother, and the like are not considerations with more moral weight than the life of the unborn. The only sufficient warrant for terminating a pregnancy would be cases in which the life of the mother is threatened and there is a reasonable possibility that the unborn child and the mother cannot both be saved. In those cases, doctors should act to save the life that can be saved. These cases, it should be noted, are rare and represent only a minimal percentage of abortions performed in America.

The fundamental reason that abortion and murder are wrong is that human beings are created in the image of God. Genesis 1:26–27 establish this foundational reality.

Genesis 1:26–27

²⁶ 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.” ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

It is important to state that bearing the image of God does not depend on the mental faculties of the human individual. The severely mentally retarded, for example, still bear the image of God even though their mental faculties might not be significantly different from a typical newborn.

Thus there is no place for a suggestion like Joseph Fletcher's, for example, that humanness be defined in terms of such criteria as self-awareness, memory, a sense of futurity and time, and a certain minimum I.Q. That view misses the very essence of humanness, wherein man's conscious capacities find their true meaning, purpose, and value in that divine-human relationship established in creation, broken by sin, and redeemed through Jesus Christ.³⁰

The following passage makes explicit the connection between the image of God and the prohibition of murder.

Genesis 9:5-6

⁵ And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. ⁶ Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

Shedding man's blood is a heinous offense for the very reason that an attack on the bodily integrity of man is an assault on the dignity and honor of the One who created him.³¹

This Scripture implies that an assault against human life is considered by God as an assault against Himself. To murder a person is to attack one who is the image-bearer of God. Homicide is regarded by God as an implicit attempt to murder God.³²

1. Do you agree with Sproul's reasoning, cited above? How does the idea that abortion is murder relate to the glory of God?

³⁰ *Abortion and the Christian*, 37.

³¹ *Ibid*, 36.

³² R. C. Sproul, *Abortion: A Rational Look at an Emotional Issue* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1990), 33.

- **ANSWER.** *Though students may have varying opinions, we would agree with Sproul's reasoning. The purpose and design of our creation is to reflect the likeness of God in the world. To attack the likeness of God is indirectly to attack God himself. Therefore, if abortion can legitimately be called murder we can say that abortion is an assault on the glory of God.*

Therefore, we would argue that abortion is prohibited in the Bible by the sixth commandment.

Exodus 20:13

¹³ *You shall not murder.*

Deuteronomy 5:17

¹⁷ *You shall not murder.*

Alcorn, citing Kline, explains why the Bible might not contain legislation specifically dealing with abortion:

Meredith Kline observes, "The most significant thing about abortion legislation in Biblical law is that there is none. It was so unthinkable that an Israelite woman should desire an abortion that there was no need to mention this offense in the criminal code." All that was necessary to prohibit an abortion was the command, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Every Israelite knew that the preborn child was indeed a child. Therefore, miscarriage was always viewed as the loss of a child and abortion as the killing of a child.³³

HOW ABORTION WAS UNDERSTOOD IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The equation of murder and abortion is supported by the testimony of the early Christian church. Though not an authoritative source—as the Bible is—the testimony of the early church does have a contribution to make to our reflection on this issue.

Writers of the first three Christian centuries laid the theological and literary foundation for all subsequent early Christian writing on abortion. We will see that three important themes emerged during these centuries: the fetus is the creation

³³ *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, 315.

*of God; abortion is murder; and the judgment of God falls on those guilty of abortion.*³⁴

Two of the earliest Christian writings that addressed abortion are the Didache (also known as The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles) and the Epistle of Barnabas. Though scholars dispute exactly when these documents were written, it is possible that they were written as early as A.D. 50 and A.D. 70, respectively, which would put them before some of the books of the New Testament!

Didache 2:1–2

¹ *The second commandment of the teaching is:* ² *“You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery”; you shall not corrupt boys; you shall not be sexually promiscuous; “you shall not steal”; you shall not practice magic; you shall not engage in sorcery; you shall not abort a child or commit infanticide. . .*

Epistle of Barnabas 19:5

⁵ *You must not waver with regard to your decisions. “You shall not take the Lord’s name in vain.” You shall love your neighbor more than your own life. You shall not abort a child nor, again, commit infanticide. You must not withhold your hand from your son or your daughter, but from their youth you shall teach them the fear of God.*³⁵

2. What is the significance of these two ancient documents as quoted above?

- **ANSWER.** *According to Gorman, in Abortion & the Early Church, “The significance of these two writings lies both in their firm position on abortion as murder and in their development of an ethical context within which abortion should be viewed. ‘Thou shalt not abort’ becomes a subcommandment of the commandment not to murder” (50). At the very least it seems reasonable to say that there was consensus in the early church concerning the sinfulness of abortion since neither document offers*

34 Michael Gorman, *Abortion & the Early Church* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 47.

35 Both ancient texts are reproduced from *The Apostolic Fathers*, edited and revised by Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), on pages 253 and 321, respectively.

any arguments for why abortion is wrong. Neither are any exceptions mentioned to the general prohibition.

Tertullian, an attorney from Carthage converted to Christianity around the close of the second century, rebutted pagan charges that Christians practiced infanticide. Such charges were absurd, noted Tertullian. “For us, indeed, as homicide is forbidden, it is not lawful to destroy what is in the womb while the blood is still being formed into a man. 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.”³⁶

After a thorough survey of early Christian history, Michael Gorman concludes:

The earliest Christian ethic, from Jesus to Constantine, can be described as a consistent pro-life ethic. It was in favor of human life regardless of age, nationality or social standing. It pleaded for the poor, the weak, women, children and the unborn.³⁷

ABORTION AS CHILD SACRIFICE

Thus far this lesson has argued that abortion should be considered as a sin of murder. Abortion would therefore be prohibited by the Bible as such. Abortion would also fall under the biblical category and condemnation of the shedding of innocent blood. Piper explains:

The phrase “innocent blood” occurs about 20 times in the Bible. The context is always one of condemning those who shed this blood or warning people not to shed it. Innocent blood includes the blood of children (Psalm 106:38). Jeremiah puts it in a context with refugees and widows and orphans: “Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.” Surely the blood of the unborn is as innocent

³⁶ Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 139–140.

³⁷ Gorman, *Abortion & the Early Church*, 90.

*as any blood that flows in the world.*³⁸

Piper makes reference to Psalm 106:38 in the citation above. We reproduce this verse and its surrounding context for you below. And now we are ready to make the further, provocative claim that abortion should also be associated with the sin of child sacrifice—a sacrifice to demons!

Psalm 106:34–42

³⁴ They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD commanded them, ³⁵ but they mixed with the nations and learned to do as they did. ³⁶ They served their idols, which became a snare to them. ³⁷ They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; ³⁸ they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood. ³⁹ Thus they became unclean by their acts, and played the whore in their deeds. ⁴⁰ Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he abhorred his heritage; ⁴¹ he gave them into the hand of the nations, so that those who hated them ruled over them. ⁴² Their enemies oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their power.

Alcorn further develops this association of abortion with child sacrifice:

Child sacrifice is condemned throughout Scripture. Only the most degraded societies tolerated such evil, and the worst of these defended and celebrated it as if it were a virtue. Ancient dumping grounds have been found filled with the bones of hundreds of dismembered infants. This is strikingly similar to discoveries of thousands of dead babies discarded by modern abortion clinics. One scholar of the ancient Near East refers to infant sacrifice as “the Canaanite counterpart to abortion.” Unlike the pagan sacrifices, however, with abortion, child-killing need no longer be postponed till birth.

Scripture condemns the shedding of innocent blood (Deuteronomy 19:10; Proverbs 6:17; Isaiah 1:15; Jeremiah 22:17). While the killing of all innocent human beings is detestable, the Bible regards the killing of children as particularly heinous (Leviticus 18:21; 20:1–5; Deuteronomy 12:31). The prophets of Israel were outraged at the sacrifice of children by some of the Jews. They warned that it would result in the devastating judgment of God on their society (Jeremiah 7:30–34; Ezekiel 16:20–21,

³⁸ “Ten Reasons Why It Is Wrong to Take the Life of Unborn Children,” an online article at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.com) website.

36–38; 20:31; compare 2 Kings 21:2–6 and Jeremiah 15:3–4).³⁹

And Piper again draws parallels between the two sins, highlighting the satanic nature of abortion:

Two years ago, a group of Catholics and Protestants produced a document called “That They Might Have Life.” In it, they said this about abortion:

The blindness of so many to this moral atrocity has many sources but is finally to be traced to the seductive ways of evil advanced by Satan. Jesus says, “He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

I think that is right. Which means that the sacrifice of our sons and daughters today is in a very true and profound sense a sacrifice to demons.⁴⁰

3. What might be the purpose of associating the sins of abortion and demonic child sacrifice? Do you think this is a valid association? Why or why not?

· **ANSWER.** *We believe that this association is valid. It’s not that we are claiming that women who choose abortion are consciously sacrificing their children to demons or Satan. Rather, the abortion industry is characterized by so much destruction and deception, and it so “neatly” accomplishes Satan’s aims, that it is reasonable to infer that Satan is directly behind it. The purpose, then, of associating these sins is to expose the wickedness of abortion and to alert Christians to the spiritual realities they will face in opposing abortion.*

The connection between the murder of innocent human beings and the glory of God will again be made in the sermon for this lesson. The primary text that will be preached is Psalm 8. Review it before listening to the sermon.

³⁹ *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, 315.

⁴⁰ “Abortion: The Innocent Blood of Our Sons and Daughters,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

Psalm 8:1–9

¹ O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. ² Out of the mouth of babes and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. ³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? ⁵ Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, ⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, ⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. ⁹ O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Christians, in addition to speaking out against abortion as murder, should proclaim that the weakness and vulnerability of the unborn should excite our compassion rather than our contempt.

Contrary to the view that an “unviable” infant is less valuable than a “viable” one, the Bible depicts human weakness, dependency, and helplessness as what most fully manifest the love of God for the wretched of the earth.⁴¹

📖 LISTENING TO A SERMON ABOUT ABORTION

Listen to the sermon “**What Is Man? Reflections on Abortion and Racial Reconciliation**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the *desiringGod* website (www.desiringgod.org).

⁴¹ *Abortion and the Christian*, 39.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. Can Bible-believing Christians differ on certain aspects of the abortion debate? If so, then what aspects are those? If not, why not?

2. How should Christians proclaim God's willingness to forgive the sin of abortion without minimizing the evil and horror of abortion?

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▷ John Piper, "Father, Forgive for We Know What We Are Doing," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website
- ▷ John Piper, "Abortion: The Innocent Blood of Our Sons and Daughters," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website

What Is Man? Reflections on Abortion and Racial Reconciliation

JOHN PIPER, 1994

Psalm 8:1–9

Two massive realities in our world brought together:

Chronological reason.

Theological reason.

A vision of God and man from Psalm 8:

A truth to be drawn from a biblical vision of God: “You cannot worship and glorify the majesty of _____ while treating his supreme _____ with contempt.”

Verse 1 and Verse 9

Verses 3–6

Illustration: a computer, a scientist, and God.

Question: “Why are you against abortion?”

Answer: “Because no amount of inconvenience could ever justify treating the supreme _____ of _____ with murderous contempt.”

Verse 2

1.

2.

3.

Job 31:15

Closing admonition: “Do not be a part of the _____ of God by holding in contempt the supreme _____ of God at any stage of his or her development”

Sin Gives Birth to Abortion

5

🔗 INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this curriculum is to reframe the abortion issue within a biblical perspective that is God-centered and Christ-exalting. Many Christians agree that abortion is sin. Not many Christians, however, speak of abortion as primarily and ultimately an injustice against God. Every sin, in fact, is primarily and ultimately a sin against God. That is why David, who had sinned terribly against both Bathsheba and her husband Uriah could truly confess, “Against you [O God], you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment” (Psalm 51:4).

In previous lessons, we have seen the ways in which abortion is sin: abortion challenges the supremacy of God who alone decides what is right and wrong; abortion defies the sovereignty of God over human life in the womb; and abortion treats those created in the image of God with murderous contempt.

In this lesson, we will examine the many possible sinful motives from which the sinful act of abortion could spring. This exercise will further expose the sinfulness of abortion and further demonstrate the need to comprehend that abortion is about God.

🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- explain the ways in which sexual immorality, greed, selfishness, and fear can result in abortion.
- explain the ways in which sexism and racism are related to abortion.
- express the conviction that abortion is about God.



This curriculum has deliberately avoided the topics of apologetics and politics. It is not our intention to suggest thereby that these topics are unimportant or that Christians should not invest time and energy in them. It is our conviction, however, that discussion of abortion in Christian circles has sometimes been dominated by apologetic or political concerns. This course is offered in the hopes that it might be a modest corrective to this tendency, reasserting the God-centered, Bible-based, theological foundations for an explicitly Christian pro-life advocacy. Our confidence is not in presidents or in political parties. And as some Christian thinkers have rightly asserted, the evil of abortion will not disappear even if *Roe v. Wade* was overturned. Abortion, like all other social evils, is in the hands of a sovereign God who will one day make all things right.

To those who argue that a woman should have a choice in her pregnancy or control of her own body, a Christian might say that virtually all pregnancies begin with a choice—a choice to have sex. As Beckwith explains in *Defending Life* (p. 180), those who make this choice should be prepared for the potential ramifications of that choice:

Thus, to understand one's self and one's nature is to understand that one's sexual organs are ordered toward procreation. And once one understands and appreciates that, it seems that consent to sexual intercourse does entail consent to pregnancy whether or not one intends or desires such a state.

The relationship between abortion and racism must be carefully stated. Nevertheless, we think that the association between these two sins should be powerfully communicated in our society, which has largely accepted that racism is evil and should be rejected. John Piper, in his sermon “When Is Abortion Racism?” (available online at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website), discusses this relationship in greater detail:

My aim is that just as once even though the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case of 1857 held that Black slaves were property without rights as free persons, yet today we view that as unthinkable; so also even though the Supreme Court in the Roe v. Wade case of 1973 did not give the unborn the rights of free persons, nevertheless the day may come when that too is viewed as unthinkable. Racism might—and often did—result in the killing of innocent humans; in our history, it often did. But abortion always results in the killing of innocent humans. Between 1882 and 1968,

3,446 Black people were lynched in America. Today more Black babies are killed by white abortionists every three days than all who were lynched in those years (Life Education and Resource Network).

. . . Again my aim is to associate abortion and racism, not to equate them. Whether the association is justified, you will decide. It's not a biblical declaration; it's a cultural observation.

. . . In other words, the de facto effect (I don't call it the main cause, but net effect) of putting abortion clinics in the urban centers is that the abortion of Hispanic and Black babies is more than double their percentage of the population. Every day 1,300 black babies are killed in America. Seven hundred Hispanic babies die every day from abortion. Call this what you will—when the slaughter has an ethnic face and the percentages are double that of the white community and the killers are almost all white, something is going on here that ought to make the lovers of racial equality and racial harmony wake up.

John Ensor, in an article entitled “Pray for the Third Wave” (available online at the [desiringGod](#) website), also addresses the racial realities concerning abortion and predicts a way forward:

. . . Over the last 35 years, as 2,000+ pregnancy help centers got established, mostly in white, suburban and small towns of America, the abortion business has consolidated into our nation's cities. Over 90% of abortion facilities are now in urban neighborhoods. Black and Hispanic women suffer 56% of all abortions while representing only 25% of the female population. This means the abortion business is gorging itself on the blood of minority children all the while appearing as compassionate servants of the poor. It also means that the business of abortion cannot survive without the silent approval of the Black and Latino neighborhoods and the churches and pastors that lead them. It means that until our movement penetrates the heart of the Black and Latino church, there is little progress to be had. This is the wave of the future that leads toward progress.

But the hard truth is that Black pastors largely dismiss the prolife movement as a “white issue.” The majority of leaders resent the fact that the people now calling for the rights of pre-born children descend from people who dismissed the rights of African-American adults. This may be an unfair perception. It may be racial suicide. But it also means that when the Third Wave finally comes, abortion will be ousted from these communities and mortally wounded as a practice in America.

Margaret Sanger is the founder of Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion provider in America. She is also a documented racist who supported sterilization and other means of limiting the reproduction of the black race. Her prejudice extended to other groups as well. Randy Alcorn, in *Pro-Life Answers* (p. 148), explains:

Margaret Sanger spoke of the poor and handicapped as the “sinister forces of the hordes of irresponsibility and imbecility,” claiming their existence constituted an “attack upon the stocks of intelligence and racial health.” She warned of “indiscriminate breeding” among the less fit that would bring into the world future voters “who may destroy our liberties, and who may thus be the most far-reaching peril to the future of civilization.” She called the less privileged members of society a “dead weight of human waste.”

In exposing the association of racism and abortion, it might be illuminating to talk about Margaret Sanger with your students.



SEXUAL IMMORALITY AND GREED GIVE BIRTH TO ABORTION

It is probably accurate to say that every pregnancy terminated in abortion was commenced by an act of sexual intercourse. Most of those acts of sexual intercourse were consensual and many of those acts occurred outside the context of marriage. Therefore, most abortions have their origin in sexual immorality. And sexual immorality violates the will of God.

¹ Thessalonians 4:3–5

³ *For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;* ⁴ *that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,* ⁵ *not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God . . .*

One reason that abortion dishonors God is because it is often the fruit of sexual immorality. Advocates for abortion celebrate the “sexual freedom” and “equal rights for women” that abortion achieves. Abortion is offered to women as the means to the same supposedly consequence-free life of unbridled sex that men seem to enjoy. Piper uncovers the twisted logic of this reasoning:

And “equal rights for women”—equal with whom? Equal with the irresponsible dad. Dad has sex and bears no responsibility for the baby. Mom should be equally able to have sex and bear no responsibility for the baby. Young people are looking at this and saying: Something is wrong with this picture. Maybe our lives are as broken as they are because our parents have twisted their hearts and minds so deeply to justify equality in irresponsibility.⁴²

In the Bible, the sin of sexual immorality is often linked with greed. Sexual immorality, greed, and idolatry are an unholy triad of sins that characterize a pagan way of life that does not acknowledge God.

⁴² “Let the Python Eat Its Tail. Amen.” an online article at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

1 Corinthians 6:9–10

⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 4:17–19

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

2 Peter 2:14–19

¹⁴ They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! ¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶ but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. ¹⁷ These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. ¹⁸ For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. ¹⁹ They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

1. Underline all references to sexual immorality and greed made in the passages above. In what ways might greed give rise to abortions?

· **ANSWER.** Sexual greed, if there is such a thing, can certainly lead to abortions as abortions are used as a means to remove the “obstacle” that pregnancy presents to unencumbered sexual indulgence. Financial greed, however, is also a powerful motive for abortions. Many proponents of abortion justify abortions when pregnancy and childrearing are seen merely as an economic hardship or as a threat to a woman's vocational career. Some go so far as to say that abortion is necessary for women to enjoy economic and political equality with men. What's more, the abortion industry is a multi-billion dollars per year industry that makes money through the destruction of human beings.

If sexual immorality and covetousness—these two massive powers in our culture—were conquered, abortion would almost entirely vanish. It isn't sex by itself that makes abortion. It is sex plus covetousness: desiring things that God does not will for us to have because we are not willing to find our satisfaction in him. Illicit sex and unencumbered freedom without children: for these we covet, and abortion is the result.⁴³

FEAR AND SELFISHNESS GIVE BIRTH TO ABORTION

Other sinful motives, though, can result in abortion. One such motive is fear. Mothers are sometimes fearful of the trials and pain of pregnancy, delivery, and childrearing. Fathers often flee a woman they have impregnated out of fear or urge the expecting mother to have an abortion.

Fear is especially a factor when parents discover that their child has a handicap or deformity of some kind. When the parents don't trust God to provide for all of their needs, they will choose an abortion. The Christian church needs to point out a more excellent way. Even if parents are overwhelmed and anxious about the prospect of raising a handicap child, giving their baby up for adoption is always an option. Piper explains:

There are long lists of parents willing to take and love children with Down's Syndrome. [...] And the reason there are tie-ups in adopting some mixed race and minority children is not because there are not enough willing pro-life parents. It is owing to complicated legal limitations and parental rights and agency policies. The resources are there to fold all children into families who want them.⁴⁴

It is possible, though, that a married woman who is financially secure and unafraid might still choose to have an abortion. In her case, abortion might not arise from sexual immorality, greed, or fear. She might simply view the baby as an inconvenience. She might be selfish.

We kill marriages and we kill unborn babies because they cut across our desires; they stand in the way of our unencumbered self-enhancement. And we live in

43 John Piper, "The Darkness of Abortion and the Light of Truth," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

44 John Piper, "Kingdom Compassion and the Killing of Children," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

a culture where self-enhancement and self-advancement is god. And if self-enhancement is god, then the One who is at work in the womb shaping a person in his own image is not God and the assault on his work is not sacrilegious, but obedience to the god of self.⁴⁵

Sexual immorality, greed, and selfishness—all three are sins on which the abortion industry runs both today and historically. Marvin Olasky, in a thorough study of the history of abortion in the United States before *Roe v. Wade*, concludes that abortion was prevalent in much of our history, though never widely accepted.

Abortion was never part of the American mainstream It was a recourse of those adrift on particular sidestreams: victims of seduction, prostitutes, and spiritists. . . . in America there has always been some abortion among women seduced by men, money, or the religion of self.⁴⁶

A passage which will be explained in the sermon for this lesson is James 4:1–4. Study this passage on your own in preparation for listening to the sermon.

James 4:1–4

¹ *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?* ² *You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.* ³ *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* ⁴ *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

2. What are some of your preliminary observations and questions on this text?

· **ANSWER.** *Student answers will vary.*

⁴⁵ John Piper, “Abortion: You Desire and Do Not Have, So You Kill,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

⁴⁶ Marvin Olasky, *Abortion Rites: A Social History of Abortion in America* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1992; Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1995), 289, 304. Citations are to the Regnery edition.

SEXISM AND RACISM GIVE BIRTH TO ABORTION

To conclude our limited survey of sinful motives that can lead to abortion we will consider the sins of sexism and racism.

Millions of abortions around the world are the outworking of racism and sexism. By “outworking” I mean that these abortions have roots in racism and sexism, and the fruit is what racists and sexists would want—namely, fewer blacks (as in the United States) and fewer girls (as in India and China).⁴⁷

Consider the following statistics:

Take sexism first. This is most prominent in India and China where preference for sons over daughters is deeply rooted in the structure of social life. One glimpse from the state of Maharashtra:

In one hospital, from June 1976 to June 1977, 700 individuals sought prenatal sex determination. Of these fetuses, 250 were determined to be male and 450 were female. While all of the male fetuses were kept to term, 430 of the 450 female fetuses were aborted. (Miller 1985)

Laws have been passed in India and China to restrict sex-selection abortions, but the practice goes on as sex-determination becomes easier and earlier.

China’s strictly enforced quotas on the number of children a married couple may have . . . make it even more apparent why [sex-selection abortion] and female infanticide have become so prevalent. . . . Indeed, there are an increasing number of villages in both India and China about whom the following claim, uttered by a Chinese peasant, can be made: “Last year we had only one girl born in the village—everybody else had boys” (Kristof 1993, 1). When these villagers are questioned about the possibility that their sons will not be able to find wives in twenty year’s [sic] time, the villagers do not appear worried. Their immediate concern is to have sons who can help out in the fields, take care of them in their old age, and who will continue the family line.⁴⁸

47 John Piper, “Abortion, Race, Gender, and Christ,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

48 Ibid.

Piper adds an important qualification at this point:

My point here is not that these motives for aborting baby girls are worse than the motives for abortion in Western countries. My point is simply to say that in the practice of abortion different kinds of evil mount up and multiply. And as they do, the position of the pro-choice person becomes less and less defensible. Pro-choice feminists, for example, who oppose sex-selection abortion (since it almost always goes against the girls) find themselves struggling not to call this mass of tissue a little girl. When the evil of sexism unites with the evil of abortion they tend to expose more clearly the evil of both.⁴⁹

The evil of racism can also unite to the evil of abortion.

Abortion, by the numbers, is a racist institution. That's not to say that all or even most of those who support abortion are racists. Nor does it imply that there are not racists among those who oppose abortion. This statement has nothing to do with agendas or intent. It has everything to do with the simple undeniable reality that in the United States, abortion kills black children at roughly three times the rate of non-Hispanic, white children. The Reverend Clenard H. Childress calls this phenomenon "black genocide" and has built a national ministry around its exposure. Alveda C. King, daughter of slain civil-rights leader A.D. King and niece of Martin Luther King, Jr., quotes her uncle often when outlining her opposition of abortion. She writes:

[Martin Luther King, Jr.] once said, "The Negro cannot win as long as he is willing to sacrifice the lives of his children for comfort and safety." How can the "Dream" survive if we murder the children? Every aborted baby is like a slave in the womb of his or her mother. The mother decides his or her fate.

Lest you feel these claims are an exaggeration, consider the numbers. Among black women, the current abortion ratio is 420. That means there are 420 abortions for every 1,000 live births. Statistically, 30% of black pregnancies end in abortion (excluding miscarriages). Among white women, the abortion ratio is 121—which means less than 11% of white pregnancies end in abortion. The abortion ratio among Hispanic women is 178, or 15% of pregnancies. Even though whites make up

49 John Piper, "Abortion, Race, Gender, and Christ," an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

63.7% of America's population, white women account for only 37% of its abortions.⁵⁰

What shall we make of this? Some people call it genocide. I prefer to use the very balanced and sobering words of Randy Alcorn. Here is what he says,

I do not believe that most people who support abortion rights are racists, any more than I believe there are no racists among pro-lifers. I am simply suggesting that regardless of motives, a closer look at both the history and present strategies of the pro-choice movement suggests that abortion for the minorities may not serve the cause of equality as much as the cause of supremacy for the healthy, wealthy and white.⁵¹

The connection between racism and infanticide can be seen in the following biblical account:

Exodus 1:15–22

¹⁵ Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶ “When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” ¹⁹ The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” ²⁰ So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. ²¹ And because the mid-wives feared God, he gave them families. ²² Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”

3. What similarities do you see between this passage and the reality of abortion in our world?

⁵⁰ Abort73.com. (2016). Abortion and Race. Retrieved July 16, 2017, from http://abort73.com/abortion/abortion_and_race/

⁵¹ John Piper, “Abortion, Race, Gender, and Christ,” an online sermon at the desiringGod website.

- **ANSWER.** Piper makes four observations in his sermon “Abortion, Race, Gender, and Christ” (available online at the [desiringGod website](http://www.desiringGod.org)) that illuminate the analogy between this account and abortion in our own country today. The observations are that (1) subtle infanticide preceded open infanticide; (2) the subtle infanticide was selective; (3) the subtle infanticide was ethnically specific; and (4) God rewarded the civil disobedience that refused to participate in the subtle infanticide. See his sermon for more details.

My aim is that those who abhor racism will abhor abortion—“Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good” (Romans 12:9). My aim is that abortion would be as culturally taboo as racism is. My aim is to hasten the day when being publicly pro-choice will be as reprehensible as being publicly racist. My aim is to hasten the day when declaring yourself pro-choice would be like declaring yourself a white supremacist.⁵²

LISTENING TO A SERMON ABOUT ABORTION

Listen to the sermon “**Where Does Child-Killing Come From?**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the [desiringGod website](http://www.desiringGod.org) (www.desiringGod.org).

⁵² John Piper, “When Is Abortion Racism?” an online sermon at the [desiringGod website](http://www.desiringGod.org).



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. Can you think of any other sinful motives that sometimes result in abortion that are not mentioned in this lesson?

2. What are the dangers of not viewing abortion as about God?

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- John Ensor, “Pray for the Third Wave,” an online article at the [desiringGod](#) website
- www.blackgenocide.org
- John Piper, “Abortion, Race, Gender, and Christ,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website
- John Piper, “When Is Abortion Racism?” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](#) website

Where Does Child-Killing Come From?

JOHN PIPER, 1998

Opening prayer.

Abortion is about God!

Piper's main point: "Abortion has to do with _____. And therefore, it's not a trivial thing. And we trivialize it to deal with it out of connection with _____."

Abortion's connections with God:

1. "Abortion is about God because the child in the womb is _____ by God and in the image of God."

Genesis 9:6

What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

2. "Abortion is about God because God is the only person who can _____ the sin of child-killing."

Romans 3:23-25

3. "Abortion is about God because the root cause of abortion is a failure to be _____ in God as our supreme love."

James 4:1-6

Desires threatened by an unborn child.

Spiritual adultery.

4. "Abortion is about God because the political and cultural events that will make abortion unthinkable and illegal are in the _____ of God."

Daniel 4:31-32

Imitating God in the Pro-Life Cause

6

§ INTRODUCTION

In our call for Christians to imitate God in the pro-life cause we need to be absolutely clear up front that our imitation of God in no way establishes our relationship with him. Neither will our imitation of God be perfect in this life. Christians, like all humans, are sinners and in need of the forgiveness freely offered in the gospel. John Piper explains this in a sermon on Ephesians 5:

A Christian call to pro-life action is a call to the children of light to be what you are in Christ. This is utterly crucial to grasp if you want to act as a Christian.

...In verse 1 of chapter 5: “Be imitators of God as beloved children.” It does not say, “Be imitators of God in order to get adopted.” It begins with your standing in Christ as “loved children.” “To as many as received Christ to them God gave authority to be children of God” (John 1:12). So the Christian call to imitate God in the world is not a call to earn a standing with him, but a call to be what you are—chips off the old block, loved children of God. Loved children love to be like their father.⁵³

It is our belief that the pro-life cause has sometimes been damaged by Christians who are not imitating the fullness of God’s character in their response to abortion. It is not enough to reflect God’s righteous anger toward abortion; we must also show the world God’s mercy, compassion, and patient persistence. In this way, we will bring glory to God.

§ LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- state why and how Christians ought to defend the weak and helpless.
- list ways in which Christians can imitate God in the pro-life cause.
- explain why speaking the truth is more important than winning arguments.

53 John Piper, “Exposing the Dark Work of Abortion,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.



TEACHING NOTES

Since this is the last lesson of *Abortion Is About God*, it might be appropriate to spend about 15 minutes at the end of class either discussing any remaining questions or discussing ways in which the students' view of God has changed during the course. Either of these options might help draw things together in their minds and give them a sense of closure. You may also choose to end the course by giving a personal charge to your students.

There are many different directions the conversation could turn in this last lesson. In addition to covering the biblical texts and other material in this lesson, you could choose to address some of the political issues at this point.

It is our conviction that the issue of abortion should affect how Christians vote. John Piper, in his article “One-Issue Politics, One-Issue Marriage, and the Humane Society” (available online at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website), writes:

No endorsement of any single issue qualifies a person to hold public office. Being pro-life does not make a person a good governor, mayor, or president. But there are numerous single issues that disqualify a person from public office. For example, any candidate who endorsed bribery as a form of government efficiency would be disqualified, no matter what his party or platform was. Or a person who endorsed corporate fraud (say under \$50 million) would be disqualified no matter what else he endorsed. Or a person who said that no black people could hold office—that single issue alone he would be unfit for office. Or a person who said that rape is only a misdemeanor—that single issue would end his political career. These examples could go on and on. Everybody knows a single issue that for them would disqualify a candidate for office.

. . . You have to decide what those issues are for you. What do you think disqualifies a person from holding public office? I believe that the endorsement of the right to kill unborn children disqualifies a person from any position of public office. It's simply the same as saying that the endorsement of racism, fraud, or bribery would disqualify him—except that child-killing is more serious than those.

We believe that this is a good way in which to approach the touchy subject of Christian voting. You might ask, “Could a Christian ever vote for an overt racist in good conscience?” Or you might ask, “Could a Christian ever vote for a candidate who endorsed a woman's freedom to commit infanticide?” If these questions were answered in the negative, we must ask then if voting

for a candidate who was unabashedly pro-abortion is any different. This does not make Christians single-issue citizens. It rather recognizes that views on certain issues are so important that a candidate's views can instantly disqualify a Christian from voting for him or her.

If the objection is raised that Christians should not seek to "impose their morality" on others by advocating for the lives of the unborn, consider the following comments made by John Piper in his sermon "Abortion: You Desire and Do Not Have, So You Kill" (available online at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.com) website):

One of the strongest arguments against legal enactments to protect the unborn is the claim that legal constraints without widespread social consensus is tyranny. And there is no widespread social consensus regarding the personhood of the unborn.

The argument loses much of its force when applied to the historical situation of slaves in this country. On March 6, 1857, the Supreme Court, in Dred Scott vs. Stanford, ruled that no act of Congress or territorial legislature could make laws banning slavery. The fundamental argument was that slaves are not free and equal persons but the property of their masters.

The ruling is analogous to Roe vs. Wade because today no state may make a law banning abortion to protect the unborn. The argument is similar: basically because the unborn are at the sovereign disposal of their mothers and do not have personal standing in their own right.

There was no consensus in this country on the personhood and rights of slaves. We were split down the middle. But the issue was so fundamental that the states went to war, and in the end the Lincoln administration overturned the Dred Scott decision. And today, 130 years later, we look back with amazing consensus and marvel at the blindness of our forefathers.

Other resources to consult in preparation for this lesson might include Piper's sermon, "Being Pro-Life Christians Under a Pro-Choice President," which outlines eight ways in which to honor a pro-choice president. Also see Piper's sermon, "Be Strong and Fervent in Spirit in the Cause of Truth and Life," which urges Christians to speak with passion and fight against culture of "acedia."

Another direction to take the conversation would be toward apologetics. As we have said before, this is not a course on apologetics. There are many good pro-life resources on apologetics including Randy Alcorn's *Pro-Life Answers to*

Pro-Choice Arguments and Francis Beckwith's *Defending Life*. If you have access to these books you might want to bring them to the discussion so that you can show them to the class. As far as Piper resources, see his sermon "Christ, Culture, and Abortion" for eleven reasons all people know abortion is wrong. Also see his article "Fifteen Pro-Life Truths to Speak."

Yet another direction to steer the conversation is onto the subject of adoption, a beautiful way in which a Christian can respond to abortion. John Piper relates his thinking behind adopting interracial in his article "Talitha, the Person Who Is Adopted":

On November 6, 1995, I wrote to Noel this paragraph as part of a long letter of joy over our adoption plan:

In adopting a black child we would embrace and affirm the value of personhood in God's image above racial distinctives. This is a crucial message for our day of cultural pride that may tend to minimize the utter uniqueness of humanity over against all other beings with a value as created in God's image that is infinitely more important than any racial or cultural trait. We would be saying that being a human person is so indescribably important that it should take priority over race and culture in governing what is good for a child.

. . . By adopting this child we would embrace and affirm the preciousness of life over against the death-dealing industry of abortion. Talitha's birth-mother chose against abortion. We choose to affirm that choice. By this we put our money and our time and our lives where our mouth is. There are other ways to be real and serious about fighting abortion. But here is one that is necessary and therefore some families must do it. To do it is a good and powerful thing.

In discussing the call to speak the truth and the power of the gospel, you might mention that some of the most powerful advocates against abortion are women who have had abortions. John Piper, in the sermon "Rescuing Unborn Children: Required and Right," has said: "One of the ironies in this whole affair is that women who have been through abortion can be one of the most powerful forces for life in our culture." In another sermon ("When Is Abortion Racism?") Piper says again: "Some of the strongest witnesses to the light of life are women who have had abortions and come out of the darkness into the light of forgiveness and light. They have become light. They are shining with the truth." He then gives the example of Dr. Alveda King, niece of Martin Luther King, and quotes her at length. You might also relate the story of "Jane Roe" of *Roe v. Wade*.

Jane Roe's real name is Norma McCorvey. She converted to Christianity while working at an abortion clinic. As a keynote speaker at an Oregon Right to Life conference she declared: "I am now prolife without exception, without compromise, and without apology." For this quotation and for much more information on both "Jane Roe" and "Mary Doe" of *Doe v. Bolton*, see Alcorn, *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Questions*, answer 37e, on pages 264–265.

Here are the comments of Richard Hays in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, referred to in the answer to Question 2 regarding the parable of the Good Samaritan:

When we ask, "Is the fetus a person?" we are asking the same sort of limiting, self-justifying question that the lawyer asked Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus, by answering the lawyer's question with this parable, rejects casuistic attempts to circumscribe our moral concern by defining the other as belonging to a category outside the scope of our obligation. To define the unborn child as a nonperson is to narrow the scope of moral concern, whereas Jesus calls upon us to widen it by showing mercy and actively intervening on behalf of the helpless. The Samaritan is a paradigm of love that goes beyond ordinary obligation and thus creates a neighbor relation where none existed before. The concluding word of the parable addresses us all: "Go and do likewise." What would it mean for our decisions about abortion if we did indeed take the Samaritan as a paradigm? (451; italics original)

Love your unborn neighbor and love the glory of God.



IMITATING THE FATHER OF THE FATHERLESS

Throughout Scripture we read of God's concern for the sojourner, the widow, and the orphan—those members of Israelite society who were the most helpless and victimized. God commands his people to remember that they too were helpless and victimized in Egypt. Therefore, they ought to protect and provide for the weak among them. They were to channel the compassion and care they had received to those who needed it the most. The following collection of passages expresses this concern.

Psalm 82:3–4

³ Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. ⁴ Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

Isaiah 58:6–7

⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

Deuteronomy 24:17–22

¹⁷ You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge, ¹⁸ but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. ¹⁹ When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰ When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. ²¹ When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. ²² You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.

Exodus 22:21–24

²¹ You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. ²² You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. ²³ If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, ²⁴ and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

Psalms 94:6–7, 21–23

⁶ They kill the widow and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless; ⁷ and they say, “The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive.” . . . ²¹ They band together against the life of the righteous and condemn the innocent to death. ²² But the LORD has become my stronghold, and my God the rock of my refuge. ²³ He will bring back on them their iniquity and wipe them out for their wickedness; the LORD our God will wipe them out.

Isaiah 1:16–17

¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.

Jeremiah 22:3

³ Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.

Zechariah 7:9–10

⁹ Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, ¹⁰ do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”

In standing with the sojourner, the poor, the widow, the afflicted, and the orphan, the nation of Israel would simply be imitating their God.

Psalms 68:4–5

⁴ Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the LORD; exult before him! ⁵ Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.

Psalm 146:5–9

⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, ⁶ who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; ⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; ⁸ the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. ⁹ The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Hosea 14:3

³ . . . In you [O LORD] the orphan finds mercy.

Psalm 10:12–14

¹² Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted. ¹³ Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, “You will not call to account”? ¹⁴ But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless.

Deuteronomy 10:17–19

¹⁷ For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. ¹⁸ He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. ¹⁹ Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

The logic of imitation is especially clear in Deuteronomy 10:18–19 (cf. Deuteronomy 24:17–18). God loves the weak and helpless, therefore his people should love them as well.

1. Underline all the phrases in the thirteen passages above that express either God’s commands concerning the weak and helpless or God’s own compassion toward them. How might these passages apply to the abortion issue?
 - **ANSWER.** *These passages set an example for the church not only to provide for and support single and pregnant mothers, but also to protect and plead for the unborn. Although the unborn are obviously not explicitly mentioned in these passages, God’s special concern for orphans suggests*

that God wants his people to come around those children who do not have parental protection or support. This concern would certainly extend to the “unwanted” unborn children. Commands to pursue justice and alleviate oppression would also apply to the abortion issue. In all our words and actions on behalf of mothers and children, however, we must remember to reflect the character of God.

God’s concern for the fatherless challenges both the de facto abandonment of paternal responsibility by many American fathers, and by implication the widespread abandonment of maternal responsibility toward the unborn. Abortion may well be the ultimate rejection of parental responsibility and compassion for one’s own offspring.⁵⁴

The expression of God’s concern for the weak and helpless is not restricted to the Old Testament. The following New Testament passage, which will receive exposition in the sermon for this lesson, bears witness to God’s continuing concern for widows and orphans.

James 1:26–27

²⁶ If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Notice that pure and undefiled religion consists both in “visiting” the weak and maintaining personal purity.

My point here is that, in relation to our sin-riddled culture, we should pursue both avoidance and engagement; both purity of heart and merciful involvement, both personal holiness and public justice. In short, we should with the mind of Christ be both culture-denying and cultural transforming. The transformed mind steeped in scripture will discern when and how.⁵⁵

What does it mean to “visit” orphans and widows? This word has a rich, biblical background that again suggests our imitation of God.

⁵⁴ *Abortion and the Christian*, 39.

⁵⁵ John Piper, “Christ, Culture, and Abortion,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://www.desiringGod.com) website.

Exodus 4:30–31

³⁰ Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. ³¹ And the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

Luke 1:68–69

⁶⁸ Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David . . .

Acts 15:13–14

¹³ After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name . . .”

IMITATING THE GOD OF MERCY AND LIGHT

After learning of the atrocities committed during the Holocaust, the world vowed “never again.” Never again would the world allow such a slaughter of the innocent. It seems as if the world has quickly broken that vow for abortion worldwide kills about seven times the number killed during the Holocaust—every year! We cannot plead ignorance. We know the wickedness that is in our midst. We cannot simply turn away.

Proverbs 24:10–12

¹⁰ If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. ¹¹ Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. ¹² If you say, “Behold, we did not know this,” does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?

Notice that the text in Proverbs reproduced above does not specify who those are who are being taken away to death. It does not tell us who those are who are stumbling to the slaughter. The generality of this passage implies that our rescue of the weak cannot be limited to any specific group. We rather have the sacred duty of saving all the weak in a day of adversity. If we do not, our strength is small and, as James suggests, our faith is dead.

James 2:14–17

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Jesus told a parable about those who passed by a victimized man who was in need of help. It is the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan. We recommend that you refresh your memory by reading the entire parable in Luke 10:25–37. Here are some of the key verses:

Luke 10:29–30, 36–37

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers . . . ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

When the lawyer asks “Who is my neighbor?” we might expect Jesus to answer, “The man who fell among the robbers is your neighbor.” But Jesus does not respond in this way. He turns the question back to the lawyer with a twist. “Who proved to be a neighbor to this man?” Piper applies this parable to the issue of abortion:

Jesus tells a story that changes the question from What kind of person is my neighbor? to What kind of person am I? He changes the question from What status of people are worthy of my love? to How can I become the kind of person whose compassion disregards status?

. . . So the point I believe I should make about abortion is this: When all the arguments are said and done about the status of pre-born human life and whether the unborn qualify for our compassion along with mommy and daddy and grandma and granddaddy—when we are done trying to establish, “Is this my neighbor?”—the decisive issue of love remains: What kind of person am I? Does compassion rise in my heart for both mommy and daddy and grandma and granddaddy and this unborn baby? Or do I just get another coke and change the channel?⁵⁶

⁵⁶ John Piper, “Love Your Unborn Neighbor,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

2. Restate Piper's application of the parable in your own words. How does Jesus' teaching in Luke 10:25–37 inform our response to abortion?

· **ANSWER.** *The lawyer's question revealed his desire to restrict his "scope of moral concern," to borrow a phrase from Richard Hays (see the teaching notes for this lesson). Jesus' response expanded that scope of moral concern by including in the parable the Samaritan and the victimized man, who would have been ritually unclean if he were dead. To apply this parable to the issue of abortion is to recognize that we must be the kind of people who show mercy to those beyond the boundaries of our culture's normal moral concern.*

Our God is a God of mercy and our God is a God of light in whom there is no darkness. In walking as children of the light, the shining of our light will have at least two effects.

Matthew 5:14–16

¹⁴ *You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.* ¹⁵ *Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.* ¹⁶ *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

Ephesians 5:6–13

⁶ *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.* ⁷ *Therefore do not become partners with them;* ⁸ *for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light* ⁹ *(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),* ¹⁰ *and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.* ¹¹ *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.* ¹² *For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.* ¹³ *But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible . . .*

John Piper explains:

Abortion is one of the darkest works of the human race—it is child sacrifice. And the only way it can survive is for darkness to survive. Wherever the light of truth and love comes, darkness flies away. Therefore it is one of the great callings of the followers of Jesus to let their light shine in both ways: to do good deeds and to expose darkness. The aim is partly negative: reveal the error hidden in the darkness,

but mainly positive: to bring people to love the light and be made light in the Lord Jesus.

This gives us some clear guidance in the Christian church. Let there be both the light of good deeds—like all the manifold ministries of crisis pregnancy centers and adoption and sidewalk counseling and education and political engagement. And let there be the light of loving analysis and critique and exposure—in reading and thinking and conversing and writing. And of course the two cannot be separated. The doing of truth in loving acts of sacrifice for the sake of life will in the end expose the darkness as much as all talking and writing.⁵⁷

WORDS OF TRUTH AND DEEDS OF LOVE IN THE PRO-LIFE CAUSE

Once we recognize that abortion is about God, an offense to his glory, then we should be motivated to speak out with even greater clarity and boldness. Consider the example of the apostles Peter and John.

Acts 4:13–20

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵ But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, ¹⁶ saying, “What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” ¹⁸ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

There are at least two things to receive from this passage. First of all, some Christians are tempted to remain silent on the abortion issue because they think they lack the sophistication or skill to address the issue. The passage tells us,

⁵⁷ John Piper, “The Darkness of Abortion and the Light of Truth,” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

however, that Peter and John were “uneducated” and “common men” (Acts 4:13). John Piper encourages us not to think that advanced education is necessary for speaking the truth:

. . . There is nothing in advanced education that makes a person a courageous and clear spokesman for the truth. I believe in education. I believe some of our brightest young people should make scholarship a career for the glory of God. But let us get the idea out of our head that scholarship makes a man or a woman bold, courageous, straightforward, and clear. There is no positive correlation between advanced education and courageous clarity.⁵⁸

The first lesson to draw from Acts 4:13–20 is, as Piper says, that “you don’t have to be formally educated or unusually skilled in order to be bold and forthright and clear in what you say for Christ in public. What you need is real fellowship with Jesus.” He then draws a second lesson from this passage:

One of the great obstacles to our speaking out in public about the truth as we see it with Jesus is that we think we have to win. Or we think we have to operate with the assumptions of secular leaders. But Peter shows us that this is emphatically not what we have to do. Our calling is not to win or to borrow the assumptions of the world. Our calling is to stand up and tell it like it is in the eyes of God.

Imagine how the rulers might have responded to Peter and John when they said, “You decide if we should listen to you or God.” “Who do think you are! Telling us the choice is between what we say and what GOD says! How do you know WE don’t speak for God?”

All Peter says is, “We must speak what we have seen and heard.” He is a witness. Now don’t get me wrong. Some people are especially gifted and called to enter more extended debate and to try to find some common ground and labor to persuade. But the point here is simpler: all Christians should stand up and tell it like they see it. Let the chips fall where they will. Don’t worry if the public doesn’t even agree with your most basic assumptions. Your job is not to win. Your job is not to control this society. Your job is to say what God wants said.⁵⁹

58 John Piper, “Abortion: Shall We Listen to Men or God?” an online sermon at the [desiringGod](http://desiringGod.com) website.

59 Ibid.

Speaking truth about abortion will obviously involve an articulation of why abortion is evil and why God is against it. But speaking truth about abortion will also involve a proclamation of the gospel. As we heard in the sermon for the previous lesson, abortion is about God because God is the only person who can forgive the sin of child-killing or any sin at all. God will forgive the woman who has had ten abortions or the doctor who has performed tens of thousands of abortions.

Recall the testimony of the apostle Paul (formerly Saul):

¹ Timothy 1:15–16

¹⁵ *The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.* ¹⁶ *But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.*

3. How might 1 Timothy 1:15–16 bring comfort and hope to those who have had, encouraged, or performed abortions?

- **ANSWER.** *It is critical to remember that Paul himself was a murderer. We know that Paul approved the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1), was “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1), and considered himself unworthy to be called an apostle because he had persecuted the church of God (1 Corinthians 15:9; cf. Galatians 1:13). But God forgave Paul as an example of Jesus’ patience, mercy, and salvation. If God saved Paul, then he is willing to save any who believe in Jesus for eternal life.*

We end this lesson with a call to action. Imitate God in the pro-life cause! Christians will need to imitate and reflect the mercy, compassion, zeal, righteous anger, and *persistence* of God.

Abortion will not go away; it will long outlast Roe v. Wade. The changing of laws is important, but laws do not automatically change minds or hearts. States that prohibit abortion will be next to states with liberal abortion laws, which will become havens for abortion clinics. Abortion pills and do-it-yourself abortion kits may become increasingly popular. Those who look to the Supreme Court to grant us an abortion-free America will be disillusioned. Many lives can be saved through judicial reform and legislative action, and for that we should rejoice. But

*our work will not be done until our Lord returns. The jobs of personal intervention, education, and political action will continue for decades to come, requiring great perseverance.*⁶⁰

In considering ways to speak words of truth and perform deeds of love, we urge you to review Appendix A. There you will find a list of 50 ways to help unborn babies and their mothers. No Christian must be involved in all 50 ways. What is important is getting involved in *some* way. Piper explains:

*Let me begin by saying . . . that in the diversity of the body of Christ some Christians should be focusing pro-life energy on the enactment of legislation that will protect the unborn. Other Christians should focus pro-life energy on educational strategies that promote the wisdom of sexual chastity before marriage and heterosexual faithfulness in marriage. Other Christians should focus pro-life energy on crisis pregnancy ministries—counseling, housing, health care. Other Christians should focus pro-life energies on adoption services—counseling, foster care, new parent connections. Other Christians should focus their pro-life energy on post-abortion ministries of counseling and care. Other Christians should focus their pro-life energy on sidewalk counseling or other forms of peaceful, public demonstration. Some Christians should specialize in extraordinary prayer, some should specialize in thinking and writing, and some should specialize in public action.*⁶¹

Spread a passion for the supremacy of God over all human life—born and unborn—for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

LISTENING TO A SERMON ABOUT ABORTION

Listen to the sermon “**Visiting Orphans in a World of AIDS and Abortion**” by John Piper and take notes using the Sermon Outline sheet at the end of this lesson. The sermon may be found by performing a title search at the desiringGod website (www.desiringgod.org).

60 *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments*, 302.

61 John Piper, “Kingdom Compassion and the Killing of Children,” an online sermon at the desiringGod website.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following two questions in preparation for class discussion. You might want to jot down some notes that will remind you of ideas to share with the group.

1. In your opinion, what are things that Christians are doing well in the pro-life cause? What things might Christians do better?

2. After studying through this lesson and reading Appendix A, what is one way in which you will imitate God in the pro-life cause?

YOUR OWN QUESTION

After answering the lesson questions and listening to the sermon assigned for this lesson, record one lingering question that you have and would like to ask in discussion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- John Ensor, *Answering the Call* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, 2003)
- Randy Alcorn, *Why Pro-Life?* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2004)
- <http://heartbeatinternational.org>
- www.nrlc.org (National Right to Life website)

Visiting Orphans in a World of AIDS and Abortion

JOHN PIPER, 1999

Opening prayer.

Hypocrisy in Romans and James.

James 1:27

Social justice *and* personal piety.

God's special concern for orphans.

Orphans and abortion.

Six reasons why abortion is killing children:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

"I'm very eager for us to be a pro-life church in the sense of having hearts that get around this whole issue politically, socially, demonstrably towards women and towards unborn children, towards born children in adoption and other ways, but I'm real eager that we not become a _____ pro-life church but a _____ pro-life church . . ."

Orphans, abortion, and AIDS.

A call to "visit" orphans.

A word about widows.

A word of encouragement to those in the pro-life cause.

Appendix A



Fifty Ways to Help Unborn Babies and Their Mothers

The following list is reproduced from Randy Alcorn's book *Pro-Life Answers to Pro-Choice Questions*, where it appears as Appendix F (pages 343–350). It has been abbreviated and modified slightly from its original form.

Direct Personal Involvement

1. Open your home to a pregnant girl.
2. Open your home to an “unwanted” child for foster care or adoption.
3. Volunteer time with organizations helping pregnant women, newborns, etc.
4. Establish a pregnancy counseling and abortion alternative service.
5. Donate materials to pregnancy centers and other prolife groups.
6. Teach your children and other young people how to say no to premarital sex.

Educating Yourself and Others

7. Become thoroughly informed about the abortion issue.
8. Talk to your friends, neighbors, and coworkers about the abortion issue.
9. Volunteer your services as a prolife speaker for schools and church groups.
10. Promote discussion of abortion in Internet chat rooms, on blogs, and on the radio.
11. Students: Write papers, make speeches, and start a campus prolife group.
12. Display attractive prolife posters and information at your office or shop.

Literature, Visuals, and Advertising

13. Order and distribute prolife literature.
14. Donate prolife books and magazine subscriptions to public and school libraries.
15. Use a premade prolife slide presentation, assemble your own, or buy a video tape and offer to show it in schools, churches, to your neighbors and government representatives.
16. Wear prolife symbols or use prolife bumper stickers or lawn signs.
17. Place newspaper ads, bench ads, and billboard posters.

Letter Writing

18. Write letters to the editor.
19. Compile and widely distribute a list of names, addresses, and phone numbers of politicians, newspapers, television stations, hospitals, and others in your area that people can contact to express their prolife views.
20. Select the most strategic measures and issues and host a prolife letter-writing party.
21. Write letters of encouragement to the sometimes tired and discouraged prolife activists.
22. Refuse any indirect or business support of abortion clinics and explain your refusal.
23. Contact physicians and hospitals that perform abortions and express your convictions.

24. Talk to journalists about your concern that they accurately represent the prolife side in their reporting.
25. Talk to teachers, especially junior high, high school, and college teachers.

Political Action

26. Write to representatives and others in government at local, state, and national levels.
27. Personally phone or set up a meeting with your representatives to share your views on abortion.
28. Draft, circulate, and sign petitions for prolife ballot measures, school board members, and so on.
29. Run for political office, or school board, or support other prolife candidates with your time and money.
30. Help a bright young prolifer through law school.

Prolife Events

31. Picket abortion clinics, hospitals, and physicians who perform abortions.
32. Make prolife signs for yourself and others.
33. Organize or participate in a “Life Chain.”
34. Join prolife rallies and marches to galvanize prolife efforts.
35. Attend prochoice rallies as a peaceful counterdemonstrator.
36. Participate in peaceful nonviolent civil disobedience.

Abortion Clinic Strategies

37. Research and write a brochure on your local abortion clinic, citing specific lawsuits and health code violations, which are a matter of public record.
38. Collect information and initiate lawsuits against abortion clinics.
39. Hand out questionnaires and legal information to women entering and leaving clinics.
40. Keep new abortion clinics out of your community by informing the public, writing letters to council members, and contacting potential landlords and real estate agents.
41. Rent space as close as possible to an abortion clinic or Planned Parenthood office and establish a pregnancy counseling clinic or prolife information center.

Influencing Your Church

42. Organize a prolife task force and approach key church leaders.
43. Set up a prolife table at church with the best prolife literature and materials.
44. Construct a Memorial Rose Garden on your church property, where memorials are placed for unborn children.
45. Place a prolife newspaper ad, bench ad, or billboard with your church’s name and phone number, offering your help to pregnant girls.
46. Take your church bus to prolife activities.
47. Have special prolife emphasis Sundays with special music, speakers, films, and literature.
48. Bring prolife issues and opportunities to the attention of your pastor, Sunday school class, Bible study, or men’s, women’s, or youth group.
49. Start a group of sidewalk counselors from your church that go once or twice a week to talk to women outside abortion clinics.
50. Pray daily for prolife ministries and victimized mothers and babies.

Appendix B

B

Exodus 21:22–25 and Abortion

The interpretation of Exodus 21:22–25 and especially verse 22 is complicated, as reflected in the variety of translations below:

Exodus 21:22—English Standard Version

²² *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.*

Exodus 21:22—King James Version

²² *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.*

Exodus 21:22—New American Standard Version

²² *And if men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a miscarriage, yet there is no further injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him; and he shall pay as the judges decide.*

Exodus 21:22—New American Standard Version, Updated (1995)

²² *If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide.*

Exodus 21:22—New International Version

²² *If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows.*

Exodus 21:22—New Jerusalem Bible

²² *If people, when brawling, hurt a pregnant woman and she suffers a miscarriage but no further harm is done, the person responsible will pay compensation as fixed by the woman's master, paying as much as the judges decide.*

Exodus 21:22—New Living Translation

²² *Now suppose two men are fighting, and in the process they accidentally strike a pregnant woman so she gives birth prematurely. If no further injury results, the man who struck the woman must pay the amount of compensation the woman's husband demands and the judges approve.*

Exodus 21:22—Revised Standard Version

²² *When men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall be fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.*

Given the different translation decisions made regarding this passage, how should we understand and interpret it? John Piper offers his own view:

Sometimes Exodus 21:22-25 is used by pro-choice advocates to show that the Bible does not regard the unborn as persons just as worthy of protection as an adult. Some translations do in fact make this a plausible opinion. But I want to try to show that the opposite is the case. The text really supports the worth and rights of the unborn.

Here is my own literal rendering from the original Hebrew:

And when men fight and strike a pregnant woman ('ishah harah) and her children (yeladeyha) go forth (weyatse'u), and there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the husband of the woman may put upon him; and he shall give by the judges. But if there is injury, you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

The key phrase is "and the children go forth." The RSV (and NASB!) translates this as a miscarriage. The NIV translates it as a premature live birth. In the former case the unborn is not treated with the same rights as the mother, because the miscarriage is not counted as serious loss to be recompensed life for life. In the latter case the unborn is treated the same as the mother because the child is included in the stipulation that if injury comes there shall be life for life. Which of these interpretations is correct?

In favor of the NIV translation are the following arguments:

- 1. There is a Hebrew verb for miscarry or lose by abortion or be bereaved of the fruit of the womb, namely, shakal. It is used nearby in Exodus 23:26, "None shall miscarry (meshakelah) or be barren in your land." But this word is NOT used here in Exodus 21:22-25.*
- 2. Rather the word for birth here is "go forth" (ytsa'). "And if her children go forth . . ." This verb never refers to a miscarriage or abortion. When it refers to a birth it refers to live children "going forth" or "coming out" from the womb. For example, Genesis 25:25, "And the first came out (wyetse') red, all of him like a hairy robe; and they called his name Esau." (See also v. 26 and Genesis 38:28-30.)*

So the word for miscarry is not used but a word is used that elsewhere does not mean miscarry but ordinary live birth.

- 3. There are words in the Old Testament that designate the embryo (golem, Psalm 139:16) or the untimely birth that dies (nephel, Job 3:16; Psalm 58:8; Is. 33:3). But these words are not used here.*

4. *Rather an ordinary word for children is used in Exodus 21:22 (yeladeyha). It regularly refers to children who are born and never to one miscarried. “Yeled only denotes a child, as a fully developed human being, and not the fruit of the womb before it has assumed a human form” (Keil and Delitzsch, Pentateuch, vol. 2, p. 135).*
5. *Verse 22 says, “[If] her children go forth and there is no injury . . .” It does not say, “[If] her children go forth and there is no further injury . . .” (NASB). The word “further is NOT in the original text.*

The natural way to take this is to say that the child goes forth and there is no injury TO THE CHILD or to the mother. The writer could very easily have inserted the Hebrew lah to specify the woman (“If her children go forth and there is no injury to her . . .”). But it is left general. There is no reason to exclude the children.

Likewise in verse 23 when it says, “But if there was injury . . .” it does not say “to the woman,” as though the child were not in view. Again it is general and most naturally means, “If there was injury (to the child or to the mother).”¹

Michael Grisanti offers three additional points which undercut any interpretation of this passage that would lend support to a pro-abortion view:

- *Even if verse 22 presents the accidental miscarriage of an unborn child, this conclusion in no way legitimizes the intentional aborting of an unborn child.*
- *Even according to the accidental miscarriage view, since a fine is levied against the guilty parties for causing this tragedy, the death of an unborn child is not acceptable.*
- *If an accidental miscarriage results in a fine levied against the guilty party, how much more serious would be the intentional killing of an unborn child? It is totally inappropriate to use this passage sanction abortion, an intentional killing of a child.²*

In conclusion, we might say that even if there are some interpretative difficulties involved with this passage, we can say with a high degree of confidence that Exodus 21:22-25 cannot be offered in support of the pro-abortion position.

¹ John Piper, “Exodus 21:22–25 and Abortion,” an online article at the *desiringGod* website. Davis, following Kline, offers another possible interpretation of these verses which establishes that “the life of the unborn child is granted a legal status equal to the mother’s” (51) but by a different exegetical route. See Davis, *Abortion and the Christian*, 49–52.

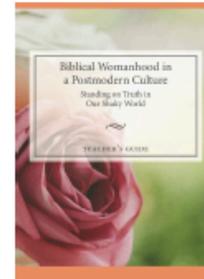
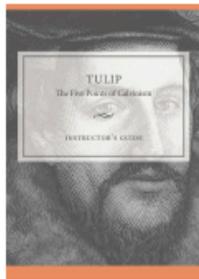
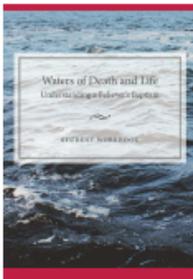
² “The Abortion Dilemma,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 11.2, 186–187.

Abortion Is About God

Reframing a Moral Issue

Abortion Is About God: Reframing a Moral Issue is a six-week Sunday School curriculum advancing the truth that the deepest evil of abortion is that it defies God's supremacy over life in the womb. The course will aim to provide a biblical and theological foundation for the pro-life cause, bringing a God-centered perspective to bear on this contested issue. In addition to asserting that abortion is fundamentally an offense to the glory of the Creator, the curriculum will celebrate the sovereignty of God over all of life, will lift up the good gifts of children and parenthood, and will proclaim the mercy freely offered to all through the gospel. Students will gain a deeper understanding of this issue by closely examining key biblical passages, answering provocative questions, and considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper. It is our prayer that this course would be used by God to awaken the church afresh to the horror of abortion as a belittling of the glory of God and an assault on those made in His image.

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Spreading a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ by equipping local churches with God-centered, theologically sound resources.