

"The Sanctity of Unborn Human Life"
Exodus 21:22-25
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Anniversaries are times to remember and reflect upon the past, and as such they can be times of joy and gratitude or times of sorrow, regret and repentance. Every January 22, we as a nation have an anniversary of an event which profoundly affected our nation's culture. January 22 is the date upon which, back in 1973, our land's highest court determined that all women have the right to kill their unborn children at will. The court said that in the early months of pregnancy, a woman has an unrestricted right to have an abortion. The court said that a woman has a right to an abortion in the later months of pregnancy for reasons of health, but the court defined health broadly to include mental health as well as physical health. So if a woman can find a doctor who will state that having an abortion will contribute to her mental well being, she can legally have an abortion during the later months of a pregnancy. For all practical purposes, women in America have been given the legal right to have an abortion at any time during a pregnancy.

As we approach the anniversary of this watershed court ruling, I want to examine the morality of this practice. The central question is our understanding of the status of the unborn child.

If someone told us that over a million warts were removed in

America every year, we wouldn't be bothered at all. But if someone told us that over a million children were deliberately and legally killed in America every year, we should be concerned. Is the unborn child just a blob of human tissue with the potential to eventually become a human person? Or is the unborn child already a human person, though still in the early stages of development? That is the crucial question.

Now I don't want to bore you with my opinion on this matter. What I personally think is of little consequence. What I want to do instead is to share with you something of what the Bible says on this issue. Now that is something of consequence because the Bible reveals God's opinion. My opinion matters little, but God's opinion is all important. God's opinion determines whether something is right or wrong.

All Scripture is God breathed, inspired by God, and is therefore profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. In other words, the Bible is authoritative and comprehensive. The Bible does not express merely one opinion among many. It is the Word of God, and therefore it carries the weight of divine authority. All men are responsible to submit to God's Word whether they do or not. The Bible is authoritative, and the Bible also is comprehensive. It covers either by explicit statement or by necessary deduction every area of life, and that includes the question of the status of human life as it exists in the womb. What does the Bible say on this issue? Let us go to the law and to the testimony, for if we do

not speak in accordance with God's Word, there is no light of dawn within us.

There are many passages in the Bible which speak of the unborn child as a human created in the image of God, but there is one passage which speaks to the issue of abortion more directly. I am going today to look at that passage, the one passage in Scripture that deals specifically and directly with the relationship of the unborn child to the sixth commandment, You shall not murder. This is found in the case law of Exodus chapter 21, the first chapter after the giving of the 10 commandments.

Let me first say something about the 10 commandments and case law. The 10 commandments are basically a summary of God's moral law, and God's moral law is unchangeable. God's moral law is the definition of the human ethical situation in terms of God's holy character. Since moral law is rooted in God's holy character, the only way for moral law to change is for God to change, and God does not change. Moral law is permanent. "You shall not murder" is just as true today as it was when Moses received the 10 commandments on Mt. Sinai.

Case law is the divine application of the moral law to the cultural situation of ancient Israel. Case law does not apply directly to us because we are not ancient Israel. Case law does, however, provide for us a divinely inspired example of the application of God's moral law to one cultural situation. From these applications to that cultural situation, we can get insight

on applying the law of God to our own cultural situation.

Here is how the **Westminster Confession of Faith** expresses this:

19.4 To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.

Now the cases laws of the Old Testament are not a cumbersome effort to apply the law of God to every situation. If that were the case, the case laws of Scripture would be a multi-volume work of codified law. Instead of trying to cover every situation, the case laws tend to be minimal applications of law that carry larger implications.

Once I was having some repair work on my personal computer, and the repairman apologized for the charge. I told him that I was not upset because I realized that we must not muzzle the ox. He did not know what I was talking about. The case law of Scripture teaches that the ox that is threshing corn should not be muzzled. The ox should be allowed to eat some of the grain as a just recompense for his work. This is a minimal application of the eighth command, You shall not steal. And if the domesticated animal servant is to receive just recompense for his labor, then this certainly implies that human laborers should receive just wages. And the Apostle Paul uses this case law about not muzzling the ox to prove that ministers of the Gospel

should be paid.

So this is what a case laws are. They are divinely inspired minimal applications of the moral law to a specific culture. Now in Exodus 21 we have a case law dealing with the accidental killing of an unborn child. If the Bible treats the accidental killing of an unborn child as a criminal offense, then how much more is the deliberate abortion of an unborn child a criminal offense in the eyes of God.

This passage is found in Exodus 21:22-23, and I am going to give you a very literal rendering of the Hebrew:

And when men fight and they strike a pregnant woman and her children go forth and there is no harm, he shall surely be fined as the husband puts upon him through the judges. But if harm or lasting injury occurs, you shall give life for life.

The passage is talking about an accidental blow that results in premature birth. If there is no lasting injury to the mother or the prematurely born child, even then there is a fine. But if there is lasting harm to the mother or to the child or to both, then a more serious crime has occurred. And there must be a punishment commensurate with the crime, a punishment proportionate to the harm done: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.

That is what I believe this passage is teaching. Even the accidental harm of an unborn child should be a criminal offense.

And if that is the case, then the deliberate killing of an unborn child would be a much more serious criminal offense.

You may be wondering how people who do not believe the unborn child is a human person deal with this verse. They often have a different translation and interpretation of the passage. They argue that the passage is saying this:

If fighting men accidentally hit a pregnant woman and there is a miscarriage, the men are fined. But if there is any lasting injury to the woman, then it is life for life, eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

Now notice the differences.

- I said the first part of the passage refers to a premature birth. They say the first part of the passage refers to a miscarriage.
- They say the statement about possible further harm in the second part of the passage refers only to the mother. I say that it refers to the mother or to the child or to both.
- They argue that the passage is saying, if there is a miscarriage, there is a fine, but if there is harm to the mother, there is a further punishment proportionate to the harm. I am saying that the passage says, if there is a premature birth, there is a fine, but if there is harm to the mother or to the child or to both, there is a further punishment proportionate to the harm.
- In their interpretation, the life of the mother carries more

weight than the life of the child. In my interpretation, the life of the mother and the life of the child carry equal weight.

But which of these translations and interpretations are correct? Mine is, and let me explain why.

The passage literally says, "if the child goes out." The word here translated "child" never refers to a miscarriage. It refers to a child. Here are a few examples of its usage elsewhere in the Bible.

Referring to Isaac:

Genesis 21:8

8 So the **child** grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.

Referring to Moses:

Exodus 2:3

3 But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the **child** in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank.

The Bible has a word for the miscarried child, and that is not the word used in this passage.

The word I have translated "goes out" is ordinarily used to refer to normal births. For example, this word is used in Genesis 25:26:

26 Afterward [Esau's] brother **came out**, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. ...

Again, the Hebrew language has words that can be used to describe a miscarriage, and they are not used here. So the passage is not saying, If someone accidentally causes a miscarriage, there is a fine. The passage is saying, If someone accidentally causes a premature birth with no harm to mother or child, there is a fine.

The passage goes on to say that if there is lasting harm or injury, then there should be further punishment proportionate to the harm done. The passage does not limit this provision to the mother. The passage does not say, if there is harm to the mother, then there is punishment. The passage says "harm" without limiting its application. We must interpret the word's reference from the context. The context points to harm experienced by either the mother or the child.

So here is what the passage is saying. If some men accidentally cause a woman to have a premature birth, and no lasting harm results either to the mother or to the child, then the men have to pay a fine determined by the woman's husband and the judges trying the case. However, if lasting harm, either to the woman or to the child or to both, does result, then there should be a greater punishment proportionate to the lasting harm done.

According to the moral guidance found in this passage, our

nation is wrong in allowing mothers to deliberately kill their unborn children. If that is the case, then what should we be doing as Bible believing Christians?

- 1) Respect the sanctity of unborn life ourselves, even if this is not required by law. Just because something is legal does not mean it is right.
- 2) Support ministries to pregnant woman who need help.
- 3) Work toward a change in the law.
- 4) Confess the sin of our nation and pray for forgiveness.
- 5) Pray and work for revival. We will not be able to successfully change the law of our land until God writes His law on the hearts of our citizenry.

I want to close this morning by sharing with you a true story about an obstetrician, Dr. Frederic Loomis.

Dr. Loomis was delivering a breech baby back before C-sections were common. The mother was frail and nervous. As the baby was coming out, he saw that one leg was terribly deformed. He thought of all the emotional and financial hardships this would put on the mother. He thought he could spare the child and family so much by delaying the dangerous breech birth process a few minutes. He decided he would delay the birth just long enough so that the baby would be born dead.

The baby's good foot touched his hand, and he felt its life and vigor. He could not do it. He delivered the child and then told the family about the handicap. The fragile mother was hospitalized for several months and became a shadow of her former self. The family went from city to city seeking medical help for their child. Dr. Loomis lost track of them and regretted his loss of nerve.

Seventeen years later, he attended a hospital staff Christmas party. The party featured an extraordinarily talented harp player. Here is Dr. Loomis' own description of what happened after this performance:

... as I sat alone, there came running down the aisle a woman whom I did not know. She came to me with arms outstretched.

"Oh, you saw her," she cried. "You must have recognized your baby. That was my daughter who played the harp -- and I saw you watching her. Don't you remember the little girl who was born with only one good leg 17 years ago? We tried everything else first, but now she has a whole artificial leg on that side -- but you would never know it, would you? She can walk, she can swim, and she can almost dance.

"But, best of all, through all those years when she couldn't do those things, she learned to use her hands so wonderfully. She is going to be one of the world's great

harpists. She enters the university this year at 17. She is my whole life and now she is so happy... And here she is!"

As we spoke, this sweet young girl had quietly approached us, her eyes glowing, and now she stood beside me.

"This is your first doctor, my dear -- our doctor," her mother said. Her voice trembled. I could see her literally swept back, as I was, through all the years of heartache to the day when I told her what she had to face. "He was the first one to tell me about you. He brought you to me."

Impulsively I took the child in my arms. Across her warm young shoulder I saw the creeping clock of the delivery room of 17 years before. I lived again those awful moments when her life was in my hand, when I had decided on deliberate infanticide.

I held her away from me and I looked at her.

"You will never know, my dear," I said, "you will never know, nor will anyone else in all the world, just what tonight has meant to me. Go back to your harp for a moment, please -- and play 'Silent Night' for me alone. I have a load on my shoulders that no one has ever seen, a load that only you can take away."

Her mother sat beside me and quietly took my hand as her daughter played. Perhaps she knew what was in my mind.

And as the last strains of 'Silent Night, Holy Night' faded again, I think I found the answer, and the comfort, I had waited for so long.

Dr. Loomis' story is taken from the December 1997 Focus on the Family newsletter, "Family News from Dr. James Dobson." The newsletter says, "These are Dr. Loomis' own words, recalling the delivery of a baby many years ago, before cesarean procedures were commonly used to rescue infants at risk." Dr. Loomis' account, entitled "The Tiny Foot," is included in the book "Christmas in My Heart," a collection of writings compiled by Dr. Joe Wheeler.