

“Upon the Lampstand”

“After lighting a lamp there is not one person who conceals it with something or who puts it underneath a bed. Instead the person puts it upon a Lampstand so that those who come inside may see the light.”—*Jesus of Nazareth*, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke 8:16–17.

Abortion Questions (April 7, 2007)

Question #1: *Do you support laws in this world that would prohibit a woman from having an abortion under any circumstance?*

Answer: In the “new earth” (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1) that “will certainly be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters are covering the very sea” (Isaiah 11:9), there will not be a circumstance in which a person will be subject to any questions related to abortion, ‘because pain and death will be no more’ (Revelation 21:4). In this world where “man dominates man [and woman] to his injury” (Genesis 3:16; Ecclesiastes 8:9), and where “the whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19), there will be times when people make choices that may result in an unwanted pregnancy or where a person is forcibly made pregnant with the child of a person with whom she did not intend to have sexual relations, let alone a child.

It is not possible for me to express or to support a law that will answer all of the questions that must be answered when it comes to the issue of whether or not abortion should be ‘allowed’ under any circumstance in the present system of things. I do not believe abortion is something God ever wanted to have happen, and based on what I have read and what I have experienced about the God of the Bible, Jehovah, I believe that abortions and the circumstances that lead up to them sadden him greatly. But I cannot account for all of the things that go into God’s judgment of a person who may have an abortion so that I could say, here and now, whether or not it is ever ‘allowable’ by him.

Therefore, beyond teaching others how to avoid such a situation, while at the same time not supporting the act itself as if it were something God does approve of (since all indications are that he does not approve of abortions in general [see below]), I must leave the matter between God and the people involved. Once a person who has had an abortion seeks counsel, then as a Christian, as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, my responsibility is to provide comfort, counsel, and support where possible, again, without suggesting that abortions are ever, under any circumstance, approved by God.

Question #2: *Do you believe the Bible clearly teaches that abortion of an unborn fetus is wrong, and if not then should not abortion be a matter of conscience?*

Answer: Whether or not any circumstance in this world provides an occasion where a person can keep a living being from growing into a mature person with all of the rights a human being is afforded in this world is ultimately between that person and Jehovah God. Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the Bible teaches us God’s will, and that it also teaches us ways to live in the present world that will help us enjoy life and be happy. With respect to “abortion,” the Bible teaches:

Exodus 23:26 (NWT):

Neither a woman suffering an abortion [Hebrew: *shachol* or *shacha*] nor a barren woman will exist in your land.

Though “abortion” often refers to the voluntary termination by a mother of the life of her fetus, it can also refer to unintentional miscarriages, which appears to be the meaning of the term in this text as translated by the *New World Translation* (NWT). But I will consider this and other similar texts here since we are also interested in how Jehovah views the death of an unborn child when answering questions related to intentional abortion today. If this text does indeed refer to the death of an unborn child, then it clearly puts such an “abortion” in a negative light from God’s perspective, as something that would not be an indication of Jehovah’s blessing upon his people.

Job 21:10–11 (NWT):

His own bull actually impregnates, and it does not waste semen; his cow brings forth and suffers no abortion [Hebrew: *shachol* or *shacha*]. They keep sending out their young boys just like a flock, and their own male children go skipping about.

Here Job compares his state with that of “the wicked,” whom he describes as being blessed with ‘cows that do not suffer abortion,’ which is then paralleled with the wicked’s ‘sending out young boys just like a flock,’ that is, rather than die or be aborted. Here abortion of the unborn is clearly contrasted with the ‘bringing forth’ of young bulls and the “sending out” of “children.” One is viewed positively, and one is viewed negatively, for the obvious reason that life is allowed to come forth where there is no abortion or miscarriage. Just how negatively such abortions may here be viewed, or how Jehovah views them in all possible circumstances, is subject to interpretation (see final question and answer below). But clearly one (birth) is desirable while the other (abortion/miscarriage) is not (compare Genesis 31:38; Psalm 144:14), from God’s servant’s (Job’s) perspective. Finally:

Exodus 21:22, 23 (NWT):

In case men should struggle with each other and they really hurt a pregnant woman and her children do come out but no fatal accident occurs, he is to have damages imposed upon him without fail according to what the owner of the woman may lay upon him; and he must give it through the justices. But if a fatal accident should occur, then you must give soul for soul.

Here, while the text does not for a certainty refer to the child that comes out prematurely as the “fatal accident,” events relative to the premature release of children from a mother’s womb are put into a negative light.

Therefore, in the light of the above biblical texts, some of which appear to touch on the subject of the death of an unborn child (primarily through miscarriage), I believe:

- 1) There is no basis upon which we can teach that abortion under any circumstance is something God looks upon favorably, since no such Bible text teaches as much and since it is contrary to what we know about how he views the life of an unborn child.
- 2) There is evidence to cite in teaching that he views the death of an unborn child negatively in certain instances, such as those texts cited above, which point can also be made with respect to Jehovah’s view of the creation and preservation of the life of those that will bear his image (Genesis 2:7).
- 3) It is not the responsibility or “job” of any Christian to go around trying to legislate or create laws in association with any kingdom of this world as to whether or not abortions should or should not be conducted under any possible circumstance (John 18:36).

At the same time, Christians should not have to endorse or otherwise support any form of an act (abortion) that involves the termination of the life of a fetus that, if left alone, will be born and will grow into a mature man or woman bearing God’s image and likeness (again, Genesis 2:7). Only Jehovah could create such a law, and so for this issue to forever resolve itself we will simply have to wait until a time when there is ‘no more death and pain’ (Revelation 21:4), for then there will no circumstance that might make us think that abortion of a human fetus might be anything but wrong. But such circumstances do exist in this world, as we find mentioned in the last question on abortion here:

Question #3: *Is abortion “less wrong” when it involves cases of incest, rape, or mistakes made through artificial insemination than when a person aborts a child conceived through consensual sexual intercourse?*

If the “wrong” is the abortion of the fetus, then it is no less wrong no matter how the child was conceived. But when a woman conceives a child from intercourse or insemination that was forced upon her against her will or not with the semen of the person whose child she intended to carry, then people tend to be more understanding of the mother’s dilemma and the extreme difficulty that is involved in making a good decision under such conditions.

People often consider the morality of abortion relative to their belief about whether or not the unborn fetus is a “person.” Unless “person” can be assigned to the fetus then some people believe it can be aborted no matter what the reason. Others believe that it is a “person” at the moment of conception, and so they believe that under no circumstance can a fetus, a “person,” be aborted. Still others believe that there may be times when abortion is permissible (as in the instances mentioned in this last question) and other times when it is not permissible (such as when the child is conceived through consensual sex), even though they believe that the fetus is a “person” in all instances. Thus, the basis for the different views of some for abortion under different conditions seems to often depend on the mother’s circumstances, and not simply on the “personhood” of the fetus.

I choose to view the issue outside of the question of the actual “personhood” of the fetus, that is, whether or not the fetus is a “person” at the time the abortion is considered. Rather, I look at a fetus as a living being and not necessarily as a “person” (but without denying that it is a “person”) that if left alone will grow and become a mature human person with human rights granted in the part of the world in which he or she lives, to the extent to which they are there granted.

The question for me, then, becomes whether or not it is permissible under any circumstance to keep a living human being, a fetus, from growing into a mature human “person.” In the second question involved in this article I presented what I have learned from the Bible, and that is consistent with what I know of Jehovah God. But I cannot answer the question about abortion in a way that I am confident will accurately and completely represent how Jehovah God views the matter in all circumstances.

Therefore, as a follower of Jesus Christ and as a witness for Jehovah God, I teach that it is wrong to purposefully abort that which will, if left alone, grow and become a person with human rights granted in the part of the world in which he or she will live, to the extent to which human rights are there granted. But I also recognize that there are varied circumstances involving purposeful abortion of a human fetus to which I am not capable of providing a clear answer as to how Jehovah views them, and thus I leave the matter between him and the person(s) involved, without claiming to know for sure whether or not abortion is wrong in his eyes in all instances, but also without advancing the belief that it is right under any circumstance.

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