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## CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

### Lesson 22

#### Abortion: Scientifically Considered

#### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The abortion question has gigantic implications to the Christian, and every Christian must get some convictions on this issue, for abortion has become one of the leading social problems in America and in the world. If it can be proven that abortion is murder, then there is no doubt that abortion is the biggest social problem of all time, involving more loss of lives than all of man's wars put together. For those who are genuinely interested in studying abortion, there are some basic questions which must be asked. What is man? When does life begin? When does a fetus become a person? When does man receive a soul? When does man have the image of God stamped on him? When is it right, if ever, to allow for abortion? When is abortion murder?
- NOTE: The defining of the issue is quite simple but outworking of the issue is ever so complicated. If human life does not begin until birth, then the fetus has no legal or Divine protection. If, however, human life begins at conception, then the fetus falls under the protection of the Sixth Commandment, ("Thou shalt not kill"), and the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America, ("Nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction that equal protection of the laws.").
- B. On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States decided by a seven to two vote that the term "person" as it is used in the Constitution has only reference to postnatal persons (after birth) not prenatal (before birth). This decision has opened the door for massive numbers of abortions in the United States.
- C. NOTE: Just because the Supreme Court has put approval on abortion, does not make the Supreme Court correct. For instance, in 1857, the Supreme Court ruled on the Dred Scott decision and concluded that slaves were not legal persons but property and could be bought, sold and even killed at the owner's discretion. In spite of the fact that it could be undeniably demonstrated that a slave was a person, the Court still ruled that the slave was not a legal person. While this decision was the popular thought of that day, there were some who disagreed violently with it and eventually the Fourteenth Amendment overturned the Dred Scott decision. It took a Civil War and almost ten years to undo this fatal decision.
- D. The issue of when life begins and when a person receives full personhood must be solved by the Bible, theology, philosophy and science. Before we can turn to the Bible, we must consider what science has to say about life and person-hood. Understanding science will make it easier to grasp the Biblical and theological issues involved in abortion.

#### II. THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS FOR THE BEGINNING OF LIFE AND PERSONHOOD

- A. The great majority of scientists (saved and unsaved) agree that life begins at conception. The fertilized ovum has all the characteristics of life, and possesses the chromosomal make-up of a human. The fetus receives its total genetic potential of RNA and DNA at conception and is in some sense alive.

*It follows, then, that whether we refer to the occupant of the pregnant human womb as a fertilized ovum, an embryo, a fetus, an unborn baby, a person, as the product of pregnancy or as tissue, the fact remains that it is human life. (Earl R. Johnson, "Human Sexuality and Holy Scripture")*

- B. At least by biologic dimension, the zygote-embryo-fetus is alive (metabolizing, growing and adapting). Science would declare life in the zygote-embryo.
- C. S. Simple logic would tell us that the life present in the fetus is human life. If it were not alive, it would be dead, and if it were not human, it would be non-human. Obviously, it is human life.
- D. The real issue is whether the zygote-embryo-fetus is a human being (real person). Pro-abortionists state that the fetus while a potential person, is not a real person with value. The fetus is just a tissue dependent upon the mother for its total existence. The fetus does not become a real person until death. The pro-life advocates say that the fetus is a person from conception and is an independent person apart from the mother.
- E. Actually there are just three positions:
1. Human personhood begins at birth or sometime later.
  2. Human personhood begins at some point during the gestation period.
  3. Human person-hood begins at conception.
    - a. If personhood begins at birth (time of first breath), then this is contrary to science.

*I will simply refer now to an experience, related by Dr. Albert Liley, of a doctor who attempted to locate a placenta on Xray by injecting an air bubble into the unborn baby's amniotic sac. When it so happened that the air bubble covered the baby's face, the child began to breathe air and, of course, cry. (Normally, the unborn child breathes fluid within his mother's womb; this is done to develop the organs of respiration. During this time the child obtains his oxygen through his umbilical cord.) The mother stated to her doctor that the baby cried so loudly that she had trouble resting. (Clifford E. Bajema, Abortion and the Meaning of Personhood)*

NOTE: In a hysterotomy abortion (used after the fourteenth week), or partian-birth abortion, the children are born alive. They move, breathe and some cry. They are dismembered.

- b. If personhood begins at some time during gestation (nine months of pregnancy), it becomes a subjective matter of when personhood begins. Is it when there is brain activity? Is it when there is blood or the heart starts pumping? Is it when there is movement, the cord is cut or when the child breathes? Most

who hold this view believe that the fetus increases in human value as it develops.

- c. It is far better scientifically to say that personhood begins at conception. The sperm and the ovum both contain life; yet they are radically different than the fertilized ovum. It is only at this point that we can speak of potential human life and actual human life. At conception, the entire genetic package is present which determines one's personality and physical characteristics. This may indicate that ensoulment (personhood) begins at conception.

Those who argue that the fetus is not a person point out the obvious differences between the fertilized ovum and the newborn baby. The existence of these differences must, of course, be conceded although after the sixth week of pregnancy they are not so great as is commonly thought. For example, between the 18th and the 25th day the heart begins to beat. At 6-7 weeks the fetus begins to move. An electroencephalogram can be recorded at ~i3 days. The brain is completely present at 8 weeks, and all are functioning at 11 weeks. At twelve weeks the fetus sucks its thumb, and drinks the amniotic fluid--more, if it is artificially sweetened; less, if it is made bitter. Dr. Liley, who developed the fetal blood transfusion and is regarded as the father of fetology, has said, "We know that the fetus moves with easy grace in his buoyant world, that fetal comfort determines fetal position. He is responsive to pain and touch and cold and sound and light. He wakes and sleeps. He gets bored with repetitive signals, but can be taught to be alerted by a first signal for a second different one." (Handbook on Abortion, Wilkie, pages 23 and 21~) Dr. Liley has also said, "The fetus reacts violently to painful stimuli—needle puncture or the intramuscular or intraperitoneal injection of cold or hypertonic solutions." (The Influence of Prenatal Development in Child Development, Liley) (Johnson, Abortion)

- F. It becomes obvious that by the time the vast majority of induced abortions occur, the fetus is not a glob of tissue cells connected to the mother, but an active, moving, rapidly developing human life with a heart beat and a functioning brain which can feel pain.
- G. The fetus is certainly more than a mass of cells or an organic growth. At the most, it is an actual human life and person. At the least, it has the potential to develop into a human person with value. For this reason, a physician with regard to the value and sacredness of life, should exercise great caution in ever advising an abortion.
- H. It is my personal understanding and belief that the unborn fetus is not merely a potential human being--he is a total human being with potential, in the same sense that a new-born is a total and present human being with potential. The humanness is not acquired by development after conception. It was there all the time and later development is the expression (rather than the acquisition) of that mate humanity.

*A sperm and an ovum or may not become a man. They may or may not meet up with one another. So in the case of sperm and ovum as well, potentiality implies possibility, but not the inevitability that what is possible will be realized.*

*Therefore, this question seems appropriate: If a fertilized ovum continues to develop naturally in the womb, is it not true (assuming for the purpose of argument that it is not yet a man) that it not only can become a man, but that it will. become a man because there are no other possibilities?*

*At conception man is called a zygote; at implantation, an embryo; at two months gestation, a fetus; at birth, a baby; at fifteen years, a juvenile; and at twenty-one years, an adult. Zygote, embryo, and fetus are mere descriptions of a man at different stages of his development. But throughout all of the developmental stages there is the basic continuity of a man. (Bajema, Abortion)*

- I. The issue is not, “When does life begin?”, for it is scientifically proven that life begins at conception. The question is: “When does human life possess the right to continue to live?”

### III. CONCLUSION

- A. The scientific evidence that life and personhood begin at conception is convincing but this is not full proof and this certainly does not deal with the moral issue of abortion. The moral issue is a matter of ethics and this falls into the category of theology and philosophy. The real issue is man’s relationship to God.

*These biological facts are impressive, but they are not sufficient to totally convince everyone that the human person begins at conception. There are some who believe (myself included) that personhood is a spiritual concept, not meaningful without reference to the relationship between God and man, and not ultimately explainable except in a “theological context.” (Bajema, Abortion)*

- B. Science may prove that life and personhood begin at conception but is no guarantee that they will regard the fetus with dignity and value will never understand the infinite value of the human soul, including fetus, apart from a relationship to God. Science does not have a conscience; it just deals with facts.
- C. We must never forget that Nazi Germany, a supposedly Christian nation, murdered multiple millions of innocent people in the name of science. These people lost a sense of the value of the human soul (person, being). The mass killings in Germany were not initiated by Hitler, but by German psychiatrists and doctors who were atheists and humanistic to the core. When all this happened, Germany was a cultured, literate, industrial and supposedly “Christian” society where abortion was widely practiced. NOTE: These respected scientists in Germany gave up concept of a personal God and each became his own god, feeling his power over the destiny of man.
- D. We do know that scientists tell us that a child from the point of conception possesses a full complement of chromosomes, distinct from those of his mother and there is some kind of life present. Because the child is thus physically different from his mother, her body treats him as a piece of foreign tissue and finally rejects this tissue at the moment of birth. The child in the womb is an independent person with full value and dignity. I would concur with John M. Frame who says,

*There is no principle of Scripture, science or philosophy authorizing us (or even allowing us) to pinpoint a time between conception and birth at which a human being emerges from something less. Even the point of “viability,” the point of time at which a fetus becomes able to survive outside the womb, cannot be shown to have such a significance. Doubtless this point of time marks a major transition in the fetus’ life; but how can this transition be demonstrated to be a transition to human status from something less? How can it be proved that viability confers human rights upon a piece of tissue? What is the connection between medical and ethical evaluations? I do not believe any plausible answers to these questions have been given. Therefore, I cannot recognize viability or (a fortiori) any other point of fetal development as marking the beginning of full human rights. (John H. Frame, Abortion - And Some Christian Asumptions)*