

Grounded: in the Body in Time & Place, in Scripture

Grounding our Discussion of Abortion

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Meet the author

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Chapter overview

Much of the discussion of abortion in evangelical circles is focused almost exclusively on the moral status of the unborn child, and based on an assumption that the Scriptures are clear in relation to this. Both “pro-life” and “pro-choice” positions are usually framed in terms of the competing rights of the unborn child and of the woman. Both approaches are reductionistic and tend to abstract the discussion from the concrete realities of life for women and children. It might be assumed that adopting a feminist perspective will lead to a broadly “pro-choice” position. Yet a number of feminists now realize that abortion serves the interests of men more than of women, and that high abortion rates are a symptom of a society that devalues women and children. An alternative evangelical approach that grounds the discussion in the Bible (specifically Genesis 3: 16), but also in the lived experience of women and the unique bodily relationship between a mother and her unborn child is proposed.

General Study Questions

Question 1

Have you ever heard a sermon on abortion?

Question 2

How have discussions of this issue gone, in your experience?

Question 3

Why do you think this issue arouses such strong emotions?

Question 4

Have you encountered people for whom a “pro-life” position on abortion has become a litmus test for being evangelical?

Question 5

How do we come to a view on issues not directly addressed by the Scriptures?

Question 6

What do we learn from the outline of the history of Christians’ attitudes to this issue?

Question 7

What do you think are the strongest “pro-life” arguments? The strongest “pro-choice” arguments?

Question 8

Do you think it is possible to pursue the welfare of both women and their unborn children? Can you think of examples of this?

Question 9

Given that one in six Australian women have had an abortion by their mid-thirties, how should the church approach this issue?

Question 10

How might the church adopt policies and practices that actually reduce the abortion rate?

Question 11

How might you counsel a friend who is considering abortion?

Question 12

How can the church support medical practitioners and nurses who face decisions about whether to be involved in terminations?

Academic Questions

Question 1

What is the fundamental philosophical difference between the “pro-life” and “pro-choice” positions? In terms of normative ethical theories?

Question 2

Do you think an absolute “pro-life” or absolute “pro-choice” position is tenable?

Question 3

What do you think is the most plausible position on the point at which a human zygote/embryo/foetus has the same moral status as a born human being?

Question 4

What do you make of the gradualist position, i.e. that the zygote/embryo/foetus gradually attains moral status as it develops, so that the more advanced the pregnancy, the stronger justification is required for termination?

Question 5

How plausible is it to link abortion with the subjugation of women?