

MEANWHILE, ACTUAL COMMANDMENTS GO UNHEEDED

# God, his written word & abortion

Many read into the Bible  
what's not actually there



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Guest columnist

The demise of *Roe v. Wade* nears. Availability of abortion services is coming to depend not on what country a woman lives in but what state, even what city.

Now is the time to question the most basic assumption underlying the actions of those identified as "pro-life": whether the Bible really demands that stopping abortion be a priority.

I carried my Bible with me each day to my public high school and have read it through more than once. The anti-abortion views I grew up with turn out to be more thinly based on the Bible than my certainty in them suggested. One can string together verses against murder and about God knowing of someone before birth.

But verses plainly condemning abortion as such aren't to be found.

Abortion has been around for thousands of years, so the failure to directly condemn abortion is unlikely to have been out of ignorance of it. It was certainly a practice in the Roman Empire, so had Jesus and the writers of the gospels thought it fundamental, there's no reason it couldn't have been mentioned by name.

Jesus openly condemned anger, lust, divorce and failure to love one's enemies, among other things. Abortion would have been an easy addition to the list.

Jesus did say it would be better to have a heavy stone tied around your neck and be tossed into the sea than to cause harm to children. But he referred to misleading children who had been born, describing them as little ones who already believed in him.

The parable about goats (versus righteous sheep) being sent to fiery damnation? It was for failure to feed the hungry, take in the stranger, clothe the needy, visit the imprisoned and care for the sick. Not for terminating a pregnancy.

Similarly, St. Paul's views are spelled out to the point of knowing that he thought it a disgrace for women to have their hair cut off, but he didn't mention abortion. St. Peter likewise did not bother to condemn abortion, though he took time to denounce women having "elaborate hairstyles," wearing gold jewelry and dressing in fine clothes.

Do a Google search for Bible verses con-

demning abortion and you'll find that the New Testament ones given are instead general condemnations of various sins or praise for purity.

Plenty of Old Testament passages condemn the unjustified spilling of blood and remark on God's pre-birth knowledge of someone. But again none directly condemn abortion in a way one would expect if stopping it were indeed the 11th Commandment.

Moses alerted the Egyptians that God was going to prove a point by killing the firstborn child (and animal) in every household. In the book of Numbers, Moses gives instructions on how a priest can test whether a pregnancy is the result of adultery. The promised result is that, if the conception was not with the husband, a miscarriage would follow. In other words, an abortion was then an acceptable means to the end.

In Exodus, a fine is imposed if a fight results in a premature birth but no further injury. As defined some 3,400 years ago, a premature birth could be expected to result in death, not in a stay in the neonatal intensive care unit. So the reference to further injury would have been to the mother. Yes, some theologians interpret the passage differently, but if the point was to have abortion punished as equivalent to murder, why not clearly say so? Why not say so in at least one place in the Old or New Testament?

In the book of Samuel, we're told God turned against King Saul because he failed to obey a command to kill another tribe's every "man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." (Saul's only disobedience was sparing some animals and one

king.)

As to the more recent past, the pro-life movement points to 1821 as when the first U.S. state passed a law against abortion. Give the many Judeo-Christian influences on the founding of the United States, if abortion were widely viewed earlier as equivalent to murder surely it would not have taken 45 years for the first state to get around to limiting it.

I respect that many consider abortion murder — I once was one of them. What I have come to see is that the biblical basis for such beliefs is more tenuous than I was willing to imagine. And the time I spent fighting against abortion could have been spent on things more clearly commanded: feeding the hungry, tending to the sick and caring for the stranger. In hindsight, I fear that the fact it was easier to pass out pamphlets was part of the reason I preferred that viewpoint.

It's common in Waco, Texas, to see signs urging us to "pray to end abortion." If one accepts that God could at any time choose to end the practice of abortion, unless and until that happens, assuming God is on one side or the other of the debate can mean creating God in our own image.

In the meantime, many children already born desperately need the time and attention instead being spent on protests and passing out pamphlets. May my youthful obliviousness be forgiven.

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