

Romans 12:17-21

Questions

- **What about “just war” theory?** Is war ever justified and if so under what conditions?
 1. This is perhaps the most obvious question that comes from the pacifist teaching of Jesus. The war with Iraq has brought this issue to the front in our time.
 2. Basic tenants of Just War theory (Arthur F. Holmes “The Just War,” in *War: Four Christian Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse, IV press)
 - a. **Just cause** - All aggression is condemned; only defensive war is legitimate.
 - b. **Just intention** - The only legitimate intention is to secure a just peace for all involved. Neither revenge nor conquest nor economic gain nor ideological supremacy is justified.
 - 1) **Defense against aggression.** (In recent times, this has been seen as the only just cause.) It is argued that “rogue states” (states that openly disrespect the global community of humanity and constitute a material threat to that global community by their declared intentions and actions) that possess weapons of mass destruction constitute aggression waiting to happen.
 - 2) **Recovery of something wrongfully taken.**
 - 3) **Punishment of evil.**
 - In 1971, civil war broke out in Pakistan, which was then made up of two ethnically and geographically separate areas. A million people died and ten million fled into India. Faced with an overwhelming refugee crisis, India invaded East Pakistan, which became independent as Bangladesh.
 - Madman Idi Amin brutalized Uganda for eight years, killing perhaps 300,000 people, before Tanzanian troops and Ugandan rebels invaded and expelled him in 1979. It should have happened much sooner.
 - The Khmer Rouge regime of Cambodia killed at least a million people before being driven from power by a Vietnamese invasion in 1979. Most of the American pacifists who opposed the Vietnam War so loudly remained strangely silent while the Khmer Rouge atrocities were being committed (Joan Baez being the one honorable exception). But the U.S. government, still smarting from its loss in Vietnam, shamefully condemned the Vietnamese.
 - While Idi Amin was grabbing headlines in Africa, Jean-Bedel Bokassa held power in the Central African Republic, which he renamed the

Central African Empire. He killed perhaps 100,000 people. In 1979, France engineered a coup that overthrew Bokassa.

- c. **Formal declaration** - After WWII this was no longer a part of International convention. At the present time, a nation need not declare war to initiate hostilities.
 - d. **Limited objectives** - If the purpose is peace, then unconditional surrender or the destruction of a nation's economic or political institutions is an unwarranted objective.
 - e. **Proportionate means** - The weaponry and the force used should be limited to what is needed to repel the aggression and deter future attacks, that is to say, to secure a just peace. Total or unlimited war is ruled out.
 - f. **Noncombatant immunity** - Since war is an official act of government, only those who are officially agents of government may fight, and individuals not actively contributing to the conflict (including POW's and casualties as well as civilian nonparticipants) should be immune from attack.
 - g. **Last resort** - Because of the severe nature of war we should exhaust every reasonable means to avoid it.
 - 1) While we can never be certain that every possible alternative has been exhausted, we must go great lengths within what common sense at the time would dictate.
 - 2) The principle of loving discipline within the covenant community laid down in Matt.18:15-20 is a helpful guide. Drastic measures are used only when other appeals have been exhausted.
- **Can a Christian participate in military service?** If a Christian does not feel a war is just should they refuse to participate?
 - 1. Submission to the state may involve participating as an instrument of the state as a judge, political leader, police officer, or soldier.
 - 2. Many states have been sensitive to pacifists and provided alternative venues of service.
 - **Is revolution ever justified?** What about the American revolution?
 - 1. I can't think of a Biblical precedent for violent revolution.
 - 2. There are other ways to resist evil in the state.
 - a. The best way to effect lasting change in an unjust system is by being a spiritual example, not by revolution.
 - b. Prayer I Tim.2:1-2
 - c. Work peacefully and legally to change unjust systems.

- d. Refuse to obey oppressive commands and be willing to suffer the consequences.
 - e. Flee from oppressive governments.
 - f. Endure suffering as the Apostles did under Nero.
3. Some challenges to pacifism.
- a. In II Chron.23 speaks of a God-appointed revolution against Athaliah.
 - b. Without revolution tyranny reigns.
 - c. Just war arguments are used for just revolutions.
- **How are we to respond to legalized Abortion?** How far should we go in expressing our convictions on this issue?
 1. Scripture is clearer than many would be willing to admit on the abortion issue.
 - a. It is true that the Bible does not deal specifically with abortion, but it does deal specifically with murder. If it can be demonstrated that the Biblical record assumes that the unborn fetus is a person, than one would not need to find specific prohibition of abortion.
 - b. Significantly, the Bible does not make a clear distinction between the child after birth and before birth.
 - 1) YELED (Hebrew) is used of both. Ex.21:22 “And if men struggle with each other and strike a woman with CHILD so that she has a miscarriage (her CHILDREN come out)---”
 - 2) BREPHOS (Greek) is used of both. Acts 7:19 (the children killed at Pharaoh’s command) and Lk.1:41 “the BABY leaped in her womb.”
 - c. The significance of **Ex.21:22-25** deserves special consideration. The issue in this passage is the apparent difference in value between the life of the mother and her “fruit” (vs.22). “And if men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a MISCARRIAGE, yet there is no further injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him; and he shall pay as the judges decide. But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”
 - 1) The Hebrew word YATZA (translated “miscarriage” above) when used alone, as it is here, refers to “live birth” (Gen.25:26, 38:28-30; Job 10:18; Jer.1:5, 20:18) and is translated “came out.” This term is used of stillbirth only when accompanied by some form of “to die,” as in Num.12:12 and Job 3:11.
 - 2) The term used in Ex.21:22, YELED, means “child,” including the newborn child, whereas for “embryo” or “unformed fetus” the word is GOLEM, which is not used in this text.

3) The usual Hebrew word for "miscarry" is SHAKOL (Gen.31:38; Ex.23:26; Job 2:10; Hos.9:14).

4) Even if we do take it to refer to a miscarriage, we must note that under O.T. law the only offense for which no fine is levied is premeditated murder. It requires the death penalty.

5) The Hebrew scholar, Umberto Cassuto, rendered this passage as follows:

"When men strive together and they hurt unintentionally a woman with child, and her children come forth but no mischief happens -- that is, the woman and the children do not die -- the one who hurts her shall surely be punished by a fine. But if any mischief happens, that is, if the woman dies or the children die, then you shall give life for life."

2. Christians should understand and respond to the politics of abortion with a full understanding of several options.

It must be recognized that sincere Christians differ on the issue of abortion and appropriate legislation. That does not mean that there is not a correct Christian position, but it does mean that **WE SHOULD KEEP AN OPEN MIND AND CHARITABLE POSTURE TOWARD THOSE WHO MAY DISAGREE WITH US ON SPECIFIC POINTS.**

3. There are three widely held positions on this subject.

1. ABORTION-ON-DEMAND FOR ANY REASON.

- a. This view is held by many secular thinkers and is consistent with the radical relativism of Joseph Fletcher.
- b. This view is based on the conviction that the fetus is not a person since it does not have a minimum degree of human consciousness and intelligence - roughly a minimum score of 20 on the Binet I.Q. scale.
- c. Few conservative Christians would hold this view.

2. ABORTION IN VERY RESTRICTIVE CIRCUMSTANCES.

a. This view is held by many secular and Christian thinkers and is articulated by Norman Geisler (professor of theology and philosophy at Liberty University).

b. Geisler summarizes the view with the following points.

1) ABORTION IS NOT NECESSARILY MURDER.

- a) Ex. 21:12 suggests that the unborn baby may not be fully human.
- b) Ps. 139:13-15 suggests that the unborn baby is "being made" and therefore is not a full person.

2) ABORTION IS A VERY SERIOUS ACTIVITY.

- a) Abortion is less serious than murder. It is the killing of a potential human person.
 - b) Abortion is more serious than birth control.
- 3) ABORTION MAY BE JUSTIFIED (by the state) in some situations.
- a) Abortion for therapeutic reasons - when the life of the mother is at stake.
 - b) Abortion for eugenic reasons. In some very rare and severe cases where the birth will result in a sub-human existence, abortion may be permitted.
 - c) Abortion in conception without consent - rape.
 - d) Abortion in conception by incest.
- 4) ABORTION should NEVER BE JUSTIFIED IN THE FOLLOWING SITUATIONS.
- a) Except in very unusual situations abortion is not justified after viability.
 - b) Abortion because of convenience (an unwanted child) is not justified.
 - c) Abortion for population control is not justified.
 - d) Abortion for anticipated deformity of the child is not justified.

3. ABORTION IS PERMITTED ONLY WHEN THE PHYSICAL LIFE OF THE MOTHER IS AT RISK.

- a. This position is represented by Harold O.J. Brown.
- b. It is presented as the PRO-LIFE POSITION in these notes.
- c. It is the position that seems to be most consistent with the Biblical record, although Geisler's position is perhaps most appropriate as a guide to public policy.
- d. **Those who take a MILITANT PRO-LIFE POSITION would be well advised to note the following points.**
 - 1. Signal loud and clear to all men and women that you stand unequivocally for the sanctity of all human life, including issues like nuclear war, poverty & hunger, racism, etc.
 - 2. Give careful attention to the original problem of the unwanted pregnancy and not just to the fight against abortion (the intolerable solution to the problem). To focus almost exclusively on the unborn

child, not the mother, will build resentment, not sympathy particularly among women of childbearing age.

- a. Pregnancy support services need to be put into operation.
 - b. Care for unwanted children needs to be provided by the State and or the private sector.
 - c. Sex education and responsibility need to be encouraged in the church, home, and school.
3. Recognize that there is some room for differing opinions with respect to the Scriptures' teaching on the state of the fetus as a full person.
- a. Exodus 21 may suggest that the unborn child is not in the same class as the mother.
 - b. Church history reveals a lack of consensus with respect to the onset of personhood.
4. Arguments against abortion that are emotionally manipulative, overstated, and sensational should be avoided.
5. Ad Hominem blasts against those who disagree (calling them murderers, butchers, and criminals) should be avoided since they do nothing but alienate opponents.
- a. If pro-lifers feel uncomfortable dialoguing with "murderers," pro-choicers feel uncomfortable dialoguing with those who call them "murderers."
 - b. It is not fair to assume that all who advocate a pro-choice position do so out of financial greed, selfishness, or disrespect for life. Many are motivated by a genuine compassion for the quality of human life and the separation of church and state.
6. Refusal to face the delicate and difficult questions surrounding this issue should not be allowed.
- a. Make distinctions that show that careful thought has been given to the implications of laws against abortion. Should there be exceptions, i.e., rape, incest, the mother's health or life?
 - b. Give assurance that you are prepared for the consequences of a strict law against abortion, i.e., support for troubled families.
7. Be careful that the pro-life movement does not outdistance its popular support. The American public is sympathetic to therapeutic abortion, but solidly against abortion on demand for any reason. Any legislative

bill will have to respect that fact if it is to be successful. We live in a democracy where the political process must be respected.

e. Those who advocate a PRO-CHOICE position should be advised to:

1. Not dodge the central question of when personhood begins.
2. Avoid the smoke screen of cliché phrases that often do not address the core issue (separation of church and state, a woman's right over her own body, etc.).
3. Avoid reference to emotionally manipulative and misleading arguments like:
 - a. Abortion is needed to solve world overpopulation.
 - b. The fetus is mere tissue.
 - c. The doctor and the woman make the decision.
 - d. "Men don't get pregnant."
 - e. The high economic cost of unwanted children.
 - f. Abortion as a social panacea.
 - g. Unwanted children are without hope.
 - h. Psychiatric scare tactics.
 - i. The coat hanger.
 - j. Incest, rape, and the mother's health.

Note: In a serious debate of this issue it should be expected that those arguing for pro-life would refrain from using the emotionally powerful but extremely rare pictures of third trimester abortions, while those for pro-choice would refrain from referring to the circumstances of rape and incest, which are equally as rare.

- k. Prohibiting abortion will favor the rich women who can travel abroad for their abortions and discriminate against the poor.
4. Wrestle seriously with the possible consequences for our culture as a pro-choice society.
5. Don't gloss over the common miscalculation of young women that abortion can make them "un-pregnant," that it will restore them to who they were before their crisis. A woman is never the same once she is pregnant, whether the child is kept, adopted, or killed. Abortion may be a kind of resolution, but it is not the one the woman most deeply longs for, nor will it even preserve her sense of self.

6. Consider the following analogy: If your 90 year old grandfather was on life support with no hope of recovery to a normal life, would you allow nature to take its course and let him die by withdrawing support? This would be a very difficult decision. But how would the decision be affected if you knew for certain that within 9 months he would be restored to good health if he could be sustained through that period on artificial support? This finds an analogy in the "potential life" represented by the fetus.
7. Strive to address and correct the widespread abuse of pro-choice freedom - abortion as birth control for personal convenience only. Admit that there is a moral consensus for a stricter abortion law. (This is a remarkably well-kept secret - a minority is currently imposing its belief on a demonstrable majority.)

NOTE: A Boston Globe/WBZ-TV Poll indicated that 89% of those polled felt that abortions performed simply as a means of birth control should be illegal. The relevant survey research indicates that public opinion on abortion has been remarkably stable for more than ten years. About 20 percent of Americans favor an unconditional right to abortion, about 20 percent favor an absolute prohibition, and the remaining 60 percent think abortion should be legal in certain circumstances. When those "certain circumstances" are specified, it becomes evident that 75 percent of the people in America think that the law should not allow more than 95 percent of the abortions done today.

Some (personal) thoughts on Christian political action.

1. We have a God-given responsibility to "render to Caesar (the secular State) what belongs to Caesar."
 - a. In a democratic republic this involves (at least):
 - 1) Our VOTE -- participating in the selection process of leaders.
 - 2) Our VOICE -- speaking our sense of what is in the best interest of the "public good."
 - 3) Our VENERATION of existing laws and authority structures (if at all possible).
 - 4) Our VIRTUE in personal conduct and example.
 - b. It also means that our right to LOBBY, DEBATE, PROTEST, CONTEST, and DISAGREE should sometimes be exercised. This is especially true when we sense

that policies and laws seem (to us) to be in violation of the letter or spirit of the Constitution or "common sense" morality.

NOTE: We do not have a constitutional right or a CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY to impose Biblical standards on a secular State or to demand that the State be perfectly just or fair.

2. We must balance our SECONDARY responsibility as citizens of a secular State with our PRIMARY responsibility as citizens of the spiritual nation (the Church). In the first, we expect to suffer and forbear with much foolishness, injustice, and evil. In the latter, we are to be a light on a hill that reflects the truth and grace of God (in contrast to its environment). This will mean that:
 - a. We do not expect to successfully reform or reconstruct the State along Biblical grounds THROUGH POLITICAL POWER.
 - b. We do expect to build the Church as a subculture within the State through the authority structures within the covenant community.
 - c. We expect that the Christian community will influence the State to the extent that the people of the State will personally submit to the truth of what is good and vote their renewed minds.
3. This means that I will:
 - a. Vote for common sense justice and conservative respect for the constitution.
 - b. Openly voice my opinions with sensitivity and understanding.
 - c. Sponsor and participate in "pregnancy support services."
 - d. Seek to reach mothers & doctors with a sensitive, thoughtful, & forceful pro-life message.
 - d. Do all I can to build Christ's church.
 - e. Pray for a renewed respect for:
 - 1) the life of the unborn.
 - 2) the renewal of our national conscience.
 - 3) the consistent & powerful example within Christ's church.
 - f. Allow women (whenever possible) to wage the debate. When men speak against abortion there is always the prospect of their arguments being lost simply because they do not bear the unwanted child.
 - g. Tearfully tolerate the foolish, selfish, & sinful (though legal) decisions of my neighbors when I cannot dissuade them.

FINAL NOTE: I believe that the least we can conclude is that THERE IS REASONABLE GROUNDS FOR THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE FETUS IS A PERSON AT SOME POINT BEFORE BIRTH. That being the case, I would not advocate abortion (especially after the first trimester), lest I risk killing another person.