

Renewing Your Mind: The Church and Abortion

Covenant Fellowship Church
September 18, 2022
Jared Mellinger

Rom. 12:2 “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Many Christians today are more disciplined by the world than by the word, more influenced by cultural pundits and political parties than local church pastors.

The goal of *Renewing Your Mind*: Equipping members of Covenant Fellowship to think biblically, cultivate a Christian worldview, engage culture in a distinctly Christian manner, apply ethics, and live all of life for the glory of Christ.

Heb. 5:14 “But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”

Col. 2:8 “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”

Phil. 1:9-11, “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

What is our role as a church? How should we as the church of Christ and as Christians engage this issue?

I. We preach and teach God’s word on the unborn.

We do not approach this mostly as a political issue, but as a Biblical issue.

Key Biblical truths:

1. God made us in his image.

Gen. 1:27 “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

Nancy Pearcey “A Christian concept of personhood depends not on what I can do but on who I am—that I am created in the image of God, and that God has called me into existence and continues to know me and love me. Human beings do not need to earn the right to be treated as creatures of great value. Our dignity is intrinsic, rooted in the fact that God made us, knows us, and loves us.”¹

2. Biblical justice protects the weak.

Ps. 82:3 “Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.”

The abortion industry is a major justice issue, primary because of what it does to the weakest and most vulnerable people—the unborn. But also because the abortion industry targets the disabled, girls, and ethnic minorities.

Prov. 31:8-9 “Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

For churches to talk about abortion is not a distraction from our mission to proclaim the truth, but an essential expression of that mission and a crucial application of biblical justice.

Biblical justice is why pro-life Christians have excelled in not only caring about the unborn child, they also care about pregnant women and children once they are born.

3. Children are a blessing.

Ps. 127:3-5 “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!”

4. Life begins at conception.

That human life begins at conception is a settled scientific fact, and there is virtually no professional bioethicist who denies that life begins at conception.

Ps. 139:13-15 “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.”

The Psalmist says in Ps. 22:10, “From my mother's womb you have been my God.” Eccl. 11:5 says that the “spirit comes to the bones in the womb.” The prophet Jeremiah was formed and called in the womb, Jer. 1:5. The eternal Son of God entered Mary's womb, he became an unborn child, who came and was born to rescue us from sin. And when Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, greeted Mary the mother of Jesus, and we are told in Luke 1, the baby leaped in her womb.

¹ Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 55.

5. Abortion kills an innocent person.

To put an unborn life to death is not different, ethically and biblically speaking, then putting a toddler to death. Biblical commands against unjustly taking human life apply to all human beings, including the unborn.

Gen. 9:6 “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.”

Prov. 6:16-17 “There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,...

The early church opposed abortion:

- The first-century *Didache* says, “There are two ways: the way of life and the way of death... Therefore, do not murder a child by abortion or kill a newborn infant.”
- A second-Century church writing says, “You shall not slay a child by abortion. You shall not kill that which has already been generated.”
- Athenagoras (2nd century) wrote, “The fetus in the womb is a living being and therefore the object of God’s care.”
- Clement of Alexandria wrote that abortion is “outright murder of the fetus.”
- Ambrose said that those who take abortifacient drugs “snuff out the life in their womb.”
- Jerome called abortion “the murder of an unborn child.”
- Augustine condemned the “poisonous drugs” that “murder the unborn child.”

II. We apply the gospel to the issue of abortion

There is a message that our nation most needs to hear. And there is no political party or secular book or non-Christian voice that has that message of first importance. But the church of Jesus Christ does have this message—it is the message of the gospel. And we must engage the issue of abortion with this message of the gospel front and center.

1. We affirm the centrality of the gospel.

John Piper “Far greater than the danger of abortion is the danger of hell. Rescuing people *for* eternal life is more crucial and more loving than rescuing babies *from* abortion. In other words, we care about *all* suffering, especially *eternal* suffering. I think it is precisely this maintenance of spiritual proportion that keeps in clear view that our citizenship is in heaven, and we’re rescuing lost people as we wait for our Savior. That spiritual proportion, that maintenance of spiritual priority and proportion, is what gave us Christian credibility over decades in the cause of life, rather than simply sinking down to the level of being a world-oriented band of do-gooders.”²

² Piper, “Roe v. Wade Has Ended — Our Pro-life Work Has Not.” www.desiringgod.org/interviews/roe-v-wade-has-ended-our-pro-life-work-has-not

2. We extend mercy and hope to the wounded and sinful.

One of the main things we need to say in our message about abortion, is that there is forgiveness in Christ for every sin.

- 1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- Ps. 103:10-12 “He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”
- Micah 7:19 “He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”
- Rom. 8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

We have a pro-life engagement marked not by judgement and condemnation, but marked by grace and hope for sinners.

3. Our engagement on the issue is marked by the aroma of Christ.

The way we talk about abortion should invite those who have had abortions to talk with us about it.

III. We equip Christians to engage courageously, compassionately, and persuasively.

Courage: a willingness to be unpopular and countercultural.

Compassion: a commitment to be kind, gracious, and winsome.

Stephanie Gray “How important it is that we be gentle with people, that we not make assumptions, but instead that we seek to understand. ...While we certainly need the strongest of minds, we also need the most tender of hearts.”³

Most women who have abortions are not celebrating abortion.

Anderson and DeSantis: “Abortion among black and Hispanic women isn’t driven by female empowerment and the celebration of ‘choice’ but by the crushing limitations of poverty and lack of meaningful options or alternatives. But...rather than provide tangible assistance to help these women choose life, pro-abortion activists actively oppose groups that do provide that assistance, further fueling a skewed race ratio when it comes to abortion.”⁴

³ Gray, *Love Unleashes Life*, 9-10.

⁴ Anderson and DeSantis, *Tearing Us Apart*, 101.

Compassion means, among other things, understanding how the abortion industry victimizes women, children, ethnic minorities, and the poor.

Persuasion: A desire to win people over.

- Persuasion will rarely happen on social media.
- Listen well. Seek to understand where people are coming from. Ask questions as an apologetic strategy and an expression of care.
- Find common ground. “I agree with you that...”
- Build a comprehensive case. Abortion is anti-woman, anti-ethnic minority, anti-special needs, anti-child, anti-family, anti-science. (See *Tearing Us Apart* by Ryan Anderson and Alexandra DeSanctis)
- Address objections.

Greg Koukl: Only One Question.

Scott Klusendorf: Bring toddlers into the conversation. “Ask if this particular justification for abortion also works as a justification for killing toddlers. If not, the argument assumes that the unborn are not fully human.”⁵

Common objections:

“A woman has a right to choose.”

Randy Alcorn “Somehow the ‘pro-choice’ movement, which is in fact the pro-abortion movement, has successfully commandeered the word *choice*. *Choice* is a euphemism for abortion, so arguing against abortion *appears* to be arguing against choice. Pro-lifers must not argue against choice—it’s a battle that can’t be won and shouldn’t be fought. We must not let abortion remain anchored to choice. Rather, whenever we hear ‘pro-choice’ we must ask, and urge others to ask, *What choice are we talking about?* If it’s abortion, the question is, *Do you think people should have the right to choose to kill children?* By opposing abortion we are not opposing choice in general, we are opposing *one choice* in particular—child-killing.”⁶

“Other people shouldn’t control a woman’s body.”

“In hard cases, it is cruel to require a woman to have a baby.”

Klusendorf “How should we treat innocent human beings who remind us of a painful event?”⁷

⁵ Klusendorf, *The Case for Life*, 25.

⁶ Alcorn, *Why Pro-Life?*, 63.

⁷ Klusendorf, *The Case for Life*, 173.

“It is uncertain when human life begins.”

Stephen Schwartz coined the acronym SLED as a way to remember the 4 differences between children who are born and children who are pre-born. None of these factors make a difference in our status as human persons.

- Size: Does how big you are determine whether or not you are a human person?
- Level of Development: Are we more human if we are smarter or stronger?
- Environment: Does our location have a bearing on whether or not we are human people?
- Degree of Dependency: Does dependence upon another person determine your status as a human person?

“We shouldn’t force our view on others.”

IV. We take action for the unborn and their mothers.

- Pray.
- Read to be informed.
- Share the truth.
- Build strong families.
- Welcome and love those with special needs.
- Celebrate adoption.
- Support Crisis Pregnancy Centers.
- Support pro-life organizations.
- Engage politically.
- Use your gifts.
- Get connected to our pro-life team.

Anderson and DeSanctus “We can’t neglect the responsibility that each of us has on an individual level to build a culture of life, finding small ways to create the kind of pro-life society within which we want to live. Much of what we can do will depend on our state in life; none of us can do everything, but each of us can do something. We need men and women to commit to each other in marriage and then commit to their children—allowing their own family to be a witness to life. We will need pro-life doctors and journalists, lawmakers and ultrasound technicians, lawyers and engineers, parents and preachers and priests. Some of us might personally support a mother in need or welcome our own child in difficult circumstances. Some are called to give witness to life by counseling or praying on the sidewalk outside an abortion clinic. Others might volunteer at a pregnancy-resource center or offer donations to support its work. And finally, each of us must arm ourselves with courage, resolving to help our neighbors open their eyes to the truth of what abortion is and how it harms us all.”⁸

⁸ Anderson and DeSanctus, *Tearing Us Apart*, 238.

Recommended Reading on Abortion

Our Top Three

The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture, Scott Klusendorf. Klusendorf is a leading pro-life apologist. If you only read one book on abortion, consider this one.

Why Pro-Life?: Caring for the Unborn and Their Mothers, Randy Alcorn. An excellent introduction to the pro-life position from a man who has labored for the unborn for decades.

Resources by John Piper: Sermons on Abortion, <https://www.desiringgod.org/topics/abortion/messages>, and the article, “Roe v. Wade Has Ended — Our Pro-life Work Has Not.” Piper has faithfully engaged this issue for decades, and has many powerful sermons on the topic.

Emphasizing Mercy and Love

Love Unleashes Life: Abortion and the Art of Communicating Truth, Stephanie Gray. An outstanding pro-life book on the importance of engaging with gentleness, sympathy, and love.

Healing After Abortion: God’s Mercy Is for You, David Powlison. A very short booklet (10 pages) that extends hope and healing to post-abortive women.

Additional Reading

Tearing Us Apart: How Abortion Harms Everything and Solves Nothing, Ryan T. Anderson and Alexandra DeSanctis. Written in 2022, this is a great resource for understanding the current cultural moment and the damage done by abortion.

The Gospel and Abortion, Ed. Russell Moore and Andrew Walker. A brief (100-page) introduction, with discussion questions.

Abortion: A Rational Look at an Emotional Issue, R.C. Sproul. A rich combination of theology, philosophy, compassion, and accessibility.

Advanced

Pro-life Answers to Pro-Choice Arguments, Randy Alcorn. In over 400 pages, Alcorn seeks to address all of the leading pro-choice arguments. Even if you don't read all the way through, it's a valuable resource for reference.

Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality, Nancy Pearcey. A 300-page treatment of the moral revolution, addressing sexuality, abortion, assisted suicide, homosexuality, and transgenderism. Chapters 2 and 3 address abortion.

Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice, Francis Beckwith. This book leans academic and is considered the most comprehensive defense of the pro-life position.

The Centrality of the Gospel in Engaging Social Problems

By D.A. Carson

“Pundits have often noted that many in the Western world have become single-issue people. The church is not immune from such influences. The result is that many Christians assume the gospel (often, regrettably, some form of the ‘simple gospel’) but are passionate about something on the relative periphery: abortion, poverty, forms of worship, cultural decay, ecology, overpopulation, pornography, family breakdown, and much more.

By labelling these complex subjects ‘relatively peripheral’ I open myself to attack from as many quarters as there are subjects on the list. For example, some of those whose every thought is shaded green will not be convinced that the ecological problems we face are peripheral to human survival. But I remain quite unrepentant. From a biblical-theological perspective, these challenges, as serious as they are, are reflections of the still deeper problem—our odious alienation from God. If we tackle these problems without tackling what is central, we are merely playing around with symptoms.

This is no excuse for Christians not to get involved in these and many other issues. But it is to insist that where we get involved in such issues, many of which are explicitly laid upon us in scripture, we do so from the centre out, ie beginning with full-orbed gospel proclamation and witness and passion, and then, while acknowledging that no one can do everything, doing our ‘significant something’ to address the wretched entailments of sin in our world.

The good news of Jesus Christ will never allow us to be smug and other-worldly in the face of suffering and evil. But what does it profit us to save the world from smog and damn our own souls? There are lots of ways of getting rid of pornography. For instance, one does not find much smut in Saudi Arabia. But one doesn’t find much of the gospel there, either.

The point is that in all our efforts to address painful and complex societal problems, we must do so from the centre, out of a profound passion for the gospel. This is for us both a creedal necessity and a strategic choice. It is a creedal necessity because this gospel alone prepares men and women for eternity, for meeting our Maker—and all problems are relativized in the contemplation of the cross, the final judgement, and eternity. It is a strategic choice because we are persuaded that the gospel, comprehensively preached in the power of the Spirit, will do more to transform men and women, not least their attitudes, than anything else in the world.”

D. A. Carson, “The Biblical Gospel,” in *For Such a Time as This: Perspectives on Evangelicalism, Past, Present and Future*, Edited by Steve Brady and Harold Rowdon (London: Evangelical Alliance, 1996), 83.