

SHINE BRIGHT

365

20 QUESTIONS

Christians, Abortion, and the United States

Greetings,

Christians always have the same basic task. We are to be and make disciples. As a people called from darkness to light, we are to live strangely so that our lives point to Christ. Our task is, in some ways, quite simple. We testify to God's glory and proclaim the gospel to a world that needs to hear it.

The complexities of a broken world often complicate that simple task. After the monumental decision in the *Dobbs v. Jackson* case that overturned *Roe v. Wade* and determined that abortion is not a constitutional right, Christians will be faced with a number of different questions. Some will be frustrated and angry over the decision. While we should celebrate the decision, we must also prepare for what comes after.

This set of twenty questions is intended to help Christians adopt a posture of compassion toward those who are committed to a pro-choice stance, as well as offer biblical and theological insights regarding the topic of abortion overall. It seeks to offer a unique "take" on the abortion question by (a) evaluating the relationship between the church and state, (b) taking a decidedly theological approach to the way Christians should respond to those in the pro-choice camp, and (c) offering key insights from the Old Testament about abortion.

Our hope is that this set of questions will help you not only answer questions and respond to objections but serve as a reminder that we cannot set aside the proclamation of the gospel even for something as important as advocating for the unborn. Protecting the unborn and saving the lost must go hand in hand because Christians do not have the luxury of choosing who gets to hear the gospel. Our job is to point others to Christ. As Dwight Moody once said, "In the place God has put us, he expects us to shine, to be living witnesses, to be a bright and shining light. While we are here, our work is to shine for him." We have recently been placed in a post-*Roe v. Wade* world. Our task now is to shine brightly for Christ in this new world.

I pray that as Christians respond to and participate in the abortion debate, we will have compassion for the lost while we demonstrate our conviction that all life is sacred.

Blessings,

James Spencer, PhD
President | D. L. Moody Center

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THE SHINE BRIGHT PROJECT

Inspired by the work of Dwight Moody, the Shine Bright Project seeks to challenge Christians to reflect Christ in a dark, broken world.

The Shine Bright Project has two primary components: (1) the Go Dark, Shine Bright campaign and (2) Shine Bright 365.

The Go Dark, Shine Bright campaign is a 20-day challenge consisting of a ten-day social media fast and concert of prayer followed by a ten-day period in which participants are encouraged to share their faith with others. While the official campaign occurs in May, individuals may participate in their own social media fast as they feel led by downloading the materials available at godarkshinebright.org.

Shine Bright 365 (SB365) is a new initiative that takes a “faith as fitness” approach by challenging God’s people to be hearers and doers of God’s word. SB365 is a spiritual “exercise program” that encourages believers to engage in concrete practices that will test God through obedience (cf. Mal 3:6-12). Providing multi-day challenges of varying length, SB365 seeks to bridge the gap between learning and learning to obey. The massive amounts of Christian content available today offers innumerable learning opportunities, yet learning is totally different from obeying. We have to put our knowledge into practice by trusting God and living according to his wisdom even when it seems inconvenient.

This guide is the first in the 20 Questions Series presented by Shine Bright 365 as a free resource to help Christians reflect Christ as they interact with others regarding the topic of abortion.



THE
SHINE BRIGHT
PROJECT

Inspired by Dwight L. Moody, The Shine Bright Project provides multi-day challenges designed to help God's people be and make disciples.

www.shinebrightproject.org

“So our work is to shine; not to blow our own trumpet so that people may look at us. What we want to do is to show forth Christ. If we have any light at all it is borrowed light.”

D.L. Moody.

Q1

What is the Great Commission? How does it relate to the abortion debate?

The Great Commission is found in Matthew 28:18-20 and reads:

“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

While this commission is given to the original twelve disciples, it applies to God’s people as a whole. We are to be and make disciples. Discipleship, according to the Great Commission, involves two activities: baptism and teaching/learning. Individuals become disciples by being buried with Christ through baptism and learning to walk in newness of life by observing all his commandments (Matt 28:18-20; Rom 6:4).

While not specifically related to the abortion debate, the Great Commission frames out the primary task of the church: we are to be and make disciples for Jesus Christ. If our participation in the abortion debate hinders us from doing so, we would be wise to change our tactics within such disputes. It is certainly appropriate to advocate for the unborn; however, such advocacy must be done with the task of being and making disciples in mind.

You can read more on discipleship via the following articles at www.moodycenter.org:

- [Why Christians Need to Get Serious about Discipleship Now](#)
- [Influences on Discipleship](#)

Q2

How should we think about our relationship with pro-choice advocates?

We are not at war with anyone. Christians “do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).

That is not to say the women and men do not oppose Christians or advance positions that conflict with Christian convictions. Rather, it means that as we consider our opposition, we need to remember that we are working with people who do not look with eyes that see or listen with ears that hear. Because they do not know Christ they are as we once were:

“And you were dead in our trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of the world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph 2: 1-3).

That is not to say that we don’t disagree with pro-choice advocates. Rather, we disagree while, at the same time, remembering the compassion God showed to us by sending Christ to die for us “while we were still sinners” (Rom 5:8).

As Christians, we have an end-goal that transcends political positions. Yes, abortion is a tragedy, but we recognize that protecting the unborn can be done while also seeking to save souls.

Q3

Aren't Christians supposed to fix the world?

The world is broken beyond our fixing. While we are to practice pure and undefiled religion by looking after “orphans and widows in their distress,” Christians are not charged to fix but to faithfully endure. As I note in *Thinking Christian*,

“When our disposition is one of humble strength, we recognize that the problems of the world are not ours to solve but to navigate faithfully. Christians will leave the world broken, perhaps more broken, despite our faithful efforts to live out the kingdom of God within it. We do not faithfully convey God to the world by fixing the world. We convey Him to the world by continuing to be faithful as we confront a world so broken only God can fix it.”

The point is not to suggest that Christians should abandon the world. Rather, it reminds Christians that our efforts aren't primarily geared toward the pragmatic result of changing the world. They are intended to point to Christ.

Q4

What if I don't want to come off as judgemental?

There is certainly a way for Christians to be judgemental. It is possible for us to assume a holier-than-thou posture. We would be wise to avoid being judgemental; however, we would be unwise to discern good and evil.

Christians offer a theological perspective on the world. While we need to be winsome as we do so, we must also be bold and truthful. We might take a lesson from Paul, who says,

“So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant the repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2 Tim 2:22-26).

We cannot call “evil good and good evil” (Isa 5:20), nor should we allow others to do so without correction. That correction, however, does not come from a place of hatred, malice, or even vulnerability. It comes from a place of compassion and love.

Q5

How can Christians discern truth on social media?

There is a slew of information coming at us at any moment. We can access the news at any moment of the day via our mobile devices or on 24-hour news stations. Social media offers individuals the opportunity to post perspectives or throw out statistics (true or false).

Most reports are necessarily narrow. In *Brave New World Revisited*, Aldous Huxley notes,

“Abbreviation is a necessary evil and the abbreviator’s business is to make the best of a job which, though intrinsically bad, is still better than nothing. He must learn to simplify, but not to the point of falsification. He must learn to concentrate upon the essentials of a situation, but without ignoring too many of reality’s qualifying side issues.”

In his article titled “The Idiot Culture,” Carl Bernstein comments on the media, “Reporting is not stenography. It is the best obtainable version of the truth. The really significant trends in journalism have not been toward a commitment to the best and the most complex obtainable version of the truth, not toward building a new journalism based on serious, thoughtful reporting.”

Both Huxley and Bernstein highlight the challenges we face as we interact with those who seek to share information with us. Perhaps, as social media has become more prominent, we face an even more challenging environment because anyone can post information without any substantial editorial oversight.

As we interact on social media, we might consider the following techniques that often accompany terribly simple accounts:

- *Dividing in-groups and out-groups*- This technique appeals less to a logical argument or source of authority to prove a case. Instead, it leverages group belonging to create an “us versus them” bias that discounts the positions of an out-group and legitimizes the positions of an in-group.

- *Appealing to ignorance*- This technique suggests that a conclusion is true because there is a lack of evidence against it.
- *Employing abstract terminology*- This sort of terminology is vague and, often, exaggerated. Labels like “best,” “worst,” “entire,” or “completely” might be considered abstract terminology. This language is often emotive rather than concrete.
- *Using straw man arguments*- These arguments misrepresent or falsify an opponent’s position. Often such arguments drain an opponent’s position of complexity.

As Christians read, watch, and listen to news or social media reports, we mustn’t lose sight of our biblical and theological orientation. Rather than being tempted to think about pro-life advocates as the in-group and pro-choice advocates as the out-group, we need to remember that the Christian “in-group” is in Christ. Those who do not belong to Christ are lost, and our job is not to keep them away from Jesus but to draw them closer to him.

We live in a world that does not know God, so we need to be wary of allowing the world’s stories to frame our thinking even when such stories align with a position we happen to hold.

To read more about techniques used in terribly simple arguments and Christian discernment, see the following articles at www.moodycenter.org:

- [Discerning and Discipleship](#)
- [A Framework for Disciplined Discernment](#)
- [Discipleship against Ideology](#)
- [Spotting the Terribly Simple](#)
- [Three Tips for Navigating the Noise of Social Media](#)

Q6

How should Christians interact on social media?

While I have doubts about social media's capacity to cultivate conversation regarding serious, complex issues, such as the recent decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson*, social media is designed to allow individuals to share their perspectives with others. If you decide to interact on social media, consider the following recommendations:

- *No call-outs*- Stay away from ad hominem arguments (arguments that attack an institution, person or group) and choose to deal with positions and ideas critically, respectfully, and graciously. Concerning the abortion discussion, we need to take care not to frame those who hold to a pro-choice position negatively. Their position is incorrect. We need to focus on that.
- *Don't say more than you can*- Keep speculations about facts and motivations or hidden agendas to a minimum. Our passion for the pro-life movement can lead us to speak out of turn, to exaggerate facts, or to make assumptions about the motives of others. If we aren't sure or don't know, we would be wise to "be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (Jam 1:19-20).
- *Offer a unique perspective (or at least try to)*- Piling on top of the heap after the tackle has been made isn't exactly a contribution...find a new angle on the situation and think it through. Christians have the full counsel of God's word on which we can draw. If we don't get carried away with the conventional arguments, we may find that we have more to say to those who hold a pro-choice position than we think.
- *No 'Sizzle' without 'Steak'*- 'Man Bites Dog' is always a more interesting story than 'Dog Bites Man,' but sometimes the more mundane stories of God's work in and through His people (the things we hear about in the news) are the most profound. As we consider how to speak publicly about our pro-life position or against the pro-choice position, we need to remember that the world may want "sizzle," but it needs "steak."

Social media is a conversation. As Christians, social media is another arena that reflects what we have in our hearts. If we find ourselves insulting others or presenting

ourselves as somehow morally superior than others, we should consider what exactly we have in our hearts.

SHINE BRIGHT 365

Utilizing multi-day challenges designed to encourage God's people to walk by faith, not by sight, Shine Bright 365 will challenge you to put your faith into practice by being doers of God's word.

Launching August 2022.



Q7

What was the ruling in Dobbs v. Jackson?

The summary decision in Dobbs v. Jackson is as follows:

“The Constitution does not confer a right to abortion; Roe and Casey are overruled, and authority to regulate abortion is returned to the people and their elected officials.”

You can access the case and read the Supreme Court’s decision [here](#).

At this time, abortion laws now vary from state to state. Some states will likely ban abortion across the board. Others will allow for abortion with or without restrictions.

Dobbs v. Jackson did not make abortion illegal, but it allowed states to regulate abortion within their respective borders.

Q8

How might Christians respond to the Dobbs v. Jackson decision?

Christians are right to rejoice because our federal government has acted in ways that align our country's policies regarding abortion more closely with God's established order. That said, political victories, as important as they are, are not ultimately important, nor does this particular political "win" (a) solve the problem of abortion completely or (b) address the challenges facing those who have unwanted or unplanned pregnancies. As such, the church would do well to recognize that in a post-Roe v. Wade world, our opportunities to provide care and support for those who see babies as a bane rather than a blessing.

We must take care not to defame those who oppose us but to remember that our primary desire is not to convert people to a pro-life perspective but to see them proclaim 'Jesus is Lord.' With that in mind, we need to recognize that those who do not know Christ will see the world differently than we do. They need a reorientation that rational argument and ridicule cannot always provide. Christians need to be quicker to listen, less defensive, and more compassionate toward those with whom we disagree, even as we disagree with them. We cannot surrender the truth, but we must express the truth in love.

Q9

How does the first amendment relate to the abortion issue?

First, while it is often used in conversations regarding the relationship between religion and government, the phrase “separation of church and state” does not appear in the first amendment of the constitution. The First Amendment (1) prohibits our government from establishing religion (the Establishment Clause) and (2) provides for the free exercise of religion (the Free Exercise Clause) except in instances where the practice of religion might adversely impact the public good.

The Establishment Clause does not preclude religious participation within state apparatus but protects the people from governmental establishment of religion. To put it differently, the Establishment Clause of the first amendment is in keeping with the desire to ensure that the United States remains a free, pluralistic society in which a diverse group of individuals interact. It ensures that the scope of the state’s authority is not exercised through manipulations in the religious realm.

The Lemon v. Kurtzman case of 1971 established one precedent for determining “establishment.” The case found that government support of religious schools was unconstitutional. The “Lemon test” is often used to guide the Supreme Court in evaluations of whether a law or governmental activity violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment by determining whether government conduct (1) has a secular purpose, (2) has a primary effect that does not advance or inhibit religion, and (3) cannot foster an excessive government entanglement with religion.

The establishment clause and the free exercise clause may be thought of as two sides of the same coin. Both protect citizens from governmental mandates in the religious realm. While the Establishment Clause precludes the government from mandating or manipulating policies, funds, etc., to privilege one religion over another, people are free to practice their religion to the extent that the public good is not jeopardized. For example, in 1944, the U. S. Supreme Court found that the state could force the inoculation of children whose parents were claiming religious exemption from such action in the interest of public health.

The first amendment defines a scope of authority for the political realm. The state exists to maintain order and ensure that no one group (religious or otherwise) begins

to create a situation in which the broader citizenry may become unsafe. The state, however, cannot accomplish that ordering task by establishing a religion either through the proclamation of a state religion (e.g., Constantine proclaimed Christianity the religion of the realm) or through manipulations in the religious arena that would de facto create a state-established religion.



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Q10

What does the Bible have to say about the church and the state?

Oliver O'Donovan describes the political realm as a "secondary theater of witness" to God's glory (O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment*). God establishes our political leaders and our governments. The nations all belong to God. While most rulers would not recognize God's sovereignty, the rulers' role is to reflect the order God has established by enacting justice and restraining evil.

The political realm is not trivial. It is not something Christians should ignore or disrespect. As Peter says, "Honor everyone, Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor" (1 Pet 2:17). Christians honor the emperor within the broader hierarchy in which the emperor is situated. Our ultimate allegiance is to God, so we don't honor the emperor to such an extent that we deny God; however, as God's representative charged with restraining evil and maintaining order, Christians participate as "good citizens" who seek to follow the nation's laws, work within the nation's systems, and respect the nation's political leaders unless or until doing so hinders us from accomplishing our Christian mission.

Perhaps the primary challenge we face as Christians today in the political realm is the loss of a Christian first mentality. My concern is that we've opted to "follow Apollos" or to divide ourselves as the body of Christ according to certain political views and candidates. While we may not see church splits, political conversations and positions tend to be divisive. It seems to me that we are making bets on the political realm that should be placed on discipleship. Our advocacy in the political realm is not unnecessary; however, such advocacy is only a small component of what Christians can and should be doing. I don't find it to be overstating the case in pointing to the Great Commission. We are to make disciples. Along the way, our discipleship might require that we seek justice and love mercy in the political realm, but such actions need to arise from and be nested within strong discipleship. If not, my concern is that we will run the risk of drifting away from an identity rooted in Christ and toward an identity rooted in something else (1 Cor 1:10-17; 3:1-9; Gal 2:20).

Q11

Aren't Christians really just conservatives that speak with a religious accent?

In *Thinking Christian*, I suggest,

““While ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’ are labels that are often used to categorize specific, opposing groups within Christian circles, a more fruitful categorization might be between those who default to specific cultural values (whether conservative or liberal) and those who scrutinize those values by privileging God’s word and the doctrines of the church. It is just as easy to think less-than theologically while elevating conservative values to a place of prominence as it is while elevating liberal ones.”

My point is that being a conservative (or liberal) is not the same thing as being a Christian. Christians may affirm conservative or liberal positions, but we don’t root our identity in being conservative or liberal. We are Christian first. We are not guided by conservative or liberal logic but subject such logic to God’s word, our final authority for life and faith.

This distinction is important because, as Christians, we are the only group of people capable of proclaiming the gospel and pointing to Jesus Christ. If we choose to set aside Jesus as we advocate for conservative or liberal positions, we deny a world that needs to hear the gospel of that message. In other words, we are not “just” conservatives. We are Christians and we have a message that a fallen world needs to hear. As Dwight Moody once said,

“I have seen many Christian men on the plain of Ono, men who were doing a splendid work but had been switched off...How many times the Young Men’s Christian Association has been switched off by discussing some other subject instead of holding up Christ before a lost world! If the church would only keep right on and build the walls of Jerusalem they would soon be built. Oh, it is a wily devil that we have to contend with! Do you know it? If he can only get the church to stop to discuss these questions, he has accomplished his desire.”

Christians aren't just conservatives that speak with a religious assent. As theologian Robert Jenson notes, "The church, we may say, is the community that speaks Christianese" (Jenson, *Systematic Theology*). Our political positions emerge from our commitment to Christ. We need to make every effort to ensure that people can see the distinction between being conservative and being Christian.

Q12

What do we say when people claim that the United States is not a “Christian Nation”?

When we use the word “Christian” in its proper theological sense, we mean that Christ is indispensable to whatever it is that we happen to be describing. Being clear about what we and others mean when we use the phrase “Christian” is important.

When people suggest that the United States is a “Christian nation,” they may have in mind that (a) some of those who founded our nation were Christians, (b) throughout our nation’s history, biblical terminology has been part of our national discourse, (c) there is some perceived alignment between the principles coded into our nation’s governing documents and the teachings of the scriptures, and/or (d) there was a period in history when many, if not most, of the citizens in the United States held to a Judeo-Christian ethic.

While it is certainly true that some of our founders were Christian and that the Constitution aligns, to some degree, with the moral and ethical teachings of scripture abstracted from their theological context, the simple fact is that the United States has no particular loyalty to Jesus Christ. As such, when the United States is called a “Christian nation,” the use of “Christian” requires qualification.

When people claim that the United States is not a “Christian nation” and, by implication, should have to adhere to certain moral rules that are perceived to be Christian, we can respond that (a) we agree that the United States is not a “Christian nation” in the sense that Christ is perceived as dispensable in the United States and (b) the moral rules we follow have no necessary connection to whether or not the United States is a Christian nation.

To put it differently, we don’t advocate for certain moral rules (like abortion) because we believe our nation is “Christian.” We do so because, as Christians, we recognize that God sits above our political leaders. Advocating for the institution of certain moral rules (like abortion) is one of the ways that we express our faith in Christ and urge our political leaders to fulfil their function as a “secondary theatre of witness.

You can read more about the need to consider how we use the term “Christian” in “When We No Longer Understand What the Word ‘Christian’ Means” at *The Christian Post*.

Q13

How might we respond when people say that Christians should just stay out of politics?

There is a difference between keeping “Christianity” out of politics and keeping “Christians” out of politics.

First, keeping Christianity out of politics is largely governed by the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause and precludes governmental manipulations through religion. The Establishment Clause does not preclude religious groups from coordinating around issues they deem significant to express their desires to those who represent them in government.

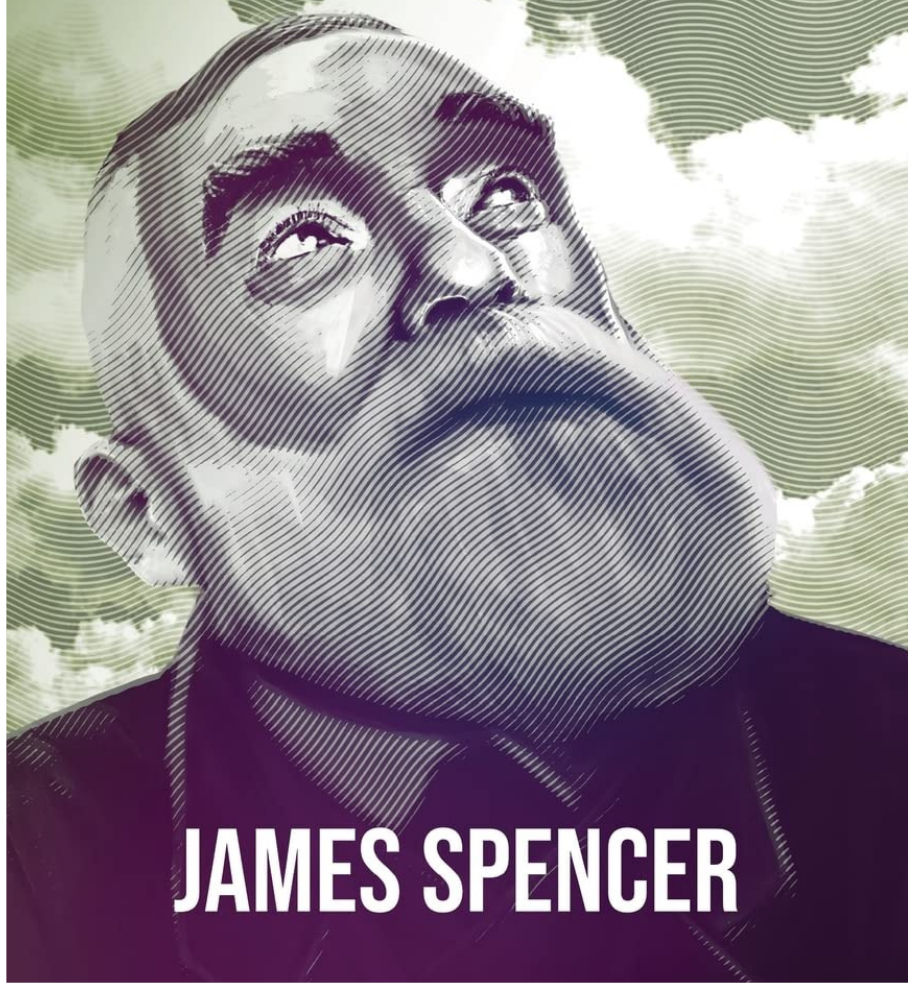
Second, Christians who are citizens of the United States have as much right to advocate for their side of a given issue as anyone else. Such is the nature of a representative democracy. Our democracy is by, for, and of the people, so as long as there are Christians among the people, I think it will be difficult to keep “our Christianity” out of politics.

As much as some might want our politics to be “religion-” or “ideology-free,” in a pluralistic society, different citizens and groups of citizens will likely approach issues from differing perspectives. There is no blank slate rationality that we can employ to ensure that no religious or ideological bias creeps into the political realm.

As such, the political realm in a representative democracy will always be a realm of conversation and compromise as different individuals and groups express their perspectives on various matters about which they are passionate. Christians in the United States can, like anyone else, certainly opt-out of politics, but to think it wise (or even constitutional) to preclude Christians from participating in government because they are Christians would seem to violate the principles upon which a representative democracy is founded.

USEFUL TO GOD

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JAMES SPENCER

“If I know my own heart to-day, I would rather die than live as I once did, a mere nominal Christian, and not used by God in building up his kingdom. It seems a poor empty life to live for the sake of self.

Let us seek to be useful. Let us seek to be vessels meet for the Master's use, that God, the Holy Spirit, may shine fully through us.”

D.L. Moody.

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Q14

What posture might Christians adopt when we interact with those who are angry about the Dobbs v. Jackson decision?

We can't become so focused on protecting the unborn that we forget about saving the lost. There are people who don't know Christ in both the pro-life and pro-choice movements. Remember, many of those who are angry about the recent SCOTUS decision do not know Christ. Convincing them to be pro-life may be a move in the right direction, but, ultimately, we want to see the lost believe in Jesus Christ.

Be prepared to proclaim the gospel in word and/or deed, even within the context of the abortion debate. If you find that debating points isn't working, stop. Ask questions, try to understand more deeply their perspective, and be compassionate. The people you are debating aren't your enemies, but lost individuals who need to be saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9) just as we have been.

As difficult as it can be to listen to the frustrations of others or to stand quietly as they make accusations or say hurtful things, that is often necessary if we are to point them to Christ.

For more on adopting this sort of posture in difficult conversations, see the following at www.moodycenter.org:

- [Two for Flinching: Vulnerability in Leadership](#)

Q15

How can Christians respond to accusations about hating or devaluing women?

First, it is important to realize that when some people make this sort of claim, they are not looking to have a reasonable discussion. Others, however, may very well be seeking to understand how Christians hold a pro-life position while not being callous toward women who feel an unwanted or unplanned pregnancy may adversely impact them.

Second, remember that many asking this question may have differing views about when life begins. While conveying your belief about life beginning at conception is appropriate, keep in mind that they may not be looking for the “standard” answer reviewing the relative importance of an unborn baby’s life versus the difficulties associated with having a child.

Third, it may be best to offer a “both...and” response. There are many Christian organizations that work with families, women, and children. Those organizations represent well the care and concern Christians have for life after birth. We don’t simply care about the abortion issue but about life more generally.

Ultimately, being pro-life does not mean we are anti-women, though many might make that leap. In the end, “the proof of the pudding is in the eating,” and Christians must continue to demonstrate that they care for the unborn, for women, and for all of God’s creation. Our role is not to convince others that we care but to do the good work of the gospel regardless.

As Paul says of the apostles and their labors,

““To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things” (1 Cor 4:11-13).

Our good work in service of the gospel may not bring blessing, comfort, or acceptance, but it is still the good work we are called to do.

Q16

How can pro-life Christians respond to pro-choice Christians?

Not all Christians are pro-life or pro-life in the same way. For instance, some Christians might allow abortion in cases of rape or incest while holding to a more general pro-life stance. Others might hold to a pro-life stance while prohibiting abortion after a particular period of time, but not before. Still, others may simply be pro-choice.

As we interact with one another as Christians, it can be helpful to lay some groundwork on which we all agree. For instance, all the biblical arguments in the world won't matter if the Christians to whom we are speaking don't believe the Bible is the final authority for life and faith.

As such, here are a few steps to keep in mind that will help you establish common ground:

- *Don't make it about the other person's identity-* When talking with those we disagree with, particularly those within the community of faith, we may be tempted to label them or their position as "sinful" or "heretical." We need to suspend judgment if we want to have a productive conversation.
- *Avoid stereotypes and labels-* Again, it may be tempting to throw around labels like "liberal" or "progressive." Maybe those labels fit...maybe not. Either way, the labels are almost always accompanied by generalizations about the members of that group. Try to deal with the individual with whom you are talking and that individual's specific understandings and positions.
- *Encourage your conversation partner to talk-* Asking questions and seeking clarity is a helpful way to find common ground and minimize the potential for defensiveness. It may even be good to ask, "where do you think we can find some common ground?"
- *Be prepared to share your perspective-* *In many debates, people hold positions that they don't fully understand. Be prepared. Think through your positions. Know its strengths and weaknesses. Be humble and ready to stay calm even if your conversation partner begins to attack your points..*

- *Having established common ground, consider the scriptures-* As helpful as logic or science may be, the scriptures instruct, rebuke, and transform. Getting others to consider the scriptures will be an important goal in any conversation with a brother or sister in Christ.

Q17

What are a few things Christians might avoid saying in conversations with those who hold differing views on abortion?

First, as I've watched Christians comment on social media, they have expressed surprise that pro-choice advocates are upset that abortion has become less efficient. Surprise seems to me to be the wrong word because it suggests that Christians are unaware of the extent to which the world is broken. While I can appreciate the sentiment being expressed, I'm not sure it is surprising that people who do not know God in Christ take a more pragmatic stance on matters such as abortion than those who have experienced the benevolence and provision of God. Whatever we do, we need to ensure we are expressing our beliefs about God, humanity, and creation as a whole in a way that is faithful to the scriptures. Our speech matters.

Second, Christians need to avoid name-calling. I believe that abortion ends a life; however, I do not believe it to be appropriate to frame pro-choice advocates as "baby killers" or use derogatory words to describe them. It would seem that the better course would be to avoid using such terminology so that we can build bridges with women and men who advocate for pro-choice policies and who need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Finally, Christians may want to avoid the normal arguments. A great deal of the angst surrounding abortion is amplified by the relative lack of emphasis on the positive, proactive activities that demonstrate our ongoing care for children after birth. Continuing to be drawn into the same discussions and debates is unlikely to yield new conversations.

Q18

Why do Christians hold inconsistent views about life? What about the death penalty?

The issues of abortion and the death penalty are separate yet interrelated. Each has some connection to the sanctity of life.

Whereas abortion has been framed as more of a private, medical choice in which a life is intentionally ended, the death penalty is a state-authorized act that lies within the scope of the state's authority as given by God (cf. Rom 13:1-7).

Just because Christians may affirm that the death penalty is within the scope of authority given to government, Christians are not required to be pro-death penalty. Other factors may need to be considered, such as one's confidence in the state's ability to determine guilt or innocence. The biblical and theological claim does not need to be correlated with a practical position. We affirm the role given to government by God but may hold a separate position depending on the competence and character of political leaders and our confidence in governmental structures and processes.

The primary difference between abortion and the death penalty is related to the circumstances associated with the decision to take a life (e.g., an unwanted pregnancy versus a capital crime) and the authority of the realm in which the action is taken (e.g., a voluntary medical procedure versus the state). Government is given the authority to take life in the course of restraining evil and maintaining order. Individuals are not given the authority to take life due to private, personal considerations.

That said, there does appear to be some biblical warrant for taking life in self-defense under certain circumstances. For instance, Exodus 22:2-3 absolves someone (there is no bloodguilt) who strikes a thief at night, whereas if a thief is killed during the day, the owner of the house who struck the thief would be responsible. The general idea seems to be that killing a thief in the night is allowable because the house-owner would not know if the person was breaking in as a thief or as a potential murderer, whereas killing a thief in daylight eliminates confusion and, thus, is not covered under self-defense. Again, here we see a deep concern for human life in the Old Testament.

Q19

Why do Christians only follow some of the Bible's commandments and not others?

The Old Testament is Christian scripture. It is not outdated or irrelevant. We read the Old Testament because it, like all of scripture, "is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Just because we believe the Old Testament is the word of God, it doesn't mean we understand how to apply the Old Testament in our daily lives, particularly the laws given to the nation of Israel.

Israel's laws were given to Israel to govern the covenant people who lived together under God as a geographically bounded nation at a particular point in history. While the laws reflect the unchanging character of God, they are given to govern a particular people within a particular context. We are not obligated to follow the Old Testament law, in part, because the law was given to a different people, in a different place and at a different time.

As such, we don't read the law as a set of commands that we are obligated to put into practice. We read the law as revelation. It tells us something about God and the order he has instituted. For instance, while we may not practice the sabbath year (Lev 25:1-7), we recognize in the legislation of the practice that God gives provision and sustenance. It is not simply a product of human labor.

Certain New Testament uses of the law also employ the law in this way. When Paul references Deuteronomy 25:4 in 1 Corinthians 9:9 and again in 1 Timothy 5:18, he points beyond the specific practice of muzzling an ox to the theological spirit that lies behind the practice. Muzzling an ox while it was treading grain conveyed a subtle expression of doubt in God's provision, if not selfishness or insecurity on the part of the one who muzzles the ox. The idea is that the law conveys something about God and his order that transcends the particular law and may be applied to the support due to those who do the work of the Lord.

When Christians refer to Exodus 20:13 or Deuteronomy 5:17 ("You shall not murder"), we

are not selectively choosing to obey this commandment and not others. Instead, we are referencing the verse as a reminder that in God's kingdom, committing murder represents the removal of a human obstacle. Removing such an obstacle suggests that we are somehow justified in choosing who lives and dies. In God's kingdom, there is never a reason to sacrifice another person made in his image on the altar of our own selfish pursuits. This understanding is why the commandment not to murder remains relevant to the question of abortion. We still live in God's kingdom and we still have no reason to remove a human obstacle.

The various laws of the Old Testament can be difficult to understand, yet they are full of wisdom for Christians willing to do the hard work of studying these important texts.

For more on interpreting and applying Old Testament law, see the following at www.moodycenter.org:

- [The Ten Commandments](#)
- [The Old Testament and Discipleship](#)

Q20

Does the Bible even speak about abortion?

Strictly speaking, abortion is not addressed in the Old or New Testaments. However, several passages have a bearing on the issue of abortion.

- *Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17*- As noted above, the prohibition against murder precludes a person from removing a human obstacle. In God's kingdom, such an act is both immoral and unnecessary as God's benevolence and provision preclude the need to murder another image-bearer.
- *Exodus 21:22-25*- Often cited as a text that seems to fly in the face of those who claim that a fetus bears God's image and, thus, should not be murdered, Exodus 21:22-25 actually illustrates the opposite. The issue is one of translation as the Hebrew word often translated "come out" in birthing contexts (Gen 25:25; 38:28) is, at times, rendered as "miscarriage" in this context. There is a Hebrew word that seems to refer to miscarriage more specifically in other contexts in the Old Testament (Gen 31:38; Exodus 23:26; Hos 9:14). In Exodus 21:22-25, however, it seems that there is no capital punishment if the woman who is hit goes into birth early and neither the woman or child are harmed (21:22). If the child, or presumably the woman, is harmed beyond the early labor, capital punishment would come into effect (21:23-25).
- *Psalms 139:13*- While we should not view this passage as a scientific text, it does suggest that the Israelites knew God was active in forming individuals before birth.
- *Jeremiah 1:5*- This text is probably one of the more well-known texts used to demonstrate that life begins at conception. Despite its poetic nature, the assertions in this text seem to assume a common understanding about children in the womb.

There are some other texts that are more suggestive. Note, for instance, the references to babies in the womb in Genesis 25:22 and Luke 1:41. These references point to life in the womb that acts and, in the case of Luke 1:41, responds to external stimuli.



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