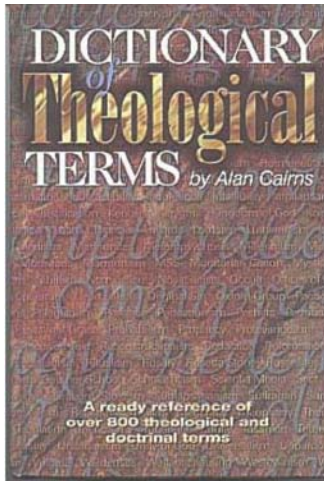




## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

### The ABC of Christian Doctrine



#### ABORTION

From Latin *abortio*, "miscarriage," the term is used in two senses:

1. A spontaneous abortion is the act of miscarriage or producing a child before the natural time, with the loss of its life.
2. A forced abortion is the deliberate expulsion of an unborn child from the womb, thus depriving it of its life.

Despite the fact that forced abortions are now legal in almost all developed countries, they are almost always scripturally unlawful. Historically, this has been the almost uniform Christian position, based, first, on the truth that man is created in the image of God, and second, that there is plain Biblical evidence that God views the child in the womb as a full person. In earlier times,

some theologians believed that some time after conception--usually 60 to 80 days into the pregnancy--ensoulment occurred; until that time the fetus was not yet a true person. There is no evidence for such a belief, either in Scripture or in science and the general belief of the Christian church now reflects the ancient opinion of Tertullian (*Apologza*, 9) that to terminate a pregnancy is as unlawful as the killing of a full-grown man. The word of God allows for the taking of life only under very strictly defined circumstances, such as in a just war, or as punishment for crimes such as murder. An unborn child has not done anything worthy of capital punishment. The sole exception to this general rule is the case where to continue a pregnancy would kill the mother. Because of her views on baptismal regeneration,\* the Roman Catholic church usually places the life of the child above that of the mother, though church law accepts the principle of "double effect"--i.e., that if, for example, a woman with cancer of the uterus needed surgery to save her life, she may have that surgery even though it would certainly kill her unborn child. Protestantism has always accepted that in cases where it is impossible to save the life of the mother and that of the child, the life of the mother should have the first right to be protected; even an unborn child does not have an innate right to kill its parent.

To say that forced abortions--whether as a form of birth control, or for some personal, social, or economic reason invoked by the mother--is scripturally unlawful is to say that according to God's word, such abortion is murder. The popular claim that an unborn child is no more than fetal matter, without personal dignity or rights, that may be disposed of according to a woman's "right to choose what she does with her own body," is as baseless biologically as it is scripturally. The killing of an unborn child is the deliberate taking of a human life, and that is a crime which God views with abhorrence. Mark Allison, an associate of the present writer, presented the case for the protection of the lives of the unborn as follows:

"The Biblical arguments against abortion are very straightforward. First, God requires the



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

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same punishment for killing a child in the womb as He does for killing a man. In Exodus 21:22-23 we read, 'If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life.'" Here is a case in which a woman with child is struck in such a way that she gives birth. If the striking results in the death of the child, then the man who struck the woman is to forfeit his own life.

"Calvin comments, 'Wherefore this, in my opinion, is the meaning of the law, that it would be a crime punishable with death, not only when the mother died from the effects of the abortion, but also if the infant should be killed; whether it should die from the wound abortively, or soon after its birth.'" Since this punishment is the same as that for killing a full-grown man (Gen. 9:6; Exod. 21: 12; Lev. 24:17), it demonstrates that God considers the child in the womb as real and as valuable a person as an adult.

"Second, there are passages throughout the Scriptures that describe the child in the womb as a person. For instance, we read concerning Rebekah that 'the children struggled together within her' (Gen. 25:22). The word for 'children' in this passage is the normal Old Testament word translated 'sons' (Gen. 5:4, 7, 10; Prov. 7:7). This is even true in the New Testament where we read concerning Elisabeth that she 'conceived a son in her old age' (Luke 1:36; compare with v. 57). Also, the word for 'babe' that is used in Luke 1:41, 44 in reference to the child in the womb is also used for newborn children (Luke 2:12; 2 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet.2:2). Hence, God uses the same words to describe children before and after birth. Besides these words, there is also David's description of himself in Psalm 139:1-16, where he uses first-person pronouns to describe his life as an adult (vv. 6-12) and as an unborn child (vv. 13-15). There is a personal identity between the child in the womb and the full-grown man.

"Finally, the Scriptures also portray the child in the womb as one who can move (Gen. 25:22), respond to noises from the outside (Luke 1:41, 44), and be filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15). "The weight of this Scriptural evidence indicates that God considers the unborn child a person and that therefore the child's life should be protected as other people's lives are protected. However, even an unborn child has no inherent right to kill. 'Thou shalt not kill' (Exod. 20:13) applies to it as to everyone else. Thus, historic Protestant theology recognizes that a woman may obtain an abortion only if her unborn child is actually killing her. "When the humanistic leaders of society justify the murder of unborn children, Christians should remember the standard raised in Isaiah 8:20: 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' Believers must stand against those defending abortion, for Scripture makes it clear that God hates 'hands that shed innocent blood' (Prov. 6:20)" (American Revivalist, May 1989, pp. 2, 3).