**December 5, 2021**

**Resurrection Church**

**Contemporary Issues: Abortion[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Introduction**

Conservative Christians generally appeal to the Bible as authoritative in all matters of faith and practice. In other words, the highest authority for Christian belief and action is the Bible. The authority of the Scriptures in all matters is complicated by three factors: 1) the Bible is written within a particular cultural context far different from our own; 2) the Bible requires interpretation; 3) the Bible does not address many contemporary issues. For that reason, Christian appeal to the Bible for contemporary ethical issues requires careful explanation. Richard B. Hays is correct in his argument that, “Unless we can give a coherent account of our methods from moving between texts and normative ethical judgments, appeals to the authority of Scripture will be hallow and unconvincing.”[[2]](#footnote-2) This kind of accounting requires the rejection of simple proof-texting and a kind of measured humility that admits the movement from biblical injunctions to a more paradigmatic use of the Bible.

Adding to the complication of the claim to biblical authority is the distinction between biblical ethics and the use of the Bible in ethics. For example, a proof-text approach to Scripture might result in the claim that OT Laws are ethical, therefore they should be applied today. This naïve approach to the Bible does not recognize the historical, cultural, and time-bound nature of some of these commands. More than that, this proof-text approach to the Bible fails to account for the progression of the covenants and their relationship to the current moment in redemptive history. The Feinbergs are right to conclude that “The Bible presents a perspective on ethics, but that does not mean every biblical teaching can be applied without any modification. The evangelical must decide which rules as stated in Scripture apply to our own day, and he must know how to decide which apply.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

The absence of biblical instruction regarding contemporary ethical matters does not mean that the Bible has no role to play. On the contrary, the biblical texts form a moral vision that transcends the culture and time-bound situation of the ancient Scriptures. The Bible does not address every situation, but it does call the Christian community to embody the biblical imperatives that “produce persons and communities whose character is commensurate with Jesus Christ and thereby pleasing to God.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The goal of this lesson is not to provide a fully-formed method for contemporary ethics but to focus more narrowly on the issue of abortion without resorting to simple proof-texting, using Hays’s method as our guide.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Hays’s Method for Contemporary Ethics**

Hays proposes four “overlapping critical operations” that must take place in the pursuit of making ethical judgments under the authority of the Scripture. He designates these operations as “the *descriptive*, the *synthetic*, the *hermeneutical*, and the *pragmatic* tasks.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

The Descriptive Task: Reading the Text Carefully

The descriptive task is essentially exegetical and interpretive in nature. This task includes considering what the entire canon of Scripture has to say on a particular matter. Sometimes, the biblical texts appear to offer conflicting judgments on an issue, but we should resist harmonizing them too quickly. By allowing the tensions or apparent disagreements to stand, we are able to note “distinctive themes and patterns of reasoning in the individual witnesses.”[[7]](#footnote-7) The goal is simply to describe what the biblical authors communicate, not to synthesize them (especially across the canon) yet.

The descriptive task is more complex than simply identifying Bible verses that address a particular issue. The descriptive task requires that those issues are seen in both their literary and symbolic/cultural context. These authors are writing in a world where moral judgments are made, so their writings need to be put into perspective by describing the thought world of the biblical authors. For example, Jesus’s teaching on divorce should not be understood in isolation from popular views about divorce during the Second Temple period.[[8]](#footnote-8) Interpreting Jesus’s comments about divorce with 21st-century American divorce practices in view might distort, rather than illuminate, Jesus’s teaching. What is needed is to position New Testament ethical injunctions in their socio-historical context.

The Synthetic Task: Placing the Text in Canonical Context

In this stage of ethical inquiry, the goal is to synthesize the biblical material, seeking to identify coherence among the biblical witnesses to a particular issue. Sometimes, this coherence is easily attained, and ethical judgments are easily made. Other times, however, consideration of the full canonical witness indicates that the matter may be more complex than isolated proof-texts may indicate.

Using the example of Jesus’s teaching on divorce, isolated proof-texting might indicate that there is only ever one situation in which divorce is permissible—*porneia*. However, the Pauline witness introduces other situations in which divorce is permissible (cf. 1 Cor. 7:10-16). Synthesizing the biblical witness on this issue is rather complex and involves determining whether Paul’s expansion on Jesus’s exception is paradigmatic/exemplary so that the Church can apply his moral reasoning in a way that allows the Church to discern additional exceptions in other situations or if Paul is giving the final word on exceptions that disallows the Church from discerning additional exemptions. Christians who are equally committed to discerning God’s will and submitting to the Scriptures disagree on this matter, evidencing the reality that interpretation takes place at every stage, but especially when synthesizing the biblical texts.

The Hermeneutical Task: Relating the Text to Our Situation

Hays comments that after we have completed the first two tasks, “we will still find ourselves perched on the edge of a daunting abyss: the temporal and cultural distance between ourselves and the text.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Yet, this distance does not mean that the Bible has nothing to say to modern Christians. Instead, “with fear and trembling we must work out a life of faithfulness to God through responsive and creative reappropriation of the New Testament in a world far removed from the world of the original writers and readers. *Thus, whenever we appeal to the authority of the New Testament, we are engaged in metaphor-making, placing our community’s life imaginatively within the world articulated by the texts*.”[[10]](#footnote-10) In other words, Christians must allow their moral imaginations to be formed by the texts of Scripture and then to perform the moral instruction of the Scriptures in modern life. Ultimately, the hermeneutical task involves integrating the biblical witness into the modern scene with imaginations that have been formed by the Bible and with eyes that have received the moral vision of the Scripture.

The Pragmatic Task: Living the Text

The final task is the pragmatic task of “embodying Scripture’s imperatives in the life of the Christian community.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Distinguishing between the hermeneutical task and the pragmatic task is difficult because “The living out of the New Testament cannot occur in a book; it can happen only in the life of the Christian community.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Using language similar to Hays’s “analogical appropriation” and “imaginative integration,” Kevin Vanhoozer brings together the hermeneutic and pragmatic tasks with the language of the drama of doctrine. The doctrines of Scripture are like a script for the Christian life. He explains,

Doctrine indicates the way, the truth, and the life of Jesus Christ and directs us to step on out. Doctrine thus resembles ‘stage directions for the church’s performance of the gospel.’ Doctrines are less propositional statements or static rules than they are life-shaping dramatic directions: ‘Doctrines serve as imaginative lenses through which to view the world. Through them, one learns how to relate to other persons, how to act in community, how to make sense of truth and falsehood, and how to understand and move through the varied terrain of life’s everyday challenges.’ Doctrines are ‘like loose but nonetheless definitive scripts that persons of faith perform; doctrines are the drama in which we live out our lives.’[[13]](#footnote-13)

The life of the church can be pictured as a gospel theater where Christians allow the script of Scripture to dictate their ethical action.[[14]](#footnote-14) As actors follow scripts, improvisation is required where the script does not dictate with the kind of specificity needed to guide each action—not to mention what scripts cannot do: respond to the unique mistakes of other actors. The art of improvisation, though, has its own rules and is ultimately to be worked out within the symbolic world of the play. This is what Vanhoozer gets at when he argues that,

Christian doctrine is an important ingredient in forming faithful disciples to be effective improvisers, but not because doctrines tell us exactly what to say and do. Their purpose is not merely to give us ‘answers’ but to instill in us habits of seeing, judging, and acting in theodramatically appropriate manners. … The key thing is to understand what God is doing in Christ so well that one can participate fittingly in the action even when the setting and scenery look completely different.[[15]](#footnote-15)

For many contemporary issues, the descriptive and synthetic tasks will not provide clear answers; but they will instill in us habits of the imagination that help us participate fittingly in the drama of redemptive on the stage of contemporary ethical issues.[[16]](#footnote-16) The study of the Bible does not provide direct answers to each question, but it does free “the captive imagination, enabling disciples to wake up to the false images that hold us captive and walk instead in the truth of what they see in the mirror of Scripture.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

Everything rests on the faithful execution of the pragmatic task—the embodiment of the moral vision of the Bible in the life of the Church. Hays rightly comments, “The value of our exegesis and hermeneutics will be tested by their capacity to produce persons and communities whose character is commensurate with Jesus Christ and thereby pleasing to God.”[[18]](#footnote-18) The previous tasks formulate doctrine, and the final task bridges into true discipleship, for “A disciple is one who does not simply face a new direction but begins to walk in it.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

**Introduction to the Issue of Abortion**

As the previous discussion indicates, articulating a Christian position on the issue of abortion is not merely political—though it certainly has implications for the larger politic.[[20]](#footnote-20) A Christian position on abortion is, above all, a call to discipleship. Recognizing that this is a discipleship issue before it is a legislative issue requires that the Christian community takes *both* a position *and* responsibility in the ethical arena. The distinction between these will become clear in the progression from the descriptive to the pragmatic. Hays orients us toward embodying our doctrinal conclusions, “If it should prove possible to achieve clarity within the church about the issue of abortion, a subsequent task of the community would be to bear witness to the world by embodying an alternative vision, demonstrating as a city set on a hill an alternative possibility, a better way to respond to the problem.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

From the start, however, we should seek to address this issue not primarily to provide answers for the State but to provide direction for the church. As Hays notes, “Even apart from questions of law and public policy, the question arises within the community of faith every time a pregnancy occurs under difficult circumstances.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Our consideration of the issue, therefore, is not so much about the people *out there*, but the people *in here* and the people who will look to this church for support and guidance.[[23]](#footnote-23)

**The Descriptive & Synthetic Tasks**

In an almost unsettling way, Hays declares:

The Bible contains no texts about abortion. This simple fact—often ignored by those who would make opposition to abortion into a virtual litmus test of true Christian faith—places the issue of abortion in a very different category…. Here it is not a question of how to interpret a contested text (as in the case of Matt. 5:38-48), or how to negotiate between texts in tension…or how to resolve the competing authority claims of the New Testament and contemporary experience (as in the issue of homosexuality). Here the Bible offers us no direct word at all.[[24]](#footnote-24)

As jarring as this declaration might be, a survey of the biblical text yields no direct instructions regarding abortion, despite the fact that opponents of abortion and advocates for abortion both attempt to identify biblical grounds for their convictions.

For example, opponents of abortion might appeal to the command, “Do not murder” (Ex. 20:13; Dt. 5:17). However, this appeal is guilty of begging the question because the issue is one of definition. No one is advocating for murder. The prior step of proving that abortion is murder is necessary. On the other hand, advocates of abortion might appeal to Ex. 21:22-25, where laws regarding the payment for injuries of a pregnant woman are detailed.[[25]](#footnote-25) In that case, if the unborn baby is killed, but the mother is otherwise unharmed, then a fine is exacted. Some argue that this penalty shows that an unborn child is a fetus, not a person.[[26]](#footnote-26) In this case, Duane Garrett warns against looking to this text for direction regarding whether or not an unborn child is regarded as a person because abortion is not the topic of this text.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Opponents of abortion often appeal to two other texts as well, Ps. 139:13-16 and Jer. 1:5, both of which describe an individual in the womb. However, these texts do not take up the issue either of sustaining life in the womb or of preventing the taking of life in the womb. Instead, they are descriptive of God’s creative power and his election and calling. These texts *do* help shape the symbolic world of the Bible, but they do not speak directly to the issue of abortion. Nor do these texts make scientific statements about the timing of when life begins. They are poetic descriptions and should be treated as poetry, not propositions.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Because there are no biblical texts that deal directly with abortion, there are no texts to synthesize (step two). The absence of biblical data on this particular issue, however, means that we could broaden our search to include texts that depict the biblical perspective on pregnancy and childbearing. This task would be extensive but would result in the conclusion that “children are a great blessing from God, and childlessness a terrible affliction.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Many texts describe infertility as problematic, but no texts describe fertility or pregnancy as problematic. We should regard it as significant “that the canon—though it does not address abortion specifically—portrays a world in which abortion would be not so much immoral as unthinkable or unintelligible.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

**The Hermeneutical Task**

Although the Bible does not address the issue of abortion directly, that does not mean that consideration of abortion should take place outside of the symbolic world of the Bible. On the contrary, we should still consider the issue of abortion within the symbolic world of the Bible. But what features of the Bible’s symbolic world are relevant to this issue?

The Symbolic World of the Bible

The most significant feature of the Bible’s symbolic world is the image of God as the creator and author of life (cf. Jn. 1:3-5). Because God is the creator and author of life, we can conclude that “Wherever new life begins to develop in any pregnancy, the creative power of God is at work, and Jesus Christ, who was the original agent of creation, has already died for the redemption of the incipient life *in utero*.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Here, Hays brings together God’s actions in creation and new-creation/redemption, leading him to affirm Barth’s declaration that “The true light of the world shines already. In the darkness of the mother’s womb.”[[32]](#footnote-32)

In the biblical description of the world where God is the creator, humans are assigned stewardship of his creation. The assignment to steward and cultivate God’s creation, rather than to destroy God’s creation, militates against the termination of any pregnancy. Debates about personhood are a non-factor here—whether a fetus is regarded as having personhood or not, “he or she is a manifestation of life that has come forth from God.” For that reason, “The normal response to pregnancy, within the Bible’s symbolic world, is one of rejoicing for God’s gift—even when that gift comes unexpectedly.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

This line of reasoning sets aside debates about personhood as well as debates about whether abortion qualifies as murder or not because it places our individual lives and stories within the story of the Bible—one in which we are creatures, and God is the creator. “We neither create ourselves nor belong to ourselves. Within this worldview, abortion—whether it be ‘murder’ or not—is wrong for the same reason that murder and suicide are wrong: it presumptuously assumes authority to dispose of life that does not belong to us.”[[34]](#footnote-34)

Paradigms for Navigating the Bible’s Symbolic World

How should individuals navigate the world if God is the creator and humans are created stewards? What paradigms for action might the Bible provide? Hays suggests three lines of reasoning that are paradigmatic for navigating the issue of abortion within the symbolic world of the Bible.

First, Hays points to the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37), where Jesus teaches that “we are called upon to *become* neighbors to those who are helpless, going beyond convention conceptions of duty to provide life-sustaining aid to those whom we might not have regarded as worthy of our compassion. Such a standard would apply both to the mother in a ‘crisis pregnancy’ and to her unborn child.”[[35]](#footnote-35) In the pragmatic step, we will consider what it means for us to “Go and do the same” (Lk. 10:37).

Second, Hays points to the example of the Jerusalem community who embodied the gospel of the kingdom through their “practices of economic sharing and caring for the needy.”[[36]](#footnote-36)Their distribution to any who had need provides a paradigm of assuming responsibility for the needy. The pragmatic task is almost self-evident here:

Thus, within the church, there should be no justification for abortion on economic grounds or on the ground of the incapacity of the mother to care for the child. The community assumes responsibility and creates whatever structures are necessary to provide for mother and child alike. Sharing, not abortion, is the answer. This is what it means for the community to live out the power of the resurrection.… The community of faith should provide whatever support is necessary for both man and woman to assume their roles as parents. This would entail not only financial support but also the support of friendship, counsel, and prayer. If the church seriously adopted the paradigm of Acts 4:32-35 as a model for its life, many of the usual arguments for abortion would fall away.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The call here is not to drain the church’s funds to support outsiders, but to fold individuals into the life of the community and to offer this kind of aid to any who are part of the community who might be in need.

Third, Hays calls for an imitation of Christ. This call is more than a trite WWJD statement but is in keeping with apostolic teaching (cf. Rom. 15:1-7; 1 Cor. 11:1; Gal. 6:2; Phil. 2:1-13) and includes a call to radical self-giving. To imitate Christ is “to forswear seeking [one’s] own self-defined freedom in order to render services to others….”[[38]](#footnote-38) A community that imitates Christ will “act in service to welcome children, both born and unborn, even when to do so is difficult and may cause serious hardship.” Hays goes on to note that because the call to imitate Christ is given to the whole church, “this word about welcoming children cannot be addressed just to pregnant women, as though the church could simply say to her, ‘You must imitate Christ by suffering for the sake of this child.’ Instead, this call is a charge laid upon the church as a whole.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

Other Authorities: Tradition

Whenever the Bible is silent on a particular issue, Christians should still place that issue within the symbolic world of the Bible and seek biblical paradigms that will aid in faithful living. Yet, where the Bible is silent, other authorities (e.g., tradition, reasons, experience) carry greater weight in the establishment of norms. In the interest of brevity, only one will be mentioned here.

The Didache, Christian teaching from the late 1st to early 2nd centuries, does reference the issue of abortion. In 2:2, the Didache expounds on the 2nd commandment, “Do not murder children through abortion nor kill them after they have been born.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Abortion and infanticide were widely practiced in the Greco-Roman world. Abortion procedures were not safe and were a leading cause of death among women. Reasons for abortion included the “concealment of illicit sexual activity” as well as economic reasons. During that time, the decision to abort was made primarily by men rather than women. Yet, “From the start, Christian doctrine prohibited abortion and infanticide, classifying both as murder.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Christians did not begin navigating this issue in the modern world with the ruling on Roe v. Wade. On the contrary, Christians have navigated this issue when the symbolic and historical world of the Bible were one and the same. From the beginning, “the entire Christian tradition has rejected the practice of abortion—while always being open to considering special cases, such as tragic instances where abortion is necessary to save the life of the mother.”[[42]](#footnote-42)

Other Authorities: Reason

There is a place for rational arguments that draw on the category of reason. However, when the issue of abortion is placed in the symbolic world of the Bible, six common lines of reasoning are excluded:[[43]](#footnote-43)

1. A conflict of “rights” cannot frame the issue. There is no “right” to life or to a particular experience of life. Life is a gracious gift from God, and no one has a claim on it. Instead, we are held responsible for stewarding it well and will be accountable to God for our actions.
2. A conflict of the “right to privacy,” which makes abortion a matter of personal choice, as articulated in *Roe v. Wade*, is not at issue. Within the church, the decision to have an abortion is an action that takes place within the community of faith and, therefore, is set against the standard of edifying the community and witnessing to God’s will in the world. Generally, abortion does neither.
3. The “sanctity of life” or “sacredness of life” has no basis in the Scriptures. The point is not that human life has overriding value but that humans do not have the right to take life.
4. Assignment of personhood or identification of when human life begins (e.g., at conception, first trimester, etc.) has no place in the discussion. All life is a gift from God.
5. The “quality of life” argument also has no place because all life is a gift from God. More than that, the identification of a child as “unwanted” has no place in the symbolic world of the Bible because the New Testament witnesses to Christ and his community who love the unwanted, not recommend their termination.
6. Hypothetical consequentialist arguments have no place. For example, the question “What if Mary had aborted Jesus?” simply raises the rejoinder, “What if Hitler’s mother had aborted him?” These questions do not address the actual issue. More than that, the NT teaches us to ask real questions regarding what God’s will is for us in this moment rather than hypothetical questions.

Other Authorities: Experience

The category of experience is fickle on this matter. Proponents of abortion easily point to the experience of individuals whose lives were, at least in their opinion, improved by an abortion. Opponents of abortion easily point to the experience of individuals who chose not to have an abortion and found that their lives were improved.

Normative Judgments

We are now positioned to make a normative judgment about abortion. There should be “a general presumption against any human decision to terminate life.”[[44]](#footnote-44) The symbolic world of the Bible and the shaping influence of the biblical paradigms on the moral imagination makes abortion unimaginable. More than that, the Church must imagine what it looks like to put the paradigms into play in local communities of faith. There should be practices in the community that remove the obstacles that are commonly cited in favor of abortion—at least for people who are part of that community of faith.

Are there any exceptions to the norm? Certainly, there are exceptions, especially regarding those situations in which an abortion is performed in order to save the life of the mother. Efforts should be made to save both the life of the mother and the life of the baby, but there are situations where both lives cannot be saved.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Another situation where exceptions are often considered is in cases of rape and/or incest. In my judgment, within the Christian community, babies conceived in these situations should not be aborted, even though I recognize that the mother might suffer greatly experientially because of the situations in which the child was conceived. Placed within the symbolic world of the Bible, babies conceived in situations marked by evil are still counted as a gift of life from God. More than that, the God of the Bible consistently redeems the human acts of evil and turns them into good. God welcomes the unwanted into his act of love and redemption in Christ.[[46]](#footnote-46)

A final situation where exceptions are often considered is in cases of disability. Again, the symbolic world of the Bible and the paradigms examined above indicate that the Christian community should aid the individual(s) facing this situation “so that the burden of the decision and its consequences would not fall on them alone.” In other words, the normative decision should be against abortion. But that is a decision that the community of faith should make along with the mother (and father) so that together they can decide against abortion and together bear responsibility for the care and support of the child. “If, however, the community does not find those metaphorical readings illuminating, or if the cost of assuming responsibility for the child is reckoned to be too great, then the church will assent to their decision to proceed with an abortion….” In my view, the decision to abort would be unethical, but if the church is unwilling to live out its ethic in offering support for the parent(s) and the child, then the church should feel the full weight of their neglect by affirming the decision to abort the child.[[47]](#footnote-47) Hays is right to conclude that “the New Testament summons the community to eschew abortion and thus to undertake the burden of assisting the parents to raise the handicapped child.”[[48]](#footnote-48)

**The Pragmatic Task**

It is now time to consider what the Church should do in response to the problem of abortion. How should the church embody God’s Word on this issue in the contemporary world?

First, while it is right for Christians to advocate against abortion in the larger culture, “we cannon coerce moral consensus in a post-Christian culture.”[[49]](#footnote-49) Advocating against abortion is not Christian nationalism. Every law legislates morality—that is how laws work. Christians advocating for laws against abortion are not advocating that the United States operate as a Christian nation or claiming that “America is God’s chosen nation and must be defended as such.”[[50]](#footnote-50) Instead, Christians are advocating for a particular moral position—one that is shared by other faith traditions, and therefore not exclusively Christian.

However much Christians hope and pray for legislation that protects unborn babies, Christians should also recognize that “the convictions that cause us to reject abortion within the church are intelligible only within the symbolic world of Scripture.”[[51]](#footnote-51) The strongest and most authoritative arguments against abortion are derived from the Bible and, for that reason, will not find wide acceptance in a post-Christian world, just as they did not during the days of the early church in a pre-Christian world.

Second, in the contemporary world, “the primary task of the Christian community on this issue is to form a countercommunity of *witness*, summoning the world to see the gospel in action.”[[52]](#footnote-52) One minister comments, “The history of the church through the ages has been the history of changes brought about in society through the church demonstrating and living an alternative vision of life.”[[53]](#footnote-53)

The primary calling of the church is not to advocate for the unborn through intimidation and large demonstrations because this action does not find a place in the symbolic world of the Bible or in the paradigms explored above. Instead, the Church is to show the world a different way forward. This exemplary action has a power that the law can never muster—though we can be grateful whenever legislation is passed that restricts abortion.

Third, if the Church at large is to form a counter-community of witness, then it is local churches that must become that community of witness. Local churches must position themselves within the symbolic world of the Bible so that they can live faithfully in the contemporary world. More than that, local churches must shape themselves with the paradigms of Scripture that beckon an orientation toward self-giving and sacrifice.

One example of church commitment to be a counter-community of witness is represented by the Durham Declaration, which includes the following pledge:

We pledge, with God’s help, to become a church that hospitably provides safe refuge for the so-called ‘unwanted child’ and mother. We will joyfully welcome and generously support—with prayer, friendship, and material resources—both child and mother. This support includes strong encouragement for the biological father to be a father, in deed, to his child.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Commenting on this declaration, Hays notes, “No one can make such a pledge lightly. A church that seriously attempted to live out such a commitment would quickly find itself extended to the limits of its resources, and its members would be called upon to make serious personal sacrifices. In other words, it would find itself living as the church envisioned by the New Testament.”[[55]](#footnote-55)

**Resurrection Church: A Counter-Community of Witness**

Resurrection Church must work to become a counter-community of witness. Members of this church should be known for their action on this issue, not because of social media posts or political protests, but because of testimonies of acceptance, sacrifice, and ongoing support that reflect the biblical paradigms. How can this happen?

First, we should make clear to all who visit with us and especially to those who are folded into this community of faith that we are committed to loving, sacrificing for, and serving all parents, including those facing “crisis pregnancies.” There should be no questions about our commitment to walk with individuals in our church who might face the decision to abort a baby. More than that, our commitment to help does not waver based on the circumstances that led to the pregnancy or the situation of the individuals involved.

Second, we should make giving toward our benevolence fund an emphasis so that we have resources available to provide aid. In addition, it may be prudent to identify a deacon or other individual who can coordinate this kind of care. Creativity should be welcomed so that ideas can be put into action (e.g., the formation of a supply storage of items for babies, including diapers, formula, etc.).

Third, we should make clear that our commitment to individuals extends beyond the birth of the child to the ongoing needs of the family. Resurrection Church’s pro-life commitment extends beyond the delivery of the baby. We should offer relational support, spiritual responsibility, and financial care in ongoing ways.

Fourth, we should strengthen our relationship with Amnion Pregnancy Center (Burnsville). In addition to the resources that we should offer individuals who are part of our faith community, we should continue to increase our care for individuals who are part of our local community who are considering an abortion.

**Conclusion**

In this lesson, we have briefly considered the contemporary issue of abortion and our church’s responsibility to be a community of counter-witness on this issue. This initial consideration does not cover every aspect of the Christian opposition to abortion, nor does it deal in detail with exceptions to the norm. Neither, however, does it fully investigate the responsibility that our community of faith has to embody the biblical paradigms of faithful living in the contemporary world. For that reason, the above suggestions are intended to prompt action and encourage further conversation. They should not be viewed as the final word on the matter, nor should our current practices be considered fully developed and final.

1. Abortion has been a disputed issue for many years, but especially post Roe v. Wade. On December 1, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments for Dobbs v. Jackson, raising discussion about abortion and the potential of the current Court overruling Roe. Regardless of whether Roe is overturned or not, the Christian community must continue to navigate this issue, seeking to make clear statements about the morality of abortion while also offering forgiveness for those who have obtained an abortion and ongoing care for individuals considering an abortion. The responsibilities of the Christian community will be explored in more detail toward the end of this lesson. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 40-41. In my judgment, Wayne Grudem’s approach to ethics fails to recognize these realities. In his popular ethics books, he primarily emphasizes the clarity of Scripture without recognizing the true complexity of the issue and, in my view, regularly engages in a proof-texting approach to ethics. While helpful at many points, readers should be aware that Grudem sometimes treats his conclusions as if they are precisely what the Bible communicates without recognizing that others who disagree with him are relying on biblical data for their positions as well. See especially Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 79-105. For a helpful introduction to Old Testament ethics, see John Goldingay, *Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019). For an introduction to Christian ethics, see D. Q. McInerny, *Being Ethical* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Hays dedicates a whole chapter to this issue in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 444-461. A short disclaimer is in order. Hays demonstrates a solid method for doing contemporary ethics in the first thirteen chapters of the book. In the last five chapters, he puts that method to work. I disagree with some of his conclusions in those chapters. However, that does not show that his methodology is flawed. Instead, it shows that even when a robust methodology is in place, Christians committed to hearing God’s Word on contemporary issues might come to different conclusions—even when using the same methodology! The possibility of disagreement stands as a reminder that Christians must exercise a measure of restraint when condemning opposing viewpoints—a restraint that is only possible by humility and love. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For a short treatment of the concept of doctrine and drama, see chapter eight in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Pictures at a Theological Exhibition: Scenes of the Church’s Worship, Witness and Wisdom* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 180-199. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers: A Pastor’s Guide to Making Disciples through Scripture and Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), xxvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, xxv. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For an insightful and brief introduction to the progression of this issue and the debate surrounding it within the American political landscape, see Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 63-108. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 446. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 444. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. We should note that Christians dispute nearly every aspect of the abortion issue, so identifying the “Christian position” is a bit of a misnomer. The wide-range of heated disagreement among Christians, not to mention between Christians and non-Christians, on this issue makes our consideration all the more urgent. Commenting on this disagreement, Hays’s word of caution is well warranted: “The absence of explicit New Testament evidence suggests first of all that a certain humility about our claims and convictions concerning abortion is appropriate. Those with whom we differ are not necessarily monsters; they might have serious grounds for their position. The church is a community of moral discourse in which we must think hard together about this matter. Sloganeering and name-calling are not edifying to the community” (Hays, 445). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 446. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Some rabbinic sources claim that this passage allows for “licit forms of the taking of human life in the womb.” However, White argues that “to invoke scripture in order to permit the intentional killing of innocent human life…constitutes a profound betrayal of the teaching of the Torah and a kind of sacrilege.” Thomas Joseph White, *Exodus*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Various renderings in English translations of Ex. 21:22 indicate the difficulty in translating the verse. CSB does not see a miscarriage here, but instead a premature delivery. ESV understands the description to indicate a miscarriage. The Greek translation of the Old Testament offers additional detail. If the woman miscarries a child that has the appearance of human form, the *lex talion* punishment is in order. If the child has not developed enough to have the appearance of human form, a fine is in order. For difficulties on this text, see Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 47. For a full treatment of the issues from an exegetical standpoint, see T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 483-485. From a treatment of this text from an ethical standpoint, see Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 105-108. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 503. Garrett goes on to comment, “If nothing else, therefore, the law indicates that a strong instinct for protecting the unborn is appropriate. With good reason, the Christian church has always regarded abortion as immoral and repugnant.” Regarding the translation difficulty, Garrett concludes, “In my view, we do not have enough information here to know which is meant” (501). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 447-448. Other texts, like Lk. 1:44, Gal. 5:20, and Mt. 19:14 are sometimes appealed to as well. However, the context shows that abortion is not the subject matter for any of these references. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 449. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 449. The proof-texts that are often appealed to in opposition to abortion cannot bear the weight of this claim. The wider biblical witness to pregnancy and infertility, not to mention the power of God over the womb, can bear this weight. As such, it is best to admit that the reason for Christian opposition to abortion lies beyond the proof-texts generally used—as helpful as they might be toward developing the symbolic world of the biblical authors. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 450. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4, 416. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 450. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 450. I am not arguing that there is no place for arguments about whether abortion qualifies as murder or when (or even if) there is a time at which personhood is assigned to a fetus. Other arguments against abortion are needed, particularly for those unwilling to consider the issue within the framework of the symbolic world of the Bible. Yet, for Christians who appeal to the Bible as their ultimate authority, the starting place is the biblical argument. All other arguments are downstream from this one. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 451. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 451. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 452. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 452. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 453. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Toby Janicki, *Didache: A New Translation and Messianic Jewish Commentary* (Jerusalem: Vine of David, 2017), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force int eh Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 453. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. What follows is a summary from Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 454-455. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 456. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. For a full exploration of situations like this and the possible choices, see Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 137-141. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Richard Hays disagrees at this point. He suggests that “such exceptions are certainly justifiable options for Christians” (456). However, I cannot understand how his exception for rape and/or incest can be made given his argument up to this point. He suggests that because of the limited direct teaching on abortion in the Bible, the category of experience should be given more weight on this issue. Since the experience of the woman carrying the baby is likely to be negative, he suggests that abortion is permissible. However, this does not fit with the symbolic world of the Bible—at least in my view. Nevertheless, perhaps this is a good example of disagreement among Christians using the same method and seeking to submit to biblical authority. Statistically, the percentage of abortions that are attributed to rape or incest are very low, so in reality, this disagreement is conceptual and only rarely surfaces in practice. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. In Hays’s view, aborting a child because of a deformity or handicap should not be the case; however, he understands that Christians might disagree on this particular exception. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 457. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 457. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. This is the definition of Christian Nationalism offered by Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 457. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 458. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Bill Tibert, unpublished sermon preached at Covenant Presbyterian Church, in Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 458. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. The Durham Declaration, available at <https://lifewatch.org/the-durham-declaration/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 459. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)