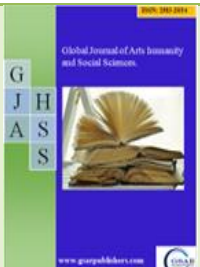
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BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ABORTION, BIRTH CONTROL, AND EFFECTS ON MORAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

By

ANONABA KINGSLEY CHUKWUEMEKA, PhD

Department of Religious Studies, Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.



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Corresponding author

**ANONABA
KINGSLEY
CHUKWUEMEKA,
PhD**

Abstract

Abortion and Birth control are two of the most complex issues in modern society, with different ethical, moral, and spiritual implications. From the Christian perspective, the debate on abortion and birth control is rooted in the Bible's teaching on the value and dignity of human life. The Old and New Testaments emphasize the importance of protecting and preserving life from conception to natural death. In this context, Christians grapple with the question: What does it mean to be pro-life? Is birth control morally justifiable? How should Christians respond to situations where pregnancy is unwanted or poses a significant threat to the pregnant woman? This study examines the perspectives of the Old and New Testaments on abortion and birth control. By analyzing relevant Scriptures and historical contexts, the work qualitatively provided a comprehensive understanding of the biblical position on abortion and birth control. The study finds that the sanctity of human life, including the unborn baby, is inexcusable and must be protected by society. To achieve this goal, the work recommends that the Church and community should provide compassionate support for pregnant women and families, and educate the people on biblical teachings and moral implications of abortion, health, and social benefits of birth control.

Keywords: Abortion, Birth control, Biblical Perspectives, Moral and Social Development

INTRODUCTION

Abortion is the deliberate termination of a pregnancy. This process of life termination can be done surgically or medically before the fetus can survive outside the womb. Furthermore, birth control encompasses various methods and devices in preventing conception or removing pregnancy. However, the interaction between birth control and abortion poses critical social and religious challenges like the need for reproductive rights and access to safe health care. It discusses the moral and ethical considerations surrounding human life and personhood. It talks about gender equality and women's empowerment. Other critical issues include societal, religious, and cultural attitudes toward sexuality, managing reproductive choices, and family planning. However, this article sets the stage for a thoughtful examination of the multifaceted issues surrounding abortion and birth control. Pregnancy is more a gift from God than a choice of humans. Therefore, it should be treated with respect, thanks, and care. In this context, three views on abortion will help to guide our choices:

1. **The Traditional Views:** This is also called the conservative view. This view emphasizes that life begins at conception. Abortion is murder in practice and must not be allowed for any reason or situation (Psalm 139.13-14, Jeremiah 1:5)
2. **Moderate Views:** The moderate view says that life at the implantation stage of human development, that is a fetus, an embryo, or a fertilized egg, within 8 weeks of conception, cannot be regarded as a human being. For this reason, abortion can be allowed in cases of rape, incest, fatal anomalies, or to protect the mother's health
3. This view says that life begins at the vitality of birth and that abortion should be the product of the woman's decision.

Generally, this work aims to provide an overview of the complex and multifaceted Christian and Biblical position on the topic of abortion. In this respect, pregnancy is a precious gift from God that every married couple would wish to have. It is a miraculous journey that brings a new life into the world. In several cases,

pregnancy is a time of wonder, awe, and anticipation as a young human grows in a woman's womb. Pregnancy reminds us of God's creation power, which requires patience, trust, and total surrender to God as we follow the unfolding process of the coming of a new human being. God instructed that man and his wife should procreate within a legally created marriage bond (Karl 16-17).

Scientific Definition of Human Formation

In his book *Essentials of Human Embryology*, Moore and Persaud (2020) postulated that human development starts immediately after the union or coming together of the male and female gametes or germ cells during fertilization. According to them, fertilization is a sequence of events that commences with the contact of a sperm (spermatozoon) with a secondary oocyte (ovum), and it is followed by penetration of sperm into the ovum, the mixture of the sperm and ovum cell membranes, the release of the sperm's genetic material (DNA) into the ovum, the union of the sperm genetic material with the ovum's genetic material (resulting in a zygote with a unique combination of chromosomes and initiation of embryonic development. This fertilized ovum, known as a zygote, is a large diploid cell that is the beginning, or primordium, of a human being. This longtime scientific expert on the stages of human life doesn't call it a "cosmic question" or say "I might draw the line here, you might draw the line there," nor does he "talk about how life begins with the breath." (Zoia et. al).

Zoia et. al, go on to quote a highly regarded science encyclopedia that states, "At the moment the sperm cell of the human male meets the ovum of the female and the union results in a fertilized ovum (zygote), a new life has begun" The development of a child in the uterus is indeed amazing. Since the ordinary eye cannot directly see the fetus nor realize how it grows, it may tend to regard it as more of a "thing," or a being in a secondary sense, rather than a truly human person. On the other hand, seeing a newborn baby often elicits curiosity, a sense of joy, and a feeling that this little human needs protection and care. Not so much with the unborn, which may not trigger the same positive emotional response in adults that a newborn would because we do not encounter the fetus directly.

In this process, it may be helpful to point out how a child develops in the mother's womb. In a normal situation, conception begins when the father's sperm penetrates the mother's egg cell. Genetic instructions from both parents interact to create a new and unique individual who is no bigger than a grain of sugar, and the process of human formation continues as follows:

Day 1 - 45: The first cell divides into two, then two into four, and so on. The new individual implants in the mother's womb. The baby's sex can already be determined. The mother's normal menstrual period is suppressed by a hormone produced by her child. The heart starts forming. Soon the eyes start to develop. The beginnings of the brain, spinal cord, and nervous system are laid. The heart begins to beat. Muscles are developing along the future spine. The child in the uterus has grown ten thousand times, to between six and seven millimeters (one-quarter inch) long. The brain has human proportions. Blood flows in the veins and is

separate from the mother's blood supply. The pituitary gland in the brain is forming. The mouth, ears, and nose take shape. The heart's energy output is twenty percent of an adult's output. The skeleton is formed. The brain coordinates the movement of the muscles and organs. Reflex responses have begun. The penis has begun to form in male infants. The mother misses her second period (Cleveland clinic.org/health). Brain waves are recorded (1 ½ months). Spontaneous movements have begun, and teeth are developing (Zoia et. al).

Weeks 7 – 13: Lips are sensitive to touch, and the ears may already be taking on the family shape. The child is well proportioned: a small-scale baby is three centimeters (one and an eighth inches) sitting up, and a gram (one-thirtieth of an ounce) in weight. Every organ is present. The heart beats sturdily; the stomach produces digestive juices; the liver makes blood cells; the kidneys begin to function; the taste buds are forming. Fingerprints are being engraved. They will grow larger, but they are unique and will never change. The eyelids and palms of the hands are sensitive to touch. The child bends fingers around an object placed in the palm. Thumb sucking begins. Fingernails are formed. The body is sensitive to touch. The child squints, swallows, furrows the brows, and frowns. The baby urinates, makes complex facial expressions, and even smiles. The baby is capable of vigorous activity—kicking, turning feet, curling and fanning toes, making a fist, moving thumbs, bending wrists, turning the head, opening the mouth, and pressing lips tightly together. Breathing has begun. The baby is prettier, and the facial expressions resemble the parents'. Movements are graceful, reflexes vigorous. The vocal cords are formed, although without air the baby cannot cry. The sex organs are apparent.

4th – 9th month: The baby can grasp with hands, swim, and do somersaults. The mother first feels the baby move. Sleeping habits are noticeable. A slammed door will result in activity. The child responds to sounds in frequencies too high or too low for adults to hear. Fine hair grows on eyebrows and the head. Eyelash fringe appears. The baby's weight is about 640 grams (one pound, six ounces), and height is twenty-three centimeters (9 inches). Babies born at this age have a survey. Eyes and teeth are present. Eyelids open and close. Eyes look around. Hands grip strongly. The mother's voice is heard and recognized. Weight increases by one kilogram (over two pounds), and the baby's quarters get very cramped. The child triggers labor, and birth occurs 255–275 days after conception. Of the forty-five generations of cell divisions before adulthood, forty-one have already taken place. Four more will come during the rest of childhood and adolescence. The development of a human being has been divided into different stages, and different terms are used to describe these stages. In the first few days, the new living entity that has been created is usually referred to as a zygote. From the moment the zygote has made its way to the uterus, it becomes a blastocyst. By the end of the second week, the "successful" blastocyst has developed to the point where it implants itself in the uterine wall. From this significant moment of implantation until the end of the eighth week, we speak of an embryo. After the eighth week, the embryo becomes a fetus in the

narrower sense of the word (even though the word is sometimes used for the entire period from conception to birth (Cleveland clinic.org/health)).

The Term Abortion

The term abortion may be accepted to mean the premature expulsion of the ovum at any time before the embryo is viable and in medical terms, abortion is classified into two main categories, spontaneous abortion (miscarriage) and induced abortion (elective or therapeutic abortion) (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2020). Induced abortion involves the intentional termination of a pregnancy through medical procedures or medications. Abortion is the termination of a pregnancy by removal or expulsion of an embryo or fetus, however, an abortion that occurs without external intervention is known as a miscarriage or "spontaneous abortion. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, (2020), miscarriage (spontaneous abortion) occurs in approximately 30% to 40% of all pregnancies. But when deliberate steps are taken to end a pregnancy it is called an induced abortion.

Walter further defined abortion as: "The direct killing of a fetus, either by causing its death in the womb or by removing it from the womb before it is viable, that is before it can survive outside the mother's womb." Abortion can be done in various ways—for example, by the use of medication that kills the fetus within a few days, or by surgical procedures. This type of abortion is what this article is concerned with—not "spontaneous abortion, but elective abortion." The phrase "elective abortion" refers to a voluntary abortion at the request of a pregnant woman for reasons other than health concerns, such reasons may include:

- 1) living in poverty;
- 2) Single parenting or living in an abusive relationship;
- 3) Challenges of raising a child: food, health care, and education;
- 4) Not ready to have a child, or another child, or simply wanting to avoid motherhood encounters;
- 5) Avoiding the shame of becoming pregnant. The phrase "elective abortions," and a majority of all abortions, focuses almost exclusively on pregnant women. Physicians who perform these procedures or persons who may force or threaten a woman to have an abortion, such as the father, family members, or human traffickers, are considered secondary or tertiary in the choice of carrying out an abortion. (Kerby 23-30).

Different Opinions on Abortion

Opinions on abortion vary widely. These opinions may depend on one's worldview and value system. Some people argue that all types of abortion should be allowed, arguing that the fetus is not yet a human person and therefore can be aborted. Peter Singer in this view said, "My suggestion, then, is that we accord the fetus no higher moral status than we give to a non-human animal at a similar level of rationality, self-consciousness, awareness, capacity to feel, and so on." (Singer, 131). Because no fetus is a person, no

fetus has the same claim to life as a person. Another group agrees that all or most kinds of abortions must be permitted, suggesting that abortion is an individual decision, which no one else has the right to interfere with, and that a woman has the full right to decide what happens with and in her body.

In this opinion, Charles Bellinger discussed the position of British philosopher Soran Reader who said: "that a woman should be able to choose abortion or not because the inhabitant of her womb belongs to her; it is her child, a piece of property over which she has "maternal authority." While it is certainly true that the expecting mother is most directly affected by the pregnancy, some people would suggest that abortion should not or even cannot be decided by the pregnant woman alone, but that society, government, churches, the father, family, and others should also have a say. To this view, Baily stated, "Abortion is first of all an individual matter...but not for an individual alone" (Baily 11-20).

New Testament Position On Abortion

The New Testament emphasized the importance of love, compassion, and selflessness. Passages like Luke 1:41-45 and Matthew 19:14 comprehensively highlight Jesus' care for the vulnerable, including the unborn baby in the womb. However, the last group of abortion proponents is opposed to abortions in principle and practice. According to Richard Hays, "The New Testament teaches us to approach ethical issues not to ask 'What will happen if I do x?' but rather to ask 'What is the will of God on x?' and the position of morals and ethics on the issue?" If the New Testament admonitions were put into practice, abortion would rarely be seen as necessary within the Christian community. Furthermore, the New Testament emphatically excludes some of the patterns of reasoning commonly used in support of abortion in contemporary society, particularly the appeal to the "right" of individuals to make autonomous moral decisions, the "right to privacy," and the "quality of life" arguments. The truth remains that God cares for everyone, from the womb to old age (Psalms 22:10-11)

Old Testament Position On Abortion

In the Old Testament theology, the Bible teaches the sanctity of life with passages like Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17, which prohibit murder, whether before or after birth. These positions and opinions reveal several underlying questions: is the unborn child a human person who therefore must be protected, or is the unborn child not yet a human being? If it is decided that the unborn is not yet human, then, the fetus can be aborted. The second question is whether abortion is an act of murder or killing. In simple terms, the two ideas fall under the scope of the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13). Though the Old Testament does not explicitly address abortion or birth control, it teaches principles that inform basic world views on abortion and birth control globally. In the Old Testament view, God created man in His image, and His sovereignty over life implies a value for the unborn child in the womb (Leviticus 18:21).

Biblical Perspective of Abortion and Birth Control

Attempts to provide answers to the issue of abortion depend on an individual's or a group's religious, social, and moral background and philosophy. The reaction of a Christian to this matter may be different from the views of an atheist, who may consider social and economic reasons to support abortion. However, the following principles will help in understanding the biblical position on abortion:

1. God exists and has revealed Himself in various ways, particularly in His Word, the Scripture, and the person of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
2. The Bible is the Word of God and reveals to man God's true nature. As much as humans can comprehend the importance of human life, the termination of life in the womb or outside the womb may be seriously questioned (John 3:16).
3. God's written Word, the Bible, and God's incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, as revealed in Scripture, teach the purpose of the creation of life. This applies to biblical texts and passages that must be understood according to the context. (Isaiah 44:24).
4. God is the Creator of all life as well as all inanimate objects. As the Creator, God has a right to everything about man and can deal with matters of life and death. The universe is God's jurisdiction; human life is not man's property but God's (Colossians 1:16-17).
5. The Ten Commandments reflect God's will and character. They have to be understood as standards of good morals. As such, they are binding on every human being.
6. Humans have the divine gift of free choice. This even includes transgressing and/or rejecting God's will as given in His law. The instruction not to kill is not subjective, but an objective command to humanity, and at all times (John 1:12; 3:16, 36). While the term "abortion" is not mentioned in Scripture, the concept appears occasionally in some references of the Bible. However, the following biblical principles and teachings may be useful in making choices for abortion:

1. Value and Sacredness of Human Life.

Human life is of the greatest value to God. This is so because God created us in His image (Gen 1:27; 2:7) and has a personal interest in man's goodwill. Life is a gift from God, and God owns it, and He alone has the right to take it. God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are one in the purpose of creation. God the Father has life in Himself (John 5:26). Jesus Christ is the life Himself (John 1:4, John 5:26). He is the way to life (John 14:6) and the resurrection and light of the world (John 11:25). According to Wotogbo-Weneka et. al, human life holds deep cultural and religious significance, transcending individual and cultural philosophy and existence. Following moral principles, protecting human life is a fundamental ethical and moral imperative. Many belief systems hold that humans are created in the image of God

who is supreme, so human life is interconnected with the world. Terminating human life is like a crime against creation.

2. The Unborn Child as Fully Human

The Bible mentions prenatal life in the Old and the New Testaments, and talks about God's knowledge of human life before it was conceived. David recounts the human-creation situation when he says "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. . . Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" (Ps 139:13, 16). From this reference, the unborn child is fully human, hence Samson was to "be a Nazirite to God from the womb" (Judg 13:5). Every human being is created and formed "from the womb" (Isa 49:1, 5). Jeremiah was already chosen as a prophet before his birth (Jeremiah 1:5), as was Paul (Gal 1:15). John the Baptist was to "be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15). In His incarnation Jesus Himself experienced the human prenatal experience, and yet was recognized as the Messiah and Son of God soon after His conception (Luke 1:39-45). God is not only the Creator of the unborn, even though humans procreate, but His intention for each child is for the unborn to know Him and worship Him. (Gen 25:21-23).

3. The Ten Commandments explained in the Sermon on the Mount

Proverbs 6:16-17 says that God hates the hand that sheds innocent blood; the unborn child is the most innocent and vulnerable of all, and therefore must be protected, whatever intentional and voluntary reason for abortion represents the "hand that sheds innocent blood" and God hates it. Revelation 21:8 warns that "the cowardly, the faithless, the murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars," will not have a place in the new Jerusalem (Rev 22:15). As previously pointed out above, should anyone hold to the argument that the unborn child is not yet be fully human but only has the potential of becoming a full human because he/she has no self-awareness, rationality, and other traits, that same fellow should know that these same traits that are not found in the developing baby are equally not found in the new born baby that is regarded as a human being. Aborting the life of an unborn child based on his or her lack of self-awareness or abilities to live would also allow for infanticide and the extermination of mentally sick, handicapped people, individuals in a coma, and the aged who suffer from severe forms of dementia (Wotogbo-Weneka 297-300).

Furthermore, Andreasen (2001) stated that "When the value of life is depreciated near the borders of human existence, no life is safe anywhere." (p. 179) The cases mentioned in the previous paragraph are not only a transgression of the sixth commandment but also of the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev 19:18; Mark 12:31), which summarizes the second table of the Ten Commandments. Thus, human life is not measured by individuals' abilities or effectiveness, but by the value that God's sacrificial love has placed on it.

In support to this standard, Wilma Ann Bailey has examined the shift from “You shall not kill” (ASV, CEB, GNV, KJV, NAB, RSV, NJB) to “You shall not murder” (ESV, NIV, NKJV, NASB, NET, NLT, NRSV) in Protestant translations, a process that may have started approximately in the middle of the twentieth century. There is no new manuscript evidence demanding such a shift. Bailey further posits that linguistically and theologically, “You shall not kill” is the better translation. But “You shall not murder” is much more limited than the broader “You shall not kill.” “Murder” is premeditated killing for reasons considered unlawful by governments, but leaves the door open for killing in combat and other cases. On the other hand, the term “killing” refers to all cases in which the life of a human being is terminated, even in cases of accidental killing with no intention to hurt or take a life (Bailey 28-30).

The man-slayer in Numbers 35:6-33 is designated with the same Hebrew term “to kill” that is used in the sixth commandment, even though in his case the issue is not murder but accidental killing. Still, if a human being were to be killed accidentally, the man-slayer ought to run for his life to a city of refuge, where his case would be investigated and where he would need to stay permanently if proven innocent. This case shows how serious even unintentional killing was in Israel. When in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus showed the deeper meaning of the sixth commandment, He must have had “killing” in mind and not “murdering.” Jiří Moskala affirms that an English translation of the sixth commandment should use the verb “to kill”.

One can indeed find expressions of stark violence as well as horrific imagery in some biblical texts. This must be acknowledged, but we must also try as much as possible to understand the times and culture and to avoid using stereotypes or considering brutal and violent behavior read in the Bible as an excuse for our own decisions and unholy conduct of taking a life. For instance, in the narratives of the book of Job, his friends share with him their theology, which was not necessarily God’s truth. (Wotogbo-Wneka 295-302).

Effects of Abortion on Moral and Social Development

The effects of abortion on the moral and social development of most communities are multifaceted in assessment and complex in approach; however, here are some impacts of abortion on our society today:

1. **Crime and Disrespect to human life:** Abortion is a crime against God and nature. A continuous act of abortion will introduce a culture where human life is no longer respected. The life of the unborn baby can be terminated at the choice.
2. **Desensitization to violence:** Abortion contributes to a desensitization of private and community violence. It potentially leads to increased acceptance of other forms of violence in families, institutions, and communities.

3. **Relationship and Family dynamics:** Abortion does impact relationship and family dynamics in negative or positive ways, depending on the reality of the situation at hand. In many cases, abortion may lead to self-guilt, family or relationship conflict, and shame. Divorce and physical abuse may follow actions of unresolved abortion acts.
4. **Social Justice and Equality:** Abortion is still an unresolved issue in social justice. With unequal access to abortion services, a systematic health inequality will be put in place in society.
5. **Demographic Impact:** When abortion becomes socially allowed, it negatively affects the population of the community. It affects population growth, demographic trends, and the aging ratio of people.

Furthermore, abortion comes with an emotional and social stigma that can have psychological effects on the woman or her family. It can lead to silence, secrecy, or isolation, sometimes hindering social support, family bonding, and connection. It is important to acknowledge the fact that the effects of abortion on the moral and social development of a community are enormous and can hinder individual and societal development and peace (Wotogbo-Wneka 299-311).

Conclusion/Recommendations

Scripture teaches that God owns everything (Ps 50:10-12), but humans like to defraud and play a role that is not theirs to play. With His incarnation, Jesus came to “his own” (John 1:11) but was not accepted. Ideally, the relationship between an owner and a steward is characterized by respect and trust, harmony, and a measure of freedom. It also includes responsibilities on the steward’s part. Stewards may decide to take good care of the owner’s property or, on the other hand, may waste it to their detriment (Matt 25:14-30), but faithful stewards enjoy cooperation with the owner and some freedom in making decisions.

Absolute freedom is a phantom impossible in a world shared with others. Paul indicates that by nature we are slaves of sin, and our liberty is limited to the freedom of choice. Our own experience affirms this assessment. We can choose to be enslaved to sin or be servants of righteousness, servants of God (Rom 6:6-23), thereby continuing to enjoy not only freedom of choice but also freedom from sin (as master of our lives), freedom from the law (as a way of salvation that does not work), and freedom from death (in the sense that we have eternal life even if we experience the first death, which is followed by resurrection to eternal life). While choosing God brings humans the greatest possible freedom, it also brings obedience to God’s will. In 1 Corinthians, Paul describes freedom in the following way: liberty includes some latitude, liberty includes limitations, and liberty means carrying responsibility.

To treat a corpse or a fetus with casual disrespect is to cheapen and debase humanity. We sink to the level of savages. I believe that the majority of abortions done today in our society are lawful and necessary, though this position may not be a statement against the reasons and processes of abortion. I do not believe church institutions should have any part in this cheapening of life. While

there is freedom of choice and may be used accordingly, the worth and the value of life should be respected by everyone (Dune 159).

Having discussed biblical principles concerning the issue of abortion, the challenges and abortion effects on the moral and social life, the following recommendations are made:

1. Grassroots sex education: The government, Churches, private and government institutions should embark on a comprehensive sex education to primary school pupils, secondary and tertiary institution students. The sex lectures should focus on responsible sexual behaviors and healthy relationships.
2. Good Parenting Support: Religious institutions and the government should provide parenting classes, economic assistance to the poor and, encourage a culture that values human life, compassion, and good health care.
3. Address poverty and Social Inequality: People should tackle various underlying cultural, social, and economic issues driving abortion decisions and actions.
4. Women Empowerment: Women and children are the most vulnerable in society, therefore, community involvement in supporting women and children will help reduce possibilities of abortion options among abortion victims.
5. Good, affordable and available health facilities: The provision and availability of good and affordable health facilities will support pregnant women who may choose abortion as a better option in comparison to pregnancy-associated health issues with no assistance in their economic realities. These health assistance units will offer health resources, counseling, and assistance to women facing unplanned parenthood.

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