

# SUPREME COURT RULING OVERTURNING ROE V. WADE

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A once-in-a-generation ruling has been issued by the United States Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. Now what? Voices supporting the new decision are celebrating it as a victory for the rights of the unborn. Critics see it as a massive setback for women's rights. What should Christians think about this ruling? *How are we to respond?*

## ***What should Christians think about the ruling?***

To begin with, the Bible does not speak specifically or directly to any modern-day policy or law; it predates us by thousands of years. Further, while the Bible addresses situations where children in the womb are harmed, the specific term "abortion" is not used. So, before making modern-day applications, we should be careful to understand how the Bible spoke to its original audience (a process called hermeneutics): how did they understand it, and how would they have applied its truth? As people committed to the authority and sufficiency of God's Word, let's start with what we see in the Bible.

## ***So what does the Bible say about the unborn?***

Genesis 1:26-27 tells us that humans were created by God in His image, unique from the rest of creation.<sup>1</sup> One of the earliest covenants in the Bible upholds this high value<sup>2</sup> of human life when God instructs Noah, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."<sup>3</sup>

The Bible repeatedly refers to babies within the womb as persons, describing action and intent. In Luke 1:41-44, we read how the unborn baby John the Baptist "leaped for joy" while in his mother's womb as Mary approached. Additionally, Genesis 25:22-23 records of the unborn Jacob and Esau:

The children struggled together within her [Rebekah], and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger."

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 8:6-8; Hebrews 2:5-9.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6:25-26.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 9:6 (Cf. Leviticus 24:17).

As one scholar points out, “Before the point of birth they are thought of as distinct persons, and their future is being predicted.”<sup>4</sup> In Israel’s early history, God commanded that if someone physically harms a pregnant woman such that the child in the womb dies, that person is to be sentenced to capital punishment,<sup>5</sup> extending equal legal protection to both the mother and the unborn child. Notably, Israelite law did not specify any restriction on how far along in the pregnancy the woman was when the incident occurred. Many other passages also illustrate how God knows and forms us in the womb.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Christians throughout history have consistent agreement on the topic.<sup>7</sup>

### **So we see that...**

1. God places the highest value in creation on human life,
2. that human life from conception is to be protected, and
3. causing the death of an unborn baby in the Old Testament for the nation of Israel was cause for capital punishment, indicating that God sees an unborn baby at any stage of development as a human being. While the ceremonial and civil aspects of Old Testament law have been replaced under the New Covenant, the moral commands against taking human life continue to the end of time.

*Thus, according to Scripture, taking the life of an unborn child is considered murder and is truly a sinful, grievous act.*

### **What does the Supreme Court ruling say?**

The United States Supreme Court (SCOTUS) ruled on Friday June 24th in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*<sup>8</sup> that the United States Constitution does not contain a right to an abortion. *Roe v Wade*<sup>9</sup> (1973) and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*<sup>10</sup> (1992) are overturned.

The majority opinion clearly sets out that *Roe* was wrongly decided in 1973 and wrongly affirmed in its central holding in 1992 by *Casey*. The reasons for reversal are that the right to abortion is found nowhere in the constitution, nowhere in our history or traditions, and the right to abortion does not spring from a recognized other right in that an abortion destroys a life.

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<sup>4</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 159.

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 21:22-25.

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 139:13-16; Job 10:11-12; Isaiah 44:24; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:15;

<sup>7</sup> J. Ryan Davidson, “Abortion in Antiquity,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016). “Many of the early church fathers spoke out about the practice of abortion. John Chrysostom in the East and Jerome in the West both condemned it (Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 132–33). Other examples include: The Didache, one of the most prominent extrabiblical early church documents, explicitly forbids abortion: “Do not abort a fetus or kill a child that is born” (Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers*, 419); Basil declared that a woman who had induced an abortion should be tried for murder (Kapparis, *Abortion*, 48); Augustine extensively spoke against abortion, particularly as he wrestled with theological issues such as the existence of the soul (Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 133).” Sacrificing children was also a major issue in the ancient Near East (Jeremiah 32:35; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Psalm 106:35-38. See also Dr. Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (University of California Press), 12-13.

<sup>8</sup> 19-1392 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* (06/24/2022) (supremecourt.gov)

<sup>9</sup> *Roe v. Wade* :: 410 U.S. 113 (1973) :: Justia US Supreme Court Center

<sup>10</sup> *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey* :: 505 U.S. 833 (1992) :: Justia US Supreme Court Center

The Court then addresses this issue of stare decisis. *Stare decisis* is the legal principle that precedent (past rulings) inform how a court rules in current cases. This is an important legal principle, but as SCOTUS explains, bad case law from the past must and should be overruled. They cite numerous examples of bad cases that the Supreme Court has overturned. The Supreme Court states that Roe was wrong on the day it was decided and that it is the obligation of the current Court to fix the mistakes from the past.

The Court returned power to the people and their elected representatives in each state to legislate regarding abortion.

In Texas, the Texas Heartbeat Bill is in effect, banning abortions once a fetal heartbeat is detectable (around six weeks). Further, Texas in 2021 passed the Human Life Protection Act of 2021, which is a so-called “trigger law” in that it takes effect 30 days after Roe and Planned Parenthood v Casey are overruled. This law makes it a 1st degree felony to perform an abortion except in cases where the life of the mother is at risk. This law will currently take effect July 24th, 2022.

### ***Then how do we apply Biblical principles to modern day laws?***

Don't short-cut the process. Often, applying Biblical principles to modern circumstances is no easy task for several reasons: many of us often look for quick fixes in these situations and often pull verses out of context; we are flawed; our understanding and knowledge is limited; our biases can cloud our judgment, etc. We should match our emphasis with the Bible's. For example, don't whisper where the Bible shouts, and don't shout where the bible whispers or is silent.

For these reasons and more, we always encourage people to take the interpretive process seriously and carefully in order to arrive at sound conclusions. Remember to not skip reading the broader context of a verse. Don't ignore observations from the generations of Christians and Bible interpreters who have gone before you. Include other Christians who know their Bible in your process and discern together in community so you're not just hearing your own echo chamber. For that matter, find someone who disagrees with you in order to understand how they came to different conclusions. Lastly, consult with subject matter experts to help steer policies, and be mindful of actual outcomes of those policies, not just the intent behind their creation.

### ***How should Christians respond to this decision?***

We should start with the right attitude first, then consider action. Regardless of where you stand on the decision itself, all Christians are to season their words with grace,<sup>11</sup> embody patience and compassion,<sup>12</sup> and humbly seek unity for the sake of the gospel.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Colossians 4:6.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4-6.

<sup>13</sup> John 17:119-23; Ephesians 4:1-3.

Additionally, when a policy or law in our land seems to come into alignment with what God wants (ie. protecting human life in the womb, or at least allowing for further protections of the unborn),<sup>14</sup> it is proper for us to celebrate. Righteousness glorifies God, whether expressed personally through individuals or corporately through policies, laws, and the enforcement thereof.

In terms of action, again regardless of where you land on the decision itself, consider ways you can help contribute to caring for mothers and families experiencing unplanned pregnancies (either through volunteering or financially supporting a local ministry such as Parkridge), participate in foster care and adoption advocacy, or take a small step and commit to learning more about ways you can get involved. Don't neglect the importance of praying for those around you who may have had abortions, or who have suffered sexual trauma in their past — people for whom this topic is sensitive and personal, not sensational and political.

Aside from these ideas, remember there are some unhealthy behaviors common in our culture which we'd advise you to generally avoid; things like quarreling or the sort of vitriolic arguments we often see taking place on social media platforms. Proverbs 20:3 highlights and contrasts these saying, "It is to one's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel." Let us be a people who use good sense to be slow to anger<sup>15</sup> as we seek to be gracious ambassadors for Jesus in the midst of social turmoil around this topic. As Jesus summarized, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"(Jn. 13:35).

Lastly, join the conversation productively. Talk to people in your small group, to your church leaders, face-to-face as much as possible, and be open to hearing different opinions and experiences.

*If you are reading this and have had an abortion, or know someone who has, we want to encourage you: God's forgiveness and grace is extended to all those who have put their faith in Jesus<sup>16</sup>; grace that is personal and eternal.<sup>17</sup> Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, his righteousness becomes ours,<sup>18</sup> no sin has the final say in our lives, and you are deeply loved and cherished in Him.<sup>19</sup> We'd encourage you to talk to us or to someone who can help if this is a lingering hurt — there's support available, and we're not meant to struggle alone (Gal. 6:2).*

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<sup>14</sup> Jesus' followers are called to defend the weak and vulnerable and we will value what God values (Psalm 82:3-4; Isaiah 1:17; Psalm 68:5; 140:12; Proverbs 31:8-9).

<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 19:11.

<sup>16</sup> John 3:16-17; Romans 6:23; 1 John 1:8-9.

<sup>17</sup> Romans 8:1; Ephesians 1:7.

<sup>18</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21.

<sup>19</sup> Romans 5:8.