

Value of Human Life: Freedom of My Body

APOLOGETICS

Prevalence of Evil in the World

Evil has been a persistent adversary of human existence and personal worth since the beginning of time. The unfortunate story of Cain and Abel in the book of Genesis serves as a prime example of this. The narrative recounts how Cain, consumed by envy and resentment, murdered his own brother Abel in a fit of rage. This tragic event occurred due to several significant factors. “Now Cain talked with Abel, his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother and killed him.” (Genesis 4:8)

Firstly, the introduction of sin into the world played a pivotal role. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, explains how sin entered the world through the disobedience of one man, Adam. This original sin not only brought about physical death but also corrupted human nature, leading to a propensity for evil and violence: “therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” (Romans 5:12)

Secondly, the forgetting of God contributed to the prevalence of evil. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses warns the Israelites against forgetting the Lord and His commandments. He emphasizes that material prosperity and success should not lead them to neglect their spiritual responsibilities. When people turn away from God, they become more susceptible to the temptations of evil.

“beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end— then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’”
(Deuteronomy 8:10-17)

Lastly, the perpetuation of false morality further exacerbates the problem of evil. The prophet Isaiah condemns those who call evil good and good evil, blurring the lines between right and wrong: “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20) This moral relativism erodes the foundation of ethical behavior and makes it easier for evil to flourish.

Throughout history, we have witnessed countless examples of evil manifesting itself in various forms. From the brutal atrocities of war and genocide to the insidious spread of injustice and oppression, evil has left an indelible mark on human society. It is a constant reminder of our fallen nature and the need for redemption.

Is My Body My Own?

The inquiry of "Is My Body My Own?" has been a subject of philosophical, religious, and ethical consideration throughout history. In Christianity, St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 present a perspective on the relationship between the body and the spirit. He asserts that the body is not solely one's own possession but rather a sacred vessel entrusted by God. “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) This notion is rooted in the belief that human beings are created in the image of God and are thus imbued with divine purpose.

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St. Paul's assertion that "we are not our own" challenges the idea of absolute individual autonomy over the body. It suggests that our bodies are not merely physical entities but also have spiritual significance. This perspective aligns with the Christian understanding of the human person as a composite of body, soul, and spirit. St. John Chrysostom's interpretation of Paul's words further elucidates this concept. He emphasizes that St. Paul's intention is to caution against sinful behavior and improper desires of the mind. Chrysostom acknowledges that humans possess many inappropriate desires, but he asserts that we have the ability to restrain them through self-control and discipline. This emphasis on personal responsibility highlights the belief that humans are not mere puppets of predetermined fate but have the capacity to make choices that shape their lives.

“What is Paul trying to prove when he says that we are not our own? He wants to secure us against sin and against following the improper desires of the mind. We have many improper desires, but we must constrain them, and we can do so. If we could not, there would be no point in exhorting us like this. Paul does not say that we are under compulsion but that we have been bought—and bought with a great price, reminding us of the way in which our salvation was obtained.”

The notion of conception as presented in the Bible also contributes to the understanding of the body as a sacred vessel. The portrayal of the womb as a place where life already exists, rather than where it is gradually created, suggests that human life has inherent value and significance from the moment of

conception. “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;” (Psalm 139:13-14) This perspective aligns with the Christian belief that every human being is created in the image of God and is thus endowed with inherent dignity. Clearly, human life has intrinsic value from the moment of conception, reinforcing the sacred nature of the body.

Abortion

In the landmark case of *Roe v. Wade*, Justice Harry Blackmun famously stated, “We need not resolve the question of when life begins.” This statement has been interpreted in various ways, but it essentially reflects the view that the legal question of when a fetus is considered a person is separate from the biological or philosophical question of when life begins. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), over 1,200,000 abortions were performed in the United States in 1995. This statistic highlights the prevalence of abortion as a reproductive choice and the need for ongoing discussions about the legality and ethics of the procedure.

Scientific advancements have provided insights into the biological development of a fetus. The detection of a fetal heartbeat as early as eighteen days after fertilization underscores the earliest signs of life. Additionally, brain waves have been recorded by the fortieth day, indicating the onset of neurological activity. By eight weeks, all the major body systems are present, and by the eleventh week, they are fully functional. These biological milestones raise questions about the moral and legal status of a fetus. The presence of a heartbeat and brain waves strongly demonstrate the existence of life and, therefore, the fetus should clearly be afforded the same rights and protections as a newborn child. Somehow, others maintain that personhood begins at a later stage of development, such as viability outside the womb. Technological advances in neonatal care have also contributed to the debate. The survival of babies born prematurely, sometimes as early as twenty to twenty-four weeks, challenges further traditional notions of viability and raises questions about the appropriate limits of medical intervention.

From a scriptural standpoint, on several occasions, passages refer to conception in reference to the beginning of life of an individual. “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, ‘I have acquired a man from the Lord.’” (Genesis 4:1) Why would the Bible mention conception if it was not significant to life? Keep in mind, the Holy Bible speaks of conception 40 times. There must be a reason the inspired writers mention the moment where sperm and egg come together—since it's only at that instant that their chromosomes join to form the full complement of chromosomes that is capable of producing human life: “your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.” (Psalm 139:16)

God planned our lives before conception ever occurred. “And I will bless her and also give you a son, by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; ... then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” ... Then God said: “no, Sarah, your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.” (Genesis 17:16-18)

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God speaks about Isaac before he was even conceived: “before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5) Our Lord knows us each from the womb and has a plan for us, therefore it is not right for us to be involved in the ending of a life that God has spent time working on, (making it in his image:) “but when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace.” (Galatians 1:15)

The Lord watches over us even before our birth, indicating the importance of our lives in His eyes; “the Lord has called Me from the womb; from the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name...And now the Lord says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant.” (Isaiah 49:1,5)

Dr. Jerome Lejeune, (the father of modern day genetics,) even goes as far to say, from a scientific perspective, that “to accept the fact that after fertilization has taken place a new human has come into being is no longer a matter of taste or opinion...it is plain experimental evidence.”

Temple of God

The significance of our physical bodies is pivotal in the Christian understanding of human existence. The apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 reveal that our bodies are not merely shells but are actually temples, sacred dwellings for the Holy Spirit, who resides within us. This profound truth carries immense spiritual implications. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Recognizing our bodies as temples has profound consequences for our behavior and lifestyle. We are called to honor and glorify God through our physical bodies. This means caring for our bodies responsibly, avoiding behaviors that damage or defile them. Substance abuse, such as smoking and drinking, and self-destructive acts like suicide, are all considered sinful because they harm and disrespect the sacredness of our bodies.

The apostle Paul further emphasizes the principle of reaping what we sow in Galatians 6:7-8. He warns us that if we sow to our fleshly desires and impulses, we will reap corruption and decay. Our bodies, being the temples of the Holy Spirit, should not be used for sinful and destructive purposes. Instead, we are to sow to the Spirit, cultivating spiritual growth and holiness in our lives. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” (Galatians 6:7-8)

The ultimate goal of understanding the sacredness of our bodies is to live in harmony with God's purpose for us. By glorifying God in our bodies, we not only fulfill our spiritual calling but also

experience true freedom and fulfillment. Our bodies become instruments of righteousness and tools for serving others, as we seek to love God and love our neighbors with all our hearts.

Tattoos and Clothing

We read in the Holy Bible how God was precise in telling the people of Israel what to wear and why? "Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God." (Numbers 15:37-40)

Later we read in Zephaniah that the people forgot God's commandments and started adopting the fashion of the countries they lived in "And it shall be, in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel." (Zephaniah 1:8)

The choice of a strange apparel involves the choice to want to be as the nations of the world. St. Jerome adds insight regarding the topic at hand, saying, "the garment of the sons of the king and the apparel of princes which we receive in Baptism, is Christ, according to that, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ," and, "Put ye on bowels of mercy, goodness, humility, patience," and the rest."

Wherein, we are commanded to be clothed with the new man from heaven according to our Creator, and to "lay aside" the clothing of "the old man with his deeds." (Ephesians 4:22) If in our daily life we have always God before our eyes we will not have a problem deciding what to wear for we can just ask the question: If Lord Jesus Christ comes right now am I dressed appropriately to meet Him? Although we live in a secular society that forbids religion in the schools we find that some schools do have a dress code they pass out to the students at the beginning of each school year.

Most institutions have a dress code, how much more the church? "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." (1 Timothy 2:8-10)

St. Ambrose explains the danger of giving too much care and attention to worldly attributes, such as clothing, etc. as, "in our prayers, too, modesty is most pleasing and gains us much grace from our God.... A noble thing, then, is modesty, which, though giving up its rights, seizing on nothing for itself, laying claim to nothing and in some ways somewhat retiring within the sphere of its own powers, yet is rich in the sight of God, in whose sight no one is rich. Richness is modesty, for it is the portion of God. Paul bids that prayer be offered up with modesty and sobriety. He desires that this should be first, and, as it were, lead the way of prayers to come, so that the sinner's prayer may not be boastful but veiled, as it were, with the blush of shame. Indeed, it may merit a far greater degree of grace, in giving way to modesty at the remembrance of its fault."

These arguments can also be extended, to some extent, to tattoos and earrings. Tattoos and earrings were signs of slavery. Masters would mark their slaves with tattoos or earrings as a branding of ownership. God gave the Israelites these commandments after they had already left slavery signifying they now belong to nobody else but God. Symbolically this represented being freed from the slavery of sin, repenting, and returning to God. If the concept of tattoos comes down to intent, what is our reasoning? If to glorify God, let us engrave God in our hearts instead lest we be blamed for hypocrisy.

“You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:28) Tattoos were rites and ceremonies with which people expressed their sorrow at funerals. The heathen did so to pacify the infernal deities they dreamt about, and to render them favorable to their deceased friend. God commanded that this must not be imitated by His people. His people, whom the God of Israel had set apart for Himself must not receive the image and superscription of these worthless deities, and therefore must not make cuts or prints in their flesh. Such practices were signs of rebellion against God Himself.

“Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me,” (Isaiah 29:13) as Christians, our standards are established by God Himself. “Glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Corinthians 6:20)

Suicide and Euthanasia

The Church teaches that all life is sacred. Through His death on the Cross, the Lord Jesus Christ transformed suffering so that all people could draw closer to God and others through it. People who killed themselves prematurely are destroying the temple of God that was given to them while also rejecting the power and love of God. One who commits suicide have found themselves completely self-absorbed and deny the possibility that God can take care of their difficulties and transform them into something positive and meaningful.

A person who commits suicide has rejected life and God's love. The sixth commandment states, “Thou shalt not commit murder.” The Holy Bible strictly forbids murdering anyone, including the murder of oneself. While murder involves the ending of life of another body, suicide ends the life of both body and soul as it prevents the possibility of repentance which jeopardizes salvation, (blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.) This is contrary to the will and authority of God.

Judas, our Lord’s disciple, is a prime case study for suicide: “then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” And they said, “What is that to us? You see to it!” Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.” (Matthew 27:3-5)

St. John Chrysostom explains: “this was a charge both against him and against these others. Against Judas, not because he repented but because he did so late and slowly and became self-condemned. For that he gave himself up, he himself confessed. And it was a charge against the others, in that having the power to reverse the verdict, they did not repent. But observe when it is that Judas feels remorse. When his sin was completed and had been fully accomplished. The devil is like this. He does

not permit those that are inattentive to see the evil in due time, lest they might repent. At least when Jesus was saying so many things, Judas was not influenced. But when his offense was completed, then repentance came upon him. And then it was too late to be profitable. For to condemn it and to throw down the pieces of silver and not to regard the Jewish people were all acceptable things. But to hang himself, this again was unpardonable and a work of an evil spirit. For the devil led him out of his repentance too soon, so that he should reap no fruit from it, and carried him off by a most disgraceful death, and one manifest to all, having persuaded him to destroy himself.”

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St. Jerome also speaks on Judas, stating why his suicide was not the correct decision to make, following his original sin. “It profits nothing to do an act of penance which is incapable of correcting the sin. If a man sins against his brother in such a way that the wrong he committed can be amended, it is possible for him to be forgiven. If the consequences of his sin remain in force, however, in vain does he attempt to do penance. The psalmist applies this truth to our most miserable Judas when he says, “Let his prayer be counted as sin.” Not only was Judas unable to repair the damage of his sinful betrayal, but he even continued to compound the evil of that initial crime by committing suicide. Of such things the apostle speaks in his second epistle to the Corinthians: “Let not a brother be overwhelmed by greater sorrow.”



Review Questions

1. True or false? Abortions are allowed under certain circumstances in the church. (A: False)
2. True or false? Suicide is one of the worst sins that can be committed: (blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.) (A: True)
3. True or false? Committing suicide is murder. (A: True)
4. True or false? Abortions are not murder, but still principally wrong. (A: False)
5. True or false? Suicide breaks the sixth commandment of our Lord. (A: True)
6. As Christians, are we allowed to care excessively about clothing? (A: No, as the choice of a strange apparel involves the choice to want to be as the nations of the world.)
7. What verse represents the Orthodox opinion on tattoos? (A: Leviticus 19:28)
8. What does St. Jerome say regarding Judas taking his own life? (A: “Not only was Judas unable to repair the damage of his sinful betrayal, but he even continued to compound the evil of that initial crime by committing suicide.”)
9. True or false? God knows us only after we are born. (A: False)
10. True or false? Life begins at conception. (A: True)



Books & References

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