

Abortion

Abortion is back in the news due to a new and powerful move to legalise abortion in Queensland.

As Christians, we may be confronted by abortion in different ways: we may have had an abortion; we may have friends who have had an abortion; we may have never been 'up close' to an abortion but feel very concerned about the issue; we may find ourselves in conversations about abortion; we may find ourselves being asked to facilitate an abortion, particularly as health workers.

The PCQ Gospel in Society Team (GiST) seeks to help believers consider how to speak, act and pray on the issue of abortion with gospel driven hearts.

Below we provide:

1. Some insights into the factors driving the choice to abort a pregnancy
2. Some thoughts on abortion and the gospel
3. A summary of current political events
4. Suggestions for speaking, acting and praying about abortion
5. Recommendations for further reading

(A reminder about who we are - GiST seeks to equip believers in PCQ congregations to live faithfully for Jesus in a secular society, and engage in gospel-hearted apologetics that point to the great hope we have in Jesus.

We believe the gospel of Jesus Christ should shape all areas of life, and therefore our approach is to provide engaging, accurate and winsome material that is informed by Evangelical, Reformed, Christ-centred theology and includes both implications for believers and principles of engagement with those not yet believing.)

1. The Choice to Abort a Pregnancy

Vulnerability can be frightening, and pregnancy certainly makes people vulnerable. The mother, the father, perhaps the siblings, family and friends, all find themselves in some way stretched to make room for this new, wondrous but utterly dependent and demanding person. The vulnerability of pregnancy is magnified when the pregnancy is unplanned, unwanted or the baby shows signs of major disability.

For many women in particular, it can be terribly difficult to see such a pregnancy positively. It means a reorientation to a very different future to the one expected, and it is often a future devoid of the things valued and hoped for. She may face losing relationships, freedom, security, career, opportunities or youth. She may lose a sense of control over her life. She may fear that she will be pushed to the sidelines of life and even lose a sense of her

own worth. A significant number of women who seek abortions are mothers who feel they cannot cope with another child. A father may feel similarly as might grandparents and others close to the pregnancy.

You may notice in the news that the watchwords for legalising abortion are a woman's *autonomy* or *right to choose*. In other words, her ability to rule herself, control her own body and choose her own life story without interference from others.

For many women, though, the experience of autonomy is one of isolation and little to no support to continue the pregnancy. They may, indeed, be presented with very little choice by partners, families, health professionals, government authorities, educators or employers.

Others chose to have an abortion more readily without realising that it is rarely a 'quick fix' and they could well carry a heavy burden of grief and guilt for the rest of their lives.

The choice to abort is made because it seems to those most influentially involved that the survival or well-being of one person or family demands the life of another. Many accept that a foetus is person – but one who's life is only of relative value.

How do we start to address the many aspects of the issue of abortion? The first place we need to go to is the gospel of Jesus.

2. Abortion and the Gospel: Love, Guilt & Life Derailed

The gospels show that Jesus sees the truth about our hearts – truth which we often fail to see or admit ourselves. He speaks to those of us who are vulnerable, isolated, struggling, or who carry heavy burdens of guilt. He speaks to us as people responsible for the care of others. He confronts the desire for self rule we all have as well as our constant propensity for self righteousness.

The kingship of God's Son transforms the way we experience and understand love, guilt and life not turning out the way we wanted it to.

Love

Many people know Jesus' story about the 'Good Samaritan' (Luke 10v25-37). Jesus related this story to a lawyer who, upon being told by Jesus to love his neighbour, asked 'And who is my neighbour?' You certainly get the feeling that the lawyer wanted to set limits concerning who he was obliged to love.

In this story it was the 'unrighteous', enemy Samaritan who stopped to care for a stranger lying hurt (and vulnerable!) by the road. A priest and a Levite had already passed by, their planned paths taking priority. The heart of God for the helpless does not appear to beat within them.

A foetus can seem like an 'intimate stranger'. Even though a foetus is formed so intimately between, from and within us, he or she doesn't look much like us, often has no name or known gender, can't talk or hug us and can't contribute. A foetus is also utterly helpless and dependent.

Jesus shows that love in the Kingdom of God does not stop to ask whether a vulnerable person qualifies as my neighbor or what his/her value is relative to mine. Love is not abandoned if it derails our plans. The character of God, and that of his grace and Spirit-filled people, is to love, protect and nurture the helpless - who often surprise us.

Guilt

Secondly, Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan was designed to make the lawyer feel very uncomfortable. He is not the law keeper he thinks he is.

And it is designed to make us feel very uncomfortable too. For we must admit that, in our bid to self rule, we have failed to love those God puts in our way on countless occasions. Much worse, we fail to love and listen to the God who made and owns us - and who owns the people we have failed.

Jesus pulls no punches about the dreadful seriousness of living only for our self made plans for fulfilment, pushing aside those who interfere, most especially God. According to Jesus, we thoroughly deserve his judgment.

However, Jesus does not pass us by. His love for God's children is unflinching. He came precisely in order to show compassion on us as we stand helpless before God's judgment throne as well as vulnerable within a world of self rulers. After telling this story, Jesus continued on a determined journey towards the cross. In his death, he voluntarily paid the price for our self rule and lifted away our entire burden of guilt. That includes the guilt of abortion. And then Jesus rose from the dead so that we might enjoy the deepest joy and eternal rest under his rule.

Life Derailed

The Bible is clear that the life of every person is unconditionally valuable because each bears the image of God (Gen 9v6). Therefore, we are not at liberty to take the life of another for our own purposes.

Furthermore, in the Kingdom of God, personal value is not found in success, youth, freedom, ability or acceptance by others. Security cannot ultimately be found in savings, jobs, education, birth control or even in particular relationships. We can be considered unsuccessful and unimportant but nothing will shift the value God gives to his precious, adopted children through the death of Jesus.

It is only through God's transforming Spirit that we can entrust our lives to the loving rule of Jesus and love the strangers who may derail our plans.

In the Kingdom of God, we are not isolated choice-makers but interdependent. For a mother, father, family and community under the strain of an unplanned or complicated pregnancy, this means, first of all, deciding to embrace the vulnerable stranger in the womb. A foetus, just like each of us, is worthy of love simply because he or she has been made by God, no matter how much that love will demand of us. Indeed, we were all foetuses once, protected and known by God before we knew anyone else (Psalm 139v13-16).

More than that, God gives enormous importance – and rich, even unexpected blessing - to the task of loving and nurturing a child, even in a fallen world.

As people loved and enabled by Jesus, we should strive to nurture communities who leave no one in isolation; who thoughtfully and generously support vulnerable people who find themselves in radically changed circumstances; who value children; who support and honour parenthood; and who embrace those with disabilities, no matter how short and difficult their earthly lives.

As we do these things, we also talk about our Lord who, in his power, is able to work meaningfully and lovingly in every life derailment, deep pain and dire circumstance for the eternal good of those who love him.

3. Summary of Current Political Events

In May this year, Cairns Independent MP Rob Pyne introduced a private member's bill to decriminalise abortion, bringing Queensland law broadly into line with Victoria, WA, Tasmania and the ACT.

(<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-committees/committees/HCDSDVPC/inquiries/current-inquiries/AbortionLR-WRC-AB2016>)

Abortion is currently illegal in Queensland except if a doctor considers that continuing a pregnancy poses a threat to the mother's life, mental or physical health. Under this exemption, over 10 000 abortions are legally carried out in Queensland each year. Approximately 80 000 abortions occur in Australia every year. These are mainly carried out by specialists in private health facilities and are partly covered by Medicare. Pre and post abortion counselling is not mandatory.

Rob Pyne is seeking to model Queensland abortion law on that of Victoria. Two features of Victorian abortion law that have caused particular controversy are:

- Abortions can be carried out after 24 weeks gestation with the approval of two medical practitioners. Pyne has not suggested a gestational cut-off point in his QLD bill but has left this open for negotiation.
- Doctors in Victoria have a right of conscientious objection but *must* refer the woman to another doctor who has no such objections. Depending on the content of proposed legislation in QLD, doctors, nurses and pharmacists could risk a range of consequences, including deregistration, should they refuse to participate in or refer a woman for an abortion.

The bill has recently been reviewed by a parliamentary committee.

Both the Labor and Liberal National Parties have said that they will allow their members a conscience vote when the issue is soon brought before parliament.

4. Suggestions for Speaking and Acting on Abortion

- **Pray** - the hearts and minds of all authorities, decision-makers, doctors and families are in God's hands (1 Tim 2v1-2). Prayer is the most effective action we can take on abortion.

Ask our Heavenly Father to:

- draw self ruling sinners to himself through Jesus
- show mercy to those who carry the guilt of abortion
- pour his saving mercy and provision on women considering abortion and turn them towards himself
- restrain evil in our community and protect the unborn
- help his children to shine in our community as those who trust him in the midst of derailed plans and seek help the helpless and isolated.
- give us opportunities to speak the gospel to many through this issue.
- give Christian politicians, health workers and other decision makers courage and wisdom to speak and act on abortion with gospel-driven hearts

- **Speak the Gospel in Love** – *All those we speak to, whether friends or members of parliament, whether pro- or anti-abortion, need to know the saving news of Jesus.* Statistics indicate that it is very likely that any one person we speak to will have had an 'up-close' experience of abortion. Every conversation we have about abortion, whether formally or informally, is an opportunity to show how gospel love shapes our approach to the very real pain of this issue. If our words sound religious or morally convincing but don't point people to the gospel of Jesus, they are not Christian.

- **Act in Love** – consider what opportunities you may have to welcome, care and advocate for vulnerable friends and strangers, from the personal to the policy level: children, mothers; fathers; single parents; families small and large; the disabled; women with unexpected pregnancies. Give careful consideration to what contraceptives and reproductive technology you use. Consider supporting adoption (including embryo adoption) and fostering.

Consider ways to do these things together as a church.

- **Listen and Ask Questions** – resist oversimplifying or caricaturing the pro-abortion stance. Know that God's Word is capacious enough to address complex people and questions and that His Spirit works deeply through His Word.

- **Talk to Doctors, Nurses and Pharmacists in your Church** – ask them whether they have considered how they may be affected by proposed legislation. Help them to think through how they may interact with colleagues, patients and employers on the issue and pray with them.
- **Write to your Local State MP** – this is a critical time to encourage your local State MP to vote against decriminalizing abortion. The best way to do this is to write or to arrange to meet with your MP in person.

There are many other ways to reach MPs and speak into the public square such as participating in rallies, writing letters to the newspaper, signing petitions and taking part in lobby groups. When deciding how you will act, always consider what potential your involvement may have for opening or closing the door to the gospel.

- Here is a sample letter you can modify to send to your local MP. (<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/members/current/list>) :

Dear

Re: Abortion Law Reform (Woman's Right to Choose) Amendment Bill 2016 and Inquiry into laws governing termination of pregnancy in Queensland

I sincerely thank you for your service of our community during your time in parliament. As a Christian, I pray for you as you undertake this very important and often difficult role, and I thank God for the work that you do.

I also ask you to vote against the Abortion Law Reform Amendment Bill when it comes before parliament later this year.

I am concerned about the care and protection of the vulnerable in our community.

I know that abortion involves deeply complex, difficult and personal decisions. As a Christian, it is clear to me that we grapple with these issues in a world gone wrong, where we all, including myself, are responsible for failing to live out God's good design for loving relationships.

My concern is driven by the mercy, kindness and protection I have so abundantly received through Jesus' death and resurrection. Since our community is part of God's treasured creation, I desire to see his mercy, kindness and protection extended to all others with justice.

1. *Firstly, I ask you vote against this Bill in order to protect women.*

Women with an unwanted pregnancy or a child with major disabilities diagnosed in utero are in a very vulnerable position. They so often face enormous grief, loss of control over their future, perhaps the loss of relationships, financial security, opportunities or employment.

Many women in this situation therefore feel a strong expectation to abort. Their choice is often very constrained and they may receive little help to work out life should they keep their baby.

There is also strong evidence of significant and extensive psychological harm associated with abortion.

The Bill proposes no regulation of abortion on demand, and does not recognize the significance of the decision for women or the harm inherent in abortion. It does not provide for the support of women who choose to continue their pregnancies in difficult circumstances. It also includes no safeguards to ensure that women are making a fully informed choice such as counselling independent of abortion providers and alternatives to abortion.

I would love to see, and would fully support, more services to offer help to vulnerable women and families faced with unplanned pregnancy.

2. *Secondly, I ask you to vote against this Bill in order to protect children.*

Abortion involves the lives of two people. The foetus is a vulnerable person with no voice who deserves the care and protection of the law and every opportunity to live and be nurtured, regardless of stage of development, gender, background or disability status.

3. *Thirdly, I ask you to vote against this Bill in order to protect doctors, nurses and pharmacists.*

The Bill provides inadequate protections for medical professionals who have a conscientious objection to performing abortions.

Thank you very much for considering my letter as one of your constituents. I do continue to honour and pray for you.

Yours Sincerely

Your Name

5. Recommendations for Further Reading

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made by Megan Best (Matthias Media)

- This provides very useful information and biblical reflections for both general readers and health professionals on abortion, contraception, reproductive technology and other related issues.

- It also considers abortion in the context of rape and when the mother's life is threatened by her pregnancy.

Matters of Life and Death: Human Dilemmas in Light of the Christian Faith by John Wyatt (IVP)

The Gospel Coalition Websites contain biblical reflections on abortion:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org>

<https://australia.thegospelcoalition.org/>

The Priceless Life Centre at Woolloongabba (<http://www.priceless.org.au/>) can offer suggestions on helping women considering abortion or suffering post-abortion grief. They also have a helpline 1800 090 777.

Women's Forum Australia has published some useful arguments against the current Abortion Law Reform Amendment Bill –

(http://www.abortionrethink.org/images/Write_to_your_MP_Suggestions_10_points.pdf)