

Guidelines on Abortion

Many contemporary societies have faced conflict over the morality of abortion.* Such conflict also has affected large numbers within Christianity who want to accept responsibility for the protection of prenatal human life while also preserving the personal liberty of women. The need for guidelines has become evident, as the Church attempts to follow scripture, and to provide moral guidance while respecting individual conscience. Seventh-day Adventists want to relate to the question of abortion in ways that reveal faith in God as the Creator and Sustainer of all life and in ways that reflect Christian responsibility and freedom. Though honest differences on the question of abortion exist among Seventh-day Adventists, the following represents an attempt to provide guidelines on a number of principles and issues. The guidelines are based on broad biblical principles that are presented for study at the end of the document.**

Prenatal human life is a magnificent gift of God. God's ideal for human beings affirms the sanctity of human life, in God's image, and requires respect for prenatal life. However, decisions about life must be made in the context of a fallen world. Abortion is never an action of little moral consequence. Thus prenatal life must not be thoughtlessly destroyed. Abortion should be performed only for the most serious reasons.

Abortion is one of the tragic dilemmas of human fallenness. The Church should offer gracious support to those who personally face the decision concerning an abortion. Attitudes of condemnation are inappropriate in those who have accepted the gospel. Christians are commissioned to become a loving, caring community of faith that assists those in crisis as alternatives are considered.

In practical, tangible ways the Church as a supportive community should express its commitment to the value of human life. These ways should include:

Strengthening family relationships

Educating both genders concerning Christian principles of human sexuality
Emphasizing responsibility of both male and female for family planning
Calling both to be responsible for the consequences of behaviors that are inconsistent with Christian principles

Creating a safe climate for ongoing discussion of the moral questions associated with abortion

Offering support and assistance to women who choose to complete crisis pregnancies

Encouraging and assisting fathers to participate responsibly in the parenting of their children. The Church also should commit itself to assist in alleviating the unfortunate social, economic, and psychological factors that may lead to abortion and to care redemptively for those suffering the consequences of individual decisions on this issue.

The Church does not serve as conscience for individuals; however, it should provide moral guidance. Abortions for reasons of birth control, gender selection, or convenience are not condoned by the Church. Women, at times however, may face exceptional circumstances that present serious moral or medical dilemmas, such as significant threats to the pregnant woman's life, serious jeopardy to her health, severe congenital defects carefully diagnosed in the fetus, and pregnancy resulting from rape or incest. The final decision whether to terminate the pregnancy or not should be made by the pregnant woman after appropriate consultation. She should be aided in her decision by accurate information, biblical principles, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, these decisions are best made within the context of healthy family relationships.

Christians acknowledge as first and foremost their accountability to God. They seek balance between the exercise of individual liberty and their accountability to the faith community and the larger society and its laws. They make their choices according to scripture and the laws of God rather than the norms of society. Therefore, any attempts to coerce women either to remain pregnant or to terminate pregnancy should be rejected as infringements of personal freedom.

Church institutions should be provided with guidelines for developing their own institutional policies in harmony with this statement. Persons having a religious or ethical objection to abortion should not be required to participate in the performance of abortions.

Church members should be encouraged to participate in the ongoing consideration of their moral responsibilities with regard to abortion in light of the teaching of scripture.

*Abortion, as understood in these guidelines, is defined as any action aimed at the termination of a pregnancy already established. This is distinguished from contraception, which is intended to prevent a pregnancy. The focus of the document is on abortion.

**The fundamental perspective of these guidelines is taken from a broad study of scripture as shown in the "Principles for a Christian View of Human Life".

These guidelines were approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council session in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 12, 1992.

Principles for a Christian View of Life

"Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3, NIV). In Christ is the promise of eternal life; but since human life is mortal, humans are confronted with difficult issues regarding life and death. The following principles refer to the whole person (body, soul, and spirit), an indivisible whole (Genesis 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Life: Our valuable gift from God

1. God is the Source, Giver, and Sustainer of all life (Acts 17:25,28; Job 33:4; Genesis 1:30, 2:7; Psalm 36:9; John 1:3,4).
2. Human life has unique value because human beings, though fallen, are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; Romans 3:23; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 3:2; John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18,19).
3. God values human life not on the basis of human accomplishments or contributions but because we are God's creation and the object of His redeeming love (Romans 5:6,8; Ephesians 2:2-6; 1 Timothy 1:15; Titus 3:4,5; Matthew 5:43-48; Ephesians 2:4-9; John 1:3, 10:10).

Life: Our response to God's gift

4. Valuable as it is, human life is not the only or ultimate concern. Self-sacrifice in devotion to God and His principles may take precedence over life itself (Revelation 12:11; 1 Corinthians 13).
5. God calls for the protection of human life and holds humanity accountable for its destruction (Exodus 20:13; Revelation 21:8; Exodus 23:7; Deuteronomy 24:16; Proverbs 6:16,17; Jeremiah 7:3-34; Micah 6:7; Genesis 9:5,6).
6. God is especially concerned for the protection of the weak, the defenseless, and the oppressed (Psalm 82:3,4; James 1:27; Micah 6:8; Acts 20:35; Proverbs 24:11,12; Luke 1:52-54).
7. Christian love (agape) is the costly dedication of our lives to enhancing the lives of others. Love also respects personal dignity and does not condone the oppression of one person to support the abusive behaviour of another (Matthew 16:21; Philippians 2:1-11; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:8-11; Matthew 22:39; John 18:22,23; John 13:34).
8. The believing community is called to demonstrate Christian love in tangible, practical, and substantive ways. God calls us to restore gently the broken (Galatians 6:1,2; 1 John 3:17,18; Matthew 1:23; Philippians 2:1-11; John 8:2-11; Romans 8:1-14; Matthew 7:1,2, 12:20; Isaiah 40:42, 62:2-4).

Life: Our right and responsibility to decide

9. God gives humanity the freedom of choice, even if it leads to abuse and tragic consequences. His unwillingness to coerce human obedience necessitated the sacrifice of His Son. He requires us to use His gifts in accordance with His will and ultimately will judge their misuse (Deuteronomy 30:19,20; Genesis 3; 1 Peter 2:24; Romans 3:5,6, 6:1,2; Galatians 5:13).

10. God calls each of us individually to moral decision making and to search the scriptures for the biblical principles underlying such choices (John 5:39; Acts 17:11; 1 Peter 2:9; Romans 7:13-25).

11. Decisions about human life from its beginning to its end are best made within the context of healthy family relationships with the support of the faith community (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 5,6).

12. Human decisions should always be centred in seeking the will of God (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 6:6; Luke 22:42).

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