



Abortion in God's family

Can you imagine your seventeen-year-old daughter having an abortion? Or the girl who sits behind you in Grade Twelve homeroom? This may or may not come as a shock, but it is happening among our Christian friends and in our Reformed families. The sad and distressing reality is: abortion is happening right in God's family.

Secrecy

Of course, this has been a well-kept secret – at least from parents and those who "must never know." And yet there is talk. The burden of guilt is felt and a friend is told. Or a counselor. I've encountered it personally. Others who have contact with young Reformed sisters in different areas of the country have confirmed to me that more than a few of our very own young ladies have visited an abortion clinic to get rid of an unwanted pregnancy.

Why?

So why is this happening? Surely our young people know it is wrong to murder their unborn child? We teach this at home, school, and church. We write letters to our politicians and newspapers. We take our teens to the March for Life walks. And yet, some who publicly parade with placards on Parliament Hill one month, find themselves the next month quietly visiting an abortion clinic for a consultation. What is going through their minds?

Motives

We need to pay attention to their motivation. It's true for all of us that our actions flow out of our desires. When facing temptation, each of us will decide to do what we most want to do at that moment. It's just like the decision some make to have sex before marriage. They know God is against it. They likely have seen certain embarrassing results of it in the lives of other church people, they know what can happen, but in that moment of decision the desire for pleasure (theirs, that of their partner, or both) exceeds the desire to please God. And the potential consequences are irrationally pushed out of their mind thinking, "That won't happen to me!"

If we wish to have our teens and young adults keep their bodies sexually pure, we need to convince them that the greatest pleasure ultimately comes from seeking to please God in every decision. Just like with Eve, reaching for the forbidden fruit comes from the conviction that doing so will result in a better outcome – usually some form of self-pleasure. Yet we know what misery followed Eve's decision – and every such decision since! But if we and our children understand that God will freely give us pleasure and fulfillment as a gift so long as we give our heart to him in love and obedience, that will be the strongest defence against sexual temptation.

Fear

When it comes to the decision to abort, it's not pleasure which motivates but most often fear. Consider the predicament one of our seventeen-year-old girls might be in when she learns she is pregnant. All her life her parents have taught her that pre-marital sex is a sin. The feeling of her personal shame is high. She realizes all at once that if this comes out in the open, her parents and family will carry the shame as well – and they will be upset! Perhaps her father is an elder – what a public embarrassment for him! She anticipates an angry response.

She also worries greatly whether she will be able to raise this child on her own, whether she will be capable as a mother. The more she thinks about the future of her child, the more anxious she becomes: will he be labelled all his life? Maybe my child will be picked on and bullied. As an unwed mother, she thinks her reputation will follow her all her life and her child will have to always live with a social stigma too. The window of opportunity to decide is short (soon she'll start to show!) – and she concludes: *I can't do it! I won't do it!*

Accessibility

When these fears are at their height, a young pregnant woman searches in desperation for a solution — and she finds a straight-forward one via the Internet at the abortion clinic. She can't talk to her parents and she dare not talk to her friends or even the child's father — no one must know! Fear drives her to be anonymous and to seek a quick remedy — and both are freely offered at the local abortion clinic. Over the last thirty years, these clinics have not only sprung up in many Canadian communities but they are prominently advertised and their costs are covered by the government. Abortion is promoted as a socially acceptable, "easy," and even "safe" solution to the "problem" of an unwanted pregnancy.

Imagine being in the shoes of such a young lady. You only have yourself to reason with, or possibly the people at the clinic who favour abortion. Many thoughts go through your mind: *"It's not that different from using birth-control is it? If only I'd been smarter, I wouldn't have gotten pregnant — one visit to the clinic and my problem is over! I've only been pregnant three weeks — it's not really a baby in there yet, is it? Having an abortion this early is not murder — it's just a group of cells! It's just a miscarriage that's been organized, that's all. God won't mind because he knows it was all a mistake and I'm too young to be a mother."* So many emotions, so many thoughts (many not rational), but in the end the immaturity of youth, a frantic need for a quick and quiet solution, and the lack of a supportive Christian sounding board makes the choice to abort the most attractive at that moment. What she wants most at that moment is to avoid the troubles of admitting her sin — and the die is cast.

Climate change

That is what we as church community and as families must change — the forceful pressures which make our daughters feel trapped in the consequences of their actions. Let me be crystal clear: we must not dumb-down or minimize the sin of pre-marital sex. It remains contrary to God's will. But there is forgiveness in the blood of Christ for all who repent — forgiveness and reconciliation! It's maddening to think that some of our young people would rather murder their unborn children (with all of the dire consequences) than seek the help of their parents, office bearers, or extended church family!

We need to adjust our social climate so that conditions favour dealing with the sexual sin (and resulting pregnancy) in a spirit of Christ-like love, forgiveness, and restoration rather than hiding it. And with forgiveness needs to come support. When a church member falls into sin, we are called to restore him gently, remembering how prone we are to fall ourselves (Galatians 6:1). Paul even says that we are to *"carry each other's burdens"* in this way. From our attitudes to our actions, our calling is to surround every repentant sinner with grace-filled care, remembering that this is precisely how our Father in heaven deals with us (Luke 15:20-32).

Test yourself

Does your daughter (and your son too!) know if she falls into sexual sin, she can talk to you about it without you having a fit of anger? Does she believe the consequences of admitting her sexual sin to you as mother or father would be worse than not to do so? Has it been stressed so much in your home that (in her mind at least) it is a "greater sin" to bring shame on the family name than it is to quietly snuff out the life of the unknown unborn?

Have previous cases in the church been handled roughly or insensitively by the consistory, bringing unnecessary difficulty upon a repentant woman or couple? Has total silence of the consistory contributed to damaging rumours? Do congregants expect a public shaming or is there

a track record of gentle, public restoration in the case of sins which become public? In short, does the young lady have reason to fear reaction to her news in her family or church?

New emphasis

If there is any doubt about the answers to these questions, we need to sound a new note in our homes and congregations. Or rather, we need to sound an old note more clearly and consistently across the board, the note of grace. To be sure, our children need to grow up knowing right from wrong and the consequences of sin, but just as well, they need to know forgiveness and renewal in the blood and Spirit of Christ. Grace never glosses over sin or dismisses it but rather grace – God's work of salvation in Christ – pays the high cost of our sin and goes to work transforming our hearts and lives.

The fears of our young adult children are often times our fears as parents passed down to them – the fear of man. As parents, we fear a bad reputation and embarrassment and will do virtually anything to protect ourselves. We don't want anyone thinking poorly of us and so we let people see only our "good" side, our strong features. We never show our faults or at least we minimize them as much as possible.

We carry on this same pattern with our children. They must never see our weaknesses or sins. If you've never said to your kids, "Dad was wrong and I'm sorry" or "Mom sinned against you earlier today – can you forgive me," then chances are you've never heard them say that to you voluntarily, from the heart. And if they don't feel free to admit their more common sins knowing they will find a kind and forgiving heart, what makes you think they will come to you when the issue is weightier like a pre-marital pregnancy?

Transparency

What we need is more transparency and humility as parents and also as office bearers. We need to be less afraid of man and instead develop a healthier fear of God. We ministers and elders along with fathers and mothers need to be more open about our mistakes and sins – and what we do about them. We all know each person is a sinner. We all know that Christians are people who struggle against sin and daily need forgiveness. Yet we can't seem to let this show to our neighbour! The example of the Apostle Paul is just the opposite (1 Timothy 1:15, 16)!

I'm not saying we need to hang out all our dirty laundry. But let's not pretend we don't have any either! Let's live in the reality that all our dirty laundry is washed whiter than snow in the blood of the Lamb – and let's encourage our family and friends to live this way too! Our past sins and mistakes can be lessons for another's benefit, as the Bible demonstrates in more than one place.

Soft landing

Let's be real and honest with one another, encouraging the confession of sin and sincere repentance. In our dealings with our children and teens, with our parishioners and fellow congregants, let us do what we can to let them know there is a soft landing in our home and church for broken sinners looking for forgiveness. As grace abounds, fear will melt away – also for those who have had an abortion.

As much as the unlawful killing of our pre-born family and church members hurts us all and is an offense to God, yet the blood and Spirit of our Saviour are there to wash also this sin away. It's a great burden for a conscience to bear alone but let us offer help and healing by households and churches filled with compassion. Let's start the conversation about grace with our sons and daughters today – and let's keep it the centrepiece of our relationships all throughout God's family.

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