

OpenTheo

Does Preventing a Woman's Access to Abortion Violate Her Religious Freedom?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether preventing a woman's access to abortion violates her religious freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment, whether the fact that God doesn't have parts now applies only to two persons of the Trinity, and what it means to seek the presence of God.

- * How should I respond to a Jewish person who claims that preventing her access to abortion in cases where her mental or physical health would be at risk is a violation of her religious freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment?
- * If God does not have parts, does the fact that Jesus is now forever incarnated in a glorified body mean that this aspect of theology proper now applies only to the other two persons of the Trinity?
- * What does it mean to seek the presence of God?

Transcript

[Music] [Bell] Welcome. You're listening to the #STRask podcast from Stand to Reason. I'm Amy Hall, and with me is Greg Koukl.

Hello there, Amos. Hello, Greg. Here's a question from Amber.

How should we respond to a Jewish person who claims that preventing their access to abortion in cases where the mental or physical health of the mother is at risk is a violation of their religious freedom and therefore a violation of the First Amendment? People would see me. They'd see me like, huh? How is keeping a person from killing their unborn child a violation of their religious freedom? That's my question. I don't understand.

Unless you have a religious view that it's okay to kill unborn human beings, okay? And what about if you had a religious view that it's okay to kill infants? Some people do. All

right, that's part of cultic, satanic, ritual religion, apparently. But just because you call a deeply immoral act religious doesn't mean it's protected by the First Amendment.

That has never been the case. That has never been the case. In fact, and you'd be more versed on this than I would be, but as I recall, the state of Utah was only allowed to be a state because the Mormon Church recanted their religious view of plural marriage.

Otherwise, they were not going to be allowed to be in the union. And when they recanted that with a convenient revelation, then that's the way I take it at least, then they were allowed to be. So wait a minute, that's their religious view.

Yeah, and it's not a good one. There are limits even to that. The First Amendment is not without limit in terms of religious freedom.

What that was is the Church is not to establish a religious religion. I mean, when you look at the details of the First Amendment, but regardless, even religious liberties broadly construed, do not entail the liberty to do significant harm to another human being. So I don't know why this is, I don't even know how the First Amendment applies to this issue.

Well, it seems to me that I agree, Greg, I don't think anyone having access to abortion is a religious issue. There's no religion, at least in this country, where there's an obligation to have access to abortion. Like, that's just not a religious thing.

I think what they probably mean is maybe my beliefs, my conscience. And I'm sympathetic to the idea that people shouldn't be made to go against their conscience. Surely, even if you're not religious, I don't think under the First Amendment that an atheist should be made to do something against his conscience.

Say something against his conscience, do something for the most part, unless it's preventing them from killing somebody, of course. So I'm sympathetic to the idea that your conscience falls under the First Amendment. But to say that- How is it a conscience issue to have the- you're going there, I guess? Yeah, yeah.

But to say that you need access to killing your unborn child as a matter of conscience seems very odd to me. Like, I can see saying you can- well, let's say you're a nurse and you don't want to be made to take part in an abortion. That I can understand, even for an atheist who thinks it's wrong to kill unborn children, even if it's- they're not religious at all, I think that's wrong.

And no one should be made to do things against their conscience or say things against their conscience. But to say that you have to have access to abortion, that would make it sound like that is some sort of a sacrament in your religion. Or a natural right, a divinely ordained right of some sort.

Right, which is just not part of Judaism. Like, is it- is it- It's not part of anything. It

doesn't- this is one of those things that don't make sense.

If you don't give me the right to kill my child, then it's a violation of my conscience because my religious liberty gives me the right to kill my unborn child. I- I mean, that's the- that's as sanitized, I think as it can get. It doesn't really make sense.

I think what this comes down to is people are trying to counter the idea that they think Christians are against abortion for religious reasons. Well, to- to the extent that we're against abortion because we're against killing innocent people, yes, that's part of our religion. We don't kill innocent people.

But it's not only part of religion, this idea that we don't kill innocent people. This is something- it's a shared value in our nation that we don't kill innocent people. But I think people are very confused about why Christians are against abortion in the first place.

So what they want to do is say, well, you're against abortion because of religion. So I'm for abortion because of religion. Now what do we do? How do we- That's right.

And the way you decide between them is you look at what we're talking about. What is abortion? Yeah, that's right. It treats abortion like a morally neutral item that only has value because someone either has a religious conviction for it or a religious conviction against it.

And this is why, characteristically, it's not a reason. Only until recently, we have never used the Bible or any kind of religious argument to deal with abortion because there's no need to do that to demonstrate that it's immoral. The moral logic of the pro-life view is very simple.

Although it seems like a lot of people don't grasp it or don't employ it in circumstances like this. And here's the way it goes. It's wrong to take the life of an innocent human being.

Two, abortion takes the life of an innocent human being. Therefore abortion is wrong. Now you can add- you can add qualifiers.

It's wrong to take the life of an innocent human being for the reasons that people give for having an abortion, but etc. etc. But this is the basic point.

And so now it turns out, and I have pointed this out, that you can make an argument against abortion from the New Testament, Luke chapter 1. And I've been doing that recently, but only with Christians who acknowledge the Bible is an authority in their lives. And I showed- look at this is from God's perspective that unborn John the Baptist is John the Baptist that unborn Jesus, the Zygote is Jesus, the Lord according to Elizabeth John's mother. So we can make that case, but that isn't- this is why your point is so important.

We are not looking at a parochial religious belief on either side. We are just setting religion aside and we're just looking at what's right, what is obviously right and wrong. Is it okay to annihilate another human being for the reasons people give for an abortion? Whatever they happen to be.

And by the way, that- even the more extreme cases which we can be sensitive to, yet it's still like rape or incest or whatever. It- a 14-year- old, a 13-year-old that's pregnant. All right.

Well, that's so traumatic for them. It's more traumatic for the child who gets killed. Yes, it's traumatic.

There's no good ending for this. Largely, you know, there may be a redemptive element with the child being born. I've seen that first hand.

But there- there's no- there's no- you know, this is a bad situation. And what abortion does is it just aggravates the moral harm that's being done to human beings by taking the life of the one that's- that's most innocent. I guess in the case of rape, you could say the- the- the mom is just as innocent.

Okay, I'll grant that. But this- but the mom isn't defenseless and the child is defenseless. And I'm not implying anything about her or not defending herself.

I'm just saying that it's a- an adult and a child, an unborn child, are two different vulnerabilities. Okay? And it's obvious. And, uh, and so if there's any question at all, let's say, there shouldn't be any question at all about the vulnerability of the unborn child and that we should be protecting the unborn child from this kind of harm.

And nothing is a justification for taking this life, except when the mother's life is genuinely at risk and then it's a choice between one life or another. Okay? Or one life and no life sometimes. Yeah, no.

Yeah, that's right. One life or the other or- or no lives. You- you- you're gonna save some or both will die.

That's exactly right. And that's a moral- that's a- that is an equation, a moral equation that has to be- a decision that has to be made based on the greatest good. And, uh, anyway, so that's- that's a little more complicated, but the point is, um, characteristically, that's not what we're facing here with abortion.

And, um, and no matter what difficulty that obtains for the- for the mother in this case, it is not morally equivalent to the difficulty that obtains for the child in the case of abortion. There's no comparison. So the way I think I would go about this, Amber, is the first thing I would do is try to- maybe just ask her, do you- why do you think I'm against abortion? Why do you think people are against abortion? That's a great question.

And then hear her answer. And then you can have a conversation about why you're against abortion. And where I think this will go, the first place this will go is, uh, it's not a human being.

So at that point, now you can argue from science when a human being begins to exist, begins to grow, and now the argument will turn to, but they're not a valuable human being. And then you can hear- hear- hear- hear- you can even just appeal to the common value we have in this country of universal human rights. Very important, right? Why would you deny the rights to a human being? And when does that ever worked out well for a particular- the right to life in particular here? Yeah.

And of course we have the Sled Test, and you can say, well, is it a moral difference for a human being to be smaller than other human beings, or to be dependent on other human beings, or to be in a different environment, or to be in a different level of development? Those are not moral categories that should disqualify a human being from any sort of- of rights. So there are ways to take it from there, but- and then you can point out, well, you can see the only thing religious here, and it's not only religious, is that I value human beings, and I think they're intrinsically valuable. Now, there are a lot of secular people who believe that too, and maybe they don't have grounding for that necessarily, and I think the fights for that truth is going to get more difficult in the future, but for now, I think most people want to say that they agree with the value of human beings.

So you can have a whole conversation and say, look, so this isn't a- this isn't a religious question, though most people think it is. And hopefully, at least you can help her to understand, maybe she won't drop this objection, but I think the objection stems from a misunderstanding of our arguments. You know, it just occurred to me too, the question that could be asked to really accentuate this point you're making, Amy, is that do you think an atheist could be pro-life? Yeah, Bernard Nathans famously, he's no longer an atheist, but he might not even be alive, but he was the director of the National Abortion Rights Action League.

You know, and ran one of the biggest abortion clinics in the country in the state of New York, and he- an atheist became pro-life. They're whole organizations that are secular pro-life organizations. So that if an atheist could be pro-life, then the question would be what are the reasons that an atheist would give to be pro-life? And the reasons cannot be religious, obviously, they're going to be secular.

And of course, this is the way we make our case all the time, but because this- the intuition, a natural intuition that we all have, the human beings are special, and that they have natural rights, and especially in foremost, the right to life, which means the right not to be killed. That's it. It's amazing to me how many people are against capital punishment, but are for abortion.

It's so weird. Talk about inconsistency. And of course, people say the opposite way, but of course, the difference between guilty and innocent is huge.

And of course, this is why I make the point. We're talking about innocent human being here. Right.

All right, let's go into a question from Jim. If Orthodox Christianity holds that God does not have parts, how do we reconcile that with the fact that Jesus is now forever incarnated in a glorified body? Does this aspect of theology proper now apply only to the other two members of the Trinity? Well, yeah, this is a difficult question. Does the idea that they don't have parts only apply to the other two? Yeah, the idea that God is simple and not simple-minded, but simple that he doesn't have parts.

And so he's not complicated in a certain fashion and ontologically complicated. I think this is a hard-it's a sophisticated question because it's a sophisticated issue that I don't know. I'm adequate to traffic in very deeply.

And I think that the simplicity of God is something that's a little bit theologically controversial. It depends on who you talk to. Or maybe it's the impassibility of God, but that's something different.

Impassibility is God doesn't have changing emotions. The simplicity of God may not be in question. However, there's not a problem here.

I know enough to know there's not a problem because nothing about God changes ontologically. God's being doesn't change the incarnation. As we've mentioned before, God doesn't become a human being who has parts.

God takes on a human nature. And so the nature of God is not changed. But there's added to the nature of God in the person of Christ.

This part of the mystery of the incarnation, there is added a human nature. So that's the way that works together. And the simplicity of God is not compromised by the incarnation.

It's just a mistake in thinking to suggest that's the case because the simplicity regards God's nature, not the human nature of Jesus. So, but you would say Jesus now has parts. Well, yeah, human body supports.

But it's not the human nature is not mixed with the divine nature. It's joined to the divine nature, but it's not the divine nature itself. Mixed is a great word there.

It is joined. And this is where, and we're both kind of like trying to figure out the right words to capture it without maligning it or distorting it. And this is where you run into some difficulty.

So I would just simply state that the divine nature is not mixed with the human nature, but it is, and I think there's one of the creed's kind of labors at making this point clear. But it's not, you're not dividing the substance, you're not confusing the nature. So I think it's the language of the creed, a Nicene or maybe Calcedonian, whatever.

Those old guys wrote a long time ago. So there is labored to make this distinction. Let's just simply say for our purposes that the divine nature remains simple, though there is a connection, a unity with another nature, which is a human nature, which is not necessarily simple.

And you talked about that in the previous episode, Greg, when we talked about the incarnation. So if anyone has more questions on that, go back to the previous episode and listen to that again. Go back to the Calcedonian creed.

Yeah. Good luck. Good luck.

Yeah. All right. Here's a question from James.

What does it mean to seek the presence of God as believers? Don't we already have God's presence? Yeah, that's a great question. And it's very practical. It's one that I think about a lot.

You know, James says, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." Now, it's using kind of a proximate location analogy. Get closer to that's spatial. But God isn't spatial and our souls aren't spatial.

We don't, neither God's essence nor our souls are located at a place in three-dimensional space. Our souls are not in our body in that sense. There's no place for them to sit.

There's no need for that. They're immaterial, so they don't occupy three-dimensional space. What James is talking about is something different.

But it's somewhat mysterious to me because he's not talking about ontology to use a metaphysical philosophical term. In other words, our existence, if the spirit is in us, then we are united with the spirit. We are born again.

So in one sense, God doesn't get any closer to us than the new birth. Okay? And then we are spiritually born again and the spirit dwells with the way the temple of the Holy Spirit. So it's not spatial, but there's kind of an intimacy there.

So a lot of times when people are saying they're seeking God's face, is that the way the language is? The presence of God. The presence of God. Sometimes I think it's probably synonymous with the idea of seeking God's face.

They are actively trying to feel closer to God. Be aware of the presence of the God. There's a famous book called Practicing the Presence of God, written many hundreds of

years ago, a smaller booklet.

But it's getting into the habit of being aware that God is there with you all the time. I think of Corom Deo. I was talking to my 17-year-old daughter who loved Latin and I was talking about my own life, wanting to live Corom Deo.

I said, "Do you know what that means?" She translated it for me in Greek. Yeah. I mean, not Greek, but Latin.

I said, "Yeah, she just had the words." And I said, "Yeah, that means to be in the presence of God." I want to be aware all the time that I am in God's presence and to support myself in a way that's appropriate. And be close to God. Just like two people can be together.

You could have sweethearts that get married. They just are always hanging out together. They're in each other's presence.

They're seeking that communion in relationship. I think this is what this is talking about. It's totally subjective awareness.

It's not anything metaphysical. It's just this instance God is already in us. But it's just this instructing our minds and our awarenesses, so to speak, of the fact that God is always there.

He is always with us. He is always watching. He's always caring.

He's always loving. There are different things you could focus in on, depending on the need of the moment. So if you're contemplating sin and you're thinking of God in a different way, then if you're seeking loving communion, okay, there's another aspect of God being... There for you.

But I think it's a very healthy thing. I think that's what people mean is they're trying to be... Increase their awareness of God's continual presence in their life within them and around them, caring for them, walking with them. And that has, I think, a salutary transformative effect on us.

So I think... Yeah, I think you're right. I think it is an awareness of God. It is an intimacy with God.

It comes in moments of intimacy when you're praying, when you're reading the Bible. And there is a certain desire for us to want this awareness of Him because it's beautiful. I mean, it is quite the experience.

Now... It's fleeting, though, seeing what... Yes. It's not all the time. And this is where I just want people to be careful because there... One time I read this book where... And it wasn't about this topic.

It was about a completely different topic, but it always used the phrase "the presence of God" instead of just saying "God." The presence of God, the presence of God, the presence of God, instead of just saying "God." And after a while, I started to think, "What are you saying here?" Because when I hear that, what I hear is that you're... That's all you're saying, instead of just saying "God." Are you seeking an experience more than you're seeking God Himself? Is there a feeling you're trying to get? Because that's... The presence of God isn't what we seek. We seek God. Now experiencing His presence is a wonderful thing, but what you are seeking is not a feeling.

What you are seeking is God Himself and to know Him and to be close to Him. And so... And this is... Like I said, I think that experience is wonderful, but I just want people to be careful that they're not seeking a feeling. The feeling results from being with God, but you should be seeking God.

Sometimes you will have that feeling. Sometimes you won't have that feeling. But if you're chasing after a feeling, that puts you in kind of a danger of trying all these different practices to try and create this feeling within you.

Whereas in a real relationship, you're seeking closeness to the person. And sometimes that is experienced in certain intimacy and feelings and experiences. Sometimes it isn't.

But you are desiring the person. You're not using the person to gain an experience. That's a good way of putting it.

And so I think... I just think it's tricky just to make sure that you are seeking God and you're seeking intimacy with God. And sometimes you will experience that His presence in a way that you won't experience if you're not seeking intimacy with God. But just make sure you're seeking God and not a feeling.

I guess that's what I'm saying. Alright. I think that's it, Greg.

We're out of time. Well, yes, we are. Well, thank you Amber and Jim and James.

We got through three questions today. We appreciate hearing from you. If you have a question, send it on Twitter with the hashtag #STRAsk or you can go through our website and the hashtag #STRAskPage and you'll find a link there and you can send us your question.

Thanks for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocoa for Stand to Reason.

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