

## What Does the Bible Say About Life in the Womb?

May 2023

There is no question that what is living in the womb is biologically *human*. At the moment of fertilization, the child's genetic makeup is complete, with uniquely human DNA. The child's gender already has been determined, along other characteristics such as hair color and eye color. To become a fully functioning child and eventually an adult, the only thing the tiny human embryo needs is time. As ultra-sound equipment continues to advance, we are able to see this development earlier and earlier and ever more clearly.

This being so, abortion advocates have shifted the debate to metaphysics. In order to be human, in the same sense as the woman whose womb it occupies, the life must *know* that it is alive. It must be self-aware. If it isn't (and surely it isn't, they say) then it doesn't have the same rights as the woman.

Assuming, for sake of debate, that self-awareness really is the chief defining characteristic of human personhood, is it a fact that the pre-born are not self-aware? How would that be proven either way? Presumably, by means of rational thought and speech. So then, what does that say about infants and toddlers? At what stage of development outside the womb does one become "aware of his own existence"? What are the implications for persons in a vegetative state? What about the elderly in the latter stages of Alzheimer's?

Is self-awareness essential to being truly alive and thus truly human? Certainly being aware of one's existence and of God's existence is an attribute of being created in God's image. It's part of what separates mankind from the animals. God did not sanctify the Seventh Day of Creation as the day of deliberate, conscious worship for the animals, but for man. Nor did He give the means of worship (the two trees in the midst of the Garden) to the

animals. What is essential to true personhood, though, is not self-awareness, but *God's* awareness and *His* sanctifying of human life—body and soul—even from conception.

What does God say about life in the womb? In Genesis 25:21–22, Rebekah's unborn twins are referred to by the common Hebrew term for "children" outside the womb. Exodus 21:22–25 dictates that if a man strikes a pregnant woman and harm follows (to the baby) "then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth." Both of these passages demonstrate that what is in the womb is truly human, and that God places equal value on life inside and outside the womb.

In Psalm 51:5 David says he was a sinner even in his conception. Passages like Judges 13:3–5, Psalm 139:13–16, Isaiah 44:24, Isaiah 49:1,5, and Jeremiah 1:4–5 teach that God personally and purposefully creates each and every life in the womb and that He is fully aware of and invested in each human life even before that child's conception.

When the Virgin Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist, their interaction affirmed the personhood and value of the unborn (Luke 1:39–45). Mary was only three months pregnant, and yet Elizabeth calls her a "mother." John leapt for joy at the sound of Mary's voice. Was he self-aware? Scripture affirms that he was aware of being in the presence of the God-Man and he reacted accordingly. Even in the womb, then, John was a person capable of emotion.

Elizabeth referred to the pre-born Christ as "my Lord," confirming that Jesus' incarnation did not begin at birth, but at His conception in Mary's womb (Matthew 1:20–23; Luke 1:30–35). What the Bible teaches and the Church confesses about life in the womb in general, applies to the life of God the Son in Mary's womb specifically.

Jesus is the true Man "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man" (Nicene Creed). God became a man to ransom and redeem people at every stage of life, even from the moment of conception. His creation and His redemption are the ultimate reason for the sanctify of human life both inside and outside the womb.

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