

Sanctity of Life Sunday 2024 Bodily Autonomy is Not the Greatest Good

I am very happy to say that we now live in a post-Roe-vs.-Wade world. In 2022, the Supreme Court, in its Dobbs decision, struck down RvW completely, found that it was a bad decision when it was made in 1973 and gave the decision for abortion back to the individual states. A recent study suggests that about 30,000 babies have been born since the Dobbs decision that otherwise would have been aborted.

Wisconsin has had an abortion ban on the books since 1849—over 170 years. Roe v Wade annulled that law. But after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v Wade, abortion became illegal again in Wisconsin according to that original law.

Sadly, Josh Kaul—the Attorney General of Wisconsin—filed a lawsuit disputing the enforceability of the 1849 law. He has said that he will not enforce that law; he will not prosecute those who violate the old law. When a judge ruled that the 1849 law does not outlaw abortion, Kaul joyfully exclaimed, “Freedom wins. Equality wins. Women’s health wins.... This ruling is a momentous victory, and we are prepared to defend it—and [to defend] reproductive freedom in Wisconsin.” That’s what he calls the murder of pre-born children—“reproductive freedom.” During the 15 months that abortion was illegal, about 1500 babies were born who otherwise would have been aborted.

Because AG Kaul has decided not to enforce the 1849 law, abortion providers in Wisconsin resumed their bloody and brutal business as of Sept 2023. According to a report I read, abortion clinics in the state had filled all their appointments for abortion within 24 hours of that court ruling lifting the abortion ban. People were lining up for abortions as soon as they were available again.

It seems likely that the SC of Wisconsin will make a further ruling on the issue, and many expect that court to confirm that abortions are legal in the state once again. The Court now has a 4-3 liberal majority, and it’s virtually assured that the court will rule in favor of abortion rights. The liberal judge who swung the court from conservative majority to liberal majority, Janet Protasiewicz, campaigned on her commitment to abortion rights.

Right now, WI law bans abortions after 20 weeks of gestation. WI republicans recently introduced a bill that would ban abortions after 14 weeks. Gov. Evers will undoubtedly veto that bill if it reaches his desk.

It seems that the majority of the citizens of Wisconsin approve of abortion. After all, a majority voted Gov. Evers, Josh Kaul, and the liberal member of the WSC into office. It's a very sad to know that most of the people in our state are in favor of abortion. It's very sad to hear an elected official rejoicing in the prospect of women killing their babies. But that's the state of our state.

I've spoken in the past about the biblical basis for the sanctity of life and about the scientific reasons showing that human life begins at conception. Both biblically and scientifically, the truth is obvious: human life is valuable and worthy of protection from the moment of conception until natural death. Abortion is a great evil that we should strongly oppose because it amounts to murder. It's commonly observed that about 65 million babies have been aborted in the US since abortion became legal in 1973.

Women choose abortion for many reasons, and today I want to look at one of the most common of those reasons, and I want to examine that idea from a biblical point of view. The common idea that many abortion proponents hold is that personal, bodily autonomy—i.e., individual freedom—is the greatest good. However, bodily autonomy is *not* the greatest good, and in many cases, the pursuit of bodily autonomy results in great evil, pain, abuse, and death. Abortion is a prime example of that.

I. What is bodily autonomy?

- A. Bodily autonomy is essentially the idea that I can do whatever I want with my body. “My body my choice” is an assertion of bodily autonomy. I have freedom to use my body in any way I want.
1. Some call it hyper-individualism or expressive individualism, “hedonistic utilitarianism” (Michael Knowles). Someone else (Chris Rufo) described the same ideas as “the unleashing of the instincts.” Bodily autonomy is the freedom to indulge your appetites and instincts with no restrictions and no consequences.
 2. Whatever you call it, the idea is the same—life is all about me making myself happy. Personal freedom is the ultimate and highest goal in life. “What do I want? What makes me feel good/happy? I must have the freedom to do whatever I want all the time.”

That sensibility is reflected in this Quote: “For so long, I did what made other people happy. And I think in the last two years I decided, I’m going to make myself happy ... And that feels really good. ... I think it’s important to be honest with yourself about what really makes you happy ... I’ve chosen myself. I think it’s OK to choose [yourself].”

“My 40s are about being Team Me. I’m going to eat well. I’m going to work out. I’m going to have more fun, spend more time with my kids and the people who make me happy.”¹

3. Individual happiness is the highest good, and in order to enjoy bodily autonomy, I must be free to enjoy pleasure and avoid pain. I must be free to use my body in any way I want. I must be free to pursue my desires no matter where that leads, no matter the results. I must have the freedom to follow my heart, follow my instincts whatever they may be.

- B. For most of the history of western civilization, there were laws against certain behaviors; you were *not* free to do whatever you wanted to do. There were laws against various forms of fornication and adultery. There were laws against polygamy, homosexuality, and abortion.

Quote: The consistent condemnation of abortion, deriving from the recognition that all life ultimately has its source in God the Creator, ... eradicated legal toleration and social approval of abortion and infanticide in Christian nations, greatly reduced their incidence, and pushed both to the shadowy corners of human behavior where unsanctioned and shameful activities occur.²

¹ Kim Kardashian, interview in *Vogue* magazine, Feb 22. “I’ve Chosen Myself”: Inside Kim Kardashian’s New World, by Jen Wang.

² ELLEN WILSON FIELDING, “Descending from Paganism” <https://humanlifereview.com/>

Illegal and shameful activities have always been a part of human life; but for the most part, in western civ, such activities have been pushed to the margins, the “shadowy corners” of life. People did these things in private, under the cover of darkness, in “the closet.” People recognized that it was best for society to suppress this kind of behavior, make it illegal. Wicked behavior was certainly not celebrated; it was widely seen as shameful and depraved.

- C. Previously, civilization promoted behavior considered good for society. People were concerned about promoting the good, the beautiful, and the true. People accepted a traditional sense of order and responsibility. People thought in terms of doing what we ought to do in the best interests of human flourishing. And that led to laws restricting the most objectionable and evil forms of human behavior. Most everyone agreed that restricting evil, shameful, abusive behavior was a good thing.
- D. But, as a result of the moral revolution, beginning in the 1960s, most of those laws restricting destructive behavior have been overturned. The majority of citizens wanted fewer restrictions on their behavior. They were tired of biblical morality being forced on them; they wanted “free love.” They wanted the permission to indulge their inner passions. They wanted to come out of the closet, come out from the “shadowy corners” of life. So they changed the laws that forbid that kind of behavior.
- E. Today, the most widely-acceptable moral imperative is “do your own thing; if it feels good, do it. Do whatever you want all the time.” Everyone must be free to engage in whatever behavior provides the most pleasure for each person. The greatest amount of freedom to express your feelings is the greatest good. Human flourishing and happiness come from the freedom to pursue your desires, to have bodily autonomy. The greatest good is personal freedom — “do your own thing, you be you, express yourself, follow your heart.”

- F. If people are going to be free to indulge in their desires for pleasure without consequences, it means that women will need access to abortion—that’s the reasoning involved. If women are going to enjoy the freedom from reproductive responsibility, they must have the option of not being pregnant and not producing children. They must be free to indulge their appetites and also be free from the burden of children. Men can do that, so women must also have that freedom.
- G. That kind of freedom for women was not even possible until recently. Medical technology has developed fairly recently to provide ways and means of women indulging their appetites/desires while preventing pregnancy. And even if they become pregnant, they can still become un-pregnant through abortion. Medical tech makes it fairly easy.
- H. And when you couple that with no concern for biblical morality, you have permission for people to pursue their own appetites without regard for others. “Love thy neighbor” is not a high value for our secular world. Caring for “the least of these” and for the widow and the orphan are not high values for secular people. If God is just a myth, then there is no higher reason for me to control myself or to restrict myself from anything I might want. If there is no God, then everything is permitted.
- I. The center of concern reversed, over time, from God to man. Instead of submitting ourselves to God’s will and God’s purposes for human life, people today are concerned only about their own desires, appetites, and instincts. The object of highest concern is now self, not God.
- Quote:** Divinely ordained moral codes increasingly appeared to be options rather than the Truth handed down from on high. Instead of being the standard by which we would be judged, such [moral] codes were alternatives that we judged according to how well they accorded with our ambitions and desires.³
- J. So if a woman has bodily autonomy, it means that she has the freedom to decide what happens to her own body. She’s not accountable to God, and the law has removed most moral restrictions.

³ ELLEN WILSON FIELDING, “Descending from Paganism” <https://humanlifereview.com/>

- K. Society now demands that every woman must be free to indulge in whatever behaviors she wants, and she must be free from the consequences of such behavior. She must be free to pursue whatever pleases her and free to avoid whatever might cause pain, discomfort, or inconvenience. No restrictions, no taboos, no moral restraints are allowed.
- L. In fact, just the opposite. Society now promotes bodily autonomy in the sense that women should explore all their options; they should express their freedoms without restraint. And if that behavior results in pregnancy, an abortion is an easy option to solve that problem with no stigmas attached.

Trans: That's the bodily autonomy many women demand today.

II. Why is bodily autonomy good?

- A. A *degree* of bodily autonomy is obviously good. We should want to enjoy the maximum amount of freedom that provides happiness and fulfillment for the greatest number of people. We should value freedom. Freedom is a biblical concept. It's a high value in western civilization. No one wants to be enslaved. No one enjoys unnecessary limitations.
- B. However, freedom must end at the point where it harms others. If the exercise of my freedom hurts you, my freedom at that point must be restricted.
- C. True freedom has guide rails. A train is free to run on its tracks. If it derailed, it can't go anywhere; it's no longer free. We are free to drive on the roads or fly through the skies as long as we obey the rules and the laws. Likewise, as long as we remain within reasonable limits, we can enjoy a degree of bodily autonomy.
- D. Who sets those limits? Who sets the rules? Who lays down the tracks for the train? That's the big question.
 - 1. For western civilization, for about 1500 years, the Bible and Christianity provided the rails on which civilization ran. The majority agreed that God exists and is the highest authority. Biblical morality provided the best set of guidelines for human flourishing and freedom.

Western Civ is essentially the combination of ideas from Judaism, Greek philosophy, and Christianity all mixed together. And that mixture of ideas has stood the test of time for nearly 2000 years. All of those ideas are under attack right now, especially the idea that we should exercise self-control and not indulge our every inner feeling and impulse.

We used to define freedom as the liberty to do what you ought to do. Freedom is not indulging your every whim and inner compulsion. Genuine freedom is self-controlled.

2. Jesus said, “The truth will set you free.” Freedom is informed and limited by truth. Through the Christian Gospel, we can be set free from sin and from the eternal consequences of sin. For centuries, the majority of people agreed that Christian morality was good for mankind. We all should abide by Christian moral guidelines; that was in the best interests of everybody; that would have the best outcome.
3. All of that began to change with the arrival of the Enlightenment in the 1700s, when leading thinkers began teaching that we should center everything on human happiness and desires rather than on God and his demands. Perhaps human happiness is found, not in serving God, but in serving self.
4. Then, as I mentioned, in the 1960s and following, western civilization in general began a radical project to dethrone God and dispense with his influence over public life. And if God is no longer allowed to have influence, it means that each individual must determine the meaning and purpose of his own life.

It’s no longer important for many people to find God’s will. I don’t have to consider what God has said regarding the highest good for human life or the meaning or purpose of life. Now it matters only what I will, what I desire, what I find pleasurable, or what I want to avoid. Modern, secular man has exchanged the truth of God for a lie and started worshipping the creation rather than the Creator.

5. Today, the quest for bodily autonomy demands that each individual makes his own rules. Every person has to be free to indulge his own appetites and desires. As a society, we no longer submit to God on such issues; God's moral order has no place in modern society. Only the individual has the right to decide what is right or wrong. The individual has to lay down his own tracks for his own life to achieve his own goals and fulfill his own appetites. What God says no longer matters.
- E. So the real issue here is the battle between God's authority and human authority.
1. Conservative Christians generally agree that the highest good is to bring glory and honor to God. God is the source, meaning, and goal of all things. We find our ultimate meaning in loving God and in loving our neighbors.
 2. Many today say the very opposite. The highest good to them is to please yourself, to do what you want. There is no God and no ultimate purpose for life. You have to find meaning and purpose for yourself. Since we are all just a bunch of animals, *merely a mass of molecules in motion*, no one else has the right to tell you the meaning of life, and no one has the right to restrict you from pursuing your own goals and desires. The highest good is freedom to do whatever you want, freedom to follow your heart.
 3. From a Christian point of view, bodily autonomy—personal freedom—is good when it's limited by biblical guidelines. When we run on the track that God laid down for us, we have freedom and happiness. The truth makes us free.
 4. From a secular point of view, personal freedom cannot be limited by God or by anyone else. The highest good is to be yourself, express yourself, and please yourself. We must allow nothing to get in the way of personal desire. Thus, if a pregnant woman does not want her baby for any reason, then she should be free of it. She should have the legal right to kill her baby if she doesn't want it or if that makes her happy. That's bodily autonomy.

III. Why is bodily autonomy not the greatest good?

- A. Non-Christians may claim that personal freedom is the greatest good, but that is nothing more than an opinion. Without God, all claims about what ought to be are nothing but opinions. And one opinion is just as valuable as any other opinion. And if that's true, then the whole debate is simply a matter of power—who has the power to force others to accept any opinion or claim? Whoever has the power wins.

Illus.: Right now, the government has the power to demand that we accept the LGBT lifestyle. They are trying to force that into society. They use the power of the government to force change on us. It's only the blunt-force power of the government that is forcing the LGBT agenda down our throats. He who has the power wins.

- B. From the Christian point of view, while personal freedom is a great good, but not the greatest good or the highest good. The highest goal in life is not bodily autonomy. That's not what gives your life purpose and meaning; it's not what provides happiness or success. Doing whatever you feel that you want to do is not the greatest good.
- C. In fact, following your evil inner impulses, your "vile affections," usually results in great harm, both to yourself and to those around you. Gal 6:7-8 is still true. Self-discipline leads to success and happiness, not self-indulgence. The self is evil; we must control it, not indulge it.
- D. What is the chief end of man from a biblical point of view? It's to glorify God, to live in a way that brings honor to our Creator.

Ec 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

1 Corinthians 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1Pe 4:11 ... that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

The highest goal for the entire universe is that God may be glorified. There is no greater goal.

- E. And if that is true, then we have to consider what God would want for us. We have to consider what God has said about the value of children. And in God's moral system, children have value from the moment they come into existence. They have purpose and value even before they are born. And thus to take the life of a pre-born baby is murder, plain and simple. Abortion violates the clear commands of scripture. The life of the baby is of more value than the desires of the mother.

In terms of bodily autonomy, the baby's right to life has more value than the mother's desire not to have that baby. A desire to be un-pregnant does not surpass the value of the baby's life. Bodily autonomy does not give one the right to murder someone else. And that baby, even though it's within the body of the mother, is an individual human being with its own set of rights.

Illus.: Recent headline: Woman dies in car accident, unborn baby survives.

- F. The greatest good beyond glorifying and loving God is to love our neighbors. That means that we treat one another with dignity and respect. Obviously, abortion is just the opposite of that; one could hardly get farther away from dignity and respect.
- G. Abortion advocates loudly claim that bodily autonomy is the greatest good, and that women should have the right to kill unborn babies in the name of bodily autonomy. Abortion is a good thing; "reproductive freedom" is an unalienable human right that must have no restrictions. This is what leads to happiness and human flourishing, so they claim.
- This is essentially the message of the vice president. Kamala Harris has been out on a nation-wide tour giving speeches in favor of abortion. She and the president want abortion to be a major issue for the upcoming election. She calls abortion a "fundamental freedom."
- H. Obviously, we could not disagree more strongly. Bodily autonomy is not the highest good. Abortion is an unmitigated evil; it's nothing less than murderous, vicious brutality. Once a woman becomes pregnant, that developing baby has more value than anything the mother might desire.

- I. The only thing *potentially* more valuable than the life of that baby is the life of the mother. The only ethical reason to terminate the life of an unborn baby would be if the birth of the baby would directly cause the death of the mother. And that does not happen very often these days.

In fact, I recently heard the statement that, with modern medicine and medical technology, there are very few cases in which a baby must be killed to preserve the life of the mother. The probability that the birth of a baby would cost the life of the mother is exceedingly low; it's very rare. That excuse for abortion is meaningless.

- J. Bodily autonomy ends at the point at which it harms another human being. And that unborn baby is another human being. You can have personal freedom *to the degree* that it does not harm anyone else. And abortion certainly harms someone else. That's the whole point of abortion—to destroy a human being.

Many of the leading voices in our declining culture want us to believe that bodily autonomy is the height of human achievement, the greatest good, and the source of all happiness and fulfillment. But that is a lie from the pit of hell. If there is no God, and if we are nothing more than *masses of molecules in motion*, then perhaps there is nothing greater to seek than one's own desires. And if there is no God, then murdering another human being is no sin. If God does not exist, then everything is permitted, including murder.

But if God exists, then our perspective changes radically. Our primary desire becomes pleasing God, not pleasing self. Our object and goal is to be acceptable in God's sight. We can enjoy freedom within certain God-ordained limits. Within those limits, we find happiness, contentment, and joy. Outside those limits, we find destruction, misery, and pain.

I find it exceedingly sad that so many people in our world today have rejected a biblical, Christian viewpoint on these issues. So many people today are driven by little more than personal desires and appetites. If an unborn child is inconvenient or unwanted, people feel that they have the right to murder it. That murder will allow them to enjoy their freedom; they won't be burdened with responsibility for a child. They'll be free to enjoy life, which, after all, is the purpose of existence—to be happy, to indulge your desires, to do whatever you want without dealing with the consequences. That's where many people in our world are today, and it's very sad.

Christians must think differently about these issues. Bodily autonomy, to a certain degree and within limits, is good. We want to enjoy maximum freedom. But our Creator has imposed certain limits on our freedoms, and it's in our best interests to acknowledge these limitations and live within them. It's in humanity's best interests to value children and to protect them both before and after they are born. No amount of bodily autonomy surpasses the value of a child, born or unborn. We should be far more concerned about human life than we are about bodily autonomy. When the desire for bodily autonomy conflicts with the value of human life, we must protect and preserve human life.