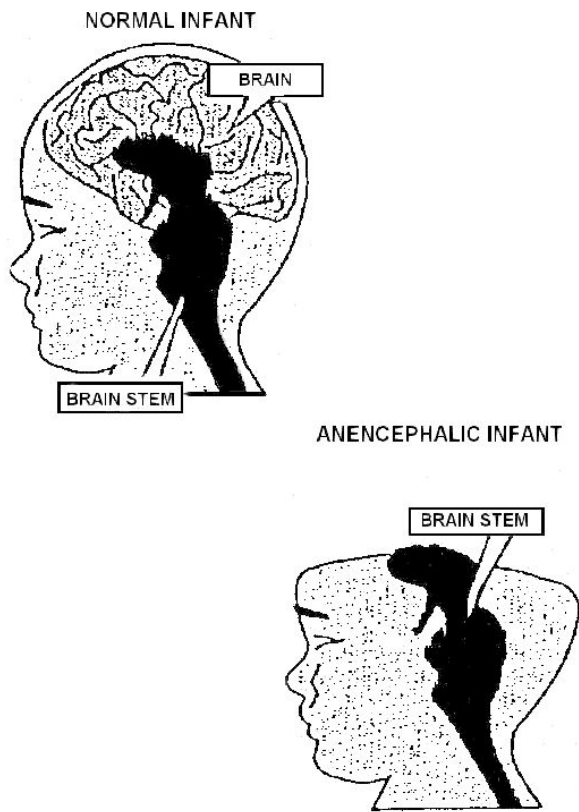


Shayla: Should an anencephalic baby be aborted?

Case History: I was asked this question by a woman who had been told her baby had anencephaly and was being encouraged to abort.



Anencephaly (pronounced an-en-sef-ul-ee) is a birth defect in which the baby is missing a large portion of the brain as well as skull and scalp. Most of these babies will be stillborn or spontaneously aborted through miscarriage. Those that actually make it to birth usually die within hours or days though some do live for as long as a year.

As a result of the brain end of the neural tube failing to close correctly a major portion of the brain, skull and scalp fail to grow. The child is born without a forebrain and a cerebrum (the thinking and coordinating part of the brain).

The child is usually blind, deaf, unconscious and unable to feel pain. Though there may be a rudimentary brain stem, and reflex actions like breathing and responses to sound or touch may occur, the fact that the cerebrum is missing precludes the possibility of the child ever being conscious. The child will have no sense of self-consciousness, no awareness of his or her environment, and no ability to interact with other persons.

Response:

This issue is so painful, so fraught with emotional landmines that it is incredibly difficult to render a righteous judgment on the matter. God never called his elders to be dispassionate in their dealings with His people. In fact He specifically chose zealous, passionate people to lead. The only way that I can offer any advice is to attempt to maintain the principle of *sola scriptura* or "only the Scriptures".

- 1 Corinthians 4:6 HCSB Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the saying: "Nothing beyond what is written." The purpose is that none of you will be inflated with pride in favor of one person over another.

As difficult as Scriptural truths may be, we must beware of trying to know more than omniscient God or being more righteous than the Holy One of Israel. We must stick to what God says and not twist it, not even if we think it presents Him in a bad light.

- Job 13:7-10 HCSB Would you testify unjustly on God's behalf or speak deceitfully for Him? 8 Would you show partiality to Him or argue the case in His defense? 9 Would it go well if He examined you? Could you deceive Him as you would deceive a man? 10 Surely He would rebuke you if you secretly showed partiality.

There are several biblical passages that treat the issue of the destruction of unborn children.¹ In Exodus², we were given specific punitive principles to apply when a fight resulted in the death or damage of a fetus.

It is noteworthy that the pre-existing physical condition of the child was unrelated to the punishment. The child's life was worth the offender's life regardless of the child's potential

¹ Exodus 21:22-25; 2 Kings 8:12; Hosea 13:16; Amos 1:13

² Exodus 21:22-25

handicaps. This goes with the Bible's clear teaching that human life is intrinsically worthy, regardless of its capacity to contribute to society. No matter how genetically deformed, a developing child in utero is still a human person.

It is very important to understand that functional definitions of what is required to be considered a "person" are metaphysically inconsistent. If there is anything we learned from the Nazi eugenics program, it is that ascribing personhood according to usefulness is also a social powder keg!

The Bible is clear in its teaching that life begins at conception, regardless of where that conception leads.³ God's work in a human's life begins while that human is still in the womb, unconscious and unable to add anything to its environment.⁴ In fact, the Bible does not even distinguish between a fetus, regardless of its development, a newly born child or a young child. The same word is used.⁵

God's wants each person to be born. He has a plan for each person. They have worth and identity before they are even born, regardless of their physical condition,⁶ simply because they are created in the image of God.⁷ The Psalmist said that children are a reward from the Lord⁸ and he did not limit that truth to healthy children.

There is an underlying principle of life in the Scriptures. Whenever we are given the choice, God's people should automatically choose life.⁹ Human life is so valuable that God Himself chose to die in order to save us from an eternal death. That is why the crime of murder is so horrendous and must be dealt with without pity.¹⁰

It would be easy to acquiesce to the argument, "I have the final say over what happens to my body." However, the Ransomed believe that our bodies are not our own. We have been bought with a price.¹¹ Like our Master,¹² We must present our bodies as living sacrifices,¹³ as God's holy sanctuary¹⁴ and must do His will regardless of the personal cost. We are to not only look out for our own interests but also consider the needs of others.¹⁵

Paul warned us that we who are strong have an obligation to bear the weaknesses of those without strength.¹⁶ In what way would this not apply to a child born with what is essentially a terminal illness?

In the Gospel of John, we read that Jesus and His disciples came across a man blind from birth. His disciples questioned Him: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him."¹⁷ Every human that is conceived is capable of displaying the glory of God. Not because of anything they may do but because of what God may do through, to or for them. To delete a child that does not reach our arbitrary standards of health is to diminish all of humanity because it removes an opportunity for humans to experience God's great strength.

If we think of the child as being essentially born with a terminal illness, then we are not obligated to treat what is basically futile to treat. It is impossible to restore the child's brain. It is

³ Exodus 21:22-25; Ruth 4:13; Psalm 51:5; 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:4-8; Hosea 9:11

⁴ Psalm 139:13-14; Job 31:15; Isaiah 44:2; 46:3

⁵ Greek *brephos*; Strong's# 1025; Luke 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16; 18:15; Acts 7:19;

⁶ Isaiah 49:5; Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 139:13-16; Proverbs 16:9; Matthew 10:29-31; Romans 9:11; Galatians 1:15

⁷ Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6

⁸ Psalm 127:3-5

⁹ Deuteronomy 30:19; 1 Corinthians 15:25-26

¹⁰ Genesis 9:5-7; Proverbs 24:11-12; Exodus 20:13; 21:22-25

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 6:12-13, 19-20

¹² Philippians 2:5-8

¹³ Romans 12:1-2

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

¹⁵ Philippians 2:4

¹⁶ Romans 15:1

¹⁷ John 9:1-3 HCSB

impossible to keep them alive in perpetuity. Therefore, there is no obligation to take heroic measures to save the child. However, as with all the dying, we are still required to offer comfort and dignity while the disease runs its course. We do not have to deny this baby's personhood, or remove the intrinsic quality of her humanity.