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About

Approach
This resource was assembled with the pastor, small group leader, or concerned friend in mind who needs to answer one critical question, “What does the Bible say about this bioethical issue?” While the Scriptures do speak to many bioethical issues, it must be admitted that there are gaps in the Scriptural response to the intricate ethical details of some bioethical issues. It is therefore hoped that the amount of material that is in the Scriptures will aid teachers and counselors to guide those areas where the Scriptures are apparently silent. Further while this resource aims to point the reader to the Scriptures for the morality and wisdom of certain actions, specific counseling helps are beyond its scope. (For example, with what Scriptures to comfort a patient who has recently discovered her genetic predisposition for breast cancer. For specific counseling helps in this area, please see Linda Costello’s similar work.) Finally, this is by no means an exhaustive work. Rather, the most applicable Scriptures have been listed. While trying to list all of the related Scriptures might be helpful to some, listing only the most salient insights should prove to be ultimately more helpful—indeed, an important criterion for effective teaching or counseling is not the quantity of material, but the quality of its reception. Less is often more.

Features
• Indexed by bioethical topic in Table of Contents and Scripture and theological topic in appendices.
• Each entry is tagged with its Scripture reference in parentheses and theological topic in square brackets. A short commentary follows.
• All Scripture is quoted from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

Usage
• There are three entry points into the material. First, one may use the Table of Contents to discover applicable texts based on bioethical topics. Second, one may start with a Scripture and use the Scripture index to find appropriate material. Third, one may start with general theological themes and use the Theme index to find appropriate material.

For example, a pastor may use the Table of Contents to collate various Scripture references and thus form the skeleton of a topical Bible Study or preaching series based on bioethical topics.

Or, a small group leader may have a Scripture in mind (e.g. – from leading a

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1 Ethical Method in Christian Bioethics: Map the Terrain by David P. Gushee may be of particular help for the thoughtful Christian who is committed to the Scriptures, but is not attracted to the often “forced” applications of some Scriptures to bioethical issues. Gushee convincingly argues for a more nuanced use of the Scriptures for discernment.
Bible Study) and use the Scripture index to see its bioethical connection to share with the group. This will model a helpful interdisciplinary approach to Scripture and bioethics.

Or, a teacher may look up a generic theological theme in order to collect a variety of verses for a bioethics class devotion by using the Theme index.

- A challenge with any collation of Scriptures is lack of context. The reader, thus, is highly encouraged to personally look up selected passages to determine their literary context as well as aim to determine its place in the history of redemption.

- If there is little time, the reader is suggested to begin with the entry on Human Dignity as this forms the foundation in many bioethical debates.

**Method of Operation**

Approximately 75% of time was spent collating Scriptures which appropriately related to bioethical issues (starting first with assisted reproduction) and writing commentary (either directly from the author or gathered from other resources). These Scriptures were gathered from books, articles, and websites which addressed bioethical (or related) issues as well as by reading the Scriptures with an eye toward finding suitable entries. The remaining 25% of time was spent organizing and formatting the document which utilizes Microsoft Word’s table of contents and indexing options. For example, each Scripture and theological theme had to be individually tagged so that Word could create the index. In addition, because Word does not recognize canonical order of books of the Bible, the Scripture index needed to be manually resorted prior to final submission. If this document were to be further developed, finding a way to automate this process would greatly enhance efficiency and viability of the compilation of the document.
Abortion

In cases of rape or incest

“Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.” (Deut 24:16) [Justice]

Because this verse is found in the context of other verses on justice, it is an insightful indictment of the injustice of abortions resulting from rape, incest, or other sins.

See also Children, Human Dignity and Justice.

Adoption

Types of adoption in Scripture

“Adoption is the legal establishment of a kinship relationship between two people that is recognized as being equivalent to one based on physical descent.” Adoption appears a metaphor between God and Israel (Exod 4:22; Rom 9:4), in describing David’s offspring (2 Sam 7:14; Psalm 2:7 which prefigures Messianic fulfillment (cf. Acts 13:33)), and referring to the standing of Christians.

Adoption reflecting the Gospel

Through Christ—God’s Son in a unique sense—Christians are made God’s adopted sons and daughters.

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—” (John 1:12) [Gospel]

“For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”” (Rom 8:15, NASB) [Gospel]

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,” (Gal 3:26) [Gospel, Faith]

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. 6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.’”’ (Gal 4:4-6, NASB) [Gospel, Law]

“He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—” (Eph 1:5, NASB) [Gospel]

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” (1 John 3:1) [Gospel, Love]

Adoption is at the heart of the Gospel and defines the believer’s relationship to God. Through the Son of God believers become adopted sons and daughters of God.

Adoption living out the Gospel
“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” (James 1:27) [Justice]

When we adopt not only do we reflect the heart of the Gospel, but we also live out the Gospel by caring for those most vulnerable.

Assisted Reproduction

Donor material
“Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. 7 But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the LORD’S sight; so the LORD put him to death. 8 Then Judah said to Onan, “Lie with your brother’s wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother.” 9 But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so whenever he lay with his brother’s wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother. 10 What he did was wicked in the LORD’S sight; so he put him to death also.” (Gen 38:6-10) [Sin]

The backdrop for this seemingly odd text is found in Deuteronomy 25:
“If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband’s brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. 6 The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.” (Deut 25:5-6) [Marriage, Family]

Stewart, Gary et al. wisely point out that Onan is married to his brother’s wife (hence excluding sexual promiscuity), and that this account may be a unique occurrence given the “special needs of early Israel.” Hence, this text may be descriptive of a special event in the life of God’s people and not an affirmation of the use of donor material.

Surrogacy
“Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, “The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her.” Abram agreed to what Sarai said. 3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan

ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me.” 6 “Your servant is in your hands,” Abram said. “Do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.” (Gen 16:1-6)

Although some would cite Genesis 16 as biblical support for surrogate motherhood, it neither primarily addresses surrogacy nor affirms the goodness of surrogacy. In the context, Abram’s agreement to Sarai’s request is primarily an act of ignorance at best or unbelief at worst in the promise that God would give Abraham a son from his own body (Gen 15:4). Further, the discord that occurs between Sarai and Hagar is indicative of the turmoil that may result in surrogacy situations. Thus, this text cannot be used to support surrogate motherhood.

**Children**

**Gift given by God**

“When Esau looked up and saw the women and children. “Who are these with you?” he asked. Jacob answered, “They are the children God has graciously given your servant.”” (Gen 33:5) [Grace]

“But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.” (Josh 24:3-4) [Grace]

“Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. 4 Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. 5 Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.” (Psa 127:3-5) [Grace]

Children are a gift and blessing given by the Lord. “In the ancient Near East, children were needed to care for aging parents, attend to the family’s work and inherit the family name and estate.”4 Further, childlessness often caused shame (Gen 16:5; Gen 30:1; 1 Sam 1:6–7; Luke 1:25), but children bought joy (Gen 21:6; 30:23; 1 Sam 2:1, 7–8; Luke 1:25). But even in our current society where the utilitarian aspect of children and shame factor of childlessness is diminished, we must still affirm the goodness of children and not allow our selfishness to cower at their associated costs.

**Children of God**

*See Adoption*

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Community

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35) [Love]

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.” (Rom 13:8) [Love]

“God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.” (1Cor 12:24-25) [Unity]

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.” (Gal 5:13) [Love]

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Eph 5:21) [Love]

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Phil 2:3-4) [Love]

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” (Col 3:16) [Word]

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (1Th 5:11) [Encouragement]

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.” (1Pet 1:22) [Love]

Christians were not meant to be autonomous individuals, but people who depend upon one another. As such, any bioethical decision must take into account what is best for the community as a whole. If that which benefits one individual may be detrimental toward others, that action should be questioned. This is not raw utilitarianism, but rather carefully measured decision making which takes into account the significance and dignity of each human being.

Death and Euthanasia

Death is an enemy

“The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (1Cor 15:26) [Death]

Paul makes clear in this text that death is evil; we must not think of death as a benign passageway from this life to the next life. While it may act as a means to glorification for the believer, it is still the wages of sin (Rom 6:23) and something to be conquered and not
actively welcomed (as in euthanasia). [Note: 2 Samuel 1:1-16 recounts the killing of Saul by an Amalekite at the behest of King Saul. Rather than condoning the practice of euthanasia, the Scriptures seems to argue against it as King David responds by having the Amalekite killed for touching God’s anointed.]

**Triumph over death**

“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Rom 8:32,35,37) [Gospel]

“When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” 55 “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1Cor 15:54-57) [Gospel]

At the same time, however, Paul affirms the glorious truth that there is victory over death through Christ! Death is then the conquered enemy which cannot keep the believer from God. It is vital to keep both aspects in tension: death is still an enemy, but a conquered enemy.

Therefore a biblical bioethical stance affirms life as well as medical advances which delay death, but ultimately finds hope in the Gospel.

**Fruitfulness of life**

“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.” (Phil 1:20-24) [Life]

Paul reminds us in this text of the tension that Christians do feel, but the properness of bearing fruit in this life until God deems it best that we die. That is, Paul trusts God with the fruit of his life and the timing of his death. We do well to do the same.

**Healing**

“When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.” (Matt 8:16) [Healing, Life]

An integral part of Jesus’ earthly ministry was healing others. By doing this, He affirms the goodness of the body as well as efforts made to make the body healthy. It follows,
then, that Christians should also be advocates of healing and health—as long as other core principles are not violated. (See Motivation)

**Human Dignity**

**Based on image of God**
The image of God is a complex multifaceted doctrine with profound implications for all aspects of Christian thought—including, of course, bioethics. Included below are key texts related to the image of God.

> “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:26-27) [Image of God, Creation]

From the creation account of Genesis 1, we see that humans are uniquely created in the image of God.

> “This is the written account of Adam’s line. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. 3 When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.” (Gen 5:1,3) [Family]

Man is both made in the image of God and in the image of Adam (perhaps emphasizing his sin nature?).

> “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.” (Gen 9:6) [Image of God, Life, Death]

The seriousness of murder is based on human’s creation in the image of God.

> “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” (Col 3:9-10) [Truth]

Our new self is related to the image of God.

> “With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.” (James 3:9-10) [Image of God, Love, Curse]

Similar to the logic of Genesis 9:6, we ought not curse men because they are made in the image of God.

In sum, the image of God gives the utmost worth and significance to its bearers—namely, humans; hence, humans should be respected and accorded dignity as such.
Dignity from conception

“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” (Psa 51:5) [Creation, Personhood]

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” (Psa 139:13-14) [Creation, Personhood]

“This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself.” (Is 44:24) [Creation, Personhood]

“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.’” (Luke 1:41-44) [Creation, Personhood]

In addition to carefully and intricately creating us in our mother’s womb, God acknowledges our personhood from that young age. Further, the personhood of the unborn is again affirmed as the unborn John the Baptist leaped in his Elizabeth’s womb.

Infertility

Cause of infertility

“To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.’” (Gen 3:16) [Curse, Fall, Sin]

“For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” (Rom 8:20-22) [Creation, Fall, Sin]

Genesis 3 recounts the Fall and resultant curses; included in these curses is an increase in the pains of procreation. While the ease or difficulty of conception is not mentioned, Romans 8 makes explicit that all creation—including conception—is under the curse of the Fall. Therefore, we must lament the general reality of infertility (just as we lament all effects of the Fall) and not automatically assume a couple’s infertility is a result of their individual sin.

Examples of infertility

“Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly. 7 But they had no children, because
Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.” (Luke 1:6-7)  
[Righteousness]

Elizabeth and Zechariah are a good example that infertility cannot necessarily be directly tied to a couple’s personal sin. Other examples include Sarah (Gen 11–21), Rebekkah (Gen 25), Rachel (Gen 29–30), the wife of Manoah (Judg 13), Hannah (1 Sam 1–2), and the Shunnamite woman (2 Kgs 4).

**Insights on infertility**

The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology’s article on “childlessness” by K. T. Magnuson gives five helpful insights on barren women in the Bible:

First, barrenness is stated simply as a fact; it is not said to be the result of sin (Gen 11:30; 25:21; 29:31; Judg 13:2; 1 Sam 1:2; 2 Kgs 4:14; Luke 1:7). While it may be a problem in human experience, it is presented as an opportunity for the outworking of the divine purpose.

Secondly, barrenness is attributed to divine causation (Gen 16:2; 30:2; 1 Sam 1:5). The reason for barrenness is not stated, perhaps because it is not the most important issue. Each story unfolds according to the divine purpose.

Thirdly, just as God closes the womb, so he also opens it (Gen 21:1, 6; 25:21; 30:22; 29:31; cf. Judg 13:3; 1 Sam 1:17; 2:1–10; 2 Kgs 4:16; Luke 1:13).

Fourthly, the children who are eventually born to barren women, with one exception, are important figures in Israelite history, and are used in the purposes of God (Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist, the exception being the son born to the Shunnamite woman). This shows that God gives children to certain barren women not for their purposes, but according to his purpose, and that he has compassion on the downcast.

Finally, these accounts relate barrenness to faith in God and God’s faithfulness.⁵

**Justice**

**Justice toward humans**

“He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.” (Prov 14:31)  
[Poor]

“If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength! 11 Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. 12 If you say, “But we knew nothing about this,” does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?” (Prov 24:10-12)  
[Righteousness]

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” (Is 58:6-7) [Righteousness]

“My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” (James 2:1-4) [Righteousness]

Scripture clearly mandates the responsibility the strong have for the weak. In a bioethical context, the weak specifically include those with little or no voice and who are unable to support, help, or protect themselves. This includes, but is not limited to, the unborn.

**Church’s response toward injustice**

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. 34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.” (Acts 4:32-35) [Compassion]

“During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) 29 The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. 30 This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.” (Acts 11:27-30) [Compassion]

The church collectively cares for those in need such that “there were not needy persons among them” (Acts 4:34). While this is referring to the financially needy, the principle of caring for those in need—be that a financial, medical, or social justice need—still applies. Hence, the church as a whole should be advocates for those unjustly affected in the bioethical realm.

**Motivation**

“Why not say—as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say—“Let us do evil that good may result”? Their condemnation is deserved.” (Rom 3:8) [Righteousness]
While Paul is specifically addressing the perversion of God’s grace (which asserts that “our unrighteousness brings out God’s righteousness more clearly” (Rom 3:5)), the general prohibition against justifying evil means in light of a good end stands. That is, in Paul’s context, purposely sinning so that the lavish and forgiving grace might be exalted is forbidden; in the bioethics arena, justifying harming one human for the benefit of another human is equally not allowed.

**Weakness**

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” (2Cor 4:7) [Gospel, Power]

“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” (2Cor 12:9) [Grace, Power]

As difficult as it may be to accept, God does use weaknesses to showcase his power. Challenges in life cause one to lean more heavily upon the Lord—which in turn better demonstrates the true extent of his strength. Therefore, as much as medicine serves to stop and slow the decay wrought by the Fall, a robust worldview also affirms the role that weaknesses can play in life.
Resources


The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology is an excellent resource to gain a biblical perspective on an issue. While bioethical issues per se will not generally be found in this resource, key biblical ideas will be found and are given in a robust context (something lacking in many collations of Scripture such as this present project).

The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity website: http://cbhd.org/

A plethora of resources with more being added each day. A good place to start when encountering a bioethical issue and wanting a current response.


A short but rich resource giving a broad overview of bioethical issues and a distinctly Christian response.


A current and compelling read regarding the contemporary issues of our society. Because it is a compilation of essays, it gives the reader a wide variety of styles and topics.


This brief book is highly accessible and should be one of the first books a thoughtful Christian interested in bioethics accesses.
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