



# ABORTION

## LESSON #4

### HOW TO DISCUSS THE HARD CASES

Welcome back to our ClaritasU course on abortion! Now, we've already learned some helpful tips and strategies for discussing this issue, including the one key question you always want to drive the conversation toward—"are the unborn human?"—and the powerful "trot out the toddler" strategy.

But in this lesson, I want to help you understand how to discuss the so-called "hard cases." This is really important. Chances are high that whenever you talk with a pro-choice or pro-abortion supporter, they will quickly ask, "Well, what about a woman who is raped and gets pregnant? Or what about cases of incest? Or what about when the baby will have serious health defects? Or what about when a woman's life is in jeopardy?"

Most people struggle with these hard cases, even if they think abortion is wrong. In fact, when you look at surveys about abortion, the most popular view in America is that abortion should be generally illegal except in the cases of rape, incest, or when the baby or mother's health is in danger. That's the most common view, which means you have to be ready to discuss those hard cases.



So what should you say? Well, before getting into each specific case, keep one thing in mind: these “hard case” objections can often be smokescreens. Sometimes, pro-choice people will throw out the hardest cases—rape, incest, health dangers—in order to undermine the pro-life case, but really what they want is unlimited access to abortion, at all stages and for all reasons, not just in the hard cases.

So when someone brings up the hard cases, the first thing you should say is: “OK, let’s just suppose, for the sake of argument, that I agree with you, and that I admit abortion should be legal in the cases of rape, incest, and when the baby’s or mother’s health is threatened by pregnancy. But since those cases are extremely rare, accounting for only 2-4% of all abortions, that means at least 96% of abortions are elective, meaning the mother chooses to abort for financial, emotional, or other personal reasons, not because of rape, incest, or health. So if I agreed to permit abortions for the 2-4% of hard cases, would you join me and agree we should ban abortions in the 96% of other cases?”

Their answer to that question will be telling. If they say yes, then you’ve found common ground, and you can ask them the natural follow-up question: “Great! But why do you think we should ban abortion in the other 96% of cases? What’s wrong with those?” which will ultimately drive the conversation back to the one key question: “Because the unborn are human, and thus abortion kills an innocent human being.”

But if they answer no, if they say that *won’t* join you in opposing the

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other 96% of abortion cases, then you know the hard cases are really just a smokescreen. It's not that the person is worried solely about those hard cases; it's that the person wants abortion to be legal in all cases, for all reasons. And if that's true, you don't need to waste time discussing the hard cases in particular. You can say, "Well, it seems then that your problem isn't just with these hard cases; you think abortion should be legal for *all*/reasons, right?" Then just use the other tips and this course to discuss abortion in general—ask them the one key question and then trot out the toddler.

So that's the very first thing you want to do: you want to see if these hard cases are *really* the issue, or if they're just a smokescreen hiding their comprehensive support for abortion. So again, ask that question first: "Would you agree with me that *all other* abortions, besides the hard cases, should be outlawed?"

Next, though, let's assume the person really *is* troubled by these hard cases. Let's assume abortion actually does make them uncomfortable, they think it's wrong and in a perfect world there wouldn't be any abortions, but nevertheless they still believe that in these hard cases, abortion is justified. Well, let's walk through the hard cases one by one, so you'll know exactly how to handle them.

First up, what about rape? The main thing you want to do is affirm that rape is awful. You can't say that enough. It's one of the most egregious crimes in the world, so do not downplay that fact. A woman who suffers rape is *always* the victim and it is *never* her fault.

But then make this point: it's also not the fault of the child who

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might result from that act. The only person who should be punished is the rapist, and he should be punished with the harshest available penalties. The woman certainly shouldn't be punished, and neither should the unborn child if the woman becomes pregnant. Why should an innocent child have to die because of a crime committed by someone else?

Now, some people might say, "Yeah, but how could you force that poor woman to carry the baby to term? Every time she sees that child she'll be reminded of the man who raped her!" I agree it's an almost unimaginable difficulty for a woman to give birth to and raise a child who was fathered by a man who raped her. It makes *me* enraged; it's horrific. However, again, the solution to such a problem is not to murder the child. The child did nothing wrong. He's as innocent as his mother. The solution to one evil act (rape) is not to commit another *more* evil act (murder.)

You can also use the "trot out a toddler" strategy here and say, "Well, suppose the mother did give birth to the rapist's child, but around the child's second birthday, the mother realizes that after two years of raising him, she just can't take it anymore. The child is looking more and more like her rapist, and it's causing her immense trauma and pain. Should she then have the right to kill the two-year-old?" Most people would say no. If nothing else, she should give the child up for adoption or ask relatives to help care for the child. But then the same principles should apply to an unborn child, too, which is every bit as human and deserving of life as the two year old. So those are some tips for handling the rape objection. Emphasize the evil of the crime, but also that the unborn child is innocent and does not deserve to die for the crimes of



someone else.

Let's take the next two hard cases together, incest and the health of the baby, because they're usually based around the same objection, which is, "What if the child is going to be born with severe birth defects or disabilities? Shouldn't we prevent it from having a life of misery?"

First, think about what this says to *born* people with disabilities. For example, think of the men and women in the Special Olympics. I challenge anyone to go to a Special Olympics event and tell those people, "Well, it probably would have been better if you had been aborted." It's crazy to even to think about. We have plenty of examples of people living amazing lives and flourishing despite birth defects or disabilities.

Second, a person's value is not tied to his health or productivity. This is a serious problem in our culture today. In truth, people are valuable simply because God made them with great human dignity. That dignity doesn't change whether a child has Down syndrome or will be born with only nine fingers or one leg. Nor does their value change even if they die right after being born. We should protect and cherish the disabled, not kill them prematurely. Nothing justifies killing an innocent child.

Finally, what about when the health of the mother is in question? Now we could do a whole video series just on this question, because it gets really complicated, really fast. But here are a few things to keep in mind.



First, there is no medical problem for which abortion is the only solution. Remember this. I'll say it again: there is no medical problem for which abortion is the only solution. So if someone tries to tell you, "Abortion is the only way to save the mother's life," you know they're misguided. Abortion is not a cure for anything. It does not directly solve any woman's health problem. So that's the first point to keep in mind: abortion is never a direct cure for any health problem.

Second, with that said, there are situations where the best solution might result, unintentionally, in the death of the unborn child. I'll give you an example. Take an ectopic pregnancy. In a healthy pregnancy, the fertilized egg attaches itself to the uterus and develops normally. But in an ectopic pregnancy, which happens in about 2% of pregnancies, the embryo gets stuck on its way to the uterus and begins to grow outside the uterus, usually in a fallopian tube. The problem is that the embryo simply can't survive in the fallopian tube, and worse, if the embryo is left there without treatment, it can also cause life-threatening bleeding for the mother and, in some cases, death. This is definitely a case where the mother's life can be in danger.

So what's the solution? Well, in most ectopic pregnancies, doctors decide to cut away the section of the fallopian tube where the embryo attached. This of course results in the death of the unborn child, but it saves the life of the mother and prevents further complications.

Now, some people are surprised to learn that the Catholic Church actually permits this sort of procedure. How can that be? Isn't the

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doctor basically killing the child? The answer has to do with a moral principle known as "double effect." This is really important, and I want you to get this, because it will help you discuss this hard case, so pay attention.

The principle of double effect says an action can have two effects: one good effect which you intend, and one bad effect which you foresee, but don't intend. That's where we get the name "double effect."

So in the example of an ectopic pregnancy, the goal is to save the life of the mother and to heal her dysfunctional reproductive system—that's the good effect, that's the goal we're intending. To do that, a section of the fallopian tube must be removed, and there's nothing intrinsically wrong with removing a fallopian tube. You're simply addressing a damaged body part.

But there's also a second effect, a bad effect, which is that the unborn child attached to that fallopian tube will die as a result of the procedure. That bad effect was foreseen—the doctors and the mother knew it would happen—but it was not intended. The doctor's goal was only to save the mother's life. If there was a way to save the mother's life *without* killing the unborn child, they would have gladly taken that option, but usually in an ectopic pregnancy, that option doesn't exist.

Yet in this scenario, what was done was *not* an abortion. This is important. Remember from the first lesson that an abortion is the direct, intentional killing of an unborn child. But in this scenario, the killing was not direct nor was it intentional. It was the indirect,

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unintentional result of another procedure aimed at saving the mother's life. Does that make sense?

This is how the Church can be adamantly against abortion but still allow for medical interventions like this one, which save a mother's life while unintentionally resulting in the death of an unborn child. It's a subtle distinction, but as with most serious moral questions the subtleties carry a load of importance.

Now, if you're still a little hazy about all of this, post a question in the discussion forum so we can talk more about it, or ask me about it in our Live Q&A.

But I hope this has helped you understand how to handle the hard cases. Remember, your first move should be to determine whether the hard cases are really a sticking point for the other person, or if they're just a smokescreen. But if you determine they are a serious problem for the other person, now you know how to talk about each situation.

In the next lesson, though, we're going to focus on some more of the best pro-choice objections, the ones you'll hear most often. I want you to master them now so you'll never be surprised or shaken when they arise in conversation. So stay tuned, and I'll see you there!