

Weekly Message from Pastor Pook for March 5, 2021

Good morning, everyone, and it's good to see you on this March 5th. Today, I am going to talk about two things that are in the news. I'm at my computer because I have some information that I really wanted to look up before we get into it.

One of them is, a couple of times, people have sent me articles and videos that have talked about the virus, the coronavirus vaccine, and how it is developed or has been developed by using aborted fetuses. And the Missouri Synod, along with many other church bodies, are very strongly pro-life in that we support life as being defined from conception, from the very beginning of its existence, all the way to its natural end. Under "Do not murder" is abortion, suicide, euthanasia, and murder. All of that is wrapped up into that definition. And so the question becomes, can we receive a vaccine or other medical treatments that have been developed through and because of research done on abortive tissue or aborted fetuses or even the frozen embryos that we find in a fertilization clinic that are no longer wanted? Are those viable human beings, or could they be used for research? Now, I would argue that once the egg and the sperm meet and combine to form a unique two-celled organism, that has become a new life. And the reason we do this is partially, well, directly from Scripture. There's a couple of passages that I want to read as we talk about and think about it. You'll find your Small Catechism with definition and explanation has some good references to this. For one thing, Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. And before you were born, I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations." So here we have God talking about knowing Jeremiah even before he was born, which implied that he is viable and valuable from the very beginning. Psalm 139:16. "Your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written every one of them the days that were formed for me when as yet there was none of them." And then, of course, we have the story from Luke 1:41-44, where the unborn John leaps in the womb after Mary, who is now pregnant with Jesus, comes near him. So we have very strong support that God knows us from the very beginning, that He formed us in the womb. And therefore, we believe since God created us, all life is sacred, and we should support all life and defend it from its conception to its natural end. Once a woman is pregnant, that fetus that is in her, and fetus is just a Latin word for baby, so it's the same, that fetus has unique DNA from its mother, a unique blood type from its mother, and the heartbeat starts at 18 days from the very beginning. Now, if we say that life ends when the heart stops, then to use reason subjected to Scripture, it makes sense that life begins at the very least, if not before, at least when the heart starts. So we are very much pro-life. We are one of the largest participators in the Pro-Life March in Washington, D.C., and we support adoption agencies and encourage people to adopt, because there would be extra babies who are unwanted in this case. So we very much support life in our church. So the question becomes, how do you deal with scientific advancements that are made on the backs of aborted fetuses? And it's not always a cut and dry issue, and I would ask that you would pray hard and pray long as you think about these things. And not everybody's going to come to the same conclusion. We need to address this with sensitivity and with love.

There's an article in this website from Nebraska Medicine <https://www.nebraskamed.com/COVID/you-asked-we-answered-do-the-covid-19-vaccines-contain-aborted-fetal-cells>. And it's an article asking, do the COVID-19 vaccines contain aborted fetal cells? And the article goes on to say that they do not contain fetal cells, but they were developed from fetal cell lines. What does that mean? Fetal cell lines are cells that have been developed from cells through multiple generations, all the way back to a child that was aborted in, let's see, one of them

was in 1973 from an elective abortion that took place in the Netherlands. And then the other one follows a line from an elective abortion in 1985, also from the Netherlands. So two abortions that happened, one in 1973 and one in 1985, were the start of these fetal cell lines. And they cloned them and copied them over all of these years, and so now they are being used. Now those cell lines are being used to test vaccines. But they are not actual the aborted fetuses currently. They are from those original fetuses from 1973 and 1985.

I'm not going to say that you should or should not receive this vaccine, or whatnot. I think at the very least, we need to continue to support pro-life issues and to really encourage and talk and support our pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies to use more ethical means and not to rely upon these aborted cells. There are plenty of other ways to test these things. Let's not go into the most morally ambiguous one there is. So I know that's a sensitive topic, but I wanted to talk about it because, well, it's there and we need to think about these things. We need to pray about these things, because we need to wrestle with what it is that we're dealing with.

The other thing that I want to talk about is the Equality Act that has just recently passed in the House of Representatives. Now, again, you know that I don't like going into politics and I neither support one party or the other party. And the only reason I'm talking about this is because it has a moral and religious implication involved, and you need to be aware of this. So the Equality Act has been around for a while. It's been passed by the House of Representatives in 2019 and then was rejected by the Senate. Whether or not it will pass this time again, I don't know. It's up to the Senate again to see whether or not it will impact it. Now, there are arguments that this thing is not needed because the Supreme Court has already ruled in June of 2020 in *Bostock versus Clayton County* that the 1964 Civil Rights Act can include on the basis of sex also extends to discrimination against lesbians, gay, and transgender Americans. The logic was that a man who, for example, loses his job because he has a same sex partner is facing discrimination on the basis of sex that were he a woman he wouldn't have faced that discrimination. Now, you can argue with the logic of that and whether you think that's a good idea or not, but that's there. And I don't have any issue with America allowing people to live their lives and not be discriminated against because of various things. But that also means that those who have a religious belief that the Bible is the Word of God, which states very clearly that we are created male and female and then He designed us to be in marriage between one man and one woman, that we also should have a right of our free exercise of that free speech and that religion. And the concern about this Equality Act is there are not those caveats for religious and moral exceptions. It basically is going to undermine the ability for Christians who believe the Bible as it says to be able to speak clearly. And also for those companies like, well, we all know the bakery who did not desire to make a cake for a homosexual wedding on religious grounds, and they've been through all sorts of lawsuits. I'm not even sure where it stands right now, but those restrictions, they would not be allowed to do that anymore. That has implications for buying healthcare, for sex changes, or abortive rights, or various other things. All of this Equality Act does not allow and has no language for the religious and moral objections to what it is saying. And so, again, we need to pray very hard for our nation to have wisdom. For our leaders, I encourage you to contact your senators and talk to them about this issue and explain that your issue is the religious issue. There's other social issues that are involved that I think are problematic as well, but that's not the issue. The issue is can I, as a religious person, who believes that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, where it says that homosexuality is wrong and where it says that God created us male and female, and by saying that we are the wrong sex, we are basically saying that God's law or God's Word is not true? So I'm struggling with this because we freely admit that we say that

homosexuality of any sort is a sin. We also say that any sexual sin that is involved with any other group of people besides one man and one woman in the bonds of marriage is wrong. So living together without the benefit of marriage, that is also as wrong as homosexuality. Viewing pornography is as wrong as homosexuality and living together without the benefit of marriage. And let me say, living together, as in having marital relations, sexual relations, is wrong. So we're not just hammering this because it's the homosexuals. We're hammering this because sexuality is a gift from God designed for one man and one woman in the bonds of marriage, and anything outside of that is wrong. So it's not just like we're pointing out this one issue, it's everything. But it's coming out in this issue. As it is, we have many people in this world who live together without the benefit of marriage, but we also have the freedom to say that, that is a sin. We may disagree with it, but in this country of America, we have the opportunity to voice our opinions without fear of discrimination. The Equality Act ironically, as it's named, does not allow equality for differing religious views and therein lies the problem with it. So pray and contact your leaders and let them know that there is no religious exemption in this bill, and therefore it is discriminatory against those who believe that homosexuality is a sin. Again, I don't like to get into politics and I'm not supporting one party or the other party. That is not where this is going. I'm simply talking about this one particular bill. So I hope you understand that that's where I'm coming from and I hope that you can pray for our leaders, pray for wisdom, pray that they continue to support our freedom of religion that we have in this country and that they continue to support the opportunity to disagree in public without fear of retribution.

And also pray that if our country does continue to move in this direction and does continue to discriminate against Christians who believe the Bible, then to pray for the strength to face up to the persecution that is going to come. So let's pray for our nation and pray for strength for us, that we might stand firm in our convictions and our beliefs that are based on the Bible so that even if we face persecution, we can say, "Unless I'm convinced by Scripture and sound reason, I can do no other. Here I stand."

May God's grace be with you always. Amen.