

# Is Abortion Acceptable in Cases of Rape and Incest?

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“I was raped at thirteen and had an abortion. What are you going to say about that?” asked a woman in the crowd gathered for an impromptu abortion debate at a local college. In forming a reply, the pro-life speaker faced two challenges. The first was *intellectual*: If a woman becomes pregnant as a result of rape, what should she do? Is abortion an option in her case? The second was *relational*: How could the speaker lovingly communicate the biblical view to the angry woman and hostile crowd?

He began with a silent prayer for wisdom before kindly expressing concern for the rape victim and a desire to see her rapist punished. Her situation stands as a reminder that attackers not only force themselves on their victims; their selfishness also sometimes leads to pregnancy, labor, and years of responsibility for a child the mother didn't consent to help create.

The speaker then turned his compassionately stated comments to the *intellectual* challenge her question presented: may women justifiably choose to end pregnancies forced on them? What at first seems a complex matter quickly untangles when we remember that no one suggests that a two-year-old conceived by rape should be killed by its mother. Few would subject an adult born into those circumstances to the death penalty either. The unborn, then, are deserving of the same moral and legal protection offered to the toddler and adult—assuming, of course, that the former is rightly accepted as being fully human from conception.

Biblically speaking, an unborn child is a living, whole organism of the human species. Even from a purely logical viewpoint, anyone who is currently a human organism was such since the moment of fertilization. The unborn aren't *potential* humans. Rather, they *are* humans with great potential.

Scripture says males and females are made in God's image (Gn 1:26-27) and that it's wrong to kill them (Ex 20:13; Pr 6:16-19; Jr 22:3). It does not distinguish between humans at an early stage of development and those at a later stage, nor does it distinguish between those conceived consensually and those conceived otherwise. All humans deserve protection (Pr 24:11-12).

As the speaker wrapped up his comments, the woman who had confronted him so angrily let down her guard. “This shouldn't have happened to me,” she said sadly. And the heartbreak in her voice is a reminder that as Christians defend the rights of the unborn with passion, they must always take care not to unintentionally reinjure rape victims by failing to see their hurt and confusion. Rather, Christians should meet the *relational* challenges of confronting this issue by acknowledging the rape victim with love and by meeting the *intellectual* challenge by showing that the unborn is a genuine human worthy of protection.

For more advice on talking to people about abortion, see the book, *Common Ground Without Compromise: 25 Questions to Create Dialogue on Abortion*.