

# Solid Ground

Enhanced

A Foundation for Building Ambassadors

Celebrating 20 Years of Ministry

January/February 2014

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- [The Violinist Argument](#)
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- [Susan Smith Morality](#)
- [Addressing Abortion Columbo Style](#)

### APPLYING CRITICAL THINKING TO AN ABORTION ARGUMENT



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I've always argued that the "complex" issue of abortion can be easily and radically simplified by pointing out that the morality of the pro-choice position hinges on the answer to only one question: What is the unborn? That simple, powerful, persuasive approach is precisely what makes philosopher Judith Jarvis Thompson's famous "violinist argument" such a threat to the pro-life view. Because she actually concedes the central point that pro-lifers seek to prove. Now what? Thompson's "violinist" argument is one of the most compelling ever offered in favor of abortion on demand. In spite of its appeal, though, it's deeply flawed. In this month's *Solid Ground*, I show you precisely how it fails.

There's a lesson in critical thinking here, too. I analyze the argument so that you can do the same thing with challenges you face.

## You Can Help Stand to Reason



My goal—as always—is not just to inform you, but to train you. It's STR's way. As culture shifts further from biblical values every year, we'll be there for you. Please, don't underestimate the importance of your partnership this new year. I consider it a great privilege to both instruct you and grow with you as a Christian Ambassador. So I hope you will re-commit to helping advance the work of Stand to Reason through your prayers and as you prepare your first gift of 2014.

*Greg Kousser*





January 1, 2014

Dear Friend,

I've always argued that the "complex" issue of abortion can be easily and radically simplified by pointing out that the morality of the pro-choice position hinges on the answer to only one question: What is the unborn?

Simply put, if the unborn is not a human being, no justification for abortion is necessary. Do what you want. Remove the offending tissue. Have the abortion. However, if the unborn is a human being, no justification for abortion is adequate, because it's wrong to kill defenseless human beings for the reasons that most women have abortions.

That simple, powerful, persuasive approach is precisely what makes philosopher Judith Jarvis Thompson's famous "violinist argument" such a threat to the pro-life view.

Thompson actually concedes the central point that pro-lifers seek to prove: The unborn is a valuable human person at every stage of development. She then argues—persuasively for many—that even so, abortion is still justified and, therefore, an appropriate liberty.

Now what? Thompson's "violinist" argument is one of the most compelling ever offered in favor of abortion on demand. In spite of its appeal, though, it's deeply flawed. In this month's Solid Ground, I show you precisely how it fails.

There's a lesson in critical thinking here, too. Make note of how I place her argument clearly before me, making sure to represent it accurately. Then I break it down into parts and look closely at each link in the reasoning chain, especially the assumptions. It's the same thing you can do with challenges you face.

My goal—as always—is not just to inform you, but to train you. It's STR's way. As culture shifts further from biblical values every year, we'll be there for you. With Solid Ground, our website, and all the other resources we'll provide you in 2014, you'll be ready for the challenge, able to stand tall with insight and with grace. But we need your help.

Please, don't underestimate the importance of your partnership this new year. I consider it a great privilege to both instruct you and grow with you as a Christian Ambassador. So I hope you will re-commit to helping advance the work of Stand to Reason through your prayers and as you prepare your first gift of 2014.

Thanks in advance for standing with us.

On your team,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Greg Kousser'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.





# UNSTRINGING THE VIOLINIST

By Greg Koukl

I remember exactly where I was the first time I heard Judith Jarvis Thompson's famous "Violinist" argument. I was driving south on the 405 freeway in Los Angeles listening to a radio talk-show. It shook me up so much I almost had to pull over.

Not only was the argument compelling, but Thompson made a stunning concession when she acknowledged the full personhood of the unborn. Having freely handed to pro-lifers what they were trying to prove, she short-circuited their argument from the outset.

My first emotion was despair. The argument couldn't be answered, I thought. This is often the case with carefully worded philosophical treatments. At first glance they appear compelling. On closer inspection, though, the flaws begin to show. In this instance, the problems with Thompson's argument are fatal.

## The Violinist Argument

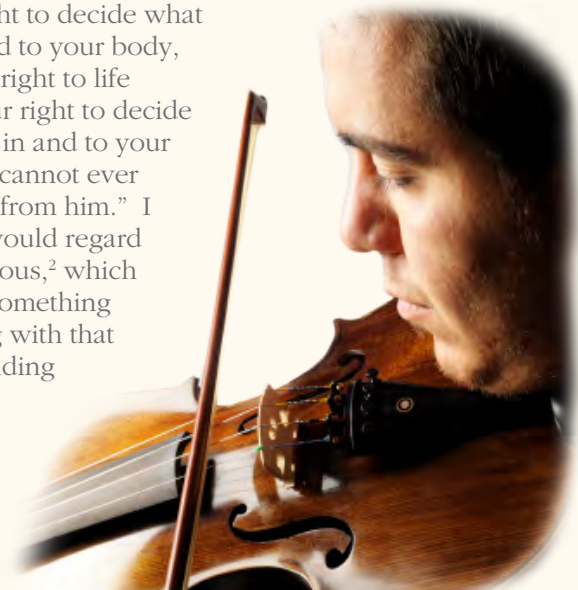
The details of Judith Jarvis Thompson's [argument](#) are important, so I will quote her illustration in full. Titled "A Defense of Abortion," Thompson's trenchant challenge to the [pro-life view](#) first appeared in 1971 in the *Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*.<sup>1</sup>

I propose, then, that we grant that the fetus is a person from the moment of conception. How does the argument go from here? Something like this, I take it. Every person has a right to life. So the fetus has a right to life. No doubt the mother has a right to decide what shall happen in and to her body; everyone would grant that. But surely a person's right to life is stronger and more stringent than the mother's right to decide what happens in and to her body, and so outweighs it. So the fetus may not be killed; an abortion may not be performed.

It sounds plausible. But now let me ask you to imagine this. You wake up in the morning and find yourself back to back in bed with an unconscious violinist. A famous unconscious

violinist. He has been found to have a fatal kidney ailment, and the Society of Music Lovers has canvassed all the available medical records and found that you alone have the right blood type to help. They have therefore kidnapped you, and last night the violinist's circulatory system was plugged into yours, so that your kidneys can be used to extract poisons from his blood as well as your own. The director of the hospital now tells you, "Look, we're sorry the Society of Music Lovers did this to you—we would never have permitted it if we had known. But still, they did it, and the violinist now is plugged into you. To unplug you would be to kill him. But never mind, it's only for nine months. By then he will have recovered from his ailment, and can safely be unplugged from you.

Is it morally incumbent on you to accede to this situation? No doubt it would be very nice of you if you did, a great kindness. But do you have to accede to it? What if it were not nine months, but nine years? Or longer still? What if the director of the hospital says, "Tough luck, I agree, but you've now got to stay in bed, with the violinist plugged into you, for the rest of your life. Because remember this. All persons have a right to life, and violinists are persons. Granted you have a right to decide what happens in and to your body, but a person's right to life outweighs your right to decide what happens in and to your body. So you cannot ever be unplugged from him." I imagine you would regard this as outrageous,<sup>2</sup> which suggests that something really is wrong with that plausible-sounding argument I mentioned a moment ago.



Let's unpack the argument. Thompson correctly shows that an additional step is needed to bridge the gap between the premise that the unborn is a person and the conclusion that killing the unborn child is always wrong. What's needed is the additional premise that taking the life of a person is always wrong. Killing, however, is sometimes permissible, most notably in self-defense.

The reasoning in the violinist illustration is very tight. Thompson accurately represents the pro-life position, then offers a scenario for us to consider. The analysis employs two powerful techniques of argumentation: an example that appeals to [moral intuition](#) followed by a logical [slippery slope](#).

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THE KEY QUESTION IN ANY SLIPPERY SLOPE APPEAL IS WHETHER THE TWO SITUATIONS ARE TRULY SIMILAR IN A MORALLY RELEVANT WAY.

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The logical slippery slope works like this. When one thing is immoral, and a second is logically similar in a morally relevant way, the moral quality of the one “slips over” into the other. For example, murder is immoral, and some think capital punishment is similar enough to murder to make capital punishment immoral, too.<sup>3</sup>

Thompson is counting on a certain moral intuition—our sense of justice—rising to the surface when we consider the plight of the kidnapped woman in her illustration who is used as a host against her will to support the life of a stranger.

She then asks us to consider if having an abortion is a meaningful parallel to unplugging the violinist. Both circumstances catch the woman by surprise. Both the violinist and the unborn child are attached to her body, which both need in order to survive. Both will release her in nine months.

Thompson's view is that disconnecting the violinist is morally justified even though he'll die, and there seems to be merit to this appeal. To stay connected would be heroic—“a great kindness,”

in her words—but, like all acts of heroism, it is voluntary and not morally required.<sup>4</sup> If that's the case, then it's moral to abort a child, even if he or she is a fully human person, just like the violinist. If the first is morally acceptable (unplugging the violinist), and if the second (having an abortion) is similar to the first in a relevant way, then the second should be acceptable also. That's the logical slippery slope.

An argument found in the [book](#), *Breaking the Abortion Deadlock: From Choice to Consent*,<sup>5</sup> uses the same approach. Author Eileen McDonagh points out that if a woman's liberty is being threatened in some fashion—if she is being attacked, raped, or kidnapped—then the law gives her the latitude to use lethal force to repel her attacker.



Pregnancy, McDonagh argues, is this kind of situation. “If a woman has the right to defend herself against a rapist, she also should be able to use deadly force to expel a fetus,” she writes.<sup>6</sup> In pregnancy, a woman is being attacked by another human being—from the inside, not from the outside. Therefore, she has the moral liberty to repel her attacker by killing the intruder.

It does seem obvious that a woman ought to be allowed to protect herself from an attacker and use lethal force to do so, if necessary. If this is true, then we must concede the legitimacy of abortion, which, McDonagh claims, is parallel in a relevant way. Again, note the logical slippery slope attempt.





### Parallels That Aren't Parallel

The key question in any slippery slope appeal is whether the two situations are truly similar *in a morally relevant way*. If not, then the illustration is guilty of a logical slippery slope *fallacy*, the analogy fails, and the argument *falls apart*.

Are there important differences between pregnancy and kidnapping? Yes, many.



First, the violinist is artificially attached to the woman. A mother's unborn baby, however, is not surgically connected, nor was it ever "attached" to her. Instead, the baby is being produced by the mother's own body by the natural process of reproduction.

Second, both Thompson and McDonagh treat the child—the woman's own daughter or son—like an invading stranger. They make the mother/child union into a host/predator relationship.

A child is not an invader, though, a parasite living off his mother. A mother's womb is the baby's *natural environment*. Eileen McDonagh wants us to believe that the child growing inside of a woman is trespassing. One trespasses when he's not in his rightful place, but a baby developing in the womb belongs there.

Thompson ignores a third important distinction. In the violinist illustration, the woman might be justified withholding life-giving treatment from the musician under these circumstances. Abortion, though, is not merely *withholding treatment*. It is actively taking another human being's life through poisoning or *dismemberment*. A more accurate parallel with abortion would be to crush the violinist or cut him into pieces before unplugging him.

The violinist illustration is not parallel to pregnancy because it equates the mother/child relationship with a stranger/stranger relationship. This is a key point and brings into focus the most dangerous presumption of the violinist argument, also echoed in McDonagh's appeal. Both presume it is unreasonable to expect a mother to have any unique obligations towards her own child.

The violinist analogy suggests that a mother has no more responsibility for the welfare of her child than she has to a total stranger. McDonagh's view is even worse. She argues the child is not merely a stranger, but a violent assailant the mother needs to ward off in self-defense. An unborn child is no more assaulting his mother than her eight year old is stealing when he grabs cookies and milk from the fridge.

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THEY MAKE THE MOTHER/CHILD UNION INTO A HOST/PREDATOR RELATIONSHIP.

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This error becomes immediately evident if we amend Thompson's illustration. What if the mother woke up from an accident to find herself connected *to her own child*? What kind of mother would willingly cut the life-support system to her two-year-old in a situation like that? And what would we think of her if she did?



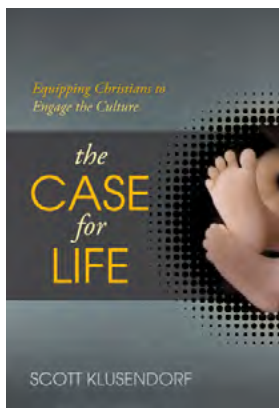


## STR 20th Anniversary Conference DVD – \$24.95 **\*NEW\***

Various Speakers, DVD Video, Runtime: 320 minutes (DVD039)

This year marked the 20th anniversary of Stand of Reason and its mission of training Christian ambassadors. To commemorate the occasion, Biola University hosted a special two-day apologetics conference featuring stimulating lectures from all of the STR speakers, as well as from STR friends Craig Hazen, Sean McDowell, and Mary Jo Sharp. This high-quality DVD set includes the following presentations:

- Greg Koukl: Still Standing
- Craig Hazen: On Knowledge
- Sean McDowell: Apologetics and Love
- Mary Jo Sharp: Reasoning Clearly
- Panel Discussion
- Brett Kunkle: Who's Waiting for Your Kids?
- Alan Shlemon: Compromise Is Not an Option
- J. Warner Wallace: Cold-Case Christianity

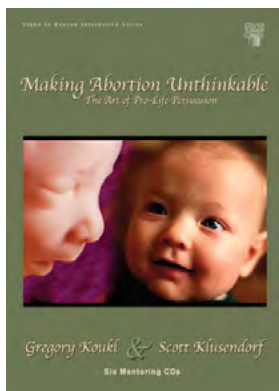


## The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture – \$16.99

Scott Klusendorf, 256 pages (BK319)

Pro-life Christians, take heart: the pro-life message can compete in the marketplace of ideas—provided Christians properly understand and articulate that message. Too many Christians do not understand the essential truths of the pro-life position, making it difficult for them to articulate a biblical worldview on issues like abortion, cloning, and embryo research.

The Case for Life provides intellectual grounding for the pro-life convictions that most evangelicals hold. Author Scott Klusendorf first simplifies the debate: the sanctity of life is not a morally complex issue. It's not about choice, privacy, or scientific progress. To the contrary, the debate turns on one key question: What is the unborn? From there readers learn how to engage the great bio-tech debate of the twenty-first century, how to answer objections persuasively, and what the role of the pro-life pastor should be.



## Making Abortion Unthinkable: The Art of Pro-Life Persuasion – \$24.95

Gregory Koukl & Scott Klusendorf, Six Audio CDs (CD133)

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Making Abortion Unthinkable will enable you to enter any arena--from one-on-one discussion to a public debate--with full confidence that your case is solid and your appeal is just.

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Blood relationships are never based on choice, yet they entail moral obligations, nonetheless. This is why the courts prosecute negligent parents. They have consistently ruled, for example, that fathers have an obligation to support their children even if they are unplanned and unwanted.

If it is moral for a mother to deny her child the necessities of life (through abortion) before the child is born, how can she be obligated to provide the same necessities after he's born? Remember, Thompson concedes that the fetus is a person from the moment of conception. If her argument works to justify abortion, it works just as well to justify killing any dependent child. After all, a two-year-old makes a much greater demand on a woman than a developing unborn (ask any parent).

Thompson is mistaken in presuming that *pregnancy* is the thing that expropriates a woman's liberty. Instead, *motherhood* does that, and motherhood doesn't begin with the birth of the child. It starts nine months earlier (ask any mother) and, unlike the woman connected to the violinist, she is not released in nine months. Her burden has just begun. If Thompson's argument works, then no child is safe from a mother who wants her liberty, regardless of their age.



In the end, both Thompson's and McDonagh's arguments prove too much. They allow us to kill any human being who is dependent upon us, young or old, if that person restrains our personal liberty.

The simple fact is, in a civilized society no one has the freedom to do whatever she wants with her own body. Liberty unfettered by morality is the operative rule of anarchy, not civilization. At any given moment, each of us is constrained by hundreds of laws reflecting our moral responsibilities to each other and to our communities. The most primal of those rules is the obligation of a mother to her helpless child. This is one of the reasons the public outcry against Susan Smith was so intense.

### Susan Smith Morality

On October 25, 1994, Susan Smith shocked the nation by murdering her children. She believed her two young boys were an obstacle to remarriage, so she placed them in her car, fastened their seat belts, and drove them into a lake.

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THE RESPONSIBILITY A MOTHER  
HAS TOWARD HER CHILD  
SUPERSEDES ANY CLAIM SHE HAS  
TO PERSONAL LIBERTY.

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Smith's crime was especially obscene because she violated the most fundamental moral obligation of all: the responsibility a mother has for the safety and well-being of her own children. Yet wouldn't Susan Smith be exonerated by applying Thompson's and McDonagh's logic? These children were kidnappers and interlopers, trespassing on Smith's life, depriving her of liberty. Why not kill them? Those boys were attacking her. It was self-defense.

A while back, a couple in New York was arrested when authorities learned they took a ten-day vacation to Florida and left their young children behind, locked in their apartment to fend for themselves. If McDonagh's and Thompson's arguments work, these parents should be released from jail because they bear no more obligation towards their own children than they do to strangers across town or burglars who break into their home. Those children were invading their privacy, trespassing in their home, stealing their food.



This argument is frightening for two reasons. First, it must reject the notion of parental responsibility in order to succeed. Second, in spite of that weakness, people in high places think it's compelling. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, writing in the *North Carolina Law Review*, has admitted that *Roe v. Wade* was deeply flawed, and instead quoted the Equal Protection Clause of the [Fourteenth Amendment in support of abortion](#). Women get pregnant, she argued, men don't. Abortion gives women a shot at equality. She then cited Thompson for support.

The responsibility a mother has toward her child supersedes any claim she has to personal liberty. If it doesn't, if Thompson's and McDonagh's arguments succeed, then release Susan Smith. Release the deadbeat Florida tourists.

If parenthood is an act of heroism, if mothers have no moral obligation to the children they bear, if child-rearing is a burden "above and beyond the call of duty," then no child is safe, in the womb or out.

### Addressing Abortion Columbo Style

"The government shouldn't tell me what I can do with my own body."

"Should the government be allowed to control your body concerning your two year old?"

"That's different. That's outside my body. Right now we're talking about my uterus. The government shouldn't tell me what I should do with my uterus any more than it should tell me I have to donate my liver or kidney."

"On that I agree with you, but that has nothing to do with the pro-life view. Pro-lifers are not asking you to give up your uterus. Pro-lifers are saying that the government should be able to protect a human being inside your body just like it does an infant child on the outside of your body."

"But we're talking about my uterus, not a human being like an infant."

"I thought we were talking about what was *in* your uterus."

"Okay, but that's not a human being."

"It isn't? Then what is it?"

"Nobody knows. It's just tissue."

"Well then, let me ask you a few questions about this mysterious thing in your uterus. You agree, then that there is something inside the uterus of a pregnant woman, right?"

"Of course."

"Is it alive?"

"Like I said, no one knows when life begins."

"You didn't answer my question. I asked if it was alive, not when does life begin. So let me ask another way. Is the thing inside of a pregnant woman's uterus growing?"

"Yes, it's growing."

"Well, this is progress. How can it be growing if it's not alive?"

### A Piece of My Mind

Listen to Greg talk about this edition of *Solid Ground*.

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“Hmm... Okay, you’ve made your point. It’s alive. It’s living tissue, part of my own body, and the government has no say over my tissue growing in my body.”

“In principle, I would largely agree with your point about the government, but I don’t think this tissue is part of your body.”

“Of course it is.”

“Did you ever watch CSI?”

“Sure.”

“When the forensic pathologist finds remains of a human body, how do they determine which person the remains belong to?”

“They try to do a matching DNA test.”

“Right. If the DNA from the tissue matches the DNA of a hair sample from a known individual, then, they know where the tissue came from.”

“Right.”

“So if someone took a DNA test of that piece of flesh growing inside of your body if you were pregnant, would its DNA match your DNA?”

“Well...no.”

“Then whatever is growing inside of your body is not part of *your* body, is it? It’s tissue from a different body. That’s why it has a different DNA.”

“I guess so.”

“What kind of foreign creature do you think would be growing inside of your uterus when you’re pregnant?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well then, let’s go back to the CSI illustration. If forensic pathologists found a piece of tissue at a crime scene, how would they know if that tissue came from a human being or from some other animal?”

“I guess they’d do a DNA test.”

“Yes, but it would be a different kind of DNA test than the first one. This one isn’t looking for a match with a *certain* individual, but with a *kind* of individual. What *kind* of creature did this sample come from? What kind

## Putting This Solid Ground into Action

- The key to dealing with an argument like the “Violinist” is to carefully unpack the argument, looking for weaknesses or fallacies.
- Remember that things that seem obvious at first, like a woman having the right to protect her own body, do not apply to the unborn upon closer inspection.
- Don’t forget the rule: The key question in any slippery slope appeal is whether the two situations are truly similar in a morally relevant way.
- Keep in mind that some moral claims are weightier than others—the responsibility a mother has toward



## Stand to Reason Speakers Near You



### Greg Koukl

#### January

[9-10](#) Defending the Faith Conference, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA [Contact](#)

[12](#) Living Oaks Community Church, Newbury Park, CA 9:30 a.m. [Contact](#)

[15](#) Reasonable Faith-Dallas Chapter via Skype 6:30 p.m. [Contact](#)

[19](#) Mission Hills Church, San Marcos, CA [Contact](#)

[30-31](#) Power to Change Student Group, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada [Contact](#)

#### February

[6-7](#) Lethbridge & District Pro-life, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada [Contact](#)

[15-16](#) Living Oaks Community Church, Newbury Park, CA [Contact](#)

[21-23](#) East White Oak Bible Church, Bloomington, IL [Contact](#)

[28-3/2](#) Fellowship Church, Knoxville, TN [Contact](#)



### Alan Shlemon

#### January

[11](#) Onnuri Church, San Jose, CA Time: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Topic: "Tactics in Defending the Faith", "Why Should We Trust the Bible?", "The Case for Intelligent Design", "Dead Men Rise" [Contact](#)

[19](#) Cornerstone Community Church, San Jose, CA Time: 10-11:15 a.m. Topic: "Making Abortion Unthinkable" [Contact](#)

[24-25](#) Upland Christian Academy, Rancho Cucamonga, CA Topic: "Pro-Life Mission Trip" [Contact](#)

[31](#) Chinese Evangelical Free Church, Monterey Park, CA Time: 7:45 p.m. Topic: "Same Sex Marriage & The Future of Family" [Contact](#)

#### February

[5](#) Crossline Community Church, Laguna Hills, CA Time: 7-8:30 p.m. Topics: "Same Sex Marriage and the Future of Family" [Contact](#)

[8-9](#) Parksville Baptist Church, BC, Canada Topics: "How to Stay Christian in College", "Never Read a Bible Verse", "Philippians Read the Right Way", "Evil & Suffering" [Contact](#)

[12](#) Heart Christian Academy, San Juan Capistrano, CA Time: 3-4 p.m. Topics: "Tactics in Defending the Faith" [Contact](#)

[24](#) Riverview Church, Bonsall, CA Time: 7-9 p.m. Topic: "Homosexuality: Truth & Compassion" [Contact](#)

[26](#) Crossline Community Church, Laguna Hills, CA Time: 7-8:30 p.m. Topics: "Why I'm Not an Evolutionist" [Contact](#)



### J. Warner Wallace

#### January

[13](#) Calvary Chapel, Bakersfield, CA Time: 6-9 p.m. Topics: "Cold Case Reliability of the Gospels" [Contact](#)

[17-18](#) First Baptist Church, Zachary, LA Time: Friday, 7-8:30p.m. Saturday, 1-2:30p.m. & 6-7:30 p.m. Topics: TBD [Contact](#)

[23](#) Upland Christian Academy, Rancho Cucamonga, CA Time: 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Topics: TBD [Contact](#)

[30-31](#) Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ Topics: TBD [Contact](#)

#### February

[6-9](#) First Baptist Church, Elgin, IA Time: TBD Topics: TBD [Contact](#)

[12](#) Crossline Community Church, Laguna Hills, CA Time: 7-8:30 p.m. Topics: "Cold Case for God's Existence" [Contact](#)

[21-23](#) Green Bay Community Church, Green Bay, WI Topics: TBD [Contact](#)

[26](#) Heart Christian Academy, San Juan Capistrano, CA Time: 3-4 p.m. Topics: "Case for Truth" [Contact](#)

[28](#) Emmanuel Faith Community Church, Escondido, CA Time: 7-8:30 p.m. Topics: "Cold Case Reliability of the Gospels" [Contact](#)



### Brett Kunkle

#### January

[5](#) Grace Christian Fellowship, Costa Mesa, CA Time: 10 a.m.-12 p.m. Topic: "Mormonism 101" [Contact](#)

[12](#) Capistrano Valley Christian High School, San Juan Capistrano, CA Time: 4-8 p.m. Topic: Berkeley Mission Trip Training. Private Event

[17-20](#) Crossline Community Church, Berkeley, CA Topic: Berkeley Mission Trip [Contact](#)

#### February

[2](#) Grace Christian Fellowship, Costa Mesa, CA Time: 10 a.m.-12 p.m. Topic: "Mormonism 101" [Contact](#)

[5](#) Heart Christian Academy, San Juan Capistrano, CA Time: 3-4 p.m. Topics: "Why I Am a Christian" [Contact](#)

[8-9](#) Upland Christian Academy, Rancho Cucamonga, CA Topic: Berkeley Training Retreat [Contact](#)

[11-13](#) Capital Christian School, Sacramento, CA Topics: TBD [Contact](#)

[16](#) Praise Church, Beaumont, TX Time: 10 & 11:30 a.m. Topics: TBD [Contact](#)

[28](#) Fellowship Church, Knoxville, TN Topics: "If God Is Good, Why Is There Evil?", "Can We Be Good without God?", "What Is God's Will for My Life?", "Who's Waiting for You?" [Contact](#)

To get information about inviting an STR speaker to your church, email [Dawnielle@str.org](mailto:Dawnielle@str.org) for Alan, Brett or Jim, or [Melinda@str.org](mailto:Melinda@str.org) for Greg.





of DNA “signature” does the sample have? It might be dog DNA, cat DNA, possum road-kill DNA, or possibly human DNA. So if we took a piece of tissue from that living thing growing in your uterus, what kind of DNA do *you* think it would have?”

“I don’t know. I’m not a scientist.”

You don’t really have to be a scientist to know the answer to that question. Let me ask my question another way. What kinds of things naturally grow in a woman’s uterus?”

“You know, offspring.”

“So, if there is an offspring growing in a woman’s uterus, what kind of offspring is it? Could it be a dog, or a cat, or a possum offspring? What kind do you think?”

“I guess it would be a human offspring.”

“So we do know what’s growing inside your uterus when you’re pregnant, don’t we. It’s not a mystery. It’s not your tissue, but your human offspring. Someone else is in there—your unborn child. So now that we’ve solved that mystery, you think the government should be allowed to force you to protect your offspring when the child is outside of your body, but not when he’s inside your body. Right?”

“I guess that’s right.”

“Why should the government be allowed to protect your offspring on the outside of your body?”

“Because children are valuable.”

“Right, I agree. But that creates a problem for you now, doesn’t it?”

“How so?”

“Well if children are valuable outside of your body—say, right after they’re born—how are those same children not valuable when they are just a couple of inches away hidden inside your uterus? Why does the *location* of your child make any difference to the *value* of your child?”

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Judith Jarvis Thompson, “A Defense of Abortion,” *Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1 (1971), 47.

<sup>2</sup>Note the appeal to moral intuition here.

<sup>3</sup>I don’t think this reasoning goes through in this case, but it’s a good example of a logical slippery slope approach.

<sup>4</sup>Philosophers call heroic efforts “supererogatory acts,” behavior that is not obligatory, but is praiseworthy if done, like a soldier throwing himself on a grenade, sacrificing his life to protect his comrades.

<sup>5</sup>Eileen McDonagh, *Breaking the Abortion Deadlock: From Choice to Consent* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Nat Hentoff, “The Tiny, Voiceless Enemy Within,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2/3/97, B-5.

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## Only One Question

By Greg Koukl

The logic of the pro-life position can be expressed in a simple syllogism:

- It's wrong to take the life of an innocent human being without proper justification.
- Abortion takes the life of an innocent human being without proper justification.
- Therefore, abortion is wrong.

The key, of course, is the second premise.

There's only one question to answer in the abortion debate: What is the unborn?

Imagine that your child walks up when your back is turned and asks, "Daddy, can I kill this?" What is the first thing you must find out before you can answer him? You can never answer the question "Can I kill this?" unless you've answered a prior question: What is it? This is the key question.

Abortion involves killing and discarding something that's alive. Whether it's right or not to take the life of any living thing depends entirely upon what it is. The answer one gives is pivotal, the deciding element that trumps all other considerations.

Let me put the issue plainly. If the unborn is not a human being, no justification for abortion is necessary. However, if the unborn is a human being, no justification for abortion is adequate.

This distinction simplifies what, to many, seems to be an intractable moral problem. Talk-show hosts, educators, politicians, even religious thinkers reflect and nod solemnly, "Oh, yes, abortion. It's a very complex issue. There are no easy answers."

Answering the foundational question "What is it?" removes the complexity. The answer to this most fundamental question—What is the nature of the unborn?—is the key to answering virtually every other

objection about abortion. Most issues raised in the abortion debate are irrelevant rabbit-trails that drag us off the track of the only pertinent consideration.

When one clears away the irrelevant thoughts on both sides—the name calling, the misrepresentations, the circular reasoning, the medical misinformation, the emotional language—the issue becomes very clear and, I think, reasonably easy to answer. The hard part is applying what we discover.

Should you do something to stop abortion?

Answering the question "What is the unborn?" makes the answer to our final question crystal clear. If the unborn is not a helpless, innocent human being, don't trouble yourself. If it is, then children are being killed for frivolous reasons, and you must do something.

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