

COLLISION OF CONSCIENCE: A BIBLE STUDY

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LIFE

How should a Christian respond to the Health and Human Services (HHS) birth control mandate — a provision of the Patient Protection Affordable Care Act (PPACA) — that includes “contraceptive methods, sterilization procedures, and patient education and counseling for all women with reproductive capacity”? Because some of these contraceptive methods and procedures end life in the womb rather than prevent conception, they are in direct conflict with God’s Word, which teaches that life is good and should be protected (Genesis 1; Psalm 139:13–16; Lev. 19:15–16; 24:19). The Fifth Commandment, “You shall not murder,” stands as the central law for a reasonable and ordered society (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17).

Read Gen. 9:6–7, where the Lord speaks His mandate. Even though the image of God was lost in the Fall (compare Gen. 5:1–2 with 5:3), yet man still possesses a measure of reason, power and ability. This original image of God stands as the reason for why we should not shed blood. Human life is a precious thing in the eyes of God. How is that seen in the second half of the Lord’s instructions to Noah: “Be fruitful and multiply”?

Read Ps. 139:13–17. We are people, and we are the objects of God’s gracious care, even in the womb. The womb should be the safest place in the world, not dangerous or violent (Jer. 20:18). Considering this, how

does the Fifth Commandment apply to unborn children?

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

The HHS mandate requires health-care coverage of “approved contraceptive methods, sterilization procedures, and patient education and counseling for all women with reproductive capacity.” But how does the Bible tell us to view children and pregnancy? (Ps. 127:3; 1 Sam. 1:27).

One of the chief purposes of marriage is children (Gen. 1:27–28). We surmise that family planning is left to the wisdom and reason of husband and wife, but we also mourn a culture that relies heavily on contraception to promote sexual immorality and to reduce sexual intimacy to recreation and worshipping pleasure (Rom. 1:24–25; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thess. 4:3–7).

Read Heb. 13:4. How is human sexuality a gift to be enjoyed in the instituted and protected confines of marriage? The Bible teaches that marriage and family are the primary institutions of society (Gen. 2:21–25) and that civil government, ordered by natural law and thus an extension of the second table of the law (Commandments 4 through 10), should serve the family, not vice versa. Luther even writes in the Large Catechism: “All authority flows and is born from the authority of parents.” The HHS mandate involves children in this preventive service as well. HIPPA laws and the no-cost provision make it possible for children to

receive treatment, birth control and counseling without their parents’ knowledge or consent. How is this in direct opposition to the care of children assigned to parents (Prov. 14:26)?

CHURCH, STATE AND CONSCIENCE

Companies that don’t abide by the HHS mandate will be penalized. This provision requires that employers — even churches, religious institutions and private religious employers — provide health care coverage that violates their consciences.

Read Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17. How does the Bible teach citizens to honor the government? And how does the Christian do so while also delighting in the institutions of family, church and state? When the state commands that which is contrary to the Word of God, we heed the apostles who said boldly, “We must obey God rather than man” (Acts 5:29).

The words of Jesus establish our position: “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21). When human authority stands in conflict against God’s will, the Christian conscience is captive first to the Word of God; the First Commandment sets the stage for the others, including the Fourth (Acts 5:29). How do Luther’s words at the Diet of Worms — “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. Here I stand, I can do no other. So help me, God. Amen” — apply here?

EXEMPT?

Although the HHS mandate says that religious employers are



exempt from this requirement, it says “a religious employer is one that: (1) Has the inculcation of religious values as its purpose; (2) primarily employs persons who share its religious tenets; (3) primarily serves persons who share its religious tenets; and (4) is a non-profit organization.”

The Bible tells us to love our neighbor, to care for strangers, to look after everyone. Our families, churches and religious institutions are in the business of caring for all people. Why is the command of Jesus to “Love your neighbor as yourself” not limited to the neighbor with the same religious tenets (Luke 10:25–37)?

These questions and their ensuing discussions can help guide our thinking about how we vote and for whom we vote. And as we dialogue these matters, we can rejoice that the Lord has provided all that we need for this body and life, including the freedom to speak and to vote our consciences.

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