

## Abortion (Overview)

Abortion refers to the premature termination of a pregnancy, resulting in the expulsion of the baby from the womb before the baby is able to survive. An abortion which happens spontaneously is called a miscarriage. An elective abortion is one that is chosen, and the term abortion is most commonly used in this sense. In most cases, the baby is killed before being removed or expelled from the womb. See separate sheet on abortion techniques.

Abortion has been practiced throughout history, with herbal or other folk “remedies” (such as jumping up and down) but generally recognized as morally wrong. The classical Hippocratic oath (c 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.) stated: “I will use those dietary regimens which will benefit my patients according to my greatest ability and judgment, and **I will do no harm** or injustice to them. I will not give a lethal drug to anyone if I am asked, nor will I advise such a plan; and similarly I will not give a woman a pessary to cause an abortion.”<sup>1</sup>

While their pagan neighbors may have practiced abortion without shame, even early Christians did not. The early Christian document, [Didache](#) (c. 150 A.D.), says: "...do not murder a child by abortion or kill a new-born infant."<sup>2</sup>

Prior to a modern understanding of genetics and fetal development, some thought it was acceptable (or at least a lesser sin) to abort a child before it was truly alive, but once “quickening” occurred, it was understood to be murder. However, modern science has made it clear that life begins at conception. See separate information sheet on fetal development.

Abortion in our present world has become one of the most common surgical procedures ever done. The number of induced abortions declined worldwide between 1995 and 2003, from nearly 46 million to approximately 42 million. About one in five pregnancies worldwide end in abortion. [3] See separate information sheet: “Abortion Statistics.”

Why do women choose to abort their children? A single woman (or a married woman who has been unfaithful) may want to avoid public knowledge of her sexual activity. A young single woman may feel unready to parent, particularly if her boyfriend is not supportive. A married couple in a poor financial situation may already feel overwhelmed with the burden of supporting their family, and feel unable to accept an additional child. A couple with older children may be dismayed at the thought of starting all over again with the lengthy process of raising a child.

It should also be noted that in many cases, it is NOT the mother’s choice to abort, but she is coerced or forced into the abortion by parents or male partner who is unwilling to share in the consequences of dealing with the pregnancy. While arguments to legalize abortion often focused on the “hard cases” such as rape and incest, or serious danger to the mother’s health, such reasons account for only a small percentage of abortions. See separate information sheet “Why Women Have Abortions.”

The Christian View: Every child, no matter what the circumstances of his or her conception, is created by God in His image. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you..” Jeremiah 1:5. “Thou shalt not kill” applies to the preborn as well as those who have been born.

1. "The Hippocratic Oath". [National Institute of Health](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/greek/greek_oath.html). [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/greek/greek\\_oath.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/greek/greek_oath.html). Retrieved 2010-03-30.
2. Cyril Charles Richardson, ed (1953) [c. 150]. "[Didache](#)". *Early Christian Fathers*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press. OCLC 832987. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.viii.i.iii.html>. Retrieved 2010-03-30.
3. Sedgh G, Henshaw S, Singh S, Åhman E, Shah IH. Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide. *Lancet* 2007; 370: 1338–45. Cited by the Guttmacher Institute “Facts on Induced Abortion Worldwide” October 2009, [www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb\\_IAW.html](http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_IAW.html). Retrieved 2010-03-30.