Abortion, termination of pregnancy before birth, resulting in, or accompanied by, the death of the fetus. Some abortions occur naturally because a fetus does not develop normally or because the mother has an injury or disorder that prevents her from carrying the pregnancy to term. This type of spontaneous abortion is commonly known as a miscarriage. Other abortions are induced—that is, intentionally brought on—because a pregnancy is unwanted or presents a risk to a woman’s health.

Induced abortion, the focus of this article, has become one of the most intense and polarizing ethical and philosophical issues of the late 20th century. Modern medical techniques have made induced abortions simpler and less dangerous. But in the United States, the debate over abortion has led to legal battles in the courts, in the Congress of the United States, and state legislatures. It has spilled over into confrontations, which are sometimes violent, at clinics where abortions are performed. This article discusses the social and ethical issues surrounding abortion, the history of the regulation of abortion in the United States and if abortion is right or wrong from a Christian prospective.
As noted earlier, abortion has become one of the most widely debated ethical issues of our time. On one side are pro-choice supporters—individuals who favor a woman’s reproductive rights, including the right to choose to have an abortion. On the other side are the pro-life advocates, who oppose abortion except in extreme circumstances, as when the mother’s life would be threatened by carrying a pregnancy to term. At one end of this ethical spectrum are pro-choice defenders who believe the fetus is only a potential human being until it is viable. Until this time the fetus has no legal rights—the rights belong to the woman carrying the fetus, who can decide whether or not to bring the pregnancy to full term. At the other end of the spectrum are pro-life supporters who believe the fetus is a human being from the time of conception. As such, the fetus has the legal right to life from the moment the egg and sperm unite. Between these positions lies a continuum of ethical and political positions.

An estimated 46 million abortions are performed worldwide each year, of which 20 million are performed in countries where abortion is restricted or prohibited by law. Illegal abortions are more likely to be performed by untrained people, in unsanitary conditions, or with unsafe surgical procedures or drugs. As a result, illegal abortion accounts for an estimated 78,000 deaths worldwide each year, or about one in seven pregnancy-related deaths. In some African countries, illegal abortion may contribute to up to 50 percent of pregnancy-related deaths. In Romania, where abortion was outlawed from 1966 to 1989, an estimated 86 percent of pregnancy-related deaths were caused by illegal abortion. In countries where abortion is legal, less than 1 percent of pregnancy-related deaths are caused by abortion.

In the United States, the legalization of abortion began in 1966 when Mississippi passed a law permitting abortion in cases of rape. In the following four years, other states expanded the use of abortion to include cases in which a pregnancy threatens a woman’s health, the fetus has serious abnormalities, or the pregnancy is the result of incest (sexual intercourse between close relatives). In early
1973 the Supreme Court of the United States decided two cases, *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*, that effectively legalized abortion for any reason before the 24th week of pregnancy, the point when the fetus becomes viable. The law allowed individual states to enact laws restricting abortion after viability, except in cases when abortion is necessary to preserve the life or health of the woman.

In 1976 the Supreme Court recognized the right of pregnant girls under the age of 18, known as mature minors, to have abortions. Three years later the court ruled that states may require the consent of one parent of a minor requesting an abortion. Consent is not necessary if a confidential alternative form of review, such as a judicial hearing, is made available for young women who choose not to involve their parents. The court stated that a judicial court may approve a minor's abortion, in place of her parents, if the judge finds that the minor is mature enough to make the decision on her own. If the judge finds that the minor is not capable of making this decision on her own, the court can decide whether the abortion is in her best interest.

Since the Supreme Court ruling that legalized abortion in 1973, pro-life supporters have worked continuously to reverse the decision. They have lobbied state and federal officials to place restrictions on women seeking abortions or on individuals providing abortions. They have also held protests directed at clinics that perform abortions, and, in some cases, have accosted and obstructed patients and providers at such clinics. In May 1994 the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act was enacted, which made it a federal crime to use force, threat of force, or physical obstruction to injure, intimidate, or interfere with reproductive health care providers and their patients. That same year, in a case known as *Madsen v. Women’s Health Center*, the Supreme Court upheld the basic right to protest in peaceful, organized demonstrations outside abortion clinics. But the court also upheld a Florida law that created a 36 ft. buffer zone around a clinic to ensure that demonstrations do not prevent access to clinics or disrupt clinic operations. In February 1997 the court upheld buffer zones around clinics but struck down certain “floating,” or moveable, buffer zones around individuals approaching clinics.
More than two decades since the Supreme Court first upheld a woman’s right to abortion, the debate over the morality and legality of induced abortion continues in the United States.

ABORTION RIGHT OR WRONG?

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)

I first knew of Jemila Monroe two years ago when I read an article she had written. From the article it seemed that abortion wasn’t an option for Jemila. She was a student at a Christian college, preparing for a life of ministry. She knew that abortion was the willful destruction of a life God had created. She was convinced that abortion was a sin. So when she saw the double pink line on her pregnancy test, she never thought about ending the pregnancy. Even though she was only a junior in college. Even though she had been married only a short time. Even though neither she nor her husband were anywhere near ready to be parents. Even though her pregnancy was difficult and she was almost constantly sick. “I never once seriously considered abortion,” she wrote. “But more than once I wished I could, Jemila admitted.”

I like Jemila’s honesty. And her experience took her pro-life views beyond slogans and bumper stickers. “My...unplanned pregnancy instilled mercy in me for women in desperate situations who make desperate decisions,” she wrote. She became convinced that she should do something to help women in such situations and during her third trimester she went to work for a local Crisis Center. Every week she counseled women on fetal development, parenting skills, and adoption. And she was able to share the gospel with many of those women, helping them to believe in a God who came to earth as a baby in awkward circumstances because He loves us.

One day, after her daughter was born, she and her husband drove by a Planned Parenthood Center (abortion clinic). “Let’s go in there and minister to them,” her husband suggested.
They stopped the car and walked in. The receptionist asked if she could help them, and Jemila answered, “We’re Christians and very pro-life. We’re here to say we’re sorry for all the people who are mean to you guys. This is not how Christians should behave, and we feel deeply sad about that.”

“I can’t tell you how much that means,” the receptionist said to Jemila. They talked about their different views on when life began. She listened as the receptionist explained some of her reasons for working with Planned Parenthood. It seems to me that Jemila compromised none of her convictions; she simply shared her “right to life” views. And yet, the receptionist thanked her for coming and invited her to come back, even though their views were completely different.

I don’t know if you know of a woman who has ever considered abortion, or done more than consider it. Maybe it’s unthinkable to you, or maybe it isn’t. I can only speak for myself when I say that Jemila’s article didn’t change my views on abortion. Nor, it would seem, have hers. Abortion is scripturally wrong. It strikes me, though, that few Planned Parenthood workers have ever told a Pro-Life Christian that she’s welcome anytime. And it strikes me that what Jemila did took much more courage than picketing. It took guts for her to walk with her husband and daughter into that building instead of assembling outside it with a group of like-minded believers and a few signs.

It always takes more courage to be a bearer of mercy and grace and compassion and repentance than it does to be a bearer of judgment and self-righteous anger. It always requires a larger investment to understand than it does to condemn. It did for Jesus. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” It cost Jesus everything to say that. Judgment? Fire and brimstone? He could’ve done that without breaking a sweat. He could’ve easily condemned the world, because grace cost Jesus His life.

That’s why I admire Jemila Monroe. She was following the way of the cross when she walked into that abortion clinic.

I know that some who read this will be uncomfortable. Some even angry. Some will say I’m losing sight of the victims of abortion. Some will say I’m trampling on the convictions and sacrifices of believers who feel called to pickets and protests. I
understand, and I certainly don’t intend to do either of those things. Abortion is a tragedy and a sin, and I don’t doubt the devotion and integrity of many believers who do what they can to draw attention to the problem.

All the same, I think what Jemila Monroe did is closer to the spirit of Christ. She reminds me that Jesus came for sinners, that He didn’t hold them at arm’s length until they cleaned up their acts. He didn’t compromise, so I mustn’t. He didn’t lose sight of the will of God, so I shouldn’t. But doesn’t the gospel tell us that the will of God was to make love and grace and forgiveness concrete enough for human beings to believe in and hang on to?

Beyond and behind the issue of abortion, or any other social ill, there is the problem that many men and women are trying to live life without God. We, as the church are to follow Jesus in embodying the good news that “God so loved the world that He gave Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Embodying. Not just telling it. Not just talking about it, singing about it, reading about it. But living it out in the world, among the people who God so loved.

Doing so might not take you to a Planned Parent-hood Center. But it will take you to equally unexpected places, to sinful, broken people who need the grace of God. Our calling is not to be adversaries of those people. Our calling is to be a ready reference for them of the power of the good news of Jesus. “Let your conversation be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” (Colossians 4:6) It is the power of God, after all, that can truly transform and re-birth. And it is in the words and actions and lives of His redeemed people that His power is most clearly seen.

Even in an abortion clinic.