

# The Use of Graphic Visuals in Pro-Life Work

## Frequent Objections of Concerned Christians

### 1. *Jesus would never use graphic images to communicate His message.*

Crucifixion was one of the most graphic of public executions in the Roman Empire. Galatians 3:1 teaches that Jesus used the cross to “placard” himself, literally, “make a public display...”<sup>1</sup>, and through the cross, triumph over His enemies. (Colossians 2.15).

The violence done to Jesus’ face, head, and body beginning with His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, was extensive according to the written accounts. He was beaten in the face and head at least three times and flogged, all before his crucifixion (Matt. 26.67-68; 27.26-37; Mark 14.65; Luke 22.63; John 18.22; 19.1-3).

The combined effect of these acts of violence, all within a 9 hour period of time, left Jesus so terribly disfigured that those who previously knew Him may not have recognized Him. The prophet Isaiah predicted (53.3-5) that Jesus’ appearance on the cross was so hideous that it would cause men to “hide their face.”

**SUMMARY:** Jesus used His crucifixion as a visible witness of the horrific nature of sin, but also as a public exhibit of His triumph against sin, as evidenced by His resurrection. Would Jesus use a graphic image to convey His message? Answer: He already has.

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### 2. **Using graphic abortion images may hinder non-Christians from coming to the gospel.**

Is greed a sin? If the answer is yes, could a picture of it hinder greedy non-Christians from coming to the gospel? The answer is “Yes!”

Jesus told a parable about a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus (Luke 16.19-31). In His word picture, both men die, but the greed of the rich man prevented him from joining Lazarus in heaven with Abraham. Did Jesus’ parable (illustration) hinder greedy people from coming to Him? In this case one might argue that it did (Luke 18.23). Or was it instead greed that **actually** caused the young rich ruler to stumble?

A realistic picture of sin might deter an **unrepentant** person from trusting in Christ. In the same way, one who has either already experienced abortion and is set on justifying their action, or whose lifestyle might call for a future abortion, might refuse to repent upon seeing

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<sup>1</sup> Greek word is προεγράφη.

a realistic picture of abortion sin. Should that possibility steer Christians from helping someone understand God's perspective of abortion? Is a picture of abortion sin the problem, or is the problem the unrepentance of the sinner who sees the picture?

The apostle Paul actually taught that the cross, an extremely graphic visual, will hinder some people from coming to the gospel (I Cor. 1.23; Gal. 5.11). If this is true, should we cease to include it in sharing the Gospel?

**How** graphic images are used, including the cross, is usually what makes the difference. When used respectfully to confront sin, graphic visuals can be a powerful tool to convince the viewer of the bad news, "For all have sinned..." (Rom 3.23), and open a door in the heart of the viewer for the good news.

Consider Mel Gibson's portrayal of Jesus' crucifixion in *The Passion*. We live in a visual learning culture.

The message that abortion is a greater evil than the readily pictured consequences of an unwanted pregnancy will frequently fall on deaf ears without the use of the very real graphic pictures of abortion.

**SUMMARY:** God used the cross, a graphic visual, to focus attention on the problem of sin, and the good news of salvation embodied in His Son. Graphic visuals of abortion, when properly used, focus the viewers' attention on the sin of abortion, and present countless opportunities to also share the good news of salvation in Christ.

### **3. Using graphic images will traumatize, offend, even drive away, both Christian and non-Christian women from seeking healing they need from a previous abortion.**

What convinces the average person that they need to see a dentist? For most, the pain or cost of **not** seeing the dentist must be greater than the pain and cost anticipated by a visit to their dentist. The lesser of the two pains wins out almost every time.

Healing from abortion will not usually begin until the emotional pain caused by an abortion becomes greater than the perceived benefits of that abortion. Only 1 in 4 women report feelings of regret over their abortion.<sup>2</sup> Without a dramatic change of moral and emotional equilibrium in these women, healing will not begin. Graphic abortion images presented respectfully have, through the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16.8), the capability of initiating such a moral and emotional change.

Without meaningful intervention, both Christian and non-Christian women who have previously experienced abortion are even **more likely** to experience a subsequent abortion. The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) reports that 47% of the nearly 4,000 abortions performed daily in the U.S. are performed on women who have already had at least one previous abortion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Psychological Responses of Women After First-Trimester Abortion," Brenda Major, PhD et al, *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2000;57:777-784.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb\\_induced\\_abortion.html](http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/fb_induced_abortion.html)

The short term trauma of seeing the painful truth about abortion is preferable to the long term trauma produced by additional abortion sin, not to mention the possible loss of reconciliation to God through Christ.

**SUMMARY:** Seeing and understanding sin as God views it has one of two effects upon us: we either move further away from Him, or we move closer through the cross of Christ. (I John 1.8-9) Showing abortion from God's perspective—for the sinful behavior it actually is—will produce both.

#### **4. Using graphic images will frighten children who might see them. Jesus taught His disciples never to harm a child.**

The Justice For All Exhibit is never intentionally placed where elementary children will see it. That does not mean young children will never see it. When permitted, we always place warning signs at some distance from the Exhibit in order to give advance warning to parents or adults who may have small children in tow. The parent(s) can then decide what action is appropriate.

At UCLA, 5<sup>th</sup> grade students on school field trips visited the Justice For All Exhibit on campus. They responded quite maturely to it compared to the relatively older university community. UCLA students complained that we had no right to offend UCLA students with the pictures of children who had been killed by abortion. The 5<sup>th</sup> graders uniformly complained that no one should have the right to harm innocent unborn children like those pictured in the Justice For All Exhibit.

Are students mature enough to help conceive a child and experience an abortion not also old enough to benefit from education about abortion and its effects? Why would anyone want to withhold such critical information from them?

Jesus taught his disciples to never do anything that might cause a child to sin. (Matt. 18.6) By that he did not mean we should avoid teaching our children to be able to recognize sin, but instead teach them so that they might avoid participating in sin.

The Justice For All Exhibit has been on campuses totaling more than 1.5 million university students over the last 9 years. Never has anyone upon seeing the graphic images contained in the Exhibit said they were afterwards more likely to have an abortion. In contrast, thousands have said that because they saw abortion, at least they could never have one, or could never have another.

#### **5. Jesus never preached against abortion nor did his disciples.**

Is abortion the murder of an innocent human being? If the answer is yes, then Jesus and his disciples both spoke out against abortion because they spoke out against murder.<sup>4</sup> The same principle exists in math: it is if  $a = b$  and  $b = c$ , then  $a = c$ .

Abortion, the murder of unwanted, unborn children, is merely a subset of the larger circle of murder of unwanted humans of all ages.<sup>5</sup> Jesus did not specifically speak out against killing

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<sup>4</sup> See Matthew 5.21; 19.18; Romans 13.19; James 2.11.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the Justice Department reports that of the total number of murders committed in 2001 (13,752), 220 were perpetrated against children one year old or younger.

unwanted born people over the age of 95, but that does not invalidate his general teaching that the euthanizing of 95 year olds violates God's standard.

**SUMMARY:** The person who says "Jesus never preached against abortion" has either intentionally or unintentionally deemed unborn children to be less than fully human. If the unborn at every stage of their development and growth are full members of the human community, unwanted unborn humans should not be selectively eliminated from the Scriptural prohibitions against murdering humans.

## **6. Focusing on abortion will distract Christians from the principle mission of preaching the gospel.**

What is the principle mission of the gospel? I Corinthians 15.3-4 sum it up as: 1) the penalty of sin, and 2) the value of Christ's substitutionary death for sin, and 3) His resurrection, eye-witnessed by hundreds of people.

Verbally preaching the gospel first requires a witness against sin, followed by the message of the efficacy of Christ's death for sin and His resurrection.

Gallup Polling consistently suggests that 2 out of 3 Americans believe that killing an unborn child during the first 12 weeks of their life should be legal, i.e., it is morally permissible.<sup>6</sup> According to polls of Protestant and Catholic Christians in Wichita, KS, 2 out of 3 say they believe abortion should be legal (i.e., it is morally permissible) for those who do not want a handicapped child.<sup>7</sup>

The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) consistently finds that the combined rate of abortion among evangelicals and Catholics is nearly indistinguishable from the rate in the overall population.<sup>8</sup> Sitting under the teaching of evangelical and Catholic pastors is not having much statistical impact on attitudes about abortions, or upon those having abortions in America.

Christians and non-Christians alike are morally confused about abortion. People don't generally seek forgiveness for an action they believe to be moral, or believe to be at worst morally neutral. How will people stuck in the quagmire of moral neutrality about abortion ever become convinced of the sinfulness of abortion? One way to begin this shift is to pretend they're all from Missouri (the "show-me state").

**SUMMARY:** Far from detracting from the gospel, a ministry focused upon reaching people with the gospel through presenting the truth about abortion seems quite in line with gospel presentations – preaching against sin and about the wonder of the forgiveness of sins in Christ. How will someone who has no real comprehension of the ugliness of abortion sin have any regard for the good news of forgiveness in Christ?

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<sup>6</sup> "Public Opinion About Abortion -- An In-Depth Review," by Lydia Saad  
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/specialReports/pollSummaries/sr020122v.asp>.

<sup>7</sup> "The Church and Abortion," Heartland Life Network, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/2814096.html>.

**7. All the children aborted are going to heaven so we should not do anything to change that—they are better off because of abortion.**

Would anyone making the same claim regarding one year old children or toddlers be treated with respect or given a hearing?

**8. Using graphic visuals is a judgmental approach—Christians should share the truth in love.**

Graphic visual images in a Justice For All campus outreach are used in a similar manner as pictures have been used to portray the horror of Christ's death on the cross, man's inhumanity to man under the Nazi regime, or in the Cambodian Killing Fields, or of the civil war in Rwanda, or in the American slavery and killing of Africans. Why would we teach differently about the immorality of killing unborn children?

Unless sharing the bad news about sin is unloving, withholding the visual truth about abortion turns out to be an unloving, even selfish decision. It benefits only those with relatively more power than the population that is being victimized—unwanted, unborn children. Because these children cannot speak for themselves, they need an advocate to speak on their behalf.

*Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.  
Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.*

Psalm 82.3-4