postponed. After all, it was the only *abortionist* casualty in over twenty years of legal abortion. Michael Griffin was seen as an aberration in the right-to-life movement even by those who commended him for forcefully protecting unborn children.

Then, on August 19, 1993, just when it appeared that the anti-abortion movement might resume picketing and protesting as usual, an Oregon woman traveled all the way to Wichita, Kansas to shoot notorious third-trimester abortionist George Tiller. Rachelle ("Shelley") Shannon fired five shots through the window of a Travelall vehicle to wound Tiller in both arms. After the shooting she ran from the scene but was arrested while dutifully returning her rental car.

In the wake of these two events, Christians are called to critically examine the use of force, even potentially lethal force, to stop acts of abortion. In light of Scriptural injunctives such as "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod. 20:13), how is it that any Christian could accord these acts of "violence" merit as righteous, and Godly? By saying that Michael Griffin and Shelley Shannon were justified in their actions, are we in reality condoning murder?

"Thou Shalt not Kill"

First, it is imperative to understand the defensive nature of the actions taken by these two people. Both abortionists are known killers (in the Biblical sense), and both were scheduled to kill again. The actions taken amounted to nothing more than providing a defense for innocent people who were going to be killed by an unjust aggressor. The temptation is to see this as a more complex issue; an act of hatred, vengeance, etc., when, in fact, it is incredibly simple. There were children who were going to be killed, and someone came to their defense to try and prevent their deaths.

The word "kill" (*ratsach*) in the Sixth Commandment is one of seven Hebrew words in the Old Testament (OT) used to describe the taking of life in one way or another. It is important to define the specific meaning of *this* word to determine if *this* Law was actually violated by Griffin and Shannon.

Ratsach appears 47 times in the OT. It is never used in the context of legitimate war, or in the case of self-defense (Exod. 22:2), accidental killing (Deut. 19:5), or in the execution of a person who has forfeited his life by "shedding man's blood" (Gen. 9:6). It is also not used in the text describing how Moses slayed the Egyptian taskmaster (Exod. 2:12). All of these Scriptures use a different word not found in the Sixth Commandment. And clearly Scripture supports certain kinds of killing as viscerally regrettable but righteous nevertheless.

The word, *ratsach*, does refer to killing for revenge (Num. 35:27, 30), and the premeditated killing of an innocent person (2 Kings 6:32). Therefore, when the Word says, "It is mine to avenge, I will repay, says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19) there is a direct connection and precaution against usurping the role of God that relates directly to this Sixth Commandment. Only two lines later there is a designation as to whom God has delegated authority to in order to avenge wrongs done (Rom. 13:1). The government then, and not the individual, has the right to *punish* for past offenses. Likewise, there is a similar pattern in Scripture that condemns those like abortionists who "lie in wait for some one's blood" (Prov. 1:11), and it is specified that "The Lord hates. . . hands that shed *innocent* blood" (Prov. 6:17).

To determine that Griffin and Shannon have violated or sought to violate the Sixth Commandment, we must examine two issues: 1) Did they usurp the government's authority by attempting to punish for killings (*ratsach*) done by these abortionists in the past, or were they engaged in preventing the deaths of children yet to be killed? And 2) Do abortionists Gunn and Tiller qualify as "innocent blood" in the Biblical sense within the context of these shootings?

Judicial Act or Justifiable Homicide?

The answer to the first question lies ultimately with Griffin, Shannon, and God, but we are able to make some determinations based on the facts surrounding the events. Michael Griffin shot an abortionist who was going in to begin the day's schedule of killing. There were already twelve children (in utero) inside who were to be aborted.

Shelley Shannon immediately made a statement to police in which she said, "If ever there was a justifiable homicide, this would have been it." In the March 1994 court testimony in her trial against the charge of attempted murder, Shannon clearly expressed that it was to prevent more killing of innocent babies that motivated her actions.

Justifiable homicide (under current civil law) is applied when a death occurs in the act of defending one's own life or property or the life of another innocent person. It would appear that Shannon's intent, as well as Griffin's, was to prevent more killings of the kind that are clearly forbidden in the Sixth Commandment not to punish for crimes already committed by the abortionists.

As to the second question, abortionist Gunn has been credited with killing somewhere between 40 and 50 thousand unborn children. Abortionist Tiller is a nationally known killer who specializes in killing older babies. There are no reporting laws for him to adhere to, but his in-house crematorium and his own public statements in which he claims to do "about 2,000" every year are testimony to the fact that he, like David Gunn, does not qualify as "innocent blood" within the context of these shootings (Gen. 9:6).

Neither Griffin or Shannon shot the abortionists for past killings which they had done. They did not usurp governmental authority. And the persons shot, because they were engaged in the ongoing process of "shedding innocent blood" (murder), were not violated in the Biblical sense.

Self Defense and Defense of Others

Next, we address the issue of defensive action. Where does Scripture say we can use physical force even to the point of taking a life in order to defend ourselves or another?

The concept of defensive action is seen in Scripture in a number of areas: Abram used force to rescue his relatives (Gen. 14:14-16), and Moses actually used lethal force against an Egyptian who was in the process of abusing a Hebrew slave (Exod. 2:11-12). Centuries later God divinely inspired the writer of the book of Hebrews to mention the period in Moses life surrounding this event. He is listed in the "Hebrews hall of fame" without a word of reproach for this deed (Heb. 11:24-27). And Stephen, before being stoned, also testified to the nature of Moses' actions in defense of the slave (Acts 7:23-25). On a larger scale, Elijah the prophet of God slew 450 prophets of Baal in defense of a nation (1 Kings 40:40). He was certainly not acting under the authority of God's divinely appointed governors (Ahab and Jezebel), but rather under the singular and divine authority of God.

It is also important to pick up the theme of self-defense which is so easily overlooked in a later chapter of the Exodus account. In the OT capital punishment is not prescribed for property crimes. Yet the thief opens himself up to the risk of death if he is caught breaking into a home in the middle of the night (Exod. 22:1). It is because of the potential risk to innocent life, implied by breaking in under cover of darkness, that the homeowner is free of "blood guilt" should he kill the thief in the ensuing effort to protect himself or his family. God simply prefers the life of the innocent over the life of the guilty. It is His right to establish such a hierarchy.

Consistent Standard of Justice

It is also His right to establish a standard of justice for all men. And while that standard is only fully realized by an examination of all of Scripture, there are patterns that we may observe which give us an indication of His divine disposition regarding justice for the unborn as well as the born. There are three simple passages of Scripture which articulate this point well. They are the famous "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" Laws. But before looking at them, it is important to realize that there is an underlying principle which is our focus. As Jesus instructed in His Sermon on the Mount, we must avoid an opportunistic interpretation that opens the door to individual retaliation.

On the first occasion when the Law prescribes the "eye for eye" rule of thumb, it is in the case where a woman with child is struck and caused to go into premature labor. The NIV translates it "gives birth prematurely," but more precisely, the Hebrew states "brings forth her child" and "prematurely" is implied. The nearest antecedent is the child, therefore; if any injury to the child results, the man who struck the woman and brought about the early delivery of the child is to be wounded so that his injuries are consistent with the injury he has caused to the child (Exod. 21:22-25).

In the second instance the principle of consistent punishment for wrongful injury is more broadly stated. It is said that the "eye for eye" rule of thumb applies in the case where "any human being" is callously injured by another. "As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured," reads the Law (Lev. 24:20).

And finally, even the intent and willful act through perjuring one's testimony to harm another is cause for this punishment. The "malicious witness" is to be punished with the consequences that would have applied to the victim of his lies (Deut. 19:21).

In examining these Scriptures we find that they point us toward a single and consistent standard of justice. There is not one standard for black people and another for white people; one for Jews and another for non-Jews; one for unborn and another — broader, more protective — standard for those who are born. And it is a principle that we see carried over into the New Testament (NT) when Jesus tells us that we are to render the care and concern for others that we would wish for ourselves (Luke 6:31). It is argued that if we wish the right to protect ourselves and other innocent *born* people from the Ted Bundys and Jeffrey Dahmers of this world, we ought not to think that we can deprive the *unborn* of that same standard of protection.

Attitude is Everything

Oh, but there was a "premeditated" aspect to the shooting of both of the abortionists! In fact "violence" in the form of bombings and arson all have an aspect of preplanning. Weren't premeditated acts denounced when Scripture says, "But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from My altar and put him to death" (Exod. 21:14)?

The KJV gives it a more precise rendering — closer to the original Hebrew — and reads, "But if a man comes presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile thou shalt take him from Mine altar, that he may die."

Again, this text does not support an argument against forceful intervention to save an innocent person. The key word, rendered "presumptuously" in the KJV and "deliberately" in the NIV is from the Hebrew word *zid*. It is a word which literally means to act proudly, presumptuously, rebelliously. It combines three aspects of pride: 1) Presumption that assumes too much of a sense of authority, 2) Rebellion or disobedience by asserting the individual will over that of legitimate authority, and 3) A willful decision to act outside the realm of authority given the individual by God.