

## A Christian View of Controlling Conception

The last 60 years have seen a revolution in man's ability to control conception: to prevent it where it is not desired, or to produce it where it is.

Preventing Conception	Producing Conception
Natural Methods	Fertility treatments
Barrier Methods	Intra-Uterine Fertilisation (Artificial Insemination)
Hormonal Pills / IUDs	In vitro-fertilisation
Emergency Contraception	Surrogate Motherhood
Sterilisation	

## Biblical Principles Regarding Birth

Biblical Principles:

1. God's first command to man was to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28). Children are celebrated as a gift from God (Ps 127:4-5). **Question: Does this mean that Christian married couples should have as many children as their bodies allow?** No Scripture commands a certain practice regarding how many children a married couple may have or should have. Scripture does assume that people marry, at least in the earlier part of life, partly to have children. How should the creation mandate be understood by a farmer? "The answer, of course, is that a farmer seeks to cultivate what he believes he can reasonably handle. He doesn't take this command to mean that he needs to make his farm be as large as is naturally possible. Likewise, then, it is right for a couple to seek to have the number of children that they believe they can reasonably nurture in light of the other callings they may also have on their lives. In the same vein, Wayne Grudem points out: "We aren't required to maximize the amount of children we have any more than we are required to subdue the earth all the time—plant, grow, harvest, etc." <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/does-the-bible-permit-birth-control> Voluntary selectivity when it comes to planting a field is wise stewardship, not destructive.
2. God is sovereign over conception (Gen 20:18). **Question: Should we not then avoid interfering in any way, and leave the results up to God?** A woman's cycle has given a natural window of time in which she is not fertile. In principle, this means that God does not forbid marital sexuality that will not produce children. If technology exists to extend this, it is not, in principle, a violation of God's order. Using human means that order and regulate nature is not a violation of nature, as long as the technology does not violate a moral commandment. Whether this technology is used to prevent conception, or to encourage it, it is part of the stewardship of nature to develop technologies to make us better managers of creation.

3. Doesn't the Bible condemn birth control in the case of Onan? Onan's actions are condemned because he had selfish motives (he did not want the inheritance to go to his dead brother's offspring). The matter in Genesis 38 is not contraception, but obedience to the Levirate principle.
4. Marital sexuality without procreation is not condemned in Scripture (Prov 5:18-19). If procreation were the sole reason for the marital bed, one cannot make sense of voluntary abstinence (1 Cor 7:5), or even the point of sexuality for the roughly 28 days a month when a woman is not fertile, or even after menopause.

#### **When Birth Control Would Be Wrong**

1. It is wrong to use it outside of marriage for illicit sexual activity.
2. It is wrong to use it if a married couple simply wish to indefinitely reject the responsibility of parenting. What if their parents had taken the same view? Indeed, the shrinking populations of Europe, Japan, demonstrate how this selfish principle can lead to a steady decline in the nations wealth.
3. It is wrong to use it if it produces abortions.

#### **When Birth Control Could Be Right**

- 1) If a married couple are not yet in a place to care for a child (Prov 24:27)
- 2) If a couple cannot afford to properly care for more children than they have (1 Tim 5:8, Lk 14:28).
- 3) To put space between children. Very fertile people can have children in rapid succession, which can place great strain on the family.
- 4) To protect the health of the parents – in some cases, more children could harm the physical (or mental) health of the parents.
- 5) To limit and complete the number of children. No Scripture forbids parents from doing so.
- 6) Some couples may choose childlessness for very specific ministry purposes. Some rare vocations almost require childlessness (Mt 19:12).

#### **The Ethics of Birth Control and Fertilisation Technologies**

1. Natural methods. Following a woman's natural cycle has no moral issues. It requires rather unusual discipline, and would not be considered reliable.
2. Barrier methods. Again, no moral issue is here.
3. Sterilisation. Jesus speaks of 'eunuchs' (Mat 19:12). This is the ancient equivalent of someone who has undergone surgery to prevent further fertility. This is a major decision, and younger couples would be advised to consider carefully before going through with this.

4. Hormonal methods. Whether taken as a pill, or supplied through an intrauterine device, these methods seek to prevent conception by imitating pregnancy, thereby preventing ovulation, and by thickening cervical mucus, and preventing sperm from reaching the egg. Some release copper ions, which disable sperm.

The moral issue with these is a third possibility: some claim that a breakthrough fertilised egg is possible, and the uterus will be thinned, causing the fertilised egg to not implant. If this third case occurs, you have the equivalent of an abortion. The Christian community is very divided on this, mainly because it is very difficult to know this with any certainty. Focus on the Family's Physicians Resource Council (PRC), under the leadership of James Dobson, examined the issue for two years. The PRC is comprised of prolife Christian doctors from a wide variety of fields. They sought to thoroughly study the issue of whether combination oral contraceptives (those with both estrogen and progesterone) cause abortion. Ultimately, even they were undecided: "Pro-life physicians who have carefully and conscientiously studied this issue have come to different conclusions regarding the interpretation and implications of the relevant scientific data. After two years of extended deliberation and prayer, the PRC has not been able to reach a consensus as to the likelihood, or even the possibility, that these medications might contribute to the loss of human life after fertilization. The majority of the experts to which Dr. Dobson has spoken feel that the pill does not have an abortifacient effect. A minority of the experts feel that when conception occurs on the pill, there is enough of a possibility for an abortifacient effect, however remote, to warrant warning women about it."

Four Christian ProLife Obstetrician-Gynecologists: "We do not find substantive evidence that hormone contraceptives include an abortifacient mechanism of action. <http://aaplog.org/hormone-contraceptives-controversies-and-clarifications/>

Other voices call IUDs 'little abortion machines'. But, from my reading, if a woman were to get pregnant with an IUD, the IUD could not do anything to the fertilised egg. In fact, the progestin may help the pregnancy, because that is what is naturally released during pregnancy. It is true that the uterine lining is thinned out, which would make implantation difficult. The majority consensus seems to be that hormonal pills or devices that prevent conception do not have abortifacient results; however, each Christian couple would have to prayerfully make a decision of conscience based on what evidence exists.

5. Emergency Contraception. The drug RU-486, is clearly a drug that kills a fertilised zygote, and this is murder. So called 'morning-after pills' vary in their make-up. Some are simply higher doses of a regular contraceptive pill. Many claim these are simply inhibiting conception during the 48-hour window in which it may take place. However, there is a higher chance of preventing a fertilised zygote from implanting, and Christians should be advised of the higher danger here.
6. Intra-uterine fertilisation, or artificial insemination, is using technology to overcome impediments to birth. This is usually provided by the husband (AIH) If the husband is infertile, a couple may elect to use donor sperm (AID). Question: is this adultery by proxy? Is it only the wife's child? Is donor sperm immoral in itself? It is not adultery, for no union is involved. To argue against another being the father would become something of an

argument against adoption. However, a couple would have to prayerfully consider their own conscience in respect of this, and consider if adoption might not be preferable to them both.

However, moral issues are present in the idea of broad sperm banks to be used by homosexual couples or even single women who wish to become 'bachelor mothers'. God's plan is for children to have a father and a mother.

7. In-vitro fertilisation. As the technology currently exists, multiple ova and sperm are united in a Petri dish, and later transplanted. The problem here is that for the sake of obtaining one fertilised zygote, many are sacrificed. This means that doctors/ scientists are knowingly causing the deaths of multiple human beings to obtain one that survives. Until the technology improves to where human life is not wasted or taken, Christians should consider other options.
8. Surrogate Motherhood. This is essentially the reverse of IUF, and uses the womb of another woman for AID. However, it carries much more emotional, social, and even legal baggage. There is the potential of the exploitation of womanhood. The maternal instinct is strong, and more than one biological surrogate had had a very hard time giving up her child. Wisdom would suggest that adoption is a better course.

*Material adapted from Norm Geisler*