

BIRTH CONTROL

Introductory comments: A controversial topic today

(1) Roman Catholic teaching:

sexual activity should always be “open to the possibility of new life”
therefore only “natural” forms of family planning are acceptable, not “artificial” forms
-- but large numbers of R. Cath. lay persons disagree with this

(2) among evangelical Protestants:

a few: oppose all forms of birth control – it’s not “natural” – see large families as a blessing from God
most: birth control is a personal decision for each family; couples are free to decide how many children to have
a few: plan to never have children

(3) even if people think some birth control is OK, what about different methods? are some wrong?

A. Overall perspective: The Bible presents a very positive view of children

(quite different from contemporary society – often views children as burden, huge expense, an inconvenience)

Genesis 1:28: ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Malachi 2:15: ¹⁵ Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.

1 Timothy 5:14: ¹⁴ So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.

Psalm 127:3-5: ³ Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. ⁴ Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. ⁵ Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Psalm 128:3-4: ³ Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. ⁴ Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.

1. Therefore, on this topic, the first question for married couples is this:

→ Do you agree in your hearts with this positive view of children as a blessing from God?

→ Do you want to have some children sometime in your marriage?

2. These verses lead me to think that married couples should, in almost all cases, plan to have children sometime.

3. We should primarily emphasize the wonderful privilege and joy and blessing of having children, in many cases several children! (They will usually continue to be a blessing and a joy throughout life.)

→ Therefore my personal encouragement to most young couples would be: plan to have several children, and to enjoy your large family for your entire lifetime. (I don’t meet couples who say, “We had too many children.”)

4. A note to husbands: be careful not to deny your wife the privilege and joy of having children for too long in your marriage.

1 Samuel 1:4-11: [to Hannah]: And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?” ⁹ After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. . . . She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. ¹¹ And she vowed a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.”

Psalm 113:9: ⁹ He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!

Isaiah 54:1 (quoted in Gal 4:27): ¹ “Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,” says the LORD.

B. But what if a couple is unable to have children?

1. This can happen even when a couple is “blameless” in God’s sight:

Luke 1:5-7: ⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

2. It is important to continue to seek to delight in God and trust him for what is best:
Psalm 37:3-5: ³Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. ⁴Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.
3. Adoption is often a good choice, if possible, and if that is your desire
4. Both Jesus and Paul were single, and had no physical children, but fulfilled the ministries that God had given to them.
5. The NT also has a positive emphasis on spiritual children
1 Corinthians 4:14-15: ¹⁴I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. ¹⁵For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.
Galatians 4:19-20: ¹⁹my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!
²⁰I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.
1 Timothy 1:2: ²To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
Titus 1:4: To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.
1 Peter 5:13: ¹³She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.
6. Yet there can still be deep grief that couples feel when they want to have children and cannot (Scripture recognizes this several times)

C. The argument that birth control is sometimes morally right (my view)

1. Deciding to have children is a weighty responsibility:
1 Tim. 5:8: But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
This includes providing for “financial, physical, emotional, spiritual” needs (J. & P. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*,² p. 305).
Also the consider principle in Luke 14:28: For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?
→ couples should wisely consider how many children they are able to care for responsibly
(however, even for families with 4 or 5 or more children, in our society today, things somehow work out)
2. All of life consists of deciding not to do some good things in order to be able to do other good things.
3. There comes a point in life for every couple where one or both spouses will have a sense, “We should not have any more children.” Or: “We cannot do a good job of raising any more children.”
→ this might also happen when both spouses are older when they marry, or because of some medical condition

D. Some people argue that all birth control is wrong: two main arguments

1. The argument that we should maximize something that is good:
(1) It is good to have children.
(2) Therefore Christians should have all they can!
2. The argument that birth control is “contrary to nature”

E. Answers: Reasons why birth control is not always wrong

1. Not prohibited: birth control is never forbidden in Scripture, and we should not prohibit something the Bible does not prohibit (either explicitly or by implication)
 - a. Doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture - a very important principle: (Don’t make commands where the Bible does not make them.)
Psalm 119:1: ¹Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!
2 Timothy 3:17: [Scripture is breathed out by God] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
 - b. Gen. 38:6-10 (Onan) should not be used as an argument against birth control
Genesis 38:6-10 ⁸Then Judah said to Onan, “Go in to your brother’s wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother.” ⁹But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother’s wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother. ¹⁰And what he did was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and he put him to death also.
→ It was a matter of greed: Onan wanted to avoid sharing the inheritance with his brother’s children – his sin was his selfish refusal to obey God’s special law for this situation.
 - c. Another way to say this: the Bible never commands us to have all the children we can have.
2. The general principle: It’s OK to place less emphasis on some good activities in order to focus on other good activities

- a. Seek to know God's will for your own life, what he is calling you to emphasize
 - 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 (in general, remain in state in which you were called)
 - 1 Corinthians 7:7: But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.
 - 1 Corinthians 12:17-20 (body has many parts, one body)
- b. Side note: In life generally, don't let people pressure you with this argument:
 - "Since activity A is good, you should do as much of A as you possibly can"
 - (Activity A = evangelize, teach Sunday School, sing in choir, minister to the poor, study theology or Bible, exercise, earn money, raise children, care for children, care for parents, etc.)
 - Answer: God may be calling you to emphasize instead good activity B or C or D – something else.
- 3. The Bible does not command us simply to follow what is "natural," but to follow his commands in the Bible (we differ with Roman Catholic view of "natural law" here)
 - a. Sexual intercourse itself: we are not just to do what is "natural" because God's commands limit sex to within marriage
 - b. Procreation is not the only purpose for which God created sex: also companionship, pleasure, expressing "one-flesh" union within marriage (Gen. 2:24). (Sex is also good after menopause, or at non-fertile times of month)
 - c. God changed the order of the natural world at the Fall and therefore our ideal is not to let "untouched nature" take its course
 - (1) Genesis 3:17-19: cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life
 - (2) Examples: we prune fruit trees; we thin carrots; we grow only a certain crop in one area, and only a certain amount; we clear out trees in order to plant crops; we kill weeds and exclude wild animals, etc.
 - (3) Gen. 1:28 ("subdue the earth") and Gen. 3:17-19 require that we take active steps to change or overcome the course of "untouched nature"
 - d. Where God gives us ordinary physical means to bring about results in this world, he does not want us just to "trust his sovereignty" (or else our fields would be overgrown with weeds!)
 - God's sovereignty does not normally override human actions and their ordinary consequences.
 - e. Gen. 3:16 changed the effects of childbirth on a woman's body:
 - ¹⁶ To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."
 - f. It is possible that Gen. 3:16 also shows an increase in a woman's fertility, more than her body was suited to bear – at least in her fallen state: This is a possible alternative translation:

KJV: Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception;

NKJV: To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;

F. Then how can we know how many children to have (or, in general, how much time and effort to give to various good activities)?

- 1. There is no one right answer for everybody
- 2. We should allow for a wide variety of different answers because of different individual callings from God.
- 3. Need to pray individually for God's wisdom, and seek the counsel of others
 - James 1:5-6: If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.
- 4. It is not wrong to "count the cost": decide how many children you believe God will enable you to raise well. But there is also a matter of doing what is right and trusting God to provide what is needed.
- 5. Two errors to avoid:
 - (a) basing decisions on fear and failing to obey God's calling
 - (b) basing decision on reckless, irresponsible supposed "faith" that is not from God
 - we have no right to dream up "faith" in God for whatever idea we might think would be good – authentic faith must have a good basis in Scripture
- 6. Christians need to respect the decisions of others and allow each other much freedom for personal differences in this regard.

G. Methods of birth control?

- 1. Avoid methods that allow conception to occur and then cause the death of a newly-conceived child (abortifacients)
- 2. Various methods that prevent conception are acceptable

H. Raising children is ordinarily one of the most rewarding and the most time-consuming activities of your life

→ don't think it is unimportant!

→ don't think it is easy! [P.S.: don't think it will end when children turn 21!]

Audio recording of classes and copies of these handouts are available on the class website:

<http://www.christianessentialsbc.com>. Or see link at www.waynegrudem.com