

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Lesson 16

Planned Parenthood

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Just a generation ago hardly any one in Christian circles would discuss the issue of birth control openly, but today the world is blatantly talking about birth control. In fact, the world is terribly abusing the use of birth control and is encouraging immorality. The church must speak up or this generation may become hopelessly buried in sexual immorality.
- B. Should Christians Practice birth control? This is a question that most Protestants give very little thought to because birth control has been an accepted practice among Protestants for over one hundred years. However, this is still a burning issue among Roman Catholics. Christians should ask themselves about the right to use birth control and whether this is a moral issue. Christianity is a total life view and we must have some Biblical and personal convictions about the right or wrong of birth control.
- C. While almost all Christians would agree that some kind of birth control should be practiced, they do not all agree on what methods (types of contraception) can or cannot be used. The morality of contraceptive techniques must be thought through by the Christian. We must have a clear understanding of God's divine will for ethical decisions in the realm of marriage and birth control, as in all areas of life. Christianity is a worldview of life and every area of existence must fall under God's sovereignty.
- D. There is no specific text or verse of scripture that settles the right or wrong of birth control. A conclusion must be drawn on Biblical principles derived from a scriptural view of the nature of man, marriage and sexual intercourse. The Bible is surprisingly silent on the issue of birth control. When the scriptures do not speak clearly and positively on a definite subject, it must be decided on the basis of scriptural principles. Because the Bible does not speak for or against birth control, it is not a primary moral issue, although it is a secondary moral issue and must be settled by Biblical principles.

II. BIRTH CONTROL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

- A. Old Testament Motivation: The Old Testament world valued a large family for economic and security reasons. Man survived because they had large families, and men in the ancient world sought the preservation of their memory on earth through their offspring. NOTE: Today Christians face a type of world that the Old Testament world could not fathom. Today, there are contraceptives, there are over population problems, and there is economic security in smaller families.
- B. The Command to Reproduce (Gen. 1:28): God commanded the human race to reproduce, and not to do so is sin. Obviously, if procreation stopped the human race would disappear in one generation. NOTE: However, God did not specify how the human race should reproduce. He did not say whether the race was to multiply by one, two or ten. This verse does not rule out some kind of family planning.
- C. The Command to Subdue the Earth (Gen. 1:28):

1. God said man was to have dominion over nature. Man was given authority over natural law but man is always responsible to God's moral law. Man has been given liberty to use his God-given abilities and capacities for the glory of God and for man's own highest well. Man has every right to control and regulate conception, providing he does not transgress God's moral law. If men have devised ways to control nature by contraception, then this is permissible as long as it brings glory to God and is used for the highest good of man.
2. Control of conception by contraception is much different than abortion. Contraception prevents life from happening, but abortion takes the life of a person already living.
3. All of man's attempts to control nature, even in the area of birth control, are still subject to God's sovereignty. God can overrule and give life in spite of all man's efforts to prevent it.
4. Roman Catholics believe that no unnatural method of birth control should be used but only natural methods such as abstinence or the rhythm method. They say that any scientific contraception is an interference with nature. Wait a minute! Man does many things against nature to benefit man. The doctor uses anesthesia in operating; the farmer dehornes and emasculates his cattle; the gardener prunes his grapes; the homeowner cuts his grass; a man shaves his beard and so on. These are all against nature because man has learned to subdue nature.

Is not civilization replete with means of interfering with nature, most of which we depend upon and take for granted in our day-by-day living? Pasteurization is an interference with nature; the 'natural' thing would be for babies to drink milk that contains germs, and for a certain percentage of those babies to die of milk-borne disease. Vaccination is an interference with nature. So is a haircut! So is the use of soap. Man is constantly intervening in the course of nature and in environment. His very dignity is his God-given ability to govern nature and make it serve higher purposes in the human enterprise. (Dwight Small, *Design for Christian Marriage*)

NOTE: If it is morally wrong to prevent life, then it must also be wrong to prolong life by surgery, hospitals or medicine which defy natural law.

- D. The Purposes of Marriage: According to the Old Testament there are four basic reasons for marriage: Companionship (Gen. 2:18), unity (Gen. 2:24), procreation (Gen. 1:28; 9:1,7) and pleasure (Gen. 3:16; Eccl. 9:9). It should be noted that Adam and Eve were experiencing companionship, unity and pleasure in sex before there were any children. Procreation is not the only reason or the primary reason for marriage. NOTE: If pleasure is basic to a marriage, then contraception may add to the freedom of lovemaking and the stability of a marriage. Contraception has great value and may preserve the marriage from unwanted children or economic disaster.
- E. Forms of Birth Control in the Old Testament. Birth control was used in the Old Testament but the world of that day was in no way faced with the problems of birth control of our day.
 1. Abstinence: Abstinence was practiced by women during the menstruation period (Lev. 15:19-28; 18:19; 20:18), and immediately after giving birth to a child for

thirty to sixty days (Lev. 12:1-8). Men were to practice abstinence for religious reasons for a brief period of time (Ex. 19:15; 1 Sam. 21:4,5).

2. Withdrawal (*Coitus interruptus*). In the case of Onan, he “wasted his seed on the ground” and this was a form of birth control used in Old Testament times (Gen. 38:8-10). NOTE: Onan was not killed as some Roman Catholics claim because he practiced birth control. He was killed because of his refusal to obey the law, which required him to beget a son to bear his brother’s name.
3. Sterilization. The Old Testament seems to frown upon the idea of castration as a means of birth control. A eunuch was excluded from the communal life in Israel (Deut. 23.1). NOTE: This verse does not prove that sterilization in all cases is wrong but it does seem that God looked upon male castration with disfavor.
4. Conclusion: The Old Testament does not forbid the use of birth control nor does it speak against contraception. The Old Testament world used the methods of birth control they knew and understood at the time. The Old Testament view of marriage and sex may actually open the door to the use of contraception to produce healthy marriages.

III. BIRTH CONTROL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- A. Background: Again there is a lack of clear teaching in the New Testament on birth control. We assume that the early Christians accepted the general Old Testament teaching on the subject. We know that early Christians spoke out against the practice of abortion in the Roman world, but nothing against contraception is recorded, even though primitive forms of contraception were used in the secular world.
- B. Marital Sexual Love: The Apostle Paul encouraged Christians to have a healthy sex life for married couples have sexual duties to one another. Paul advised against long periods of abstinence (1 Cor. 7:1-5). NOTE: We may conclude that Paul is approving sex for mutual pleasure and satisfaction in marriage. If this is true, then contraception may be used to cultivate a strong love life in marriage.
- C. Eunuchs: In the New Testament, a different attitude is taken towards those who have had a forced sterilization. In Matthew 19:10-12, it speaks of eunuchs for the kingdom of God. This probably does not mean these men castrated themselves for God’s kingdom (although we cannot be sure) but it probably means these men voluntarily set themselves aside as celibates to do the will of God. In Acts 8, we know the Ethiopian Eunuch was saved and became part of the church so there was a different attitude towards those who had been artificially sterilized in the New Testament than in the Old Testament.

IV. RESPONSIBILITY IN BIRTH CONTROL

- A. Liberty: Because the Bible does not specifically speak out against birth control, then it becomes a matter of conscience. A Christian couple is at liberty to practice birth control and to use natural as well as scientific means of contraception. A Christian couple, however, is only free to use their liberty responsibly under the fear of God and consistently with God’s moral law. NOTE: There will always be some who will abuse contraception for their own selfish ends, but this does not negate their proper use.

- B. Children: It is God's revealed will that men should reproduce and those children should come into a Christian home. Children are a gift and a blessing from God (Psa. 127:4-5). No couple should enter marriage with the idea they will never have any children unless there is a clear medical reason not to have them. A selfish refusal to have any children clearly violates the spirit of God's Word. Birth control helps space children, not avoid the responsibility of children. Birth control also enables married couples to have wanted children who will be loved and instructed in the gospel of Christ. NOTE: God in His divine providence sometimes does not allow some couples to have children and in these cases a happy home can be established, but adoption of a child or children may be the most sensible solution to the problem of childlessness.
- C. Family Size: The Bible does not say how many children a family should have, but it does say that we are to provide well for the family we do have (I Tim. 5:8). Some couples can have no children. Jacob had twelve sons and Joseph had two. Moses had three and Aaron four. Man's responsibility and God's sovereignty play a big part in the size of one's family.

“No person or law can tell a couple how many children they should have or how they should be spaced. This decision is in the area of Christian liberty. Christians know their entire lives, including their sex lives, belong to God; therefore, they must act with love rather than selfishness. They must observe the times and circumstances in which they are living, and through reason and guidance of the Holy Spirit, they can make responsible decisions.” (Dr. Merville Vincent, Assistant Medical Superintendent, Homewood Sanitarium, Guelph, Ontario)

- D. Circumstances: Family planning is a personal matter and the whole situation ought to be discussed openly and honestly before marriage and during marriage. From a practical standpoint, a couple should ask themselves the following questions:
1. Can the spiritual, economic, and educational needs of the children be met if another child is added?
 2. Are we emotionally able to personally care for more children?
 3. Will another child affect the physical well being of either parent, especially the mother?
 4. Is there the possibility of some genetically transmitted illness?
 5. Does our manner of living provide enough space for children to play (e.g., in a cramped apartment)?
 6. Is our vocation such that a larger family will not limit our effectiveness (e.g., pioneer missionary work)?
 7. What is the population picture in our area? Do we live on a jungle mission station, in India, Canada or the United States? The answer could vary.
 8. Do we consider having a child a sacred trust, and are we prepared to assume total spiritual responsibility, and will we make our decision prayerfully, soberly, and in the fear of God? (Allen Petersen, *The Marriage Affair*)

NOTE: In the twentieth century, we are now faced with the problem of the over-population of the world. There are over six billion people in this world. Since we do

have the power of birth control, should we not do all we can to help eliminate this world social problem in the best interest of humanity?

V. TYPES OF BIRTH CONTROL

A. General: A scientific contraceptive must be:

1. Harmless. There should be no injury to the wife, husband or future children.
2. Protective. The contraceptive must provide a high degree of protection or it will cause great frustration because of fear of pregnancy.
3. Practical. The technique or instrument of birth control should be aesthetically satisfying to both partners and economical to purchase.

B. Specific: There are many natural and unnatural types of birth control methods. The purpose of this lesson is not to discuss the pros and cons of each method, but to deal with the moral and spiritual aspects of contraception. If you desire a detailed discussion of modern techniques of birth control, you should talk with your pastor and/or physician. NOTE: There are some forms of birth control that have moral questions involved in their use and it is to those methods we shall direct our attention.

1. Natural Methods

- a. Abstinence: Abstinence prevents pregnancy but it also will cause much frustration to both partners. It defeats the whole purpose of cultivating physical love in marriage. Abstinence is a moral issue because it is failing to do your duty in meeting the sexual needs of your mate.
- b. Coitus interruptus: Withdrawal is also effective but it is not 100% effective. Furthermore, it's psychologically frustrating for both husband and wife.
- c. Rhythm: The rhythm method (cycles of the month) interferes with the naturalness and spontaneity of married love.

2. Unnatural Methods

- a. Sterilization. A vasectomy for a male or tubular ties for a woman are the most radical forms of birth control. Sterilization is usually permanent and should never be recommended for single people. Sterilization should not be considered for married people under the age of 35. Sterilization should only be considered after a couple has a full family. Remember that there is always the possibility that one's partner may die young, and if a person is sterile, there is no possibility of children with another mate. Sterilization may open the way for unfaithfulness in marriage for there is no fear of pregnancy.
- b. Condom (for men).
- c. Diaphragm (for women) and jellies.
- d. Patch, implants, injections.
- e. IUD. The inter-uterine device may have some serious theological problems involved with its use. Many think that the IUD produces a form of abortion. There are two basic theories on the IUD. One theory is that the sperm and the ovum do fertilize (a form of life) and the fertilized egg rests in the lining of the uterus. Because there is a foreign object in the uterus (the IUD), this interferes with the growth of the fertilized egg. It dies and/or is flushed out. If this is what actually happens, it is a form of abortion. The other theory is that the ovum, because of the presence of the IUD, may pass through the fallopian

tube at a more rapid rate than usual, eliminating fertilization at all. If this is the case, then no form of abortion takes place.

- f. Pill: The pill is a very effective means of contraception but with some women, it may have side effects. Some women have no immediate effects from the pill but we cannot tell about the long-range effects. Medical men are linking up the pill with various forms of cancer in some women. The immediate effects of the pill in some women are obvious: nervousness, blotches on legs, acne, loss of sex drive, increase of sex drive, extreme tiredness, stomach sickness, headaches, etc. NOTE: The pill involves a moral issue of a woman towards her own body and towards the mental health of her husband who must put up with her weird behavior.

VI. BIRTH CONTROL AND SINGLE PEOPLE

- A. The Bible never contradicts itself. One moral principle never cancels another moral principle. The Bible absolutely forbids premarital and extramarital sex, as they are a violation of God's moral law.
- B. Birth control methods are usable only for enhancing marital love. Therefore, birth control methods should not be given to men or women who are single. Providing contraception for the single person merely propagates more sexual immorality. Contraception merely encourages immorality because it takes away the fear of pregnancy. However, if a single person feels responsible enough to enter into sex, then he or she must be responsible enough to run the risk of pregnancy. NOTE: Often Christians rationalize away human responsibility. They reason that the world is going to exercise free sex and this will bring many unwanted children into this world; therefore, we should equip single people with contraceptives. People who reason this way are guilty of supporting sexual immorality and are failing to let people take the moral consequences of sin.