

Viewpoint: JAV361

IS BIRTH CONTROL UNBIBLICAL?

by Richard J. Poupard

This article first appeared in the Viewpoint column of the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL, volume 36, number 01 (2013). For further information or to subscribe to the CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL go to: <http://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/>

Contraception has been the hot topic of many recent news stories. A ruling by the Department of Health and Human Services of the Obama administration mandates that medical insurance must cover preventative services without copay. The description of preventative services includes immunizations, cancer screenings, and all forms of contraception. In other words, it is now mandated that medical insurance provides coverage for contraception and so-called emergency contraception without any patient copay. The felt need to “prevent” a healthy young woman’s reproductive system from functioning properly has been placed in the same category as preventing polio or breast cancer. Medically speaking, preventing a woman’s body from normal reproductive cycles is not disease prevention, but wellness prevention. Strikingly, contraceptive use has morphed from the exercise of a personal, individual choice to a governmentally supplemented health care right.

Fighting for Family Planning. Internationally the contraceptive scenario is even more confounding. In November, the United Nations Population Fund annual report described contraception for the first time as a basic human right. The report states, “Studies have shown that investing in family planning helps reduce poverty, improve health, promote gender equality, enable adolescents to finish their schooling and increase labour force participation.”¹ There seems to be no end to the societal and personal advantages when government enables a woman to manipulate her reproductive systems. Ironically, the declaration states that it is against a woman’s human rights to allow her body to have normal and optimal reproductive function.

Christians and Contraceptives. Followers of Christ across denominational lines have rightly denounced the increase of government influence on the grounds of religious freedom. In addition, I believe this also gives Christians an opportunity to evaluate the use of contraceptives as normative practice in their own lives. I do not wish to argue that contraceptive use is inherently immoral, or that contraceptives should never be used.² However, I do believe that with our uncritical acceptance of contraception, we not only have failed to make a positive impact on the culture around us, but also have

embraced wrong beliefs about parenthood and children. Is the frequent use of contraceptives more consistent with our troubled culture or with God's character as revealed in Scripture? Does the idea that something is morally permissible also mean that its use is always right and good? Frequent use of contraception likely has a detrimental effect on our decisions about children and parenthood, our understanding of sexual intimacy, and our trusting in God's provision.

This is reflected clearly in the birth rate decline that has occurred in the United States since modern contraception became widely available in the 1960s. The birth rate peaked in the late 1950s at 118 per 1,000 women of childbearing age, but in 2011 was almost half that rate. The average number of children born to American women dropped to just above replacement rate at 2.1, and has been far below replacement rate in most European countries for many years.

Blessing or Burden? Contraceptives carry the promise of greater control, freedom, and convenience, but I believe their negative effects are more significant than any perceived benefits. First, contraceptive use promises the ultimate control to decide when and with whom we open ourselves to the possibility of conceiving children. I believe a negative change in attitude regarding the value of children has occurred because of this compelling control. Children are no longer viewed as intrinsically valuable gifts of God. Instead they are seen as a tremendous burden that should be shouldered only when a couple believes they are completely financially and emotionally prepared. President Obama once famously stated that he would not want his daughters "punished with a baby" if they made a mistake by becoming pregnant. This belief of parenthood as punishment permeates our culture. Young couples today frequently are advised to postpone having children indefinitely, until they decide that their personal timing is satisfied. Since children are now considered a significant financial and emotional burden as well as a detriment to a woman's freedom and health, we should not be surprised that their value has decreased in the world's eyes.

This decrease in the value of children has had other significant repercussions. Now that we expect to plan the birth of children whenever we wish, it should not be surprising that we should expect to have the right simply to terminate the pregnancy if it is not what we desire. Although increased access to contraception is touted as a theoretical solution to the problem of abortion, reality has shown this is not the case. The number of abortions has not decreased since contraception has become more readily available. Furthermore, if bearing a child is such a burden, then why should we expect couples to accept a child not in perfect health? Recent reports indicate that upwards of 90 percent of children conceived with Down syndrome and diagnosed during pregnancy are intentionally killed via legal abortion. These children were mostly from planned pregnancies, but were valued only if they exceeded some subjective standard of health.

Contrast the world's convictions about children with God's as revealed in Scripture. Unless they turned wicked, children were never described as a nuisance or a terrific burden to be tolerated. Children were seen as a precious gift from God and one

of the highest possible blessings. On the other hand, sterility and barrenness were seen as a curse of the highest magnitude. Yet more and more Christians are choosing to make themselves artificially sterile for a time and yet expect to receive the blessing of children according to their personal timetable. The sad result is that many are choosing to delay having children until later in life as their fertility naturally decreases. The same individuals who choose sterility are later seeking the services of fertility clinics.

Second, while contraceptives are believed to enhance sexual fulfillment by taking the natural consequence of pregnancy out of the equation, their frequent use has significantly changed our practice and principles regarding sexual intimacy. God has designed sexual intimacy with both a relational and procreational purpose within the bounds of marriage. This is part of the one-flesh relationship that describes the incredibly intimate relationship of a married couple. The physical act, which is designed to bring a married couple together, also produces the profound miracle of the creation of a new human life. This is not to argue that both aspects of sexuality need to be present during every intimate moment, but that both are part of God's wonderful design to bring couples fulfillment.

Contraception by definition provides a disconnection of the two purposes of sexuality. As a result, intimacy is now seen primarily as an act for personal physical satisfaction that many believe should be enjoyed without the risk of conception. The impact of this change in belief on our culture has been profound, resulting in so-called sexual freedom. Sexuality that used to be termed illicit, such as adolescent sex, extramarital affairs (under certain conditions), and use of pornography are no longer considered shameful or wrong. Not only have Christians been increasingly tolerant of these changes in attitude and behavior, but we have not been immune to the same temptations, nor to their consequences. When we observe sexuality as merely an expression of our personal desires and deny its true divine nature and purpose, we should not be surprised that we suffer from this foolishness. Contraception is not solely responsible for these changes, but it has contributed to them more than we would like to believe.

Lastly, while contraception is believed to deliver us from the burden of ill-timed childbirth, its use has affected our willingness to trust the Lord and His provision for our lives. Those who have been blessed with children know that it is one of the most amazing yet humbling experiences. Nothing exercises our dependence on God and His grace more than experiencing the wonder and challenges of becoming a parent. This is one of the greatest blessings and important lessons that we receive from conceiving and raising children.

For example, a young couple often will feel that they lack the emotional maturity necessary for raising a child. The answer to that situation is not necessarily to delay children until they feel ready, but to humbly rely on their Savior. The truth is that the spiritual resources of wisdom, patience, strength, and character needed to raise children ultimately come from the bounties of God's grace. This is not to say that prudent planning in this area and others is unreasonable or immoral. However, is it possible that we have gone too far in our quest for the perfect circumstances to have children?

Evaluate the Ethics. As our contraceptive-embracing culture continues to reduce the value of children, enjoy sexual freedom, and take control over the timing of pregnancy, this is the time to consider and possibly reevaluate our convictions regarding the practice of contraception. As followers of Christ, our decisions should reflect the heart of Scripture and God's will instead of merely mimicking the world around us. Does frequent use of contraception for reasons of convenience reflect the principles found in Scripture or the values found in the world's system? Are we willing to accept children only in our timing or do we trust God's timing and provision? Are children believed to be blessings from the Lord or a burden to be tolerated?

Even if we grant that the use of contraception is morally permissible, I have shown that there are adequate reasons to question whether its common use is best. The changes that have occurred within our culture in part due to the widespread use of contraception are irrefutable.

Christian thoughts on contraception tend to gravitate to one extreme or the other. I do not believe that every Christian family has a moral obligation to have children numbering in double digits. But this also does not mean that we should feel free to use contraception indiscriminately as does the culture around us. Closing oneself off from conceiving a child is a serious decision and one that should be made only after prayerfully considering our motivations. If we truly desire to make God-honoring decisions, we find that many of the reasons that we choose to justify contraceptive use are unwise. The better answer may be simply trusting Him. —*Richard J. Poupard*

Richard J. Poupard is a board certified oral and maxillofacial surgeon and is a speaker for Life Training Institute, as well as a father of five.

NOTES

- 1 United Nations Population Fund, "State of World Population 2012: By Choice, Not By Chance: Family Planning, Human Rights, and Development." Available at <http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/publications/pid/12511>.
- 2 A more thorough examination of this topic can be found in H. Wayne House, "Should Christians Use Birth Control?" *Christian Research Journal* (Winter 1996), available at <http://www.equip.org/articles/should-christians-use-birth-control/>.