

## Q. Is it right for Christians to use birth control?

A. First, what we mean in this answer by birth control is conception control or contraception. We are not here addressing abortion, which is another issue.

Unfortunately, various churches and Christian writers express differing opinions on contraception or birth control, most of which do not fully express the biblical view. The Bible does not mention birth control as such. Therefore, we must look at the implications of what the Bible says on the subjects of children and mercy to find the biblical view of birth control.

First, we must dispense with a Scripture that is often used to condemn birth control, but which really has little to do with the subject. It is Genesis 38:7-10: "And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord slew him. And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother. And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the Lord: wherefore he slew him also."

In these verses, Onan uses a form of birth control called coitus interruptus. Because verse 10 says, "the thing which he did displeased the Lord: wherefore he slew him also," this Scripture is often pointed to as proving that God is displeased with birth control. But those who say this are inserting their own personal opinion into the Scripture. The context explains what displeased the Lord, and it is not birth control as such.

Verse 8 shows us that Judah gave his son Onan a direct order to marry his dead brother's wife and raise up seed to his dead brother (in other words, the children, or at least the first child, would be considered the dead brother's). This was an accepted practice in the culture of the time and was later codified in Deuteronomy 25:5-6. But Onan did not want to raise up seed to his brother. He rebelled against his father's order. To avoid raising up seed to his brother, he used coitus interruptus. What displeased the Lord was Onan's direct rebellion against raising up seed to his brother.

Because Onan's birth control is only used in this act of rebellion, this Scripture cannot be used to determine God's pleasure or displeasure with birth control in other situations. It is interesting to note, however, the coitus interruptus was apparently a known method of birth control at the time.

The first Scripture that is truly pertinent to the subject occurs much earlier in Genesis. In Genesis 1:28, God tells Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful, and multiply." Adam and Eve were our first parents and legally represented the human race (for example, their fall into sin was also our fall in sin). Therefore, this can be seen not only as an order from God to Adam and Eve, but also to us. We are to be fruitful and multiply. Numerous Scriptures either directly state or imply that children are a gift from God and the man who has many of them is blessed by God. I'll cite only two of them. Psalm 127 states, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (verses 3-5). Psalm 128 is similar: "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord" (verses 3-4). Obviously, having many children is an expression of God's blessing.

Therefore, we must conclude that the modern idea prevalent in western culture to limit families to one or two children is foreign to God's idea of the family. If we are to be fruitful and multiply, and if children are a blessing from God, we should have as many of them as possible. This is especially true for Christians, who are to raise their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). To purposely limit the gifts that God wants to put in our charge because of our own selfishness, financial concerns, false ideas of what a decent and orderly family is, misguided notions of overpopulation, etc., is wrong. But this does not mean that there is never a time when birth control is right.

In Matthew 12, we find the account of Jesus and His disciples going through a grainfield on the Sabbath. Because they were hungry, Jesus' disciples were picking heads of grain and eating the grain. The Pharisees saw this and told Jesus that His disciples were breaking the Sabbath law. As small as their "harvest" was, this was still laboring on the Sabbath. Jesus did not tell the Pharisees they were wrong to consider this unlawful. Instead, he reminded them about how, when

David and his men were hungry, the priests gave them the shewbread to eat. Because only the priests were to eat the shewbread, this also was unlawful. Jesus also pointed out that the priests labor by performing the sacrifices on the Sabbath, but are blameless.

What Jesus was doing was teaching that sometimes one law overrides another. It was unlawful according to one law for David and his men to eat the shewbread, but they were hungry, and the law of mercy was more important. Likewise, because His disciples were hungry, it was alright for them to harvest what they needed to eat. As Jesus says in verse 7, "But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless." In Matthew 23:23, we see again that Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of omitting "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." We must be careful that we are not also guilty of this.

What has this to do with contraception? Just this. There are times when a couple must consider that, for medical reasons, it would be better for the woman not to become pregnant. In fact, it would be unmerciful. Yes, we are to be fruitful and multiply, but we are also to be merciful. Those who make sweeping statements that Christians must never use contraception fall into the same ditch as the Pharisees, at least on this subject. The decision of when to use contraception in obedience to the law of mercy is the couple's.

Since we would otherwise no doubt be asked, here's a quick word on methods of contraception. There are those who seem to take delight in telling married couples what they must and must not do in their bedrooms. Among them are those who don't hesitate to sanction or condemn certain methods of birth control as if their word is a "thus saith the Lord." This is particularly true of Roman Catholic writers, who irrationally say that "artificial" methods of birth control are sinful, but "natural" methods are acceptable. These "natural" methods are the use of various means to determine the time when the woman is fertile and avoiding sexual intercourse at that time. On the other hand, the apostle Paul advises, "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency" (1 Corinthians 7:3-5).

Therefore, our only counsel on this matter is that some methods of contraception (birth control pills, for example) are medically riskier than others and couples who have decided that they must use contraception in accordance with the laws of mercy should weigh these risks. One additional note: Our understanding of the way IUDs work is that they do not prevent conception. They allow the egg to become fertilized, and then cause it to abort. This, of course, is abortion, and we are adamantly against it. By the way, nothing in this article should be construed as medical advice.

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