

What does the Bible tell us about Contraception?

By Terry Moore and Art Braidic

© 2015 the Eternal Church of God

All Scriptures are from the New King James translation unless otherwise noted.

The Scriptures state that “children *are* a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb *is* a reward” (Psa. 127:3). Could this mean that married couples should never prevent the conception of a child? What does the Bible tell us about contraception? One prominent religious organization teaches that it is a sin to use any form other than abstinence or the rhythm method. Another instructs its members that families are to have at least five children. Such ridged practices have forced couples to have unplanned children that cannot be properly cared for, but where did the belief that contraception is wrong originate?

It likely began by a misinterpretation of the story of Onan. This man refused to impregnate a woman by spilling his seed on the ground. Consequently, God slew him, but it was not for merely using this method of contraception. The complete story reveals that God’s anger was a result of Onan refusing to honor the Almighty’s law. As the story relates:

Then Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name *was* Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD killed him. And Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and marry her, and raise up an heir to your brother." But Onan knew that the heir would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in to his brother's wife, that he emitted on the ground, lest he should give an heir to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the LORD; therefore He killed him also (Genesis 38:6-10).

God’s judgment was based on the “duty of a husband’s brother” (Deu. 25:5-6). Commonly known as levirate marriage, this statute required the brother of a man who died childless to take his dead brother’s wife as his own in order to raise up a son to his brother’s name. Onan refused to perform this duty before God. This act prevented her from having a child and preserving her husband’s name. That is why God killed him. Contraception was not the offense. God’s displeasure was a result of Onan not fulfilling his obligation toward his deceased brother’s wife.

This incident is the only mention of contraception in the Bible. The Scriptures state nothing explicit regarding men or women taking measures to avoid conception. Therefore, ministers must not tell brethren what to do regarding contraception. However, there are biblical examples that can give married couples a foundation for making their personal decisions.

There are numerous verses in Bible indicating that a husband and wife can enjoy a sexual relationship for pleasure alone. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote that couples are not to withhold themselves from one another (1Cor. 7:5). The Song of Solomon contains verses speaking of the sexual love between a man and woman, and this inspired book never mentions children. The author of Hebrews states that marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled

(Heb. 13:4). Thus, God approves of couples enjoying intimacy for pleasure alone. On the other hand, God clearly states what He regards as sexual sin. It is not contraception. It is “fornicators and adulterers” (ibid).

The Bible also appears to validate contraception when Paul wrote that a husband and wife must be able to financially support their family (1Tim. 5:8). Thus, it would be appropriate for couples to consider their finances and limit the number of children accordingly. Finally, from ancient times couples have used various forms of contraception, and throughout biblical history God nowhere forbids the practice. What the Bible forbids is murder. However, contraception in its true sense is not murder.

The word “contraception” literally means “deliberate prevention of conception or impregnation” (*Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary*). Therefore, true contraception does not allow a woman’s egg to become fertilized. However, there may be some methods defined as contraception today that are equivalent to killing an unborn child. For example, abortion requires the woman’s egg to be fertilized, for life to begin, and then to be destroyed. Proper contraception avoids fertilization altogether. Therefore, couples who desire to avoid pregnancy should research the various methods available to determine which technique they might use.

A Spiritual Analogy

What may be the most profound evidence in favor of contraception is the fact that God is using birth control right now as He builds His family. Christians are called, baptized, and have hands laid on them in order to receive the Holy Spirit. This causes them to be begotten as God’s children. They are spiritually conceived, and begin developing spiritually over time, as they await their birth into the Kingdom of God (1John 3:9; John 3:5). If this doctrine is not familiar, we suggest reading our booklet—*What Does it Mean to be Born Again?*

After an individual receives the Holy Spirit, they are placed in the body of God’s Church where they are nourished with the milk of the Word as well as with spiritual meat (1Pet. 2:2; 1Cor. 3:2). This is much like a physical child that is nourished in the womb of his or her mother where it grows. As believers develop righteous character, they mature to the point where God will decide whether or not they are worthy to be chosen as one of His born again children that will rule with Christ in His Kingdom (Mat. 22:14; Rev. 20:6). This process is symbolically represented in the physical world by a fetus maturing in the womb while waiting to be born into his or her family.

Understanding this spiritual course of development, the Bible teaches that everyone will eventually have an opportunity for salvation. However, everyone is not called at this time (1Cor. 1:26). Even among those who are called, only a relative few will be chosen to be born again at Christ’s return (Mat. 22:14). This subject is thoroughly explained in our books—*The 144,000 and Now is Not the Only Time of Salvation!*

This divine process of selecting who will be born as God’s firstfruits shows us that the Father is practicing a form of spiritual contraception. He is only calling certain individuals to begin development toward a new spirit life (1John 3:9). Only those who are proven to be true and faithful will go on to be born into the family of God when Christ returns (1Cor. 15:51-52).

The example of God’s use of spiritual contraception regarding the saint’s conception and birth, combined with the fact that there are no Scriptures stating contraception is a sin, has led the Eternal Church of God to conclude that the use of proper contraception does not violate the Scriptures. Therefore, avoiding pregnancy is a personal decision that should be agreed upon by both the husband and wife.

However, any form of abortion does violate God's command not to murder and must be avoided (Exo. 20:13). Married couples must not use any method that would allow for a woman's egg to be fertilized and then terminated. Our recommendation is that couples considering contraception talk to a physician and do the research necessary to understand the process of the various techniques. Then make their choice in a manner that honors and obeys God.