

ON CHOOSING A FAMILY PLANNING METHOD

In our previous commentary, we presented a Scriptural position on non-abortive methods of contraception. Again, we wish to emphasize that contraception is an act of prevention; “contraception after fertilization has taken place” is just a more elaborate phrase for *abortion*.

But in a country dominated by Roman Catholic teaching, even non-abortive methods of contraception stir up controversy. Is there a way of thinking through these family planning options? Which methods are most consistent with Christian values and beliefs?

Let us keep in mind that we are discussing the use of contraceptives only within the context of marriage. We heed the Scriptures’ caution that God is displeased with sex outside a marriage relationship. But for the married couples, we suggest the following criteria for choosing an appropriate contraceptive method: Is it morally acceptable? Will it possibly damage mother or child? Is the method reliable? How about the ease of use?

The rhythm method, which is the only method accepted by the Roman Catholic Church, enjoins people to abstain from sexual intercourse during the fertile phase of the woman’s menstrual cycle. It can only be used by highly motivated couples and is not applicable to women having irregular menses. Also, the period of abstinence is frequently greater than the time during which sexual relations may be practiced. Failure rates are also generally higher than in any of the other properly-used methods (26-40%).

Condoms are one of the oldest surviving forms of contraception. Registering a 7-15% failure rate, they are effective, safe, and relatively inexpensive. Condoms are highly effective, but only when couples use it with every act of intercourse.

If properly used, pills register the lowest failure rate among all the contraceptives at 0.3%. However, side effects include troublesome breakthrough bleeding, absence of menstruation, nausea, headache, weight gain, and breast tenderness. These usually disappear or lessen in severity after two or three years of pill use. Pills are designed to prevent ovulation. Where there is no egg, no conception can take place, and therefore, abortion does not enter the picture.

Of all the contraceptives available, the IUD, or intrauterine device, has the most potential to harm the child. Gynecologists say that there is no definite proof that IUDs do cause abortion. Nevertheless, because there is a shade of doubt, the method would best not be used.

There is plenty of information now available on birth control methods, and couples should be responsible about discussing the pros and cons of each method. Consult a specialist. And do not forget to steep decision-making in prayer.

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