

Family Planning



The sermon this afternoon focuses on the second purpose for marriage, as described in the Marriage Form:

“Second, by marriage the human race is to be continued and increased, and, under the blessing of God, husband and wife will be fruitful and increase in number....”

This sentence raises sensitive questions about family planning, some of which I’d rather not address in a sermon. Since those questions nevertheless are very real within marriage, I’d like to use the forum of *A Bit to Read* to point to some answers. The simple fact is that (very) small families are encouraged in our current culture, and the contraceptives that make this goal possible are readily available for all who wish them. We’re naïve to think that Christians are immune to the temptations that come with today’s technology. And Yes, the Lord our God definitely addresses the issue of family planning.

Contraceptive

Perhaps the most common of contraceptives is the pill. I am not a doctor, and so do not write from a position of expertise on this topic. Yet information is readily available that argues strongly against the use of the pill.

The pill works by either 1) preventing ovulation, 2) preventing the sperm from reaching the egg, or 3) preventing (if the first two fail so that the woman conceives) the tiny baby from attaching to the lining of the uterus so that in turn the baby dies. The later, of course, is abortion, and the possibility that abortion is involved makes the use of the pill impossible for those who take seriously God’s command not to murder (Exodus 20:13).

The medical side effects of the pill are multiple, including suppression of the immune system, depression, inability to conceive once the pill’s use is ended, and greatly increased risk of developing breast or cervical cancer. Given that the Lord would have us look well after our bodies (temples of the Holy Spirit as they are), such side effects also argue strongly against the use of the pill. For further information on these points, please avail yourself of the information readily available on the internet.

Other contraceptives are also readily available, though not as easily used, and not as medically dangerous. Yet in my judgment the marital problems coming from the use of contraceptives are, taken on the whole, even more damaging than the medical problems.

Marital issues

The Lord tells us that receiving children is a blessing (Psalm 127:3-5). Their identity as God’s children-by-covenant dictates that these children need to grow up in homes that reflect what God is like. God the Father has shown us His self-emptying love in that He gave

up His only Son for the salvation of the undeserving (1 John 4:9,10). Similarly, the Son of God on earth “*did not come to be served, but serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:28) – and so went to the cursed cross for our benefit. This same attitude needs to characterize the atmosphere of the homes in which the Lord places His covenant children. Separating the link between sexual activity and potential pregnancy removes one mechanism the Lord has created to promote self-denial and self-discipline.

Open talk

In love for his wife, the eager husband (for the buck stops with him; he’s the head) may well need to deny himself precisely because it is not wise to make his wife pregnant at this time, or even give her cause to fear pregnancy. Yet to grasp what’s wise requires conversation between husband and wife. The conversation needs to be about the needs of the existing family and about how well each is coping with those needs. The conversation needs to be about trusting in God to supply one’s needs, and about how each is faring in the struggle to trust God in the specific circumstances in which the family finds itself. The conversation needs to be about what’s going on in the mind of the other, the hopes and dreams, and fears. The conversation needs to be about the challenges at work, including what effect a particular woman (or man) in the office has on you. The conversation requires an open Bible as one seeks God’s will, and drives the couple to pray for God’s guidance and wisdom. It’s conversation wherein the husband as head shall have to give wise leadership to his wife as he seeks to care for her well, and conversation wherein the wife shall need to show that she entrusts herself to his care and leadership. I suspect there is no conversation in marriage that brings together so fully all the various aspects of what marriage is about than such a conversation in the bedroom where each carries the other in love. And where the husband –he is ultimately responsible before God– needs to conclude that it is not wise to give his beloved cause to fear pregnancy at this point in time, he makes his love for her most clear by denying himself. How valuable such action is for the struggling spouse! This sort of love and understanding and self-sacrifice in the bedroom resonates through the entire home, and provides a safe haven for the little ones of God’s covenant. Yet precisely this sort of conversation is inhibited when sex is seen as a right, or used for self-satisfaction – and the contraceptives available today play to that perception. Here is where contraceptives can have dangerous side effects on happy, Christian marriages.

Natural

In relation to pregnancy, the Lord God has built into His handiwork a means whereby a couple can know whether she is at her time when she might conceive or not. Changes occur in the woman’s body at her time of ovulation, and one is able to learn to detect when these changes occur. An international organization called WOOMB (acronym for *World Organisation of the Ovulation Method Billings*) runs a website that supplies the necessary information.

The Lord would have a husband and wife be open with each other, helping each other in all things that belong to this life and the life to come (as the Form has it). As the couple considers whether it is responsible to become pregnant tonight, they do well to read the signs of the woman’s body and include the significance of those signs in their activities. Again, sharing and understanding the signs requires conversation – something so imperative for every part of marriage.

One month...

On average a woman has a brief period of fertility once in 28 days. The question whether or not to have another child, then, can be answered each month anew. Instead of making a

once-off decision to have no more children (and hence perhaps undergoing surgery to ensure no further pregnancies), a couple does better to confront the question each month anew. This is very much in keeping with Jesus' instruction in the Sermon on the Mount, where He spoke about the Father's care for the birds and the flowers, and then adds, "*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious about itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*" (Matthew 6:33,34). If in matters of food and drink we have enough with the concerns of one day, surely the application to pregnancy –given the woman's monthly cycle– is that each month's concern is sufficient. One can be tired today, or not have the health (whether physical or mental) for another pregnancy at this point in time, but under God's blessing that can change next month or next year. Here is where we need to work with the responsibility God has created us with, both in terms of not making a wife pregnant too quickly as well as in terms of resisting another covenant child unnecessarily.

Conclusion

In his list of the fruit of the Spirit Paul mentions "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22,23). It's clear that many of the spiritual qualities characterizing the Christian have a profound bearing on the present topic....

For that matter, might the works of the flesh (listed in Galatians 5:19-21) have a bearing?

This *Bit to Read* is an edited excerpt from the book I wrote on the Marriage Form, entitled *A Vow to Love*, pp 151-155. For more information, the reader is referred to that book.

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