

Statement on Birth Control

Birth Control: A Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Consensus

Scientific technologies today permit greater control of human fertility and reproduction than was formerly possible. These technologies make possible sexual intercourse with the expectation of pregnancy and childbirth greatly reduced. Christian married couples have a potential for fertility control that has created many questions with wide-ranging religious, medical, social, and political implications. Opportunities and benefits exist as a result of the new capabilities, as do challenges and drawbacks. A number of moral issues must be considered. Christians who ultimately must make their own personal choices on these issues must be informed in order to make sound decisions based on biblical principles.

Among the issues to be considered is the question of the appropriateness of human intervention in the natural biological processes of human reproduction. If any intervention is appropriate, then additional questions regarding what, when, and how must be addressed. Other related concerns include:

likelihood of increased sexual immorality which the availability and use of birth control methods may promote;
gender dominance issues related to the sexual privileges and prerogatives of both women and men;
social issues, including the right of a society to encroach upon personal freedom in the interest of the society at large and the burden of economic and educational support for the disadvantaged; and
stewardship issues related to population growth and the use of natural resources.

A statement of moral considerations regarding birth control must be set in the broader context of biblical teachings about sexuality, marriage, parenthood, and the value of children--and an understanding of the interconnectedness between these issues. With an awareness of the diversity of opinion within the Church, the following biblically based principles are set forth to educate and to guide in decision making.

1. Responsible stewardship. God created human beings in His own image, male and female, with capacities to think and to make decisions (Isa 1:18; Josh 24:15; Deut 30:15-20). God gave human beings dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26, 28). This dominion requires overseeing and caring for nature. Christian stewardship also requires taking responsibility for human procreation. Sexuality, as one of the aspects of human nature over which the individual has stewardship, is to be expressed in harmony with God's will (Exod 20:14; Gen 39:9; Lev 20:10-21; 1 Cor 6:12-20).

2. Procreative purpose. The perpetuation of the human family is one of God's purposes for human sexuality (Gen 1:28). Though it may be inferred that marriages are generally intended to yield offspring, Scripture never presents procreation as an obligation of every couple in order to please God. However, divine revelation places a high value on children and expresses the joy to be found in parenting

(Matt 19:14; Ps 127:3). Bearing and rearing children help parents to understand God and to develop compassion, caring, humility, and unselfishness (Ps 103:13; Luke 11:13).

3. Unifying purpose. Sexuality serves a unifying purpose in marriage that is God-ordained and distinguishable from the procreative purpose (Gen 2:24). Sexuality in marriage is intended to include joy, pleasure, and delight (Eccl 9:9; Prov 5:18, 19; Song of Sol 4:16-5:1). God intends that couples may have ongoing sexual communion apart from procreation (1 Cor 7:3-5), a communion that forges strong bonds and protects a marriage partner from an inappropriate relationship with someone other than his or her spouse (Prov 5:15-20; Song of Sol 8:6, 7). In God's design, sexual intimacy is not only for the purpose of conception. Scripture does not prohibit married couples from enjoying the delights of conjugal relations while taking measures to prevent pregnancy.

4. Freedom to choose. In creation--and again through the redemption of Christ-- God has given human beings freedom of choice, and He asks them to use their freedom responsibly (Gal 5:1, 13). In the divine plan, husband and wife constitute a distinct family unit, having both the freedom and the responsibility to share in making determinations about their family (Gen 2:24). Married partners should be considerate of each other in making decisions about birth control, being willing to consider the needs of the other as well as one's own (Phil 2:4). For those who choose to bear children, the procreative choice is not without limits. Several factors must inform their choice, including the ability to provide for the needs of children (1 Tim 5:8); the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of the mother and other care givers (3 John 2; 1 Cor 6:19; Phil 2:4; Eph 5:25); the social and political circumstances into which children will be born (Matt 24:19); and the quality of life and the global resources available. We are stewards of God's creation and therefore must look beyond our own happiness and desires to consider the needs of others (Phil 2:4).

5. Appropriate methods of birth control. Moral decision making about the choice and use of the various birth control agents must stem from an understanding of their probable effects on physical and emotional health, the manner in which the various agents operate, and the financial expenditure involved. A variety of methods of birth control--including barrier methods, spermicides, and sterilization--prevent conception and are morally acceptable. Some other birth-control methods¹ may prevent the release of the egg (ovulation), may prevent the union of egg and sperm (fertilization), or may prevent attachment of the already fertilized egg (implantation). Because of uncertainty about how they will function in any given instance, they may be morally suspect for people who believe that protectable human life begins at fertilization. However, since the majority of fertilized ova naturally fail to implant or are lost after implantation, even when birth control methods are not being used, hormonal methods of birth control and IUDs, which represent a similar process, may be viewed as morally acceptable. Abortion, the intentional termination of an established pregnancy, is not morally acceptable for purposes of birth control.

6. Misuse of birth control. Though the increased ability to manage fertility and protect against sexually transmitted disease may be useful to many married

couples, birth control can be misused. For example, those who would engage in premarital and extramarital sexual relations may more readily indulge in such behaviors because of the availability of birth control methods. The use of such methods to protect sex outside of marriage may reduce the risks of sexually transmitted diseases and/or pregnancy. Sex outside of marriage, however, is both harmful and immoral, whether or not these risks have been diminished.

7. A redemptive approach. The availability of birth-control methods makes education about sexuality and morality even more imperative. Less effort should be put forth in condemnation and more in education and redemptive approaches that seek to allow each individual to be persuaded by the deep movings of the Holy Spirit.

¹ Some current examples of these methods include intrauterine devices (IUDs), hormone pills (including the "morning-after pill"), injections, or implants. Questions about these methods should be referred to a medical professional.

This statement was voted during the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee on Wednesday, September 29, 1999 in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Recommendations: Use of Mifepristone (RU486)

In the treatment of medical conditions, such as cancer, for which RU486 may provide effective therapy, the drug should be used in keeping with relevant laws and established medical science.

RU486 is also used for contraception. When the effect of the drug is to prevent fertilization, its use is ethically permissible. Like other oral contraceptives, however, RU486 may sometimes prevent implantation of a fertilized ovum. This is ethically problematic to those who consider this effect to be abortion.

When RU486 is used in legally permissible and medically appropriate ways for the purpose of causing abortion, the previously adopted Seventh-day Adventist Guidelines on Abortion should guide the practice.

This recommendation was voted by the Christian View of Human Life Committee at Pine Springs Ranch, California, April 10-12, 1994, and was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM), Silver Spring, Maryland, July 26, 1994.