

**Contraception: The Debate Over Our Freedom in The Gospel  
to Control and Limit our Family Size and Spacing  
Rev. Daniel Krueger ©October, 2013**

While debate about contraception is normally thought of as a Roman Catholic issue, there has been a growing discussion amongst some Lutherans as to the use of contraceptive devices. The discussion does not revolve around contraceptive methods that destroy life after contraception. The discussion revolves around using any method of contraception including those that merely prevent conception. A reportedly "Lutheran" website solely devoted to this issue is currently active ([lutheransandcontraception.blogspot.com](http://lutheransandcontraception.blogspot.com)). Lifted from that blog (dated July 8, 2013) is a sample of the discussion taking place and the issues involved.

*Question Submitted: At a recent theological symposium, I posited that we in the Church need "to return to teaching properly about the positive locus of marriage – teaching about its procreative purpose and nature." Another attendee replied in part that "procreation is NOT an intrinsic quality of marriage, as we do not say the infertile are not married." If I had had a chance for rebuttal, I would have pointed out the error of his logic. Bipedalism is an intrinsic quality of humans, despite the sad reality of paraplegia. It would be very helpful to hear how you would counter the idea that infertility invalidates the argument that procreation is an intrinsic quality of marriage. I have my own answers to this false argument, but I would like to make sure I have an answer that is sensitive to the minds of those who suffer from infertility.*

According to "The Reporter" (Reporter Online, May 27, 2010), one of the Floor committees at the 2010 LCMS convention submitted a resolution stating that the LCMS had no "official position" on birth control.

"...a final resolution declines three congregation-submitted overtures -- to end all official theological talks with the ELCA; to request the Synod president not to attend ELCA Churchwide Assemblies; and to return to a Scriptural position on birth control. The committee cited the encouragement of 2Tim: 2:25 to "correct opponents with gentleness" so that God might grant them repentance as reasons for the first two declinations. **As for the third overture, the committee noted that the Synod has never had an official position on birth control.**

While supposedly no "official" LCMS statement exists, a 1981 CTCR document does address this issue entitled "Human Sexuality: A Theological Perspective. The document was submitted for study to the church, but was never formally adopted as the "official" position of the church. In discussing the entire area of human sexuality, it makes the point that we need to study not only God's intention for marriage, but we must also have a right understanding of God's creation of us as male and female. The CTCR document states:

*(p. 7) We are not simply "persons," however important that claim may on occasion be as a protest against inequities. When the Scriptures deal with human beings as man and woman, created to realize not themselves but their fellowship as a harmonious union of those who are different, they view man and woman as embodied creatures. Men and women are not mere persons who meet in a purely spiritual union. On the contrary, the body has its own integrity. What we do in our bodies is done by us; there is no inner, purely spiritual self which remains untouched by our physical commitments (1 Cor. 6:18). We are, quite simply, created as embodied creatures: as male and female. Thus we do not find in the other simply an image of ourselves, an alter ego; rather, the fellowship for which we are created is a fellowship of those who are different and who yet are joined in a personal community of love.*

*There is a further reason why we must begin not with marriage but with the creation of man as male and female. Not every human being need enter the order of marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-7). Celibacy is also in accordance with the will of God. . . . The church today must certainly make clear to its people that marriage is ordained by God and sanctified by Him . . . Nevertheless, the church must also assure those who do not enter the order of marriage that they also please God.*

While the marriage of man and woman is the norm for human society, Jesus himself notes in his discussion on divorce:

*(Mt 19:12) there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."*

What is interesting about these comments of Jesus on being a "eunuch," is that the circumstances he lists are not all a result of the fall or a consequence of sin in this world. Indeed, while God made man and woman for marriage, Jesus, and Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:7, see some forms of celibacy as a special gift and opportunity to serve God. While Paul recognized the rights of an Apostle to have a wife, he voluntarily gives up the right to have a believing wife (1 Cor 9:5). Both the statement of Jesus, and Paul's discussions of marriage, are a drastic departure from the typical treatment of marriage in the Old Testament and the culture of Judaism. According to the 1906 edition of the Jewish Encyclopedia:

*Deliberate renunciation of marriage. In the Old Testament there is no direct reference to the subject. The prophet Jeremiah was a celibate (Jer. xvi. 2). He seems to have regarded it as futile to beget offspring doomed to death in the impending national catastrophe (ib. iii. 4). The pessimistic author of Ecclesiastes, although no admirer of woman (Eccl. vii. 26, 28), counsels "enjoying life with a woman whom thou lovest" (ib. ix. 9).*

*In post-Biblical literature Jewish opinion stands out clear and simple: marriage is a duty, and celibacy a sin. "The world was created to produce life; He created it not a waste, He formed it to be inhabited" (Isa. xlv. 18; Gi? . iv. 5 = 'Eduy. i. 13). "Be fruitful, and multiply" (Gen. i. 28) is taken as a command; marriage with a view to that end is a duty incumbent upon every male adult (according to some the duty devolves also upon woman; Yeb. vi. 8; Maimonides, "Yad," Ishut, xv.; Shul?an 'Aruk, Eben ha-'Ezer, 1, 13).*

*Abstention from marital intercourse on the part of the husband exceeding a legitimate limit, which varies with the different occupations, may be taken by the wife as ground for a divorce (Ket. v. 6, 7). A single man who is past twenty may be compelled by the court to marry (Shul?an 'Aruk, l.c. i. 3). Isserles adds that this custom is obsolete. Exception is made in favor of a student, who may postpone marriage until a time when his education is complete and beyond the possibility of being endangered by the cares incident to procuring a livelihood (ib.; the source is ?id. 29b). "He who is without a wife is without joy, without blessing, without happiness, without learning, without protection, without peace; indeed, he is no man; for it is written (Gen. v. 2), 'Male and female created He them, and called their name Man [A. V., "Adam"]'" (Yeb. 62b, 63a; Shul?an 'Aruk, l.c. l. 1, note). "He who is not married is, as it were, guilty of bloodshed and deserves death: he causes the image of God to be diminished and the divine presence to withdraw from Israel" (Yeb. 63b, 64a).*

*The only known celibate among the rabbis of Talmudic times is Ben 'Azzai, who preached marriage to others, but did not practice it himself. . . .*

*According to Josephus ("B. J." ii. 8, § 2) marriage was repudiated by some of the Essenes. Inasmuch as intercourse with woman was regarded as polluting, the aspiration to the highest degree of Levitical purity and sanctity may have led them to the rejection of marriage. **There is nothing in Jewish literature to parallel Matt. xix. 12 in phraseology or motive** (Dalman, "Worte Jesu," p. 100). [emphasis mine, taken from the online version article on celibacy . . . <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4166-celibacy>]*

Despite the high emphasis that the Jews placed upon marriage and having children, it is worth noting that the Talmud does approve of contraceptive methods that were available in ancient times. Among ancient Jews, these methods included sponges soaked with some mild acidic substance. Also common place were various substances that roughly mimicked our so called "morning after pill." These ancient contraceptive methods were allowed (Talmud tractate Yevamot 12b) for very young married women, pregnant women, or nursing women, when pregnancy was viewed as a risk to either the woman or her child.

Use of these methods was also permitted when families had at least two children. The Talmud (Mishnah Yevamot 6:6) cites the following: According to the school of Shammai, being fruitful and multiplying is interpreted as having a minimum of two sons, while according to the Hillel school it is interpreted to mean a son and a daughter (because the Bible says "male and female He created them"). The rabbis established the halakhah (Jewish law) according to the view of Rabbi Hillel and his school.

While women could use contraception, men could not. The Tosefta (supplemental Talmud), in tractate Yevamot 8:2, specifically states that a man is not allowed to drink any potion in order to become infertile because it is his mitzvah to propagate the race, whereas a woman is permitted to drink the potion in order not to conceive. This ruling is codified in the Code of Jewish Law (Even HaEzer 5,12).

Thus, the use of contraception is not a modern practice, but was current and well known in the New Testament era and, in particular, the Jewish culture. It is worth noting that these issues are never commented upon in the New Testament. It is also pertinent to our discussion that the Jewish culture of the New Testament (The essenes being an exception), believed it was their moral obligation to get married and have children. Paul, steeped as he was in Jewish Law, would have been well aware of this fact. He would also be aware that the theological argument underpinning this obligation was rooted in the very act of creation, which predates the Law of Moses. Paul, in addressing gentile audiences, frequently references creation in condemning homosexuality (Rm 1:20-22), discussing the role of women in the church (1 Co 11:7-15; 14:35-36; 1 Tim 2:11-15) and the meaning of marriage (Eph 5:21-31). It is therefore quite astounding that, regarding the necessity of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, he abandons the Jewish arguments rooted in God's creative act, in reference to women and men.

In the culture of Judaism, not bearing children carried with it a huge stigma, particularly for the woman. This was not a mere cultural stigma, but a theological stigma grounded both in God's creation of man, and also in God's blessing upon Abraham. Abraham was told that he would be the father of many nations, and through his line the promised seed would come (Gen 12:1-3; 17:1-8). Eve herself appears to see the act of child bearing not only as a fulfillment of the command to be fruitful and multiply, but as an act of hope in God's promise when she declares in Genesis 4:1, "I have gotten a man, Yahweh!" (*literal rendering of קַנְיָתִי אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה*).

While the inability to have children was stigmatized, it was not a condition which invalidated marriage. In fact, Old Testament literature is somewhat astounding, given the period, for the love that husbands bestow on childless women. Abraham gives Hagar to Sarah to mistreat, even though Hagar had given birth to Ishmael and Sarah was still childless (Gen 16:6). Rachel was loved more than Leah (Gen 29:30), even though Rachel was barren for many years. Though "the Lord had closed Hannah's womb" (1 Sam 1:5) she was loved and held in greater honor by her husband Elkanah than his other wife Peninah, who regularly tormented her because of her childless condition.

In Old Testament literature the inability to have children does not invalidate marriage. In addition, having children does not always constitute marriage. One point of reference for this fact is the Old Testament rite of Levirate marriage, prescribed in Dt 25:5-6. While this act is called marriage, the first born male of such a union is not considered a product of the marriage between his biological father and mother. Rather, the male child is legally defined as the son of the deceased brother of his biological father as if that deceased brother were still married to her.

While the Old Testament does not regard bearing children as essential to marriage, it does envision the married estate as the norm for male and female relationships. In the New Testament there is a notable shift with regard to the importance of seeking marriage. We find this change in sentiment both in the words of Jesus, quoted earlier, the life of the apostle Paul (1 Cor 9), and the counsel of the Apostle Paul, particularly in 1 Corinthians 7.

*1 Co 7:6-9 Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*

What is fascinating about Paul's discussion of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 is the almost complete lack of reference to children with regard to marriage and its purpose. Though they are mentioned once (1 Cor 7:14), it is only to note that children born of a mixed marriage (believer and unbeliever) are still holy. Beyond this somewhat parenthetical remark, Paul's emphasis throughout this chapter is our ability to serve God whatever state we are in. Paul sees marriage, when not necessary to avoid sin, as somewhat impeding that ability. His remark that he wishes that "*all were as I myself am,*" from a Jewish perspective, would be calling people to abandon service to God, and not a call to serve God. Paul can only make this statement because he is viewing marriage from a new point of view. Paul rightly understands marriage as an earthly institution which is passing away, and as such it can distract from a continual focus on "pleasing the Lord."

*1 Co 7:32-34 "I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord,*

*how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.*

Though Paul doesn't quote from Jesus, his description of marriage as a "worldly" institution properly reflects the teaching of Jesus. (Mk 12:25) *"For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."* Marriage exists only for this life, and not for the next. Even though Paul sees marriage as an earthly institution, that does not mean he has low regard for the estate. Indeed, Paul sees the establishment of marriage by God as an earthly means of reflecting the love of Christ for the Church.

*Eph 5:22-31 "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

Paul sees marriage as an earthly institution, created by God, to reflect God's love for his people. In pointing this out, Paul's entire focus is the relationship of husband and wife, and not the procreation of children. Though Paul mentions children in chapter 6:1, they are not described as part of the mystery. They are counseled to be obedient because of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment and its promise. Paul's treatment of marriage as an earthly institution helps us understand why the New Testament seems to treat marriage as less vital in human relations than the Old Testament. The situation may be similar to New Testament's treatment of the Old Testament sacrificial rituals.

The Old Testament tabernacle was commanded by God. Its function was to teach God's people heavenly concepts. The book of Hebrews makes this role of the tabernacle both clear and repeatedly.

*Heb 8:3-5 For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.*

*Heb 9:11-12 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.*

*Heb 9:23-24 Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.*

*Heb 10:1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.*

With the appearance of Christ, the importance of the sacrificial rituals changed. The church faced early on the question of the role of Old Testament ritual in the life of a Christian, particularly Gentile Christians. The conclusion of the church was that the Old Testament law was no longer binding because what it foreshadowed had now appeared. Christ has not abolished the Old Testament, but he had fulfilled it.

*Gal 3:19:26 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?*

*Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*

If a person was of Jewish descent, the practice of Old Testament sacrificial ritual was allowed. Indeed, even after the Jerusalem council regarding the circumcision of Gentiles (Acts 15), the apostles at Jerusalem still had high regard for the temple. This is reflected in the request made to the apostle Paul to undergo special vows when he visits Jerusalem.

In order to squash the rumors that Paul was teaching Jews to not follow the law, the leaders of the Jerusalem church asked him, and he agreed to, undergo purification rituals at the temple (Acts 21:21-28). However, Paul submitted himself to this not because he saw it as necessary in obedience to the Old Testament Law, but as necessary in his witness to the Gospel, as he explains to the Corinthians:

*1Co 9:20-21 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.*

For the same reason, Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3). The act was carried out not as necessity for obeying the law, but because Paul believed it would serve him in his sharing of the Gospel to Jewish believers. Thus, for Paul, and the church, obedience to the institutions established by God which pointed us to Christ became optional, even in Paul's personal life, depending on how they served his ability to preach the gospel. For Gentile believers, such as Titus (Gal 2:3), practice of these rituals was resisted, because it was compromising the gospel message that we are saved by faith alone, and Gentiles were under no obligation to participate in them.

Returning now to 1 Corinthians 7 and the institution marriage, we have insight as to why Paul (*and Jesus in Mt 19:10-12*) now sees the institution of marriage as something to be avoided if one can, and why children are not an essential part of Paul's discussion. Because Christ has appeared, marriage, like the tabernacle/temple, is not necessary in enhancing our understanding of God's love. The promised seed has arrived, "the offspring" has come, and the promise to Abraham is now fulfilled. Marriage was designed by God to point forward to his supreme act of love, where he himself joins with his creation to become one flesh. Some would argue, that even if sin never entered the world, the incarnation would still have taken place. Now, instead of looking at marriage to understand how God would someday become one flesh with his creation, we behold Christ in relationship with his church. As with the tabernacle, our attention is shifted away from the copy, to the reality which is Christ.

The institution that once foreshadowed God's love to us in Christ is now supplanted by the actual presence of Christ. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, two become one flesh in the partaking of the body and blood of Jesus. (1Co\_10:17) *"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."* Paul uses the same expression which describes the sexual act (1 Cor 6:16) to describe the "one body" relationship of believers in the act of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 10:17) and the relationship of believers in the Church (1 Cor 12:12, 13, 20). As our liturgy reminds us, in the Lord's Supper we now experience a foretaste of the feast to come, which Revelation describes as marriage feast.

*(Rev 19:7-9) Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."*

The New Testament offers a dramatic change with regard to the necessity of marriage in the life of God's people. This is not because of fear of impending doom, like that of Jeremiah, but because Christ has appeared.

*Heb 1:1 "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.*

That mystery which marriage foreshadowed, is now fully revealed in Jesus. Since in heaven we are present with God and know the fullness of love by knowing him, marriage ceases its teaching/modeling function.

*Isa 54:1-5 "Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says the LORD. . . . Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called."*

Because we live in a new age (*though it is both now, but not yet*), the function of marriage is viewed differently in the New Testament. In the context of 1 Corinthians 7 its role is the enabling of greater service to God, primarily by keeping our bodily needs under control. The function of not getting married in 1 Corinthians 7 is also the enabling of greater service to God, for those who have their bodily needs under control apart from marriage.

*1 Co 7:28-31 "But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed (παρθενος) woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away."*

It is interesting that in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul is speaking particularly to people (as ESV translates) who are betrothed, and counseling them that it is "okay" for betrothed people to refrain from marriage (*other commentaries suggest he is addressing the fathers of virgins, or "spiritual" couples who haven't yet married*). Within Judaic and Christian tradition, including Lutherans, betrothal was long held to be "tantamount to marriage" (see Kretzmann, New Testament vol. 1, p. 6-7). Within Judaism, talmudic law held that after betrothal, the laws regarding adultery applied, though the actual ceremony and living together could be up to a year away.

It is amazing that Paul, a Jew, would argue against marriage at all. It is even more amazing that Paul would suggest to betrothed people that they were not required to marry, if their decision was based on a desire to more fully serve the kingdom. Pressing on to "astounding," is that Paul wishes everyone was like him in his unmarried state. Paul's reasoning is made clear in verse 31. "*For the present form of this world is passing away.*" Marriage is part of this world, and we are living in the end times. The promised seed has come. Not only the institution of the tabernacle, but the institution of marriage, which are both copies or shadows of our eternal life with God, are coming to an end, because what they foreshadowed has now appeared.

Though we are in the end times, we are still living in bodies designed by our creator for our life here. Our maleness and femaleness naturally draw us together as God intended, and this desire to seek union precedes the fall into sin. God established marriage as a committed relationship, reflecting his commitment us. To exercise that which God designed for marriage outside of marriage is sin. However, when exercised within the confines of marriage, the sexual relationship draws people into closer communion with each other which is one of its intended purposes. The other purposes are the procreation of children, and since the fall, the right and proper control of our natural physical inclinations. However, procreation is hardly the emphasis of the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor 7.

Sexuality outside of the context of marriage is sin not because of its impact on procreation, but because it presents to the world a false image of God. While we are in the end times, marriage is still God's creation and still reflects himself in his relationship to the church. Notably, while the Gentiles were released from obedience to Jewish law by the council at Jerusalem, they were still asked to do three things: (Acts 15:20) "*abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.*" Of all the areas of what we would call "*moral law*," why is this area of sexual behavior singled out? It is because this behavior is intimately linked to the image of God.

*1Co 6:15-20 "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is*

*joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

Sexuality outside of marriage, both in ancient times and still today, is usually practiced in such a way as to not produce children. It was identified as sin in the New Testament not because it broke Old Testament Law, for that was no longer binding on Gentiles. It was not called sin because it failed to produce children. It was called sin because it was a “one body” experience devoid of love and commitment. That which God created to reflect himself no longer reflected who he is. Gentiles had to abstain from sexual immorality because the act, in its essence, attaches God to a false image.

When “properly” exercised with the context of committed love, that is, love which flows from God’s love for us, the sexual act is pleasing to God. This is true whether or not the act is capable of producing children. When exercised outside that relationship of committed love, even in such a way that no children could ever result from such a union, it is always sin. It is sin not because of it is forbidden in Old Testament Law, but because the “one body” union does not reflect God’s committed love toward us. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and should proclaim God’s love in everything we do.

In the same way homosexual acts are sin. They are sin not because they can not produce children. They are sin not because homosexuals are incapable of committed love (*though studies show it extraordinarily rare in such relationships*). Homosexual acts are sin because they fail to reflect God in relationship to his church. Woman is not man. Woman, is the compliment to man. Man existed first. Woman was created out of man, just as the church was created out of God. Homosexual relationships reflect self worship and not the relationship between Christ and the church. Paul condemns homosexuality because it exchanges God’s image for the image of creature.

*(Rm 1:21-27) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

It is worth noting here that when God created man in his image, the image he created was male and female. *(Gen 1:27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* The true image of God is an image which includes God in relationship to his creation. Its fullness is expressed in the person of Jesus Christ, where human flesh is taken into the godhead. If you will, in the person of Jesus Christ, God and man become one flesh. Yet, God is still distinct from man. Jesus is the groom, the bride is the church. Both are intimately united, yet distinct. They exist not in competition, but in their uniqueness form a perfect compliment.

While children are a normal and usual outcome of the marital relationship, scripturally they are never an absolute requirement of the marital relationship. Man and woman are the image of God at creation, prior to their bearing of children. There is no provision in Scripture for divorce because one or another partner to marriage is unable to produce children. Paul’s directions to Timothy to not enroll widows under the age of 60 (1 Tim 5:9) and encouraging younger widows to marry (1 Tim 5:11) was a specific encouragement to women who were often past the age of child bearing to remarry. The average age of menopause varies with cultures, but in the U.S. it is age 51, Saudi Arabia is 49, Mexico 46, India and Philippines are age 44. These studies suggest that differences in the average age of menopause are linked to general health and life expectancy factors, and not specifically to race. In Paul’s day we could presume that half of all females between 48 and 53 were infertile, and virtually all women above age 53 were infertile. Nevertheless, he states regarding widows under age 60:

*(1Ti 5:9-14) Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work. But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.*

While Paul does encourage younger widows to bear children, in reality this would never be possible for many, if not most, of the widows he had identified. His primary encouragement for widows in remarrying was so that their passions did not draw them away from Christ. This is an argument consistent with his Paul's discussions in 1 Corinthians 7. **It is therefore totally consistent with Scripture to say that while bearing children is a function of marriage and assigned to the estate of marriage, the ability to have children is not a necessary requirement for marriage.**

From the evidence of Scripture, women who can not bear children are still married, and should not be divorced simply because of their incapacity to fulfill this function. Women who do not have the capacity to bear children are still encouraged to marry and remain within marriage after they lose that ability. However, the encouragement of infertile people to marry has not always been the position of the church. Particularly, the Roman Catholic Church.

*From Human Vitae section 14: Unlawful Birth Control Methods*

*1. 14. Therefore We base Our words on the first principles of a human and Christian doctrine of marriage when We are obliged once more to declare that the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and, above all, all direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children. (14) Equally to be condemned, as the magisterium of the Church has affirmed on many occasions, is direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary. (15) Similarly excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation — whether as an end or as a means.*

*(16) Neither is it valid to argue, as a justification for sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive, that a lesser evil is to be preferred to a greater one, or that such intercourse would merge with procreative acts of past and future to form a single entity, and so be qualified by exactly the same moral goodness as these. Though it is true that sometimes it is lawful to tolerate a lesser moral evil in order to avoid a greater evil or in order to promote a greater good," it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it (18)—in other words, to intend directly something which of its very nature contradicts the moral order, and which must therefore be judged unworthy of man, even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family or of society in general. Consequently, it is a serious error to think that a whole married life of otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong.*

Within Roman Catholicism, there is such a strong linkage between the sexual act and the bearing of children, that any interference in that process is considered morally wrong. As a result of this strong linkage, the Roman Catholic Church has, in the past, forbidden marriage to people who, by reason of physical defect, can not complete the sexual act. Such an instance made headlines in the New York Times (*PARALYSIS BARS A WEDDING, UPI, Published: January 27, 1982*):

*"KANKAKEE, Ill., Jan. 26— A man paralyzed below the waist in a fall and a nurse he met while recuperating planned to marry this spring, but a little-known law of the Roman Catholic Church is standing in the way.*

*Larry Bonvallet and his fiancée want to have the ceremony in the church her family has attended for years. But when the couple went to a priest with their plans, he told them Catholic Church law states that only people who can have a sexual relationships can marry in the church."*

The 1983 Code of Canon law states: *Canon 1084.1 Antecedent and perpetual impotence to have sexual intercourse, whether on the part of the man or on that of the woman, whether absolute or relative, by its very nature invalidates marriage.* Referencing again the document *Human Vitae* quoted earlier from section 11:

*These acts, by which husband and wife are united in chaste intimacy, and by means of which human life is transmitted, are, as the Council recalled, "noble and worthy," [Ibid, no. 49.] and they do not cease to be lawful if, for causes independent of the will of husband and wife, they are foreseen to be infecund, since they always remain ordained towards expressing and consolidating their union. In fact, as experience bears witness, not every conjugal act is followed by a new life. God has wisely disposed natural laws and rhythms of fecundity which, of themselves, cause a separation in the succession of births. Nonetheless the Church, calling men back to the observance of the norms of the natural law, as interpreted by their constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marriage act (quilibet matrimonii usus) must remain open to the transmission of life. [Cf. Pius XI, encyc. Casti Connubii, in AAS XXII (1930), p. 560; Pius XII, in AAS XLIII (1951), p. 843.]*

Commenting on this Roman Catholic teaching, the 1981 CTCR document on Human Sexuality rightly stated that this Roman Catholic teaching unjustifiably, from a scriptural point of view, insists that sexual acts must always fulfill both relational and procreational intents of marriage. The quotation below references a "threefold purpose of marriage." The CTCR includes the avoidance of sin as a third reason for marriage.

*(p. 19) Catholic teaching recognizes both the relational and the procreative purposes of marriage and affirms that both are to be fulfilled within marriage. Its position on birth control derives from its insistence that no single act of sexual intercourse can seek to enhance one of these purposes (the relational) while deliberately frustrating the realization of the other (the procreative). It is not enough, according to this teaching, for the marital union of husband and wife as a whole to be fruitful. Rather, every act of intercourse must place no artificial impediment in the way of fruitfulness. From what the Scriptures say about the threefold purpose of marriage, we could judge that such a viewpoint isolates the sexual act from its human, personal context and focuses too narrowly on the procreative function apart from the personal context.*

When the Roman Catholic Church insists that all purposes of the sexual act must be served, it is then led to the unfortunate position of stating people with paralysis can never be married. The inconsistency of their position is that when procreative ability ceases, particularly among women, but also among men, this would mean that all sexual contact even within marriage should cease. This obviously is not the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, but it is the logical extension of what they teach.

From our previous examination of Scripture, the Bible commends marriage even when procreative ability has naturally ceased (as in the case of widows). It commends marriage as a means of satisfying the natural desires God placed within men and women even before man fell into sin. It is also important to note that while the ancient world had numerous contraceptive methods available, both methods preventing conception, and rough equivalents of the morning after pill, the Bible is essentially silent with regard to their use. From comments in the Talmud, noted earlier, we can be reasonably certain that Paul was aware of these uses, and we can be absolutely certain Jesus was, since He is all knowing. The CTCR document concludes, with regard to contraception.

*In view of the Biblical command and the blessing to "be fruitful and multiply," it is to be expected that marriage will not ordinarily be voluntarily childless. But, in the absence of Scriptural prohibition, there need be no objection to contraception within a marital union which is, as a whole, fruitful. Moreover, once we grant the appropriateness of contraception, we will also recognize that sterilization may under some circumstances be an acceptable form of contraception. Because of its relatively permanent nature; sterilization is perhaps less desirable than less-far-reaching forms of contraception. However, there should be no moral objection to it, especially for couples who already have children and who now seek to devote themselves to the rearing of those children, for those who have been advised by a physician that the birth of another child would be hazardous to the health of the mother, or for those who for reasons of age, physical*

*disability, or illness are not able to care for additional children. Indeed, there may be special circumstances which would persuade a Christian husband and wife that it would be more responsible and helpful to all concerned, under God, not to have children. Whatever the particular circumstances, Christians dare not take lightly decisions in this area of their life together. They should examine their motives thoroughly and honestly and take care lest their decisions be informed by a desire merely to satisfy selfish interests.*

*With respect to voluntary childlessness in general, we should say that while there may be special reasons which would persuade a Christian husband and wife to limit the size of their family, they should remember at all times how easy it is for them simply to permit their union to turn inward and refuse to take up the task of sharing in God's creative activity. Certainly Christians will not give as a reason for childlessness the sorry state of the world and the fear of bringing a child into such a world. We are not to forget the natural promise embedded in the fruitfulness of marriage. To bear and rear children can be done, finally, as an act of faith and hope in the God who has promised to supply us with all that we "need to support this body and life."*

The CTCR document does deal briefly with appropriate contraception methods (those that prevent conception) versus inherently sinful methods that destroy life after conception takes place. This paper will let the reader do their own research on these methods recognizing that not all forms of contraception are pleasing to God. However, at the core of the CTCR's document when it references the subject of contraception is a belief that the proper answer to this question is rooted in a responsible evaluation of how we might best serve God. Family planning is a matter Christian liberty within the context of marriage, and responsible use of non-abortive contraceptives can not be condemned on the basis of Scripture.

Below are a few scenarios where people have chosen to limit, or not limit, their procreative abilities. When used, assume that the birth control methods are non-abortive. Also assume that the families described are regular in church attendance and active in leadership within your congregation. Evaluate the family planning decisions these couples have made in light of their service God and their desire to serve others. At the heart of family planning decisions should be a desire to serve God and others, and not a desire to serve self.

- 1) Two parochial school teachers who are very active in your church have decided to marry after several years of on again, off again dating, but continual friendship. They are still in child bearing years but toward the upper end of that time. They are great teachers, love their work, and before meeting each other were content with continuing in their work without ever getting married. While they want to get married, they don't want to have children. Instead, they want to continue to see the children they teach as "their" children.
- 2) A family has one child but the pregnancy was very difficult. The doctor has recommended sterility for the mother or father because the mother will be at very high risk of death if she becomes pregnant again.
- 3) A family has been putting off childbirth because the husband enjoys the freedom he and his wife have to do things, including church work, and traveling. The wife is worried they will wait too long to have children. When they were first married they both freely agreed that they wanted to put off having children, and were not even sure if they wanted any children. Now, she has changed her mind and wants to have children before it is "too late." He prefers things as they are. She's the one who has changed.
- 4) A couple in your parish who have been married several years are still without children. One night when you are invited to their house for dinner you bring up the subject. The couple has discussed the possibility, but the wife is fearful about becoming a parent. She has tried to teach Sunday School and VBS once. She is not comfortable around children. She has come to the conclusion she would not be a good mother. She is a very high strung, nervous person. Though you have never asked, you suspect that sometime in her early life she may have been on some nasty drugs. Your first reaction to her statement (but not stated out loud) is agreement with her self-assessment. You wouldn't have wanted her for your mother!
- 5) Your counseling with a couple about to be married that have decided they don't want to bring children into this world because the world is becoming so corrupt.
- 6) In a group Bible Study the subject of raising children comes up including the cost of raising children today. One woman, who is fairly upper middle class, announces that she and her husband only had one child because they want that child to have the best in schools and advantages, and when they considered the costs, including a Ivy League College Education, they determined one child was all they can afford.

- 7) Another person in the same Bible Study is on food stamps, and receives several other forms of government assistance. The family gets food baskets from the church at Thanksgiving, and have been helped out by many individual members. She and her husband have four children and she is pregnant with their fifth. She counters the first woman's statement by saying, "Sometimes you just need to trust that God is going to provide!" Through the Church grapevine you've heard they don't believe in using birth control.
- 8) Another person in the Bible Study who is in the lower end of middle class, says that her husband and her only wanted two children when they were married, but they wanted a boy and girl. They now have four boys and the budget is getting really tight. They recently underwent financial counseling, and while they are squeaking by they just can't afford to try one more time for a girl. They are great parents and are doing a wonderful job raising their four children. The wife has happily agreed to have surgery to end her procreative abilities.
- 9) Another person in the Bible Study has twelve children whom she home schools and she is pregnant. She is very vocal about the fact that they don't use birth control. They have a small piece of land outside of town that is paid for. The husband works, but they survive by sewing their own clothes, raising most of their own food, and using wood to heat their home. While they are very self-sufficient, the children, particularly the younger ones, are a huge discipline problem in Sunday School and church. Most people avoid sitting by that family. This family never misses a church pot luck! While you marvel at their thriftiness, you also marvel at their lack of parenting skills.