

A Review of Reproductive Technologies

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April 2001

Because reproductive ethics is a little known quantity for the average person the following is offered as a simple guide for discussion and consideration in personal decision making. Please note the pastoral concern at the end of the guidelines intended to again introduce those who have already made use of technologies (that may not be compatible with biblical meanings) to the grace of God.

Assisting Procreation:

- Drugs used to stimulate ovulation or corrective surgeries intended to assist in conception are compatible with the biblical meaning of healing.
- A couple should be cautioned that taking such action may lead to becoming preoccupied with child-bearing which puts a strain on husband or wife and the marriage itself. Children are a gift of God that may or may not be given to all.

Artificial Insemination

- Infertility is sometimes due to the inability of sperm to reach an egg. In artificial insemination sperm is mechanically introduced into the uterus where conception can take place. Although such a procedure diminishes the intimacy associated with conception, it may be compatible with the biblical meaning and intention for marriage and conception. Sperm may be collected at home by means of a condom during intercourse and brought to the clinical setting where it is introduced into the wife's uterus. If the sperm and egg are from the same married couple, the One Flesh union of marriage is preserved.
- But when sperm is collected apart from intercourse between husband and wife from a donor, artificial insemination becomes incompatible with the biblical meaning of marriage and conception.
- It is also incompatible with biblical meanings of marriage and conception for a single woman to seek pregnancy through artificial insemination.

In Vitro Fertilization:

- With in vitro fertilization, an egg and sperm are brought together in a Petri dish in a laboratory. Such a setting changes the meaning of conception from that which results secondarily from our love-making, to the making of a child as an end in itself apart from the intimacy which is primary.
- With in vitro fertilization there is, of necessity, a separation of the relational from the biological. Thus conception becomes reproduction (producing a commodity) rather than procreation (creation at the initiative of God). In reproduction the

intention is to "make" a child. In procreation, we receive a child from God resulting from our love-making.

- With in vitro fertilization several embryos are created but only a few are implanted, leaving the remaining embryos to be stored as our "possessions" until needed or where, in time, they die or are destroyed, or used for research, . . . all of which leads us further away from understanding children as a gift from God to be received rather than a product for our use. The fact that embryos are also lost in-utero by nature differs from the above in that in the latter it is our intentional act that causes it to happen.
- The suggestion to put embryos up for adoption, although well-intended, may lead to an industry of producing yet greater numbers of embryos for commercial gain. Likewise, embryo research promises to lead to commercial gain at the expense of human life.
- With in vitro, the sperm or egg or both may not be from the married couple seeking a child and therefore is not compatible with the biblical meaning of marriage and conception. In the One Flesh understanding, two become one. With the introduction of a third party (i.e. donor sperm or egg or surrogate mother) the oneness is violated. Such violation may be called adulterous for in such a case one covets that which is found outside the marriage because it is lacking within the marriage. Neither spousal consent nor well-intentioned motives change the reality of what is taking place in the use of donors.

Surrogate Motherhood

- Surrogate motherhood is the use of another woman's uterus to carry a child to term for another person or couple. The child carried may be the result of the contracting husband and wife's sperm and egg, or the child may be the result of any combination of donors, and may have been fertilized in vitro or in-utero. All is incompatible with the biblical meaning of conception. A child carried by a woman in pregnancy is to be received by her as a gift from God to be nurtured, and loved, but in surrogacy the child has become a commodity conceived solely for the purpose of giving it away. Most often the child is "given away" for money, making this the selling of children, further treating the child as a commodity similar to the practice of treating some as non-persons in the colonial era of slavery in America.
- Surrogate motherhood violates the One Flesh union of marriage by inviting a third party to bear the child. Donor and surrogate conceptions and pregnancies subject the child to risk of identity confusion and uncertain lineage, a significant aspect of family and community life.
- Surrogacy differs from adoption in that with adoption a child is not conceived for the purpose of giving the child away, but rather is unintentionally conceived and is left without someone to raise the child. Adoption is a generous and hospitable act that is consistent with the Christian faith.
- More than any other technology, surrogacy employs all that is objectionable in reproductive methods, treating the child as a commodity to be produced, then rejected, and sold by the mother. There is a similarity between selling the use of

one's body for conception and selling the use of one's body as a prostitute. Motives as crass as merely "wanting the experience of pregnancy" without the obligation of parenting or the "generosity of desiring to help a childless couple" are all incompatible with the biblical meanings of marriage and conception because they fail to grasp the meaning of what God is doing through procreation.

Pastoral Response:

Having said this, it is also necessary to speak subjectively about the spiritual care of couples. Childless couples need care and support but not approval for choices they make that are incompatible with the biblical meaning of the One Flesh meaning of marriage and conception. Pastors need to minister to the need that drives a couple to do what they do as well as make them aware of the limitations God imposes on us. The desire for a child is good and wholesome, but it can also become an obsession that dominates and threatens a marriage.

If couples choose that which is believed by the pastor to be incompatible with the intention of our Lord then compassion and patience is needed in ministering to them. None of us is without sin. The pastor must try to bring the couple to a mind of daily prayer and confession, feeding and leading them while bearing with their erring choices in hopes that they will grow in faith and find forgiveness and peace in Christ.