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# THE HERALD

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## What does the Bible say about Modern Infertility Treatments?

By Joshua Steiner

Today many couples struggle to have children. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), it is estimated that, in the United States, 1 in 5 women, aged 15-49 years, are unable to get pregnant after a year of trying and are considered infertile. Often couples who struggle with infertility will enlist the help of an Infertility Specialists, or Reproductive Endocrinologists. Some of what these specialists may suggest can be helpful (diet, health of mother, medicines, surgery etc.).<sup>1</sup> If none of those options enable the couple to conceive, specialists will often recommend trying some kind of assisted conception. Those methods include: In vitro fertilization (IVF); Egg and sperm donation; or surrogacy. The question becomes, are these assisted conception solutions ethical? In other words, what does God have to say about these different attempts by man to bring forth life?

In order to answer those extremely important questions, it is important to begin with a couple of biblically based presuppositions. First, God is the One who creates life (Ps. 127:3; 139:13), and God is the One who opens and closes the womb (Gen. 20:17-18; 21:1-2; 25:21; 29:31; 30:22; Ruth 4:13; etc.). Second, life begins at conception. Conception is when the sperm implants in the egg. Third,

abortion is murder. Any purposeful killing of human life is sin, whether the killing is carried out with a gun, surgical knife, chemicals, or intended neglect. And finally, any sexual intercourse outside of marriage is sin.

With those truths as the foundation, let's focus on a Christian couple who is infertile. How should they think biblically about the different methods and procedures of assisted conception that an infertility specialist would recommend?

### Egg and/or Sperm Donation

Egg and sperm donation, is taking eggs and/or sperm from other people and using them to conceive a child. This practice is wrong, because God has designed the husband and wife to come together to bear children (Gen. 1:28). Using someone else's egg or sperm in order to conceive is in opposition to God's design of a husband and wife coming together to bear children.

Receiving a donated egg is basically what Abram and Sarai tried to do in Genesis 16. Sarai thought she was infertile, because of her age, so she wanted to use someone else's egg in order to have a child. Instead of employing a medical procedure, she gave her servant Hagar to become Abram's wife (Gen. 16:3), donating her eggs in that way. Hagar conceived and trouble started right away (16:4). Not only had Abram and Sarai sinned, by breaking the covenant of marriage, but now there were major problems between Sarai and Hagar.

Using someone else's egg or sperm in order to conceive goes against the moral will of God, because it is adding a third person to the marital union. God has designed the husband and wife to come together in a sexual union in order to bear children. There should never be a third person.

Every believer should acknowledge if a couple cannot conceive a child and thus decides to hire another man to impregnate the wife via sexual intercourse, that would be wrong. They would be sinning. Even one act of sexual intercourse outside of marriage is sin. Replacing the hired man with a donor who is giving his sperm via a medical procedure, does not change the fact that a third person is entering into the realm of sexual union that is reserved for the husband and wife.

In addition, as First Corinthians 6 makes clear, the members of a believer's body should never be joined to someone who is not his spouse. The two becoming one flesh (1 Cor. 6:16) is a special and unique relationship that should be shared with no one. Therefore, sharing the fruit of that special union, one's sperm or eggs, is not glorifying God with one's body (1 Cor. 6:20).

The other reality that must be thought through, concerning this question of egg or sperm donation, is the perspective of the child. If a father or a mother were to donate or sell their child to another person, they would be sinning against God.<sup>2</sup> A person donates or sells their sperm or egg for the purpose of creating a child. Thus, donating or selling your sperm or egg is tantamount to donating or selling your 11-year-old child. God has designed the parents to be the ones who raise and care for the needs of the children. When parents sell or give away a child, they are treating the child as a commodity, instead of a gift from God, that cannot be sold. One could only imagine the harm such a transaction would cause for the child, which is slowly coming to light.

### **In vitro fertilization**

In vitro fertilization (IVF) is a complex process that involves retrieving eggs from ovaries and sperm from a man and then manually combining them together in a lab, for fertilization of the eggs. Several days after fertilization, the fertilized egg (now called an embryo) is placed inside a uterus. The reality is, there are many children who are conceived in the lab with the use of many eggs and many sperm. Often 30-60 eggs are fertilized in a cycle. The children (called embryos) who are the most likely to survive, are either implanted or frozen as they await implantation. The rest of the embryos are discarded. Not only is this procedure contrary to God's design for conception, but the fact that many of the children of this procedure are killed, is morally wrong. It is murder!

Often the doctor will keep a number of children frozen in the lab, in case the first ones that are placed in the uterus do not survive. That is actually quite likely, because there is only about a 25-35% success rate per cycle. However, if the first one does indeed survive, the rest of the children remain frozen in the lab. It is not uncommon for parents to abandon their children, which then places the responsibility in the hand of the labs of what to do with these children. It is fascinating that there is much discussion among unbelievers about what to do with all of these children. Even unbelievers acknowledge that it would not be ethical to just throw these children away (murdering them).

Because of the many children who are conceived in the lab and then murdered (discarded like medical waste) I do not think it is morally acceptable for a Christian couple to attempt to use this service. From the very beginning God made clear that murder was wrong (Genesis 9:6). This truth continues today. Killing a human, no matter their size or condition, is murder. The murder that is taking place in the IVF procedure is sin. As a result, a Christian must have nothing to do with IVF.

God did not design doctors or lab technicians

to create life in a laboratory. God designed a husband and wife to create life in the sanctity of their sexual union. Plus, as Jennifer Lahl has said, "Once we take egg and sperm out of the body, our children become like a project that we are making and manufacturing." That is in opposition to the loving act of sexual intimacy that God has gifted to a husband and wife, which sometimes results in the fruit of a child.

Before looking at the third option of surrogacy, it is important to remember that the children who are conceived via IVF have not sinned. They too are created in the image of God and have the same value, worth and dignity as a child conceived via sexual intercourse in the marriage relationship. Just like the child who is conceived in rape is not guilty, the child who is conceived by IVF is not guilty. We praise the Lord for the gift of life, even when it began in sinful circumstances.

### **Surrogacy**

Surrogacy is "a process in which a woman carries and delivers a child for a couple or individual. A legal contract is required for intended parents and their carrier before medical treatment begins."<sup>3</sup> There are two main types of surrogacy: "In traditional surrogacy, the surrogate's egg is used to create the embryo of the child she is going to carry (either through intrauterine insemination or in vitro fertilization.) In gestational surrogacy, the intended parents create an embryo using their own egg and sperm or using donated egg or sperm."<sup>4</sup> The created embryo is then placed inside of the surrogate's uterus. Some surrogacy is done commercially for money; other surrogacy (altruistic) is done out of love and concern for a family member or friend.

Both of Jacob's wives, Leah and Rachel, gave their handmaids to Jacob; as Rachel said in order "that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children" (Gen. 30:3). The practice of having children with women, other than your wife, has been practiced all over the world; whether it was a slave, servant or 'friend.'

Each and every time though, it has a detrimental effect on everyone involved, especially the children; because it is outside of God's moral will.

In addition, as Dr. Roland Chia writes, "Both commercial and altruistic surrogacy violate the traditional understanding of motherhood. A mother is traditionally defined as the woman who gives birth to the child. But since science is now able to separate the genetic and gestational aspects of motherhood, there is a now a debate as to whether motherhood should be defined in genetic or gestational terms." But God did not design such a division. Surrogacy is contrary to God's design for the procreation of children.

A Christian woman should never be willing to bear a child for another woman or man (who is not her husband). God has designed a woman to bear the children of the fruit of the sexual union she has with her own husband. Children are a gift from the Lord (Ps. 127:3-5). God is the one who gives children to a married couple, that is not the role of a surrogate. God, in His infinite wisdom, has designed children to be the fruit of the sexual union of a husband and wife.

### **Final Thoughts**

As we continue to think through these issues, it is important to remember again that God has a plan for all that He does. When He chooses to prevent a couple from conceiving, when He closes her womb in that way, He has a plan behind it. As believers, we must be willing to trust in God's good plan, even when, from our perspective, it seems bad. The truth is, God is sovereign and in control of all things. Just like a single person can trust God and His good reasons for not bringing him a spouse; a married couple can trust God and His good reasons for not giving them children.

One more truth to keep in mind: having children is not a right.<sup>5</sup> In America, we are often very concerned about our rights and what we think we deserve. We think we have the right to happiness and good health. We think we have the

right to children and a good job. But the reality is, we don't deserve any of those things. As believers, we are not guaranteed good health here on this earth. Christian couples are not guaranteed biological children. God doesn't always give us what we want, even when we are convinced it is what we need [Remember the Apostle Paul's request in 2 Corinthians 12?]. The truth is, only God can truly satisfy (Ps. 16:11; 73:25-28). Children are a great blessing to a husband and wife, but they are not ultimate. Only God is ultimate. May we commit to continuing to trust Him.

1. But even with some of these options, specifically fertility medicines and hormones, there are often side-effects and other unintended consequences [ex. stroke, mood changes and cancer].
2. This is different from adoption, which is being done for the best of the child. Whereas sperm and egg donation is being done based on what is 'best' for the donor or the recipient. The child conceived by this method has no say in the matter.
3. <https://www.yalemedicine.org/conditions/gestational-surrogacy>
4. <https://surrogate.com/about-surrogacy/types-of-surrogacy/types-of-surrogacy/>
5. The daughters of Lot thought they had the obligation, or right, to continue the family line. As a result they took steps that were contrary to God's design, which resulted in many problems. See Genesis 19:31-38 and compare Numbers 25:1-3 and Deuteronomy 23:3-4.

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We plan to discuss this topic at our upcoming Family Forum on November 5th at 1:30pm. In preparation for that time, think through the following discussion questions:

- Where is the line between what can be done and what should be done, medically speaking?
- How should we discuss these topics with our friends and family members?
- How would you counsel and support a couple who is struggling with infertility?
- Are there other options to pursue besides these assisted conception procedures?
- Would it be morally acceptable for a Christian couple to adopt one of the abandoned embryos created in a lab?
- Do you agree with the points in this article? Why or why not?
- What other questions and/or concerns do you have?

# FUNNIES

Dwight Nelson told a true story about the pastor of his church. The pastor had a kitten that had climbed up a tree in his backyard and then was afraid to come down. The pastor coaxed, offered warm milk, etc. The kitty would not come down. The tree was not sturdy enough to climb, so the pastor decided that if he tied a rope to his car and drove away so that the tree bent down, he could then reach up and get the kitten. He tied the tree to the car and started the car, all the while frequently checking his progress in the car. He figured if he went just a little bit further, the tree would be bent sufficiently for him to reach the kitten. But as he moved a little further forward, the rope broke. The tree went "boing!" and the kitten instantly sailed through the air - out of sight.

The pastor felt terrible. He walked all over the neighborhood asking people if they'd seen a kitten. No, nobody had seen a stray kitten. So he prayed, "Lord, I just commit this kitten into your keeping," and went on about his business.

A few days later he was at the grocery store, and met one of his church members. He happened to look into her shopping cart and was amazed to see cat food. Now this woman was a cat hater and everyone knew it, so he asked her, "Why are you buying cat food when you hate cats so much?"

She replied, "You won't believe this," and told him how her little girl had been begging her for a cat, but she kept refusing. Then a few days before, the child had begged again, so the Mom finally told her little girl, "Well, if God gives you cat, I'll let you keep it." She told the pastor, "I watched my child go out in the yard, get on her knees and ask God for a cat. And Pastor, you won't believe this, but I saw it with my own eyes. A kitten suddenly came flying out of the blue sky, with its paws out-spread, and landed right in front of her."