

and affection which constitute the inner soul of human sexuality, in its physical dimension also. In this way sexuality is respected and promoted in its truly and fully human dimension, and is never 'used' as an 'object' that, by breaking the personal unity of soul and body, strikes at God's creation itself at the level of the deepest interaction of nature and person."

Sometimes NFP can be difficult. Good things are rarely easy. We're brainwashed in our society to think that sex should always be available for any reason. We're trained to be selfish or self-oriented, and this fits in with our natural propensities as fallen human beings. It's not easy to abstain for a period as a married couple, because it is the right thing to do (rather than the thing we would choose, if we had the choice). But the most important issue is knowing what is right or wrong. The difficulty will affect the implementation, to be sure, but it ought not affect our decisions. Through God all things are possible. It's always better and more rewarding in the long run to do the right thing, no matter how difficult it is to do.

Catholicism teaches that sex is good

Talk of contraception being wrong (rarely heard at all in our modern secular society) gives the impression that Catholic sexual teaching is merely some list of prohibitions. While it is true that a list of prohibitions is more to the point, it's also true that such a list can really miss the point. Catholics do not believe contraception is wrong because (marital) sex is *wrong*. Catholics believe contraception is wrong because sex is *good*. Sex is such a great gift from God; it has such an intrinsic dignity, that it deserves an exalted place. Contraception — like divorce — degrades a good thing as if it were a trivial thing. Blessed Pope John Paul II, again in *Familiaris Consortio*, observed:

"In the context of a culture which seriously distorts or entirely misinterprets the true meaning of human sexuality, because it separates it from its essential reference to the person, the Church more urgently feels how irreplaceable is her mission of presenting sexuality as a value and task of the whole person, created male and female in the image of God."

"This is Just a Catholic Thing"

Until the Anglican Communion decided in 1930 to allow contraception "in hard cases" only (doesn't that sound familiar from the abortion debate?), no Christian group had ever held that contraception was permissible or moral, and all condemned it as sin. The early Church dealt with contraceptive practices too. It's not just a recent invention. There have been potions, the withdrawal method (observed in the biblical story of Onan), and suchlike since the beginning of time. Thus, the Catholic Church is simply continuing the

time-honored Christian tradition that all Christians used to agree with. It's not that the Catholic Church has introduced novelties; other Christian communions have decided to forsake historical Christian moral teaching and compromise with modernism and secular ethics and sexual practices.

Overpopulation

Ignoring for a moment several strong objections to the overpopulation scare, overpopulation has no bearing on the morality of contraception itself. If something is absolutely wrong — like murder or contraception — it is never a moral action. For if we can do something morally wrong to solve overpopulation, why not start with mass genocide? Therefore, if the act itself is bad, even a guaranteed "good" result (which is not the case with contraception and overpopulation) would not absolve it.

A Final Somber Note: Many Contraceptives Are Abortifacients

Most forms of the birth control pill may actually cause an *abortion to occur*, because they kill a child after he or she is conceived, rather than *prevent* the conception. This is a shocking and little-known fact, but well-documented from medical and scientific sources. Thus, most who contracept are complicit in the death of a recently conceived child.

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Contraception



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Not a Trifling Matter At All

How can something as seemingly insignificant as a condom or a birth control pill severely hurt our relationship with our all-loving God and possibly even lead us to eternal damnation? Is using artificial birth control such a sin? We commit a serious sin whenever an action is gravely wrong, we know it, and yet consent to it anyway. Besides turning our back on the possibility of spending eternity in Christ's kingdom, we harm ourselves even in this life. "Sin ... creates perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil" [CCC, 1865].

How could birth control have such grave consequences? Let's explore the issue for a few minutes.

An Argument from Reason

To those outside the Church, Catholic sexual teaching often seems like some backward-looking moral inhibition contrary to human reason and modern science. Yet it is really the fullest fruit of human reason: it is in fact strengthened by a strong understanding of human biology. In fact, from a purely materialistic, utilitarian understanding of what a human being is, contraception is still wrong. Here's one such argument:

When are things good? Things are good when they do what they're supposed to do well (e.g., a good chair will often have soft cushions). When are things bad? Things are called bad when some aspect of them undermines what they are meant to do (e.g., a bad chair has large iron spikes pointed upwards from the seat).

Biologically, what are humans supposed to do? That is, what is the biological effect of humans? It's undeniably the same as any other species: self-perpetuation. Therefore, if human beings are to be good at being human beings, biologically speaking, they cannot undermine fundamental bodily functions. There may be a hierarchy of bodily functions, but even if this were granted for the sake of argument it would not change the fact that reproduction is the most important biological function for any living thing. It is a matter of life or death, and only matters of life or death can approach the weight of the biological imperative of sexuality.

An Argument from Theology

Here is one theological angle: everyone agrees that sterility is a tragedy. Couples who live with sterility deserve sensitivity and respect, as do all made in God's image. Indeed, it is because they are made in God's image that this physical difficulty of sterility, for which they have no blame, is a very serious trial. Even couples who deliberately contracept deserve to be treated with love and kindness. It's not love or kindness, however, to refrain from telling them the hard truth: contraception

hurts them here and now; it hurts their family and loved ones; it could hurt them forever by way of hell.

How does contraception hurt us? The answer is clear. Contraception hurts you, and is a sin, because you are made in God's image. Like the love of Christ for His bride, the Church, like the love within and from the Trinity, we are meant for total self-giving and nothing less. We are made to abandon ourselves to our love, and our love is meant to be fruitful, to bring forth a new person. This does not mean that every act of love must end in conception. It only means that contraception must never be used in order to deliberately separate the act from its essential purpose.

Procreation, while the deepest purpose for sex, is not the only purpose. There is also the unitive level, in which the two become one flesh. Contraception isolates the unitive dimension from the procreative, and so stifles, sterilizes, and diminishes it.

Familiaris Consortio (On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), Apostolic Exhortation of Blessed Pope John Paul II (22 November 1981):

"When couples, by means of recourse to contraception, separate these two meanings that God the Creator has inscribed in the being of man and woman and in the dynamism of their sexual communion, they act as 'arbiters' of the divine plan and they 'manipulate' and degrade human sexuality — and with it themselves and their married partner — by altering its value of 'total' self-giving. Thus the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality."

Contraception (unlike natural sterility) is a deliberate attempt to separate the natural functions of the body in an unnatural way that violates natural law. It's the difference between a man born without legs and a man who cuts off his legs. If we break the gift of sexuality on purpose, even temporarily, we bear very serious fault.

Why Is It So Serious?

God, Creator of all things, gave us the gift of procreation specifically to draw us closer to Him. By contraception we say, "Thanks, but no thanks." While enjoying the moral and pleasurable (physical, sexual) benefits of marriage, we offer our whole selves in marriage, but contraception is holding something back.

It's a betrayal of the marital vow, an abuse of marriage. More seriously, in contracepting, we attempt to tie even

the hands of God, who may actually want to allow a new human being to come into existence as a fruit of marital love. If it is His will at a particular time in our lives, we in effect thwart His perfect will and say "no" to God. We want the pleasure of sexuality without the responsibility and fruit and deepest, most life-affirming purpose of it: children.

Does This Mean We Can't Plan How Many Children We Have, and When?

No. There are other ways to morally and rationally plan one's family that do not dismantle human dignity, degrade our spouses, or distort the marital vows. These methods are far more advanced than the "notorious" old rhythm method, and fully endorsed by the Church. Natural Family Planning (or NFP) is not a Catholic variation of contraception. In fact, to use NFP with the same mindset as we would use contraception would make it just as immoral. It may only be used after serious, prayerful consideration, and only with grave reasons. Legitimate reasons to space births may be financial, emotional, or health related. These were acknowledged by Pope Paul VI in his 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which reaffirmed the traditional Catholic prohibition of contraception. For serious situations, a priest and a pro-life doctor should be consulted.

The Natural and Spiritual Benefits of NFP

Rather than manipulating the woman from outside, using unstable methods, fighting her body every step of the way, these natural methods work *with* her pre-existing biology. NFP uses a combination of periodic abstinence, the woman's natural cycle, and medical technology to determine fertile periods.

There are many happy side effects of NFP: increased satisfaction within a marriage, a deeper appreciation of rhythms of the woman's body, a more mature appreciation of the possibility of parenting, removing reliance on chemicals and plastics, being more aware of each other's needs and fostering an unselfish approach to sexuality and marital union, but the biggest benefit of all is spiritual: knowing that we are not engaging in gravely sinful activities.

Blessed Pope John Paul II, in *Familiaris Consortio*, stated:

"The choice of the natural rhythms involves accepting the cycle of the person, that is the woman, and thereby accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control. To accept the cycle and to enter into dialogue means to recognize both the spiritual and corporal character of conjugal communion and to live personal love with its requirement of fidelity. In this context the couple comes to experience how conjugal communion is enriched with those values of tenderness