

Understanding the Church's teaching Concerning Contraception

The Church has been opposed to use of Contraception since the Church began 2000 years ago. Why is this? Does the Church not want man and woman to freely, without the fear of pregnancy, engage in sexual acts? What would be wrong with that? To understand the Church's teaching on contraception, one must, first of all, understand its teaching on sexual morality.

The Church and Sexual Morality

So what does the Church teach about the morality of sexual acts? From the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

CCC 2370 "every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible" is intrinsically evil

CCC 2362 "The acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honorable; the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving they signify and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude." Sexuality is a source of joy and pleasure:

Catholicism teaches that the sexual union is valid only when one as a spouse one freely chooses to engage in such an act while respecting fully the goods of procreation and mutual self-giving. This is often referred to as the unitive and procreative goods. Or in other words the act must be within marriage, totally freely given, enriching the spouses, and open to life. For these reasons it is often termed the marital act.

All this will be unpacked as we proceed.

The Community Of Persons

Let's go back one step further and address why be moral in the first place.

Gen 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

Gen 1:31 God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good

Man is an image of God because he is a rational being. He has memory, intellect and free will. Each person is created totally unique, and because man is created in God's image, each man's worth is infinite. Therefore, we are to treat one another with a respect due to this infinite worth. We are never to do anything that would tarnish the image of God within us. We are to act morally toward each other. We must remember God is not anthropomorphic, rather man is meant to be theomorphic.

Furthermore, God is not an individual person. He is in community yet he is one being. He is also Creator, thereby life giving. He is total love, unconditional, always one. We are to mirror that also.

Man without woman is “not good” Gen 2:18. God not only created man in His image individually, God imaged man in community – the community of man and wife. To be fully an image of God, man and woman must, in a sense, also become one being. In addition, by being “fruitful and multiplying” spouses participate as procreators. Always, always, we are to be like Christ, be like God to the best of our abilities. Yet we sin. St. Thomas Aquinas said “God is offended by us only because we act contrary to our own good.” (Summa Contra Gentiles 3.122) Let’s apply this to sexual sin.

“Why is Sexual Sin Sinful”

What is contrary to our own good in sexual sin? Let’s begin with the marriage requirement

Marriage

So why must sexual union be only “in marriage”?

We are called to be in union. As God is in permanent union in His community of 3 persons, we are to be in permanent union with our male/female communion.

The sexual union is a true giving of oneself to the other, a blurring of the boundaries between the two. But until there is a covenantal relationship, there is no permanence to the bond, and thus the mirroring of God in the trinity is flawed.

In marriage, however, there is a change. By taking the marriage vows, two individuals take on a different role, a new identity. No longer is one a separate individual. The man becomes husband to his wife. A woman becomes wife to her husband. Her body is his, his body is hers. In a sense the couple exchange their body, blood, soul, and humanity with each other, while yet remaining a separate person. Sound familiar? Marriage gives the couple the right to seek sexual union for in union they mimic the divine union. For those unmarried, this does not fully happen. There is a lack of commitment which exists even if they plan to marry. Before that point a door is always open and there is no permanency to the union. There is no commitment until you commit. It’s like being pregnant, you are or you’re not. By having sexual union without permanency, the couple becomes less like God, which is always contrary to their own good and thus is a sin.

Freely chosen

This is really almost self explanatory. Love always requires a free response. Unlike some seem to believe, God cannot make us love Him. If one chooses to love God and truly proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior, then drift away, God cannot force one back. God will only provide actual graces which the person must accept and respond to. If the sexual union is not freely given and is forced whether by physical coercion, emotional coercion, or just outright deceit, then one or both are using the other as an object, there is self-centered love in the union. In the trinity, the 3 persons are bound in total, forever, committed, unconditional love, for God is love. Without love in the divine union, there is no God. Without freedom to love, there is no love in the human sexual union. Sexual unions which are not freely chosen are contrary to both partners involved, and thus is a sin.

But what about cohabitation, wouldn’t that count as freely given love? It sounds good, but the door still remains open. The lingering doubt of lack of commitment always remains. That is a major reason nearly all cohabitators contracept. Will the partner stay if a child enters the picture?

Open to Life

It is obvious to see, looking at Nature, that man is made for woman and vice versa. By the nature of the act, it is also obvious to see that procreation and the continuation of the species is a prime function of the sexual union. However, it is also evident that there are only certain times when procreation is possible. To be open to life means to act in such a way as to not circumvent the function of the sexual union. Sexual unions which are not open to life in this manner defy nature, which is only acting as intended by its design, which God tells us was good. Sexual unions, which defeat a primary function of the act are contrary to the good of the individual, and thus is a sin.

Must be Unitive

Unlike animals, man's sexual union by its nature also is intended to unite the individual. Biologically, the man and woman share in the act in a most personal way because, for instance as one example, they are designed to directly face each other while kissing and commonly, face each other in a loving gaze during intercourse. There are also physical components such as the hormone oxytocin which are released during sexual union which increase the bond between individuals (which is also seen in the mother/child relationship during breastfeeding). The sexual union is evidently more than animalistic.

There are three elements which make up the Unitive good. They are the goods of love of spouse, the good of marriage and the good of personal integrity (to be explained in a moment). Note pleasure is not a good of the marital act, it is rather a fruit of the marital act as are children. If a sexual union is to be valid, all goods are to be met.

The unitive good of love of spouses

It must be an act of love which should enhance the love of the spouses. This does not mean all marital acts are to be acts of passion. The greatest acts in marriage are sometimes not even pleasurable, such as taking care of a sick spouse, or forgiving a spouse for whatever. Each spouse is to meet the need of the other, which sometimes means making love and sometimes refraining from making love. When an act is treated solely as a right to be honored no matter what, there is a problem. Similarly, when a spouse routinely dismisses the needs of the other, there is a failure to love. In both cases, sexual unions, which are given or not given, can be contrary to the good of the other partners involved, and thus can be a sin. The use of the term "making love" can be very appropo, because sometimes one has to work at meeting the need or lack of need, whichever is most suitable. Obviously, both partners must consider and balance the good of the other. It can be truly work to be a participant and not simply an object, or to conversely to not be disappointed, or grouchy if a need is postponed. Pope John Paul II considered this to be part of the Sexual mastery one must achieve.

The unitive good of marriage

Intimacy is a necessary component of any marriage. Intimacy involves many levels – the intimacy of a deep friendship, the intimacy of strong emotional bonds, and the intimacy of a physical union given faithfully solely to one's spouse. Because it rightly involves intimacy, the sexual union has been said to be part of the "glue" which helps hold the marriage bond together. Lack of the sexual bond weakens the marriage, particularly in cases where a strong sexual need is present in one or the other. Unfaithfulness can occur when any of these three areas of intimacy are not met. The marital act, then, is a good for the marriage. One is unfaithful to one's marriage promise to love the other, when one

seeks sexual union outside the marriage, or when one foregoes the sexual union continually without just cause within the marriage. These actions are contrary to the good of the marriage, and thus are a sin.

The unitive good of personal integrity

Personal integrity in this context does not refer to trustworthiness of an individual, but rather to the wholeness of an individual. Pope John Paul II in his talks on the Theology of the Body, spoke of the nuptial meaning of the body. The body is not meant to be solely for an individual, but is meant to be in communion with another. The body itself speaks its own language of love. In the sexual union, the body is a gift to the other, and is an outward sign of the communion between spouses. This sign, by one's actions, communicates the union and the love which is being shared. Sounds alike like a sacrament. Well that's because it is. Each proper sexual union is a source of grace to both individuals because it mirrors the Trinity. This certainly is a good. Like all sacraments there is form and matter. The form being the language of the body and the matter being the bodily exchange. But each person is comprised of both body and soul. There can be no separation of these until death. When a sexual union simply becomes a bodily function without love involved, there is a problem. When, conversely, one partner or the other comes to believe that they can be a true marital partner without involving physicality assuming no physical/mental limitations, there is also problem. The marital act requires the totality of the individual. Body and soul cannot be separated. That is personal integrity. When either the body or soul dominates, the personal integrity of the act suffers, leading to sin.

How does this apply to Contraception?

The Church's teaching on contraception falls right out of this.

For contraception to be an "evil", that is not a good, the act must violate one of the goods of the sexual act. Does contraception violate these goods. Yes, multiply:

Violation of the goods of Sexual Union

- 1) Contraception, whether it succeeds or not, is intended to prevent life, and is therefore not open to life.
- 2) Contraception is an affront to God, as what God declared as good when he created mankind, is now deemed as an evil by the couple.
- 3) Contraception introduces unnatural acts (example early withdrawal) or products (example, the pill, IUD, etc.) into the act, deemed good by God.
- 4) Contraception shifts the goal of the sexual act from the pursuit of the intended goods of the act to the **pursuit of a fruit of the act, that is pleasure.**
- 5) The act itself, which is to be an act of total giving, becomes a partial lie, as the fertility of the partners is withheld and the person is not fully given to the other.
- 6) Contraception is often used contrary to the desires of the other spouse. If one spouse does not desire a child at this time for a valid reason, that spouse require the other spouse to use contraceptives, and thus the very act is not freely given.
- 7) Contraception often results in one partner, usually the male, seeing the other as an object who should be readily available to him 24/7 as the possibility of children is greatly reduced or even eliminated. In time the love will not be unitive, nor will there be a good for the marriage.

Fruit of Contraception

- 1) Contraception leads to an increase in immorality. Prior to marriage, in effect using contraceptives by the female, tells the male "I am available". In marriage leads to a belief that a partner can be unfaithful without consequence, if not caught.

- 2) The death of whole cultures is projected due to the declining birthrates.
- 3) Increased divorce rates due to the pursuit of pleasure.
- 4) Decreased marriage rates due to perceived requirement because of rampant divorce rates to cohabit to determine compatibility. 50% of cohabitators do not marry. 80% who do eventually divorce.
- 5) Diseases occur within marriage – see the package insert of the pill and various devices.
- 6) Diseases are brought into the marriage due to infidelity of a spouse, or previous immorality. 25% of high school students will be infected with an STD before graduation.
- 7) Increased pregnancy and subsequent abortions where contraception is provided due to the failure of contraceptives. In one study there was a 36% failure rate to prevent pregnancies when condoms were used by teenagers. 9% of adult couples using the pill get pregnant. Up to 20% for teens. About 50% of abortions occur to couples who used contraceptives in the previous month.(USCCB)

I have described the act as giving the body, blood, soul, and humanity to the other spouse. The inference is of course a reference to the Eucharist, which is a sacrament intended to give us the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ, thereby giving us union with Jesus. Thinking along these lines, a question needs to be asked - What if the priest, somehow or other, contracepted the Eucharist, and God's life could not be transmitted? How would you feel?

How does one achieve these goals of respecting the goods of the marital act?

There are two basic ways. One is to just be free and open to God, and accept the gifts God gives you. One may have a larger family, or may not. Nature can self regulate, whether it is due to age, disease, or even tiredness and stress. The other way is utilize Natural Family Practice (of which there are multiple techniques). This technique recognizes that there are times in which in the course of a woman's cycle she is fertile and at other times infertile. The design of periods of fertility versus periods of infertility was created by God, and is therefore good. Success using these techniques when properly instructed and followed is equivalent to the success of contraceptives. Its success is equivalent, but it is not a Catholic contraceptive. Everything is done according to the design God has given which is necessarily good.

How is this different from using medicines or surgery which defeat the function of certain body parts? The difference is that those body parts are not working as designed, but are failing in some respect from God's design..

Only one caveat remains. The couple must still remain open to life. Conception may be managed, but if the potential for new life is continually avoided, the procreative good of the marital act is not being respected, and that would be wrong. This doesn't mean one has to periodically intentionally try to conceive.

What if you are Non-Christian or an Atheist?

If you are non-Christian, then you don't believe in the Trinity. Thus God as a community of persons, does not work. For those who utilize the Pentateuch, there are references to all things being created good, Onan who withdrew from Tamar and was killed by God, not because he didn't fulfill the Law in regards to his brother's wife (the Deuteronomic punishment was to spit the man's face and remove his sandal – a loss of dignity(Dt 25:9) but because of his contraceptive act, and the mention of not allowing

those with crushed testicles to enter the camp – crushing testicles being a method to prevent conception.

If you are atheist, you have other evidence. Marriages of those who contracept fail at a rate around 50%. Marriages which respect the goods of marriage, such as those who use Natural Family planning, have divorce rates around the 2-5% range. Contraception has led to greater percentages of pre-marital sexuality, increased sexual diseases, out of wedlock children, greater objectification of women, sexualization of society, and infidelity—all of which were predicted by Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. Pope Paul VI also predicted that as part of the contraceptive, anti-life mentality, governments would try to force population control, which, in fact, we have seen in China and in the U.S. trying to force contraceptives on 3rd world countries.

Summary

In conclusion, the Church has taken a stand against contraception, primarily because it tarnishes the image of God within us, and anything which makes us less like God is against the will of the Father and is termed sinful. The act of contraception goes against the design of God for man. This is reflected in the negative fruits of contraception as seen in the reversal of the purpose of sexuality from the unitive good of the spouses and the procreation of life to the pursuit of the fruit of the sexual act which is pleasure. This has led to the destruction of families, the objectification of spouses, increase in diseases, negative birth rates, etc. In contrast, following the plan of God, leads to new life, stronger marriages, healthier marriages, and greater joy.