



Most people enter marriage wanting the best for their spouses and themselves. They want their love to last forever. They hope life won't be too hard and that they too can have the American dream of children, a home and a happy life. These are good things to aspire to. The Catholic Church has similar desires for married couples but goes further. The Church wants good marriages to become great! How? By living God's plan for married love!

Today there are a number of modern practices that are actually bad for marriage. Chapter 7 in the catechism of the World Meeting on the Family sheds light on one of these negative practices: contraception. That may sound strange to many people because popular thought says that contraception is "practical" and even "necessary" in modern life. So, why would the Catholic Church insist that contraception is wrong and against God's plan? The answer may surprise you. It has to do with how God designed the nature of men, women, and marriage.

Men and women are created in God's image. This means that God has given men and women a share in His own nature which includes the ability to love, form relationships, be faithful, forgive, and even procreate. In God's plan, human sexuality is the means by which a man and a woman bring the unique gifts of their masculinity and femininity to each other to form friendships. When we consider that human fertility is part of sexuality, we can see that it is a central gift from God since it is the way by which new life is brought into the world.

In marriage man and woman create a two-in-one-flesh communion of persons for the "whole of life"—a total, self-giving union oriented to the good of the spouses and to having and caring for children (see the Code of Canon Law, Can. 1055). God designed marriage to form the family. Within the covenant of marriage, sexual intercourse is the act where husband and wife give all of themselves to each other to express their love and also to cooperate with God to bring new life into the world. St. John Paul II reminds couples that "nothing that is part of themselves can be excluded from this gift" (Message to Centre for Natural Fertility Regulation, 27 Feb. 1998). Their fertility, their power to participate with God in creating a new person to love in union with each other, is part of that gift. And herein lies the reason why contraception is wrong.

Contraception breaks the “inseparable connection” between the two meanings of the conjugal act, the love-giving and the life-giving (see *Humanae vitae*, no. 12). In other words, God designed sexual intercourse to be both where the spouses can give and accept the total gift of themselves to each other, and also receive the gift of new life if it comes. When couples use contraception, they basically reject not only something of each other, but also God’s gift of fertility. In fact, contraceptive sex locks God out of the very union which He designed for their benefit. This is ultimately harmful to the couple.

So what are couples to do if they need to space or limit births in marriage? The Church answers with the natural methods of family planning or NFP. NFP methods respect God’s design for married love. They do nothing to separate the life-giving potential from the love-giving nature of sexual intercourse. Couples simply refrain from sexual intercourse during their fertile time if they decide to postpone attempting pregnancy.

The Church’s teachings on the moral spacing of births in marriage are a real bright spot for married couples. They represent God’s invitation to husband and wife to live their marital love according to His plan. Couples who accept God’s design for married love often remark that their marriages are stronger due to their mutual growth in a deeper respect for the gifts that God has given them. The light of God’s truth is necessary for making good marriages great!