

What is the Biblical Worldview of In Vitro Fertilization, and why does it matter?

Breakpoint on 08/30/2024

In a FOXNews article earlier this week, a Southern Baptist pastor argued that pro-lifers can and should support in vitro fertilization (IVF) as a way for “parents to fulfill their God-given desire to nurture a child.” The article never addresses why most pro-lifers oppose this assisted reproductive technology, especially as currently practiced. It also doesn’t mention a resolution that was overwhelmingly passed at this year’s annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, in which the denomination voted to formally oppose IVF.

That resolution was entitled “On the Ethical Realities of Reproductive Technologies and the Dignity of the Human Embryo.” In it, Southern Baptists clarified a core conviction that “the dignity and value of every human being ... necessarily includes frozen embryonic human beings.” Like many of the delegates (called “messengers”) at the convention who opposed the resolution, the author of the FOXNews article told a moving, personal story of struggling with infertility. Because of IVF, he wrote, he and his wife have five beautiful children. In his view, IVF is deeply pro-life because it brings children into the world, and it is even miraculous because it offers people who otherwise could not conceive a child a chance to do so.

As the SBC’s resolution rightly described, and stories like this confirm, infertility brings “searing pain” for those who want children but cannot conceive. However, the resolution also recognizes that the real pain of infertility cannot justify all means by which children may be produced. Here the FOXNews article diverges, calling for “doing everything possible to help moms and dads pro-create—no matter their hurdles.”

Whether or not the ends justify the means is at the heart of evaluating the ethics of reproductive technologies. As commonly practiced, IVF almost always involves creating multiple embryos, since “excess” embryos improves the chance of achieving pregnancy. In most cases, the embryos that are created are then screened for “viability.” Those deemed unviable are either destroyed or stored.

Embryos are transferred into the woman's uterus, either one at a time or multiples at a time. If pregnancy is achieved before all embryos are transferred, the rest are frozen, disposed of, donated to medical research, or stored for later use. If multiple pregnancies are achieved, a "fetal reduction" is often recommended and performed. This pastor and his wife staunchly refused that recommendation, understanding it to be what it is, a euphemism for abortion.

Some clinics stipulate that all embryos that are created must be transferred. However, that has proven to be nearly impossible to enforce, and most providers do not have that requirement. Thus, an estimated 1.5 million embryos are frozen in the U.S. alone, as the SBC's resolution noted.

A very small number may be donated for adoption, an especially redemptive alternative that offers these embryos a chance at survival. However, the vast majority of embryos created through IVF are either destroyed, given over for medical experimentation, or otherwise treated as property, and not as children.

This surfaces the central ethical question at heart of IVF, the moral status of the embryo. According to the FOXNews article, "An embryo is not synonymous with a child. Only when an embryo successfully attaches in a mother's womb does a child begin its beautiful journey to soon living an independent life." This statement is misleading, as if where an embryo is somehow determines what an embryo is. Certainly, attachment determines if the embryo will survive after its conception, but conception determines that the embryo—a whole, separate, valuable human being in its earliest days of existence—is alive.

To be clear, IVF can be done in a way that does not lead to the creation of "excess" embryos or their destruction. In a 2018 interview, former president of the Christian Medical and Dental Association Dr. David Stevens argued for either fertilizing and implanting one embryo at a time or agreeing to implant every embryo created. This is how the Southern Baptist pastor and his wife directed their IVF journey.

Though ethically far better than how the technology is most often employed, both the costs of an IVF cycle and the almost 50% failure rate mean that most couples and clinics choose the more "efficient" and

less ethical option, which involves the creation and destruction of excess embryos. Also, the industry of artificial reproduction is remarkably underregulated, and most churches offer little to no ethical guidance for Christian couples about artificial reproductive technologies.

In the end, Katy Faust is correct to observe, as she did at the recent Colson Center National Conference, that abortion and IVF are, as currently practiced, “two sides of the same child-commodifying coin.” Both reduce the rights of children to the desires of adults. The SBC resolution on IVF rightly articulates all that is at stake and is a strong step toward clarity and consistency.¹

- I. What is it?
 - a. Watch the What Would You Say video
 - b. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dgEPIAM0q8&t=19s>
 - c. *In-vitro fertilization is the process of joining a sperm and egg together outside of a woman’s body, then placing the fertilized egg, or zygote, in the woman’s body so that she can become pregnant. In-vitro fertilization is a controversial issue among Christians, and the Bible does not address it. Therefore, it becomes a matter of conviction from the Holy Spirit.²*
 - d. The fertilized egg is a living human being.
 - e. Most of the time, couples and doctors harvest more eggs than they plan to use.
 - f. This means some embryos end up being destroyed, or frozen.
 - g. *However, if the couple conceives immediately, they may never need to use the frozen embryos, which would then end up being destroyed. The Bible does not give us permission to destroy innocent human life—this would be murder.³*

¹ Breakpoint; 08/30/2024. Accessed on 09/24/2025
<https://breakpoint.org/ivf-and-infertility-good-ends-do-not-justify-all-means/>

² Got Questions Ministries, [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#), vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2014–2021).

³ Got Questions Ministries, [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#), vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2014–2021).

- h. They can choose to only harvest one egg.
 - i. Surrogacy
 - j. Watch this video:
 - k. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NS107WwsJ24&t=2s>
 - l. Other reproductive technologies
 - m. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NO4PmOkYPJA>
- II. What does the Bible say?
- a. Psalm 139:13–15 (ESV) *For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.* ¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.*
 - b. Gen. 1:27-28
 - c. Psalm 127:3
 - d. In Genesis 16 Abram and Sarai took matters into their own hands, but it was not God's plan.