

Is In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) a sin?

Moral Considerations

1. The status of the embryo.

The scientific consensus of biologists is that life begins at conception.

“Biologists from 1,058 academic institutions around the world assessed survey items on when a human's life begins and, overall, **96% (5337 out of 5577) affirmed the fertilization view.**” - Jacobs SA. The Scientific Consensus on When a Human's Life Begins. Issues Law Med. 2021 Fall;36(2):221-233. PMID: 36629778.

The biblical argument is that the unborn is living and significant to God:

“For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” – **Psalms 139:13-16 (ESV)**

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” – **Jeremiah 1:5 (ESV)**

John the Baptist leaps in the womb when a pregnant Mary enters in **Luke 1:41-44.**

“When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. ²³But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, ²⁴eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” – **Exodus 21:22-25**

The situation is that two men fight and cause a pre-mature birth. The wording about harm is vague and some suggest that “the harm” is only applied to the mother, but the text naturally allows both.

It seems that if either the mother or child dies – then the death penalty can be called for. This suggests that the child was viewed as more than biological material.

The bible says not to kill the innocent, and this would include the pre-born:

“Keep far from a false charge, and **do not kill the innocent** and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked.” – **Exodus 23:7 (ESV)**

Many IVF practices involve creating multiple embryos, some of which may not ultimately be transferred and may be frozen, donated, discarded, or otherwise disposed of. However, IVF can be

structured to minimize the number of embryos created, including approaches that seek to transfer one embryo at a time.

2. Embryo selection and screening.

Preimplantation genetic testing can be used to discard embryos with anomalies or to select by sex. Most pro-life ethicists treat this as eugenic selection, distinct from testing done to care for a child.

3. Selective reduction.

Transferring multiple embryos increases the possibility of a multiple pregnancy, which can create medical risks. In some circumstances, physicians and parents may consider multifetal pregnancy reduction, which involves ending the lives of one or more of the pre-born.

4. Third-party gametes and surrogacy.

Donor eggs or sperm bring a third person into a marriage's procreation, and surrogacy brings in a third body. Often the concern is the “one flesh” appeal that Scripture makes. Genesis 16 offers a cautionary narrative: Sarah's surrogacy plan through Hagar ends in rivalry and division.

Some will point out that while the eggs or sperm are from someone else, a sexual union did not happen, just merely a transfer of gametes. This is debated.

This can be mitigated by using a married couple's own gametes though.

5. Separating procreation from sexual union.

This is the central Catholic objection. Catholic teaching objects to treating procreation as a technical production process rather than as the fruit of the marital act.

6. Sperm collection.

Catholic teaching objects to masturbation, though collection methods exist that avoid it. Most Protestants see no problem within marriage. The common appeal to Onan (Gen 38:9) misreads the text, since Onan's sin was refusing his levirate duty to his dead brother.

7. Trusting God amid infertility.

Scripture takes barrenness seriously as grief (Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, Elizabeth). Rachel's cry, "Give me children, or I shall die!" (Gen 30:1), shows how longing for children can become an emotional struggle and in some instances something close to an idol. As Christians we should seek to empathize with the person who is hurting, yet if appropriate help them to understand that a child does not change their worth or value in God's eyes.

Nearly all traditions accept medicine as part of God's common grace. They disagree over whether IVF counts as healing infertility or as bypassing it.

8. Practical concerns.

These include cost, health risks to the mother (such as ovarian hyperstimulation) and to children.

Many Protestant ethicists hold that IVF can be practiced in ways that answer the strongest objections:

- fertilize only as many eggs as the couple will transfer, or freeze eggs instead of embryos;
- transfer embryos one at a time;
- commit in advance to giving every embryo a chance to be born;
- refuse selective reduction and screening done in order to discard embryos;
- adopt existing frozen embryos.

Church Positions

Roman Catholic: IVF is intrinsically wrong.

Key documents: *Donum Vitae* (CDF, 1987), *Dignitas Personae* (2008), and the Catechism §§2373–2379.

Their view is even IVF using a married couple's own gametes, with no embryos lost, is morally illicit, because it separates procreation from the conjugal act and makes the child "the product of a technical intervention" rather than "a gift."

Treatments that assist or restore natural intercourse are encouraged: surgery for endometriosis or blocked tubes, hormonal therapy, and fertility-awareness approaches such as NaProTechnology.

Whether women may adopt frozen embryos is still debated among Catholics - *Dignitas Personae* §19 raised concerns without settling the question. The Church also teaches that children conceived through IVF must be loved and fully respected, and it rejects surrogacy, which *Dignitas Infinita* (2024) explicitly condemned.

Assemblies of God: IVF is not categorically prohibited, but it raises serious ethical concerns and must not involve destruction of unimplanted embryos.

Key Document: "Sanctity of Human Life: Abortion and Reproductive Issues." - <https://ag.org/en/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Sanctity-of-Human-Life-Abortion>

It holds that God's plan for conception is sexual union between husband and wife in marriage, but that infertile heterosexual couples who have pursued all viable treatments without success may face a decision about using IVF.

It lists the ethical issues to weigh, including cost, the harvesting of sperm and eggs, and the creation of multiple embryos that may not all be implanted. It calls disposing of unused embryos an acute ethical problem, since they represent the beginning of human life, and warns that multiple pregnancies could lead to selective abortion.

It requires couples who choose IVF to seek godly and knowledgeable counsel and to work with medical professionals who share their ethical standards, and it states: "We disapprove any procedure that results in the destruction of unimplanted embryos." The paper also raises concerns about deriving stem cells from unused embryos left in fertility clinics.

Summary

	Catholic	Assemblies of God
Is IVF itself sinful?	Yes	No, if done within strict limits
Embryo destruction	Grave evil	Explicitly disapproved
Married couple's own gametes only	Still illicit	Assumed ("heterosexual couples")
Embryo adoption	Debated	Not addressed
Binding force	Magisterial teaching	Official position paper