Theological Considerations

- The bioethical questions generally revolve around some type of suffering. Some type of evil from a fallen world. So, we first recall some theological considerations.
  - God is sovereign (this is good news!)
  - His sovereignty does not relieve man’s responsibilities
  - God is benevolent... “not tempting beyond what you can bear” (I Cor 10.13)

- Dignity of Human Life
  - Christian or Universal Concept?
    - Gen 4.15
    - Gen 9.6
    - For all that is wrong with our healthcare system, there is much more that is right. There is a culture of death, but much more a culture of life.
      - It heals, it saves lives, it comforts pain.
    - Committing Murder is far worse than killing an animal... or even think of vehicular manslaughter versus hitting a dog, etc...
  - We are called to live... God is an active moral, responsible being and so are we called to pursue.
  - Humans are put in dominion over the earth...
    - And even in heaven we are greater than the angels.
  - Social Creatures... “male and female”, we were designed to be in community... this impacts our evaluation of bioethics and life.
  - Body & Soul
    - We are not merely souls... our bodies are truly part of our very being. Thus questions about this early life... matters of pain and suffering truly affect us.
  - Suffering
    - Not if... but how
    - All bioethical questions inevitably involve some type of suffering. The Bible teaches us a lot about how to suffer. We can’t unpack all of that in this class, but it is worth mentioning.

Marriage, Procreation and Contraception

- Purpose of Marriage
  - WCF 24.2: “II. Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife,[2] for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed;[3]and for preventing of uncleanness.[4]”
    - Mutual help of husband and wife... they work together and help each other.
    - Procreation
    - Give a seed for the Church
    - Prevent uncleanness... meaning in marriage we express our sexual relations positively, as opposed to negatively outside of marriage.
  - Procreation in Marriage is particularly highlighted as significant in Scripture
    - inheritance being passed to offspring
    - God working to give seed to Barren women in a theme of Scripture
• Consummated with the Virgin Mary.

• Procreation
  ○ Through technological and medical advancements we are able to detach sex and procreation.
    ■ Through contraceptives, we can have sex and have high certainly of not procreating.
    ■ Through artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization we can have procreation without sex.
  ○ God’s calling
    ■ To unite and procreate
    ■ But, also to produce technological advancements.
      ● We do not always simply go “au naturale”, but we use technological advancements to transcend natural limitations all the time.
    ■ There are no clear Biblical mandates here, but there are some wisdom considerations...
      ● How do we view children?
        ○ Miraculous gifts of God?
        ○ Or products of our how human labors?
      ● How do we view sex?
        ○ For the world it opens to door to promiscuity. It lacks the profound weight of what sex truly is and meant to be.
  ○ How Many Children?
    ■ Does our call to be fruitful mean we are to maximize our fruitfulness?
      ● Paul says it is at least as noble, if not preferential, calling to be unmarried as to be married. What light does this shed on the procreation mandate?
      ● The mandate is to mankind, generally... not necessarily each man and woman.
      ● Also, negative commands in Scripture are generally to always be observed (do not kill means, never kill)... but positive commands do not mean that (the call to work does not mean always work).
        ○ With that, if it is possible to work too much, for example... then likewise it is possible to procreate too much.
        ○ We are called to have wisdom and discernment and responsibility with such things.
    ■ What factors to consider?
      ● Financial
        ○ Stay out of debt, be able to leave an inheritance, etc...
        ○ But, greed, covetousness should likewise not be a factor to NOT have children
      ● Education (contraception while pursuing one’s education may be a consideration)
      ● Health (perhaps the mother is in poor health and should consider not having children?)
        ○ But fear of possible poor health is not a good reason
    ■ Excursion: Sex still fills God’s calling, even if not for the purpose of procreation.

• Contraception
  ○ “wasting semen on the ground”... this verse really has to do with the fact Onan was not fulfilling his duty to bear a child for his deceased older brother, not inherently because of “wasted semen”.
  ○ Nothing that destroys Embryos (assumption: Embryos are human life). This rules out:
Abortion
Morning After Pill
Regular Pill and IUD’s?

- This is somewhat disputed and I am not a medical professional, but based on the research that Julie and I have done, for our part, we concluded that these methods not only prevent fertilization, but also can destroy fertilized embryos prior to implantation, or in some cases even shed after implantation. I encourage you to research this if this is something you are considering.

Other topics to consider, which we won’t have time to discuss in detail:
- General morality of “artificial” versus “natural” methods.
  - There may be practical considerations here, but despite most RC and some Prot teaching, there is not good reason to conclude that artificial is inherently immoral.
- Sterilization
  - Reasons for serious caution here, but again, not inherently immoral.

Human Embryo
- Possesses unique human DNA and everyone agrees is clearly alive... the question is: “Is it a person?”
- Being an image bearer
  - One must not necessarily say that one must require ALL elements of being an image bearer to be called a person. Should an amputee be considered a non-person or less of a person?
  - Everyone is in some stage of development or decline. Does that make one less a person? What is one’s rationality (cognitive abilities) are less developed or declining, are they less a person?
- Scripture?
  - We aren’t going to look into it, but Scripture, at a minimum clearly communicates that human personhood at least occurs prenatally, at some point.
- The only radical transformation?
  - Happens at fertilization and becoming an embryo. Not at any point later is there a radical transformation that sets the life on track to personhood.
    - Genetically different from the egg and then sperm!
  - Other options for personhood?
    - Birth?
      - Certainly circumstances change dramatically. But, there is not transformation of being.
    - Viability?
      - One problem is that this is a moving target dependent on the medical technology of the day. Or medical access in certain parts of the world.
      - Again, no radical transformation of being.
    - Nervous System?
      - Some say when the nervous system develops and the embryo becomes a rational being it is a person.
      - Still arbitrary. Just because it has developed the nervous system, does not mean it is now rational. Only that it has more potential to be rational in the future.
    - Individuation?
- This one is above my pay grade. But, the argument is that in the first three weeks it is a life, but not yet a human individual.
- During this stage it is still relying on mother’s RNA to “direct development”.
- Embryonic cells still have potential to develop in any number of ways, but are not on a set path yet.
- During this period the embryo could split into identical twins (monozygotic) and can even then recombine back into a single embryo. If that is still possible, it poses challenges for calling it an individual yet until this potential period has passed.
- Argument?
  - This period is still a scientific mystery.
  - The twinning and recombining is very rare (less than 0.25%) and we do not know for sure that those lives did not exist separately during the one embryo phase.
  - More importantly, even if individuation has not yet happened for the <0.25% of identical twins immediately, does not therefore mean it did not happen for the other 99.75%+ at fertilization.

- Stem Cell Research?
  - Is an embryo a life? If it is, then there is no question you cannot unilaterally decide to sacrifice it for the greater good. What if it was a born person who we determined if we killed and disected her, the research might saves millions of lives. Would we then have the right to take her life without her consent?
  - Furthermore, there are serious questions if the promises on stem cells can deliver?
  - And there are other opportunities for stem cells, outside of embryonic.

Assisted Reproduction
- Disclaimer: This was never a struggle for Julie and I for even one month.
  - I am sensitive to the fact that infertility causes great, great suffering and it is a pain that I have not known.
  - Reproductive technology, generally speaking, is positive affirmation of God’s calling on married couples to so strongly desire children.
  - Speaking of suffering generally, we know as Christians we are called to suffer differently than the world.
    ■ We are called to contentment in our suffering. That is not to say we cannot desire different circumstances (to pursue to have children), but yet we are called to contentment first and foremost.
    ■ God may call one to never have children, and you are still called to be content.
    ■ We are called to Stewardship. We must carefully evaluate our finances in relation to a pursuit of reproductive technology.
- Infertility Options
  - Remain Childless
  - Adoption
  - Infertility Technologies
    ■ Medical Treatment / Cure
■ Artificial Insemination
  ● Not many moral objections get raised on this one. Just as with any “medical technology issue”, the only possible objection here is that it isn’t natural.

■ IVF
  ● Normal procedure
    ○ Due to high costs, as many eggs as possible are extracted and fertilized. And then 4 embryos or so are implanted with the hope that at least 1 or 2 will stick. If more than 2 stick, then often will abort the extras to make sure the 1 or 2 has the best chance at survival. All of the extra embryos that were not implanted are destroyed or frozen.
  ● Christian Considerations (again assume that the embryo is a human being)
    ○ Only extract as many eggs as you would carry as children. Only fertilize that many eggs and only implant 1 or 2 at a time.
    ○ You can freeze the remainder for later under the assumption that you will implant and carry them later.
      ■ Also, for any that are frozen, you should have a will in place with whom they will be implanted in case of death of the mother (or possibly father), just like you would prepare a will on who will adopt your children.
    ○ These methods will be much more expensive on an already expensive process.

■ Third-party methods with Artificial Insemination or IVF?
  ● This creates an adoption scenario. Instead of creating a trauma for a child who them must be adopted, perhaps consider adopting a child who is already in trauma.

■ Cloning
  ● Won’t talk much about this now, because not yet a reality. But, perhaps only a matter of time and something worthy of more thought.