

GENDER SELECTION

With the advances of modern medicine it is possible, with some degree of accuracy to predetermine the sex of a child. Again, just because such a thing is possible does not necessarily mean that it is agreeable to the principles of Scripture.

The gender of a child is determined by whether the sperm, which fertilizes the egg, carries an X chromosome or a Y chromosome. If an X, the child will be female, if a Y, then the child will be male.

There are basically three ways to select gender.

1. *Sperm sorting*, where the sperm is sorted according to those with the X or Y chromosome. Fertilisation then occurs by artificial insemination, or by IVF.
2. *Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis, PGD*. This method is used in conjunction with IVF, and at the point where the embryo is beginning to develop in the “test-tube” prior to implantation in the womb. The gender is determined by analysis of its cells and only those embryos, of the required gender are implanted in the womb. The others are either discarded or frozen.
3. Abortion. This is the crudest form and involves ultrasound determination of the gender in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and aborting those children who are not of the desired gender.

The reasons given by prospective parents for desiring to select the gender of their child are varied, but can be divided into social or medical.

Social: Some simply want a boy because all of their other children are girls -so called *family balancing*. Others desire a certain gender because of social and cultural reasons, like China, where it is virtually imperative that there is a boy, to carry on the family name and receive the inheritance.

Medical: There are some genetic diseases that only affect males. e.g. Duchenne muscular dystrophy and haemophilia. Parents may want to select the gender of their child to make sure that the child will be a girl and will therefore not suffer from the condition.

UK Legislation

Present UK legislation in the form of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, 1990, determines that any medical technique involving embryos must occur in clinics licensed by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. Thus the second method, PGD falls under this, whereas the first, sperm sorting, does not. The third is governed by the 1967 Abortion Act, which as we have already proved, provides for abortion on demand regardless of the reason.

We have considered what is possible and what is lawful, regarding gender selection, but the greatest question is, what is Scriptural? On the methods alone, we can, on Biblical grounds rule out PGD, because it necessarily involves the destruction of the children who do not conform to the desired gender, and, also the third method, which also involves the destruction of the unwanted unborn child. While there may be less to criticize the first method, sperm selection, with regard to the method, because it does not involve the destruction of a child, we must look at the validity of gender selection in the first place.

Gender selection for social reasons, tampers with the over-all balance of society. It has been practiced in India and China for many years, with devastating results. In India the method of selection was abortion. In 1984 UNICEF claimed that of the 8000 babies aborted in Jaipur, 7,999 were girls! The other methods are now being employed, but still in 2003 there were 130 boys being born, for every 100 girls. In China, where the government implemented a *one child* policy in 1979, there are 117 boys born to every 100 girls. As a result it is estimated that currently there are 111 million Chinese men who are unable to find a wife -all because of gender selection.

Children are the heritage of the Lord and a gift from Him, it is therefore wrong to tamper with what He gives. The result of such tampering has been proven to be a cause of great problems in society.

It is possible now to choose the gender of a baby, but it may soon be possible to choose eye colour, height, and even intelligence, on the basis of genetic testing. We are closer to the possibility of “designer babies” than we may realize. Gender selection begins to devalue the child and it is the start of the slippery slope to making the child nothing more than another commodity. People will claim that it is their right to choose, but it is fearful thing to usurp the right of the Almighty.

The medical reasons for gender selection must also be considered. The cases where the child will be disabled in some way if a boy, is very emotive. Even if you go down the line of gender selection in this *hard case*, there still remains the difficulty of a method agreeable to Scripture. That aside, this is the same slippery slope. The questions will inevitably arise, what is normal? What is acceptable? How far can a baby deviate from the *norm* before it is considered abnormal, and not fit to live? Again in this situation, man is trying to usurp the control that belongs to God alone. Regarding the case of an X-linked condition where a male child would be affected, it is also the case that half of the girls born to parents in this case would be carriers of the condition. They would not suffer from the abnormality, but they in turn could pass the condition on to their children. Again we must say hard cases make bad laws.

Gender selection enters the domain of a sovereign God, and as a result upsets the balance of nature He has ordained.