

Fertilization vs. Conception—What’s the Difference and Why Does It Matter?

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by Creation Museum on April 12, 2024

The scientific advancements made in the area of reproduction can leave us in greater awe of God’s amazing and good design. For believers, that is our response—we are wowed by our Creator’s creative but highly ordered design.

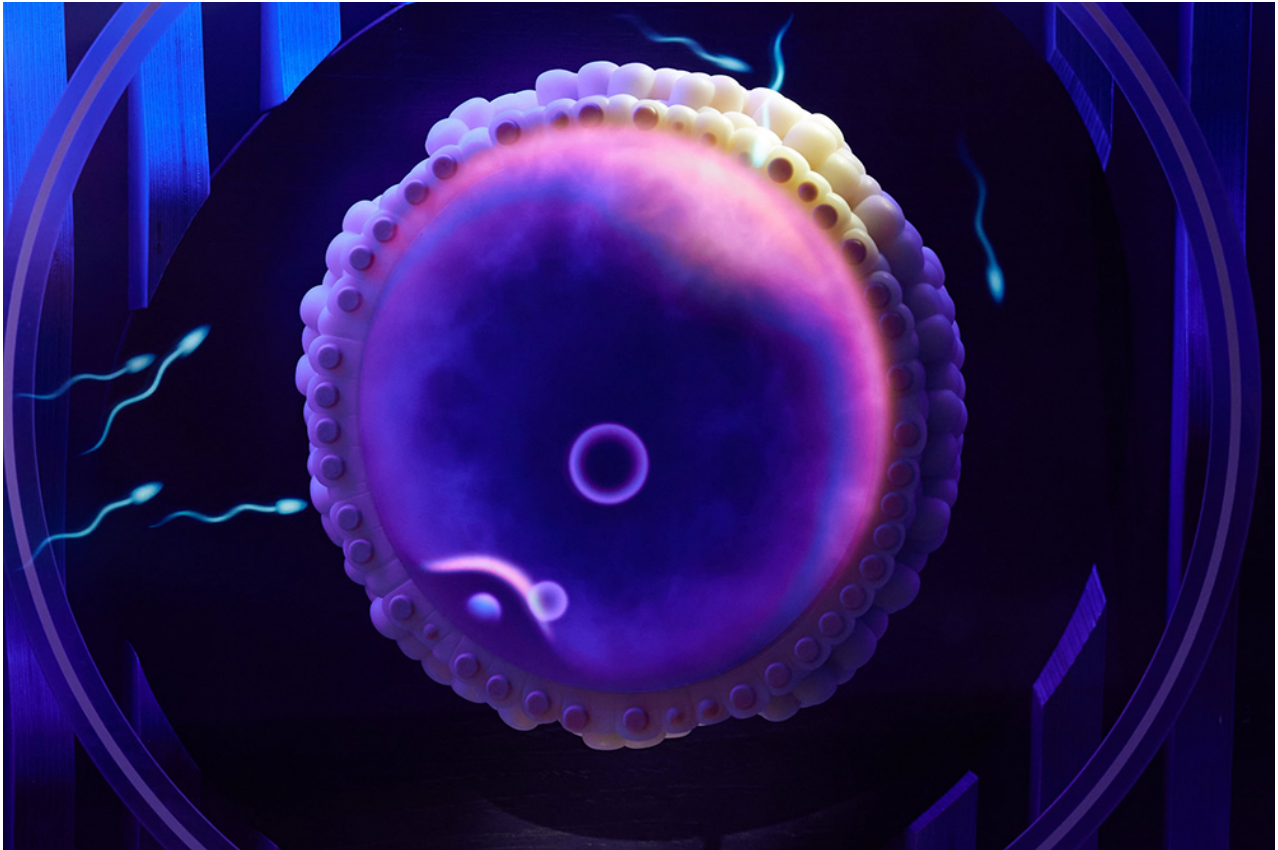
From the tiniest of cells to the largest kinds of the created world, the purposeful order of our world beautifully displays God’s intelligent design. The miracle of life begins at microscopic levels, but medically speaking, what do conception and fertilization mean, and why is it so important that people know the difference?

The Difference

Traditionally, it was said that life began at conception. Through scientific advancements, conception has now been redefined as *the processes* that occur from fertilization through embryo implantation in the womb. As with many terms that are being redefined today, it is critical that believers understand what has changed and why, so that we are not deceived into believing unbiblical ideas and so that we can be a voice for truth.



Since the term “conception” has been more broadly applied to these processes, it is no longer the correct term to describe the moment when life begins. In fact, using the term “conception” to describe the moment when life begins is downright dangerous. The only term to use, and the biblically sound term to use to describe this moment is “fertilization”—the moment when the father’s DNA combines with the mother’s DNA within the egg.



Why Does it Matter?

We understand reproduction in greater detail than ever before. With that increased knowledge, questions naturally arise. Questions like “When does personhood begin?” and “When do the unborn feel pain?” The questions themselves aren’t wrong or bad, but the consequences of those questions have been devastating to unborn life because we live in a fallen world.



We now know that the first cell holds all the information that the baby needs to grow; Christians recognize that this is life—a human being made in the image of God. For those who do not value the life of the unborn, they have reduced this miracle of life down to nothing more than a clump of cells through this redefinition. Once they have convinced themselves this “clump of cells” isn’t life, then they can justify murder. But those “clumps of cells” are outdated arguments proven false by this increased understanding of the journey of life before birth. It is a lazy phrase designed to deceive and ease the conscience of the conflicted.

CULTURE SHIFT

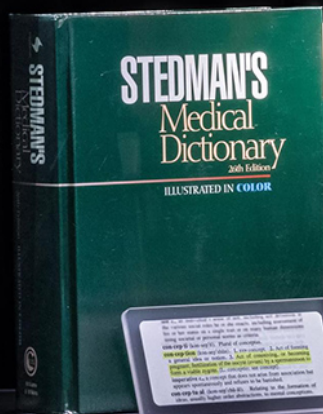
News, Literature, and Scientific Language
Change to Reflect Culture



POP CULTURE CHANGES

Cultural arguments for abortion often appeal to a supposed common sense understanding of a woman's right to choose. This argument implies that recognizing life in the womb is an outdated view. Indeed, two magazine covers, only 35 years apart, present a dramatic shift in thinking at the turn of the century.

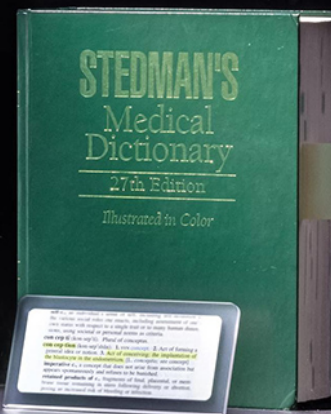
LIFE MAGAZINE	TIME MAGAZINE
LIFE magazine from 1965 depicts a clearly recognizable baby at 16 weeks gestation and uses the word "living" in describing the image.	TIME magazine from 2000 presents the abortion pill as the world's fingerto, using the word "fingerto" to describe something that would end the life of that 16-week-old child pictured in LIFE Magazine.



"SCIENCE" CAVES TO CULTURAL PRESSURE

Related to the abortion debate, scientists made curious changes, apparently in response to societal pressures. In two editions published just five years apart, Stedman's Medical Dictionary offers radically different definitions of conception.

26TH EDITION	27TH EDITION
The 1956 edition defines conception as taking place at the moment of fertilization.	The 2000 version connects conception to the end of the implantation process, which can be up to two weeks after fertilization.



The more Christians understand the terminology and the science, the more clearly they can understand the issues for themselves and intelligently speak to them when given the opportunity. Some people understand and admit that abortion is killing a child and will further admit that they just don't care. But there are also people who just need help to understand the actual science and think through the ethics better, people who can be reasoned with and who will respond to logic and appeals to ethics and morality.

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The more prepared we can be to give a defense to the world on all that the Bible speaks to, the more effectively God can use us to be a witness for his truth and good news.

Want to learn more and better prepare yourself to speak about the miracle of life? Visit our *Fearfully & Wonderfully Made* exhibit [during your trip](#) to the Creation Museum.