

Chapter 4: The Fruit of the Womb Is a Reward (Psalm 127:3) (7,574 words)

As for you, be fruitful and multiply; populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it. -Genesis 9:7

Behold, children are a gift of the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. -Psalm 127:3

It had to wait until 1930, almost two-thousand years after the ascension of our Lord. This was the year that, for the first time, a Christian denomination endorsed the use of contraception. It was at the Anglicans' once-a-decade Lambeth Conference where three-hundred Anglican bishops passed a resolution declaring that Christian husbands and wives were free to obstruct the union of sperm and egg in order to "limit or avoid parenthood."¹

The world was shocked. Never before had the Church said such a thing.

It wasn't that various forms of contraception and birth control had not existed and not been used before 1930. To the contrary: going all the way back to Onan in Genesis, we read that Onan used withdrawal to avoid having a child. During intercourse he spilled his seed on the bed to keep it from fertilizing his wife's egg. But Onan was condemned by God so that spilling seed during intercourse came to be called "Onanism."

Likely some readers are fearful to see this chapter dealing with such a positive subject as children—the fruit of marital love—begin so negatively.

Please be patient. There are few subjects in marriage and family life where Christians know less about what their fathers and mothers in the faith have believed, taught, and practiced as this matter of contraception and birth control. We must lay the groundwork of Scripture and church history on birth control, first. Then we'll turn to the joy of children.

Let it be clearly stated that, across history, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant Christians were united in teaching that the account of God's punishment of Onan in Genesis was not simply the condemnation of Onan for refusing to give his wife a child, but more foundationally, God's condemnation of contraceptive methods used to render lovemaking sterile. To "limit or avoid parenthood," as the Anglicans put it.

But let's get it out here on the table:

Who cares what all the old dead men believed and taught? What did they know, anyway? I mean, didn't they all think women were lesser men. Didn't they think women should be silent in the church—you know, like Paul says somewhere in one of his letters? Those men in the past were

¹ "...in those cases where there is such a clearly felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence, the Conference agrees that other methods may be used..." The Lambeth Conference, Resolutions Archive; Resolution 15; <<https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1930/lambeth-conference-archives-1930-index?year=1930>> accessed September 2, 2020.

just trying to protect their authority, so they kept their wives barefoot and pregnant, at home and under their control.

When I was a young man, I was filled with this almost-universal conceit of moderns. If history can be visualized as a long line, this conceit believes that line doesn't stay flat or go down. It rises ever upward. History is the story of progress. As in...

Changes in morals, principles, and laws are usually for the better because we're evolving in our understanding of the world. It's not just science improving us; thinkers are doing their work, too. Scholarship is making progress—especially in our translating and study of Scripture. Biblical scholars now use computers to analyze the Bible so that our understanding of what the text is actually saying is far superior to what all those dead men across the centuries thought and taught.

This is why there are so many new Bible translations. The latest scholarship requires it. Also evolutions in the way we talk to each other have left a lot of Biblical words and expressions incomprehensible to us. Who ever heard of "propitiation?" What is an "effeminate?" Where today does anyone ever address a congregation of both men and women as "brothers?"

Progress is always being made. Look at that guy still using a flip-phone, stubbornly sticking to his old paths. The people who continue to say sodomy and lesbianism are sin are just haters. The Dad who tells his daughter to change her shorts because they're too short should mind his own business. The pastor who preaches that God will judge the woman and man who use pornography is a Pharisee. A moralist. Can you believe that some of the elders of our parents' church have told women to submit to their husbands?

If the good reader thinks he's escaped this conceit of the modern, he should think again. Consider, for instance, our attitude towards the elderly. We are condescending towards older people—but not just their persons. Also their commitments and thoughts.

Yet what attitude and posture does God command from us toward those who are older?

You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.²

What is honorable about the aged?

*Wisdom is with aged men,
With long life is understanding.³*

*A gray head is a crown of glory;
It is found in the way of righteousness.⁴*

God says we are to honor the aged because wisdom and understanding is with them. God says their gray head is a crown of glory that is found in the way of righteousness.

² Leviticus 19:32.

³ Job 12:12.

⁴ Proverbs 16:31.

This is not our world. We laugh about the elderly not knowing how to use their smartphones and computers. We dismiss the danger of Covid because it only kills older people about to die, anyway. We'd rather be caught dead than wear the clothes old dudes wear. We'd rather die than do our hair like women on Medicare. And sadly, compounding the problem, the aged often speak and act dishonorably, thus confirming our youthful conceit.

But we forget that, like our slaughter of the unborn, our disrespect for our elders is God's judgment on us. God judged His people in Jeremiah's time, and this was Jeremiah's lament:

*They did not honor the priests,
They did not favor the elders.⁵*

The conceit of the modern and the pride of youth are the very air we breathe, but we're not just dismissive towards snowbirds who winter in Florida and Arizona. We're dismissive of everything and everyone who came before us—the whole way back until we come to the Apostles and their writings in the New Testament when, all of a sudden, we feign respect because those are inspired words and we can't mock them for being the thoughts of old people. After all, Scripture is inspired by God, so we must pay it some respect.

It's a sad fact, though, that much of the project of the latest Biblical scholarship is to dismiss the actual words of Scripture because they're old and in the way. We feign honor while seeking ways to dismiss it. People way back in the ancient times were patriarchal, and we all know how totally awful that is! So out with all the talk of "heads of father's households," "brothers," Sarah calling Abraham "Lord," and God naming our race "adam" rather than "eve."

We handle Scripture like we handle a dog:

*Nice doggie! Nice doggie!
Down, boy! Down!*

Haven't we yet wearied of this conceit pervading our culture today? Being condescending and dismissive of the elderly and everything old (except maybe novels, paintings, and cathedrals) is so barbarian and ugly, not to mention stupid. Who is more ignorant than the young and what is more hopeless than trying to reason with a young man full of himself?

This entire book can only be helpful if we join together in repentance of this conceit of the modern and commit ourselves to the wisdom of the aged and the paths of the ancients. Much of what there is to learn about marriage from Scripture is how much we must unlearn concerning sexuality, marriage, and family life we've sucked in from our culture. The world we inhabit is on a highway to Hell, and that highway has largely been built through sexuality, marriage, and family life. Surely we know this? Surely it's obvious to us?

One more thing before we return specifically to the marital blessing of children.

⁵ Lamentations 4:16.

While it's true that Scripture is inspired by God and everything written after Scripture is not inspired by God, it's not true that everything after Scripture is not to be honored and obeyed. Many souls have been shattered by the mistaken thought that the Reformation motto *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) means the Church and the believer must listen to "nothing but Scripture." The mistaken doctrine that no writing of any church father should have any authority for the Church and her believers.

Let's explain this in two ways. First, a quote:

Those who urge against tradition that men in the past were ignorant may go and urge it ...along with the statement that voters in the slums are ignorant.... Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. ...We will have the dead at our councils. The ancient Greeks voted by stones; these shall vote by tombstones.⁶

Dad would warn his sons, "All the great heresies were started by one man alone with a Bible." It's an apt warning for the church today, not so much that it's filled with individual men and women alone with their Bibles, but that the Church of our time is alone with her Bible. Terribly alone, and as each successive year passes, she becomes ever more alone as she caves to the modernists and, like Jefferson, cuts word after word out of her Bible on the recommendation of the best and latest Biblical scholarship.

Are you, good reader, willing to reconsider your view of the fruitfulness of the marriage bed in light of Scripture? Are you willing to hear all the dead fathers and mothers of the faith who have preceded you? Are you willing to give a vote to the tombstones concerning the meaning and application of Scripture to fatherhood and motherhood?

Sure, they're now very, very, very old, but hey, what's listening to the twirps on Instagram gotten you in terms of godliness and eternal life? I mean, let's be honest, here.

So now, here is a short collection of statements of church fathers condemning the practice of contraception and birth control.

First in priority is the second century catechism used to instruct believers in the basics of Christian faith and practice called The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles—or, more commonly, the Didache. This short instructional manual is not Scripture, yet it demonstrates the foundational commitments of the Apostles and Early Church concerning church and family life. Abortion and birth control were common among the pagans, but the Didache forbids them:

⁶ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Orthodoxy; IV The Ethics of Elfland*.

You shall not practice birth control, you shall not murder a child by abortion, nor kill what is begotten...⁷

The second century apostolic father, Clement of Alexandria, wrote:

Women who resort to some sort of deadly abortion drug kill not only the embryo, but along with it, all human kindness.⁸

Near the end of the second century, the church father, Tertullian, wrote:

...we may not destroy even the fetus in the womb, while as yet the human being derives blood from other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to the birth.⁹

In the early third century, church father Hippolytus condemns:

...women, reputed believers [who] began to resort to drugs for producing sterility, and to gird themselves round, so to expel what was being conceived on account of their not wishing to have a child...¹⁰

This excerpt from Hippolytus is important, demonstrating that, from the beginning of the Church, God's people were consistent in condemning the use of potions to cause an abortion, but also the use of potions to render intercourse sterile.

Here is fourth century church father, John Chrysostom:

Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit? Where there are medicines of sterility? Where there is murder before the birth? You do not even let a harlot remain only a harlot, but you make her a murderess as well...

Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you condemn the gift of God, and fight with His laws? What is a curse, do you seek as though it were a blessing...?¹¹

Such condemnations continued with great consistency down through the centuries. Fifth century church father, Augustine, wrote:

[I]ntercourse, even with one's lawfully wedded spouse, can take place in an unlawful and shameful manner, whenever the conception of offspring is avoided.

⁷ Some English translations render the Greek *pharmakeia* as "sorcery" rather than "birth control." In his classic work on contraception, John T. Noonan comments: "Pharmakeia ... is the employment of drugs with occult properties for a variety of purposes, including, in particular, contraception or abortion." (Accessed November 5, 2020 at https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com.au/&httpsredir=1&article=1125&context=nd_naturallaw_forum.)

⁸ Clement, *Paedagogus* 2.10.96.1.

⁹ Tertullian, *Apology*, Chapter 9.

¹⁰ Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, Book 9, Chapter 7.

¹¹ Chrysostom, *Homily XXIV on Romans*.

*Onan, the son of Judah, did this very thing, and the Lord slew him on that account.*¹²

In his letter to Eustochium, fifth century church father, Jerome, wrote:

*Some go so far as to take potions, that they may insure barrenness, and thus murder human beings almost before their conception.*¹³

In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas addressed the question whether “the emission of semen apart from the proper purpose of generating and bringing up children [is] either a slight sin, or none at all?” He responded:

*[Such] emission of semen is incompatible with the natural good; namely, the preservation of the species. Hence, after the sin of homicide whereby a human nature already in existence is destroyed, this type of sin appears to take next place, for by it the generation of human nature is precluded. Moreover, these views which have just been given have a solid basis in divine authority. That the emission of semen under conditions in which offspring cannot follow is illicit is quite clear.*¹⁴

Coming to the Protestant reformers, sixteenth century reformer, Martin Luther, wrote:

*Onan must have been a malicious and incorrigible scoundrel. This is a most disgraceful sin. It is far more atrocious than incest and adultery. We call it unchastity, yes, a Sodomitic sin. For Onan goes in to her; that is, he lies with her and copulates, and when it comes to the point of insemination, spills the semen, lest the woman conceive. Surely at such a time the order of nature established by God in procreation should be followed. Accordingly, it was a most disgraceful crime to produce semen and excite the woman, and to frustrate her at that very moment.*¹⁵

Similarly, the Protestant reformer, John Calvin:

*The voluntary spilling of semen outside of intercourse between man and woman is a monstrous thing. Deliberately to withdraw from coitus in order that semen may fall to the ground is doubly monstrous. For this is to extinguish the hope of the race and to kill before he is born—the hoped for offspring.*¹⁶

Calvin comments on barren Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John the Baptist:

Luke 1:25: that he might take away my reproach

Elizabeth assigns it as the cause of her barrenness that the favor of God had been at that time withdrawn from her. Among earthly blessings, Scripture

¹² Augustine of Hippo, *De adulterinis coniugiis ad Pollentium*.

¹³ Jerome, *Letter 22 (To Eustochium)*.

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*; Chapter 122.

¹⁵ Luther, M. (1999, c1965). Vol. 7: *Luther's works, vol. 7 : Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 38-44* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

¹⁶ John Calvin, commentary on Genesis 38:10.

speaks in the highest terms of the gift of offspring. And justly: for, if the productiveness of the inferior animals is his blessing, the increase and fruitfulness of the human race ought to be reckoned a much higher favor. It is no small or mean honor, that God, who alone is entitled to be regarded as a Father, admits the children of the dust to share with him this title. Let us, therefore, hold this doctrine, that “children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward,” (Psalm 127:3.)

But Elisabeth looked farther; for, though barren and old, she had conceived by a remarkable miracle, and contrary to the ordinary course of nature. That he might take away my reproach.

Not without reason has barrenness been always accounted a reproach: for the blessing of the womb is enumerated among the signal instances of the divine kindness. Some think that this was peculiar to the ancient people: because Christ was to come from the seed of Abraham. But this had no reference, except to the tribe of Judah. Others think more correctly that the multiplication of the holy people was happy and blessed, as was said to Abraham, “I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth,” (Genesis 13:16;) and again, “Tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: so shall thy seed be,” (Genesis 15:5.)

But we ought to connect the universal blessing, which extends to the whole human race, with the promise made to Abraham, which is peculiar to the church of God, (Genesis 13:15.) Let parents learn to be thankful to God for the children which he has given them, and let those who have no offspring acknowledge that God has humbled them in this matter. Elisabeth speaks of it exclusively as a reproach among men: for it is a temporal chastisement, from which we will suffer no loss in the kingdom of heaven.

Seventeenth century Puritan divine, Jeremy Taylor:

“He is an ill husband, that uses his wife as a man treats a harlot, having no other end but pleasure.” Concerning which our best rule is, that although in this, as in eating and drinking, there is an appetite to be satisfied, which cannot be done without pleasing that desire; yet since that desire and satisfaction was intended by nature for other ends, they should never be separate from those ends, but always be joined with all or one of these ends ...never with a purpose, either in act or desire, to separate the sensuality from these ends which hallow it. Onan did separate his act from its proper end, and so ordered his embraces that his wife should not conceive, and God punished him.¹⁷

The Protestant church continued to oppose contraception up to the beginning of the twentieth century. For instance, in 1888 the Reformed Presbyterian Church declared:

¹⁷ Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living*; Rules for Married Persons, or Matrimonial Chastity, p. 106. (Accessed November 6, 2020 <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/t/taylor/holy_living/cache/holy_living.pdf>.)

We believe that uncleanness, in all its polluting and debasing forms, is increasing. We fear that many, who are members of the Church, employ means to prevent offspring, using the marriage bed to gratify their lusts, destroying their own lives, and bringing on themselves the wrath of a holy God.¹⁸

In the twentieth century, German pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote:

The right of nascent life is violated also in the case of a marriage in which the emergence of new life is consistently prevented, a marriage in which the desire for a child is consistently excluded. Such an attitude is in contradiction to the meaning of marriage itself and to the blessing which God has bestowed upon marriage through the birth of the child.¹⁹

At their prior 1908 Lambeth Conference, the Anglican bishops declared themselves in full continuity with the church through the ages, issuing this warning:

[T]he Conference records with alarm the growing practice of the artificial restriction of the family and earnestly calls upon all Christian people to discountenance the use of all artificial means of restriction as demoralising to character and hostile to national welfare.²⁰

Nevertheless, a mere twenty-two years later at their 1930 Lambeth Conference, these same Anglicans endorsed contraception; and almost immediately, all Protestant Christians followed their lead. The floodgates were opened and the tide rushed in.

The Roman Catholic hierarchy, though, didn't give in so easily. In 1968, Pope Paul VI issued the encyclical letter, *Of Human Life*, which was very much in line with the previous statements of our church fathers throughout two millennia of Church history:

a conjugal act which is deliberately made infecund ...is intrinsically dishonest.

an act of mutual love which impairs the capacity to transmit life which God the Creator, through specific laws, has built into it, frustrates His design which constitutes the norm of marriage, and contradicts the will of the Author of life.²¹

Of Human Life also presents a way of talking about marital love and fruitfulness that is helpful in its gentleness and simplicity, speaking of “the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act.” In other words, God has decreed that lovemaking be both unitive and procreative, and what God has joined together, man should not divide.

¹⁸ General Meeting of the Reformed Presbyterian, 1888; *Minutes, Causes of Fasting and Thanksgiving*. (Accessed November 6, 2020 < <https://www.covenanter.org/reformed/2015/7/30/1888> >.)

¹⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, NY, Macmillan, 1965, p. 176.

²⁰ Resolution 41, The Lambeth Conference, 1908.

²¹ *Humanae Vitae*; accessed November 9, 2020 <http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html>.

One word of explanation before we proceed. Note how often our church fathers spoke of contraception (obstructing the fertilization of the egg by the sperm) alongside abortion (destroying the baby created by the fertilization of the egg by the sperm). They make a distinction between rendering intercourse sterile and killing the unborn baby before he is born, but it's clear that distinction is cloudy to them.

This is due to their lack of knowledge concerning anatomy and the agency of chemicals (or potions). While it was clear to them *coitus interruptus* (withdrawal) prevented fertilization, it was not clear which other methods of contraception were really contraceptive and which were abortive.

Some readers might argue that it was even the remotest possibility of killing the unborn baby the church through the ages has opposed, and thus their vehemence. Such readers might go on to assert that we today know both anatomy as well as the agency of chemicals and other artificial means which prevent the conception of a new human being. Our greater scientific understanding proves these means don't harm babies, and therefore they are moral.

Such thinking has ushered in a cornucopia of contraceptive methods and drugs now firmly established within the Church, but our complacency is unwarranted.

First, the principal Biblical condemnation of separating the unitive and procreative functions in marital intercourse has always been God's condemnation of Onan, and Onan's method of contraception was unmistakably contraceptive—not abortive. His withdrawal kept the sperm from the egg, and thus all the church fathers who condemned this sin recorded in Genesis knew they were not condemning murder.

Second, the chemicals and artificial means now firmly established within the church under the justification that they prevent the union of sperm and egg, and never kill the child conceived by that union, have always been known to work, not only by preventing conception, but also by killing the conceived child. Furthermore, even within the genocidal abortion business, it is chemicals that are becoming the preferred method of abortion. Surgical abortions are decreasing as chemical abortions increase.

But to return to all those methods widely used by Christian couples believing their agency is purely contraceptive, there's an awful problem. The scientists have changed the definition of "conception," and thus the definition of "contraception," and thus the definition of when human life begins—leaving couples ignorant of the blood on their hands.

For decades now, scientists and the media (including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists) have been promoting the lie that conception doesn't occur until the attachment of the newly fertilized egg on the wall of his mother's uterus. Prior to this attachment, they claim this child has not yet been conceived. The egg has been fertilized by the sperm, creating one unique individual bearing the image of God travelling through to his mother's uterus given him by God to feed and clothe him until the moment of his birth, but science denies he exists. He hasn't yet attached himself to his mother's womb.

The deceptiveness of current debates over contraception and birth control is seen in a 2018 article of the New York Times titled “Science Does Not Support Claims That Contraceptives Are ‘Abortion-Inducing’.” The Times there declares to the reader with all authority that “the medical definition of pregnancy is that it begins after a fertilized egg is implanted in the uterus, not before.”²²

It is this lie which has allowed Christians to think their pills don’t kill their babies, but Christians aren’t thereby innocent or absolved of their bloodguilt. For decades it has been a fact known and easily confirmed in pharmacists’ continuing education literature distributed by pharmaceutical firms that the Pill’s agency is not simply the prevention of fertilization, but also the rendering of the uterine wall inhospitable to the new little one seeking to attach herself so she may receive sustenance from her mother.²³ This is also part of the agency of what are variously known as “morning after” pills now available over the counter and widely used in the Church. It is a fact that most of their agency is the prevention of fertilization, but they also work through aborting the little one.

Do Christians care that our use of such chemicals has left blood on our hands? Have we really convinced ourselves that God has no wrath against fathers and mothers aborting little ones He has lovingly given them just as long as those fathers and mothers thought they were practicing contraception? That they were unaware of the sloughing off and snuffing out of their tiny little child?

These words are no scare tactics. Read the literature and ask yourself why your Christian physician didn’t warn you about the possibility that your use of, for instance, the Pill and ECPs might result in the death of your little one? Ask yourself why your pastor never taught or preached on this violation of the Sixth Commandment? Ask yourself whether you have ever yourself really wanted to know precisely how all these so-called “contraceptive” methods and drugs work? Is human life still inviolable to we who believe?

While we condemn the Democrats for promoting late-term abortions, Christians have been practicing early-term abortions (although most have done so unintentionally). Yet we must face the fact that, since the mainstreaming of birth control methods which are not just contraceptive, but at times also abortive (the Pill, IUD, Depo-Provera, Plan B, etc.), the Church has lost many of her children by her mothers and fathers rendering the mother’s womb inhospitable to their little one. Calvin explains the horror of this killing place:

*If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man’s house is his place of most secure refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy a foetus in the womb before it has come to light.*²⁴

Summing up, then, for almost two-thousand years the church Eastern, Roman, and Protestant forthrightly taught Scripture’s condemnation of spilling the man’s seed and taking potions to

²² Accessed November 9, 2020 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/07/health/kavanaugh-abortion-inducing-contraceptives.html>>.

²³ See, for instance, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0015028206045468> and <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8774274/>>.

²⁴ John Calvin, comments on Exodus 21:22ff.

obstruct pregnancy and childbearing. But then, following the Anglicans' reversal in 1930, believers began to practice contraception so that now, ninety years later, the methods of child prevention believers employ, largely unbeknownst to them, at times prevent childbirth by killing these little ones in the womb.

How should we respond to this tragic state of Christian marriage?

First, every couple should prayerfully consider whether they have honored God in the matter of the fruitfulness of their lovemaking? For some readers of this book, this will be an area where there must be repentance, fully believing in and claiming God's forgiveness through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Being a pastor, I hear people confess their sins so that I know every church has mothers and fathers who have intentionally killed their babies without any confusion that what they were doing was murder. Many of our sisters and brothers in Christ have killed their babies through chemical or surgical abortion and this is terribly sad. When some have confessed, it has been my privilege and joy to assure them (and you) that this sin, too, is under the blood of Jesus Christ. King David murdered Uriah. David was later confronted by the prophet Nathan, leading him to confess his sin and receive God's forgiveness.

Read David's prayer of confession recorded for us in Psalm 51. Make David's humble plea your own, dear sister and brother. Throw yourselves on God's mercy, believing always that we serve the God Who Alone forgives sins.

Distinguishing yourself from the horrors of direct abortion, you may be thinking you are not one of those who killed your little one intentionally; that you didn't know how the definition of conception had been changed and what that meant concerning your practice of birth control. You had no idea you were running the risk of killing your little one in your womb, so your conscience is clean and God will understand.

Sadly, this does not remove your guilt. Whether or not we intended bloodshed, many of us have blood on our hands. It is the blood of our children given us by God and it commands repentance. You have used a form of contraception that occasionally is abortive and that is sin. Christians are not to risk murder, let alone for the purpose of preventing childbirth. Take your sin to God and promise Him you will reform your approach to the fruitfulness He has placed in your marriage bed.

Second, I am myself convinced there are circumstances in which contraception is necessary to protect the mother and her family. We won't go into a discussion of such circumstances, but let me leave no question concerning my conviction in this matter, stating that I have responded to requests for pastoral counsel from several couples in our church by agreeing that they would be wise to prevent further pregnancies. In both cases it was because of threats to the physical wellbeing of the mother, and that threat was neither hypothetical nor trivial.

One friend who is a pastor my age says couples should have no more children than they can educate well. A celebrity pastor recently caused a ruckus by arguing that it's proper to use

contraception to facilitate your career as a missionary. The publisher of Christianity Today once wrote me saying he thought one of his columnists was able to make a greater contribution to the Kingdom of God because he and his wife had no children—implying this was their choice. He said he'd pass my article on to his editors and I'd hear from them.²⁵ Of course, they declined to publish my piece on the blessing of children, although they went on to ask if I had something else in the works they could see?

Each of the statements above were made by men I know personally and I am scandalized that these brothers in Christ—several of whom have a reputation for standing firmly for the Word of God and truth—when it comes to the marriage bed easily find and announce justifications for rendering it sterile that fit their own take on what is really pious. It's fine to sterilize the marriage bed just as long as the sacrifice of children is in protection of something they think is really important: writing, getting a good education, or working on the foreign mission field.

If the good reader inquires whether being a famous writer, giving our children a quality education, or doing Christian work in a foreign country are legitimate justifications for turning off God's blessings of children in our lovemaking, the answer is no.

As a matter of fact, I think the church would have been better off without the writer's books whose name the publisher mentioned to me. Too, I have expressed serious concern to my pastor friend that I think we (he and I, at least) need to repent of our idolatry of education. And concerning Christian couples who fly to another country to tell the souls there about Jesus, do we really want one of the main messages they will take with them is their childlessness—and specifically their contraception? We already have the United Nations, USAID, and Planned Parenthood promoting contraception, birth control, and abortion. Do they need the church's help?

What is a better witness to the Gospel than Christian marriage and family life? This was the witness that won men and women to Christ in the Ancient Roman Empire when the elites went childless or adopted. Will it not win men and women to Christ today, seeing how Christian men are faithful to their wives and love, discipline, and instruct their children with great faithfulness?

Yes, I believe there are some very rare situations where couples should use contraception. But let's not give our support to what Chesterton called "the modern and morbid weaknesses of always sacrificing the normal to the abnormal."²⁶ It may be that particular challenges of particular families lead a husband and wife to consider using contraception when it is not the physical life of the mother at stake, and after searching their conscience and prayer, they believe God is leading them to close off the mother's womb.

If this is the reader's situation in his or her marriage, may I make a couple recommendations. If at all possible, find a godly physician you can discuss your situation with and receive Biblical

²⁵ I'd submitted the piece to his editors, but the publisher was a friend of my dad and father-in-law, so he kindly took it from his editors, giving it his personal attention.

²⁶ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *The Superstition of Divorce*; accessed November 13, 2020 <<https://www.ecatholic2000.com/gk/super/divorce.shtml>>.

counsel. These are private matters. Then again, do not take the physician's advice blindly, but respect her (or him) and listen carefully and prayerfully. Then, if it's a godly Christian physician recommending the use of contraception, go to your pastor (or an elder) and talk it all over with him. We need shepherds. You need your shepherd. Ask for his counsel and prayer. This will be a sad time for you and he will want to love and support you as you make this difficult decision. Finally, if you are agreed on the limitation of your family size, be careful to use some barrier method that is known never to work by preventing the baby attaching herself to her mother's womb. But remember, no method of contraception is one-hundred percent effective, so if God decides to give you another child while you are doing your best to avoid it, submit to His will and welcome your child, by faith, with joy trusting our Heavenly Father to care for you, your children, and your new child with every need met by His Divine providence.

Third, please do not resent me. It is not my intent to lay on sisters and brothers burdens they find unbearable. If the historic church has understood God's Word rightly, it is neither I nor the church who lays this burden on you, but God Himself. The mandate of fruitfulness at the center of marriage is there by His design. Protestant church confessions as well as the most-commonly used wedding ceremony from the Book of Common Prayer all declare God has placed three purposes at the center of marriage. Here is the wedding ceremony liturgy we've all heard many times:

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the presence of these witnesses, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony. Marriage is an honorable estate which God Himself made and it signifies to us the mystical union that is between Christ and His Church. This holy estate Christ adorned and made beautiful with His presence and first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. Marriage is also commended by Paul to be honorable among all men.

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, soberly, in the fear of God, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

Leaving our consideration of birth control and contraception, we now turn to the life of faith which causes us to love and welcome the children God gives us.

This chapter on children begins with two Scriptures. The first is the command God has given a number of times in Scripture, that we are to be fruitful and multiply, populating the earth "abundantly." The second Scripture is the simple declaration that children are given to us by God as a "gift" and "reward."

Do we have faith to obey this command and to greet with joy all the children placed in the womb of our wife by God?

As I write this morning, an email flurry is arriving in my queue from my wife's siblings and their spouses discussing a recent news item about a family in Grand Rapids, Michigan, who just received God's gift and reward of a newborn girl they named Maggie Jayne. That is joy enough, but the mother and father's joy at the birth of this little one was multiplied by the fact that, prior to her birth, Jay and Kateri Schwandt had been blessed by God with Tyler, 28, Zach, 25, Drew, 23, Brandon, 21, Tommy, 18, Vinny, 17, Calvin, 15, Gabe, 14, Wesley, 12, Charlie, 10, Luke, 8, Tucker, 6, Francisco, 5, and Finley, 2. Fourteen boys born to these childhood sweethearts, and then—finally—their first little girl. It adds to the romance of this news that the Schwandts never find out the sex of their baby until he is born.

Mrs. Schwandt was herself one of fourteen children. Commenting on her household of fourteen boys: "There's enough testosterone in our house to fill a stadium." Mr. Schwandt said their house doesn't have one "stitch of pink clothing." But is he happy? Thankful?

"This is our 15th child so obviously we've kind of been there done that, but it feels like we're starting all over ... we were completely shocked but so excited," Jay Schwandt beamed."²⁷

My wife and her siblings were interested in the Schwandts' new little girl because Mary Lee herself was nine of ten children given by God to Ken and Margaret Taylor. I was interested because I was one of seven children given by God to Joe and Mary Lou Bayly. Growing up, when either Mary Lee or I was asked if we had brothers or sisters and we said how many, it was shock and awe. Inevitably, what followed was the question, "Are you guys *Catholic*?"

Today, about the only way to escape being labelled "weird" if you have more than three or four siblings is if you are, in fact, Catholic. Rick Carlisle, coach of the Dallas Mavericks, speaks about his brother Bill who with his wife, Monica, have been blessed by God with fourteen children. Says Carlisle, "I always knew he'd put up big numbers."²⁸ No surprise that Bill and Monica are Catholic.

Marrying is an act of faith. Childbearing, though, is even more an act of faith. The economic structure of our world has now come to disincentivize fulltime motherhood. Until the last half of the twentieth century, the world was structured around assuring that one breadwinner could earn a wage sufficient to support a fulltime mother caring for a houseful of children. But then, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, we threw all that out.

We now expect mothers to provide a second household income and it's become exceedingly difficult for families to get by without that second wage. There are substantial number of

²⁷ Accessed November 10, 2020, < <https://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/2020/11/the-schwandt-family-welcomes-first-baby-girl-after-14-boys.html?fbclid=IwAR0YV5cqmdWdf0C3cGOI9wKgtYNNTuaoSouQDA8e1oIZuWM1KJmoUJEZIQ>>.

²⁸ Accessed November 10, 2020; Rick Carlisle: < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KB4zBdes0AA&feature=youtu.be>> (starting at 2:15).

Christian families rich enough to pull it off, but many homes where the husband has a middle to low income find it very difficult to get by.

Add to this the grave injustice perpetrated by our governing authorities requiring Christians to pay thousands of dollars a year in taxes to support government education while that education grows ever more antagonistic towards the Christian faith these parents live to pass on to their precious children. Look at the Supreme Court's *Obergefell* ruling, noting how government schools have used this ruling to increase their hostility to any smallest part of Biblical sexuality. Then, even if we were not concerned about the sexual innocence and purity of our children, pay careful attention to how public education has turned its back on the historic academic disciplines to the point that the curriculum is now more indoctrination in the pagan worldview than instruction in the basic tools of a well-ordered mind.

There are so many ways our world has become hostile to children. We have burdensome car seat, booster seat, and safety belt laws that require parents to search high and low for family transportation that is legal, but also affordable. We have legal threats to Biblical corporal punishment that keep parents who spank in fear of child protective services. We have busybody shoppers and neighbors reporting hardworking and careful, loving mothers for, as an example, having a child in the front yard while mother is around the side of the house. Regularly, Christian fathers and mothers have their little ones taken from them by the government that judges the children to be endangered by their parents, and large families are much more susceptible to such violation of their parental rights than one mother with one or two children able to dote on them to her heart's content.

There are many justifications for choosing fewer children. The cost of a fruitful marriage bed seems unsustainable to most believers. But hasn't bearing children always required mothers and fathers to trust God by exercising their faith in God's kind provision for their family financially, physically, and spiritually?

Even if we limited our concern to the cost of children, we need to wake up and realize that having children is not expensive. What's really expensive is *not* having children. What's really expensive is putting off fatherhood and motherhood. What costs too, too much is limiting children to one or two. What costs something we should truly fear having to pay is not allowing our wife to give herself to motherhood, but requiring her to work and provide a second income.

When we think Biblically and decide this issue by faith, we realize that turning off God's gift of fruitfulness is incredibly expensive! Instead of giving our marriage bed to the fruitfulness God designed, we bury our treasure and prepare to answer to Him for that burying by telling Him that He is a harsh taskmaster.

Do you remember Jesus warned us "where your treasure is, there your heart will be, also"? Put your treasure into your home and fill it with children. The Bible tells us God makes the husband and wife one "for the propagation of a godly seed." God our Heavenly Father makes us one with our husband or wife in order for us to raise up Christian children who will trust in Jesus Christ and bring Him glory.

In your heart of hearts, if you and your wife/husband are honest with each other, you might admit you prefer a nice house, job security, fancy vacations, new cars, a summer place, a remodeled kitchen, or a boat, to allowing God to bless you with children. But remember Jesus' warning:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.²⁹

The last few years of his life, Dad had much for which to be grateful. He'd written books and had many speaking engagements. He was CEO of a Christian publishing company and counted among his friends Christian leaders who requested his counsel. For twenty-five years he'd been writing a monthly column for an Evangelical magazine. He was married to his first wife and they loved each other. Yet it was during those years we heard him exclaim that his children gave him his greatest happiness.

We were nothing special. At least, I certainly wasn't. But quoting his statement, I plead with young couples to go ahead and glorify God by having children, adding that children is one thing they will never regret.

Life yields its blessings to those who do the hard thing. We work to get along with our neighbors. We ask and grant forgiveness of our wives, children, and our brothers and sisters in Christ. We keep our job long after it's grown tedious and we aren't given the raise and responsibility we deserve. We submit to those God has put over us. We get up while we're still tired. We fight our sins. We talk to our wives and listen to our husbands.

We trust God with our marriage bed. Not just this year, but by faith, next year and the year after that, decade after decade until our childbearing years are over. Or at least we think they're over, and then God decrees we have one more. Child. Another round of first-trimester nausea. Another round of weight gain. More heartburn and varicose veins. Maybe another C-section. Maybe we'll be nine months pregnant when it's hot and humid in July. One more infant to nurse. One more mouth to feed. One more mind to educate, and this one born after our eldest daughter who was so helpful caring for her younger siblings, has left home. Some of us will be in our sixties before our last child leaves the nest.

Bearing and raising children is hard—very hard—but we can't afford not to do it because, as our Lord warned, where our treasure is, there our hearts will be, also. What owns our hearts more than our children? My Dad was no anomaly. All fathers and mothers love their children, both the ones who are easy to raise and the ones who are hard. God put love in our hearts for them and He only asks that we follow that love faithfully until death.

Mary Lee and I have been living without our children for about a decade, now. When the last, our youngest son Taylor, left our home, there was a huge hole in our home. We have a large dining room table that accommodated our children and various other children who lived with us

²⁹ Matthew 6:19-21.

for a year or two as well as six years of my elderly aunt who needed our care and died in our home—not to mention the various guests who joined us regularly. Following Taylor’s departure, Mary Lee continued to set the table each night and there she and I sat, night after night, all alone.

After a while, I asked if we could sit at the kitchen island counter instead of the dining room table. Mary Lee asked why and I answered, “I can’t bear sitting there, just the two of us, with no children around the table. It’s depressing and I wouldn’t notice as much if we just ate in the kitchen.” Which is where we have now been eating for the past eight years or so. It helps.

God has blessed our children now with scads of children of their own so that Mary Lee and I now have twenty-eight grandchildren, and expect there will be even more. Eighteen of them live near us and about three years ago a bunch of them needed to be driven somewhere, and I was nominated. Climbing high up in the gargantuan van of one of the families, the kids climbed in and we were off!

May I tell you something? Driving the grandkids in that van, I was the happiest I’d been in years. Years! I was smiling. We sang. I listened to their music. A half hour or so into the trip, I realized how pumped I was and wondered why?

Then it hit me. Children! Scads of children surrounding me, yacking and arguing and bragging, some kind and some not so kind, all together living their lives given their parents by God. What blessings. What gifts. What treasures and such happiness!

Readers who are cynics would respond, pointing out I didn’t have to change those kids diapers and spank them and do their wash. All I was doing was sitting in the driver’s seat with my foot on the gas and my hands on the steering wheel.

True enough, but oh the joy that came flooding all over me as I remembered the joy of fatherhood. All those years with all those children. Hard work, yes; and even harder for Mary Lee, their mother. But nothing else in life compares.

To having a quiver full of children. So said God, and I testify to you with all the sincerity I have, so I found and so our children now too find, themselves.

Dear brother and sister, will you trust God? Will you give yourselves to fruitfulness? If you do so, no greater joy will ever come to you (along with many sorrows) and your treasure will be laid up in Heaven where, one day, those children will join you around God’s throne singing His praises forever and ever.

A Song of Ascents.

*How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
Who walks in His ways.
When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands,
You will be happy and it will be well with you.
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
Within your house,*

*Your children like olive plants
Around your table.*

*Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed
Who fears the Lord.*

*The Lord bless you from Zion,
And may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.
Indeed, may you see your children's children.
Peace be upon Israel! (Psalm 128)*