

Accepting Children as Gifts from God

The holy bible begins with the words: “In the beginning God created...” Everything that exists has originated with Him. As John says, “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” God made all things by the power of His Word (John 1:3).

In His Word, God has revealed himself to be a loving Father who is good to all, who has mercy on all His creation, is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works (Ps. 145:9,15–18). He is both the giver and sustainer of all life.

Man is not able to create anything from nothing, let alone the miracle that is life. The power of God is beyond comprehension. Recognition that God is the sole giver of life, that He has made us in His image, and that He has paid a great price for our redemption kindles respect for life and its sanctity.

The Increase of Knowledge

Science and technology have advanced at an accelerating pace. The fields of medicine and biotechnology bring new treatments, new therapies, and new possibilities. Advances in these fields in particular also bring us face to face with new and sometimes difficult moral and ethical questions. Science and technology however do not provide the moral framework or the values required to guide their use.

In the modern world, many have rejected or perhaps simply drifted away from the Bible’s teaching that God is Creator, the giver of life. Respect for life and the sanctity of life has diminished as a result. This has led to widespread use of birth control and the legalization and use of abortion.

Birth Control

The prevention of conception, or birth control, is contrary to God’s Word and good conscience. It contradicts the teachings of God’s Word with regard to both creation and marriage.

The biblical doctrine of creation is crystallized in the First Article of the Creed: “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” Luther explains the meaning of this article thusly: “I believe that God has made me and all other creatures; that He has given and still preserves to me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses” (Luther’s Small Catechism). When we believe this, is it not also true that God continues to create new life, the lives of our children and all children?

Thus while science sees new life as a product of evolution, faith sees all children as God’s creation. While science sees the conception of life, and the unique individual that it gives birth to, as the random and arbitrary outcome that occurs when the seed of man and woman are joined in the mother’s womb, faith sees conception as the continuation of God’s creation work. It is His plan and His work. The Old Testament examples of Rachel, Hannah, and Ruth all show that it is God who gives conception and the fruit of the womb (Gen. 29:30–30:2, 6; 1 Sam. 1:5,19,20). Of Ruth is said, “So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son” (Ruth 4:13).

One of the primary purposes of marriage is procreation. God created man, male and female, and then commanded them to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Gen. 1:27,28). Luther says that this is “more than a command, namely a divine ordinance which it is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore” (Martin Luther, *The Estate of Marriage* 1522).

Despite God’s command or ordinance, birth control is widely practiced. People defend their disobedience with a variety of reasons including the psychological and physical burdens of raising children, economics, pursuit of an education or a career, concerns about overpopulation, etc. These arguments reflect man’s battle of reason against faith and are often rooted in unbelief and selfishness. Believing husbands and wives know these arguments well. The threefold enemy frequently tempts us with them. We wish, however, to cast aside these arguments as well “and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,” and bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

Abstinence and Birth Control

Marriage has a purpose in addition to procreation, namely, the avoidance of fornication. The desire that resides in us as a result of God’s creation work and the command to be fruitful and multiply is strong and few are able to resist it. Thus the Apostle Paul writes, “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:2).

In the same context Paul, while permitting abstinence in marriage for the purpose of prayer and fasting, warns that it must be only by mutual consent and only for a short time in order to avoid sin. Paul warns both husband and wife not to de--fraud one another of the “benevolence” each is due. Sexual life is also an expression of love intended to strengthen the psychological and emotional bonds that are a part of two becoming one flesh. Paul, while cautiously allowing abstinence, does not here either encourage or give license to use abstinence as means to limit the number of our children or otherwise practice family planning.

Difficult Situations and Abortion

Pregnancy and childbirth always entail some degree of risk for a mother. On occasion there are also health and medical

issues that may substantially increase those risks. In such circumstances a couple may face painfully difficult questions caused by the conflict between God's command to be fruitful and multiply and their own concern for the mother's life. Her life, too, is God's gift and undeniably precious. In the face of such difficult issues, we feel our smallness and inadequacy.

Even in difficult situations, however, God's children do not wish to abandon the perspective of faith for the perspective of science and reason. It does not mean that believing fathers and mothers do not take medical information and advice into account, but rather that they strive to consider it in the light of God's Word, faith, and conscience so that they might hold "the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1 Tim. 3:9).

God's Word teaches us that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding" (Prov. 9:10). Thus faced with these kinds of difficult questions, we humbly pray for God's guidance, turn to His Word, and seek counsel and support from God's congregation, which Paul calls the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). In the end, however, each must decide according to his or her own conscience. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, writing about matters of conscience, teaches that he who acts contrary to his conscience and in this way doubts is damned, "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Luther too said, "It is neither safe nor right to act against conscience" (Martin Luther, The Diet of Worms).

Once life has been conceived, we wish to do all that we can to protect it. Thus abortion, which is the destruction of a life that God has created and which is His image, is not an option. It is sin. If the life of a mother is threatened by illness or injury during pregnancy, we want to see to it that everything that is medically possible is done to save the life of both mother and child. God has given both lives. Both lives are precious and both lives are in God's hands, the hands of Lord over life and death.

Birth control and abortion further the decay of marriage and sexual morality in our society as well. These have significant consequences, not only with regard to eternal life, but also for temporal life and especially for children.

To observe the birth of a child is a humbling experience; to observe death, whether that of a child still in the womb, at childbirth, or at the end of a long life is an even more humbling experience. We say with the psalmist, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Ps. 8:3, 4).

God has promised to be with us in times of trial and temptation. He is our faithful help and support. Paul says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Adapted from *God Is Lord over Life and Death* presented by Jon Bloomquist at the LLC Ministers & Board Members Meeting, Rogers, Minn., 7.2.2010

Discussion:

Read the following Bible passages.

Gen. 1:27,28; Ps. 127:3-5; Isa. 44:24; Jer. 1:4,5; Ps. 139:13-17. How do they relate to the understanding of believers regarding children as God's creation and gifts?

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