

Introduction to Christian Ethics Part 2
Course Developed by Ron Habinski in 2002/2003
for
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Unit #2 – Marital and Sexual Issues

Reproduction and Birth Control

- In the section that we have just completed we saw that sexual intimacy was designed by God to unite a couple for life, building intimacy and connectedness between them and serving as an honourable means of bringing sexual fulfillment and joy to them both.
- But that is not all that sexual intimacy was designed for.
- God intentionally attached to the act that joins a man and a woman, the possibility of reproduction.
- Children need and benefit from having two functioning parents, so God's plan provided for every child to have two biological parents who participated in giving them life.
- The vast majority of couples who marry want to have one or more children.
- They see children as a good thing, an amazing adventure that they can look forward to sharing together.
- This idea that reproduction is a good thing, and is seen by God as a good thing, is taught in the Bible.
- **[READ Gen 1:21f; 27f]**
- Fertility and reproduction, whether they involve fish, birds or people, are to be understood as the result of God's blessing.
- Let me remind you that the word, "***blessing***," means ***saying something good***.
- As a consequence of this root meaning, this word has two different meanings, depending on who is doing the blessing.
- When ***a person*** is saying something good about God or about another person, we understand that the person is admiring or praising the God.
- But when ***God*** says something good about someone, something good happens to that person, ***because God's words have His power attached to them***.
- Good things happen to the people He blesses.
- God's blessing makes good things happen.
- So when God blessed our first parents with the ability to reproduce themselves and God's image, they were enabled to produce children.
- It is worth noting that this blessing was given before Adam or Eve had sinned.
- Human reproduction has no stain attached to it.
- Apparently, God saw to it that Adam and Eve did not begin having children until after they had sinned and were expelled from Eden.

- But the capacity to reproduce was given to them before they sinned.
- **[READ Ps 127:3-5]**
- There is no doubt about how the author of this Psalm felt about having children.
- A willingness and desire to have children is a natural thing for Christian couples.
- They see this as a good thing, because they know that it is something that God regards as a good thing, and they appreciate and accept God's point of view.
- Now, there may be a good reason for a couple to choose to entirely avoid having children, such as the knowledge that one or both parents have a serious genetic defect, a defect that they do not want to pass on to a child.
- We also know that some couples are unable, for some reason or other, to have children.
- But Jewish and Christian thinking on the subject of children is that they are a gift from God.
- So any married person who is entirely against the idea of having children, rejects God's perspective and point of view on children as incorrect.
- This is not something that those who love and worship God feel free to do.
- I have never come across a believer who disagrees with God's view of children.
- In fact, most married couples, whether they are Christians or not, consider having children a good thing.
- It is normal for couples to deliberately try to have a child, and be thrilled when evidence comes along that they have succeeded.
- People the world over consider the inability to have a child a great tragedy, and many couples with fertility problems will try almost any medical procedure to get around this problem.
- Most people seem to accept God's perspective of on the desirability of children.

- Now, in a sense, *making babies is an incidental part of making love.*
- When I say that, I do not mean that the connection between intimacy and pregnancy is an accidental or unimportant one, because God established that connection.
- The connection is a given without any special planning on our part.
- But even with married couples, the hope of immediate conception and reproduction is not constantly in their minds every time they enjoy intimacy together.

Q: Does anyone suppose that most people would lose all interest in sexual intimacy, if there were no possibility of a baby attached to the act?

A: Of course not!

- It is the possibility of enjoying intimacy with little risk of making a baby that has led to an explosion of casual, no-strings-attached sexual intimacy in our society.
- In the past, the risk of an unwanted pregnancy encouraged some measure of sexual self-control and restraint among unmarried people, even when considerations of right and wrong didn't matter to them.
- But now, much of that self-control has vanished, among people who have free access

to contraceptives.

- The easy availability of contraceptives has also freed married couples from concern about having children before they are ready for them, or about having more children than they really want to have.
- It is not surprising that people who do not want to be joined for life are happy to have ways of avoiding the embarrassment and inconvenience of conception.
- From very ancient times, various methods of avoiding pregnancy have been known and practiced by people who wanted the fun without responsibility for a new life.
- Such methods have also been practiced by married couples to control the timing and number and spacing of their children.
- For example, my grandmother deliberately nursed each of her children for up to two years, because that would reduce her likelihood of conception during that time.
- She still ended up raising a large family, but at least she was able to space them out a bit.
- Today, medical discoveries have made a number of birth control methods available in much of the world at fairly low cost.

- But when the question of using contraceptives for purposes of birth control or family planning has come up, there have often been Christians and Christian leaders who have said with great assurance and authority that using such methods to prevent pregnancy is wrong.

- Now, it is important to understand how they have come to this conclusion.
- Earlier in this course we saw that for Christians the only authority on matters of right and wrong is the ethical teachings of Jesus, delivered by Him personally, or by the apostles whom He personally selected and trained.
- Now most people know that *Jesus and His apostles said nothing specific on the subject of contraception, birth control or family planning.*
- You can read the New Testament from one end to the other without finding anything on the subject.
- And neither is there any record of any such teaching in written records outside the New Testament.

Q: So how is it that many people who want to follow and obey Jesus have become absolutely convinced that any use of contraceptives is wrong?

- (By the way, it not only Roman Catholics who hold this view.)

A: The answer to this question is not hard to find.

- It is a well known fact that Jesus pointed back to the record of creation in the book of Genesis as establishing a pattern, - a pattern that reveals God's will for us.

- Let's read Gen 1:28.

- The people who hold the view that contraception is wrong base it squarely on this verse or on the say so of respected spiritual leaders who have based themselves on this verse.

- They say, ***“This passage contains a command of God to be fruitful and increase in number, so it is our duty to obey this command, not avoid it. God blessed them, and then He gave them a command to reproduce.”***

- Generally the people who express this view honestly want to align themselves with God’s thinking, and for this they should be honoured.

- They want to obediently do what they understand God to be commanding.

- They usually stop short of saying that all Christians should have as many babies as it is humanly possible to have in their lifetime, although their thinking definitely seems to imply such a conclusion.

Q: But is it truly God’s intent to instruct His creatures to have as many children as possible during their lives?

A: There are lots of ways in which this particular interpretation of the words of verse 28 can be challenged.

- I would like to draw your attention to only one of them, because I believe it is simple, clear and decisive.

- I think it can be demonstrated that the words, ***“be fruitful and increase in number,”*** were never intended by God as a command for people to obey.

- In fact, they were not even intended as a command for Adam and Eve to obey.

- If this is true, we are not required to obey these words in any way shape or form.

Q: “Now just a minute,” you may say, “doesn’t this verse contain two verbs in the imperative?”

A: The answer is yes, ***“Be fruitful”*** is an imperative verb in Hebrew, and so is the phrase, ***“increase in number.”***

- But these words are not commands for us to obey any more than they were commands to be obeyed when God spoke the same words to sea creatures and birds in verse 22.

- Imperative verbs are usually used to give a command, but they can also be used for another purpose.

- Another possible use of verbs in the imperative is to pronounce and bestow a blessing, and that is how they are used here.

- Let me explain.

- First of all, there are no quotation marks in the Hebrew language in which these words were first written or in the Greek language in which the New Testament is written.

- So when the Biblical writers wanted to introduce the words of a quotation, they stuck in the words, ***“and said”*** or ***“saying,”*** or some other form of this expression.

- In the Old and New testaments these two expressions are used thousands of times to introduce quotations, and in some of the newer English translations these words are simply left out and replaced by quotation marks.

-What that means is that the words, ***God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number,”*** should be written, ***God blessed them, “Be fruitful and increase***

in number.”

- God said only one thing, and that one thing was a blessing not a command.
- When God gave them this blessing, they immediately became fruitful.
- The capacity for reproduction was bestowed on them, so that if they did what came naturally, they would have children.
- They didn't even have to consider obeying these words, because God built into their nature the desire to be joined as man and wife.
- And God made that joining result in human offspring without any special thought or effort on their part to obey.
- It is generally understood that Adam and Eve had *only one command to obey* in Eden, and that involved not eating the fruit of one specific tree.
- Now let me show you a few examples of a blessing being used to make things happen rather than to give a command to be obeyed.

[READ Genesis 1:20-22; 9:1; 17:16, 20; 27:29c (cf. vs. 37); Psa 133:3 “bestow” <command>]

- I have been trying to show you that a blessing is not a command to be obeyed.
- God's blessing is a word of power that accomplishes His purpose.
- Thus, God's blessing made Adam and Eve and their descendants fruitful, and they are still being fruitful to this day, as the increasing population of our world shows.
- *God's blessing of fertility was not designed as a command to our wills.*
- *Rather it was a command to our physical nature, a command that was immediately implemented as part of our physical and emotional makeup.*
- God has placed in our bodies a desire to come together and this desire is joined to a capacity to reproduce.
- But He also enabled our minds to discover ways to limit and control our fertility in various ways.
- And He has not prohibited us from using those methods, and using them as we please.
- Where there is no command to guide us, we have freedom, so the whole question of contraception comes under the heading of our liberty in Christ.
- The Scriptures depict having children as a joy and a privilege, not a duty.
- They regularly refer to mothers as giving birth to children *for their husbands* and with God's help (e.g. Eve Gen 4:1; Hagar 16:15f; Keturah 25:2; Rachel 29:32-35; Bilhah 30:5-7; Zilpah 30:9; Leah 30:17-20), *and not for God or as an act of service or obedience to Him.*
- We have seen that sexual intimacy is a duty husbands and wives have to their spouse (1 Cor 7:3-5).
- Nothing is said about it being a duty to God, so as to produce children for Him.
- When God imposes no command on us, we have unrestricted liberty of action.

Comments or Questions?