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And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Ge. 1:28

In the beginning, the first command God gave mankind mandated the reproduction of the man and woman, with the purpose of filling the earth with people. God would receive glory and pleasure by the expansion of the human race across the earth He had created.¹

The fall of man meant that the growth of the human race would be accompanied by all the problems caused by Adam and Eve's sin. As one specific consequence of the fall, children would be born in great pain. However, we understand from Scripture that children were considered a great blessing—not a curse.

One of the most familiar statements in the Scriptures about the blessing of children comes from Psalm 127:3-5:

Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.

Twice this passage emphasizes that children are a gift from God. It also seems to suggest that a “full” number of children is something to be desired, and is a source of happiness.

¹ Ed. Note: God loves people. Satan hates people. While it is true that Satan hates a holy man more than a carnal man, he simply hates all men and is on a mission to destroy humanity. Think about this mission in the light of birth control.

The past hundred years have seen considerable change in family demographics in this country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average household size in 1900 was 4.60 persons. One hundred years later, in 2000, this number decreased to 2.59—a fairly dramatic change.²

These numbers reflect society as a whole. However, it seems more than likely that this trend is reflected in Christian subcultures as well. Conservative Christian groups are often characterized by larger families, but many of these groups would likely show a decrease in family size over the past century if a scientific study were done on them.

Conservative Anabaptists have typically been among the last bastions holding out against societal changes. However, even in these groups, a similar trend seems apparent. A 2006 study by Cory Anderson noted this trend in the Beachy Amish churches.³

Some time ago, a midwife lamented to my wife and I that she was obligated to purchase stocks of birth control products at Walmart for the Plain ladies in her community who were too embarrassed to be seen buying them.

The bottom line is clear: we are having fewer children. And it is not by accident.

The primary reason for the decrease in family size over the past hundred years seems fairly obvious. Discoveries in science and technology have brought access to easy, reliable, and affordable methods of birth control. No one needs to have children unless they intend to do so. Now, more than ever, having children is optional.

There are valid ethical debates about birth control methods. This discussion will not enter into those questions. Rather, the question to be addressed is one that is more basic: *Why* do we want to prevent conception in the first place? *Why* don't we want children?

All methods and means of birth control have the same purpose: the prevention of conception. The *motives* behind the desire to prevent conception will be the focus of this discussion.

As Christians, we should be more than willing to examine our motives in the light of Scripture. Are we willing to take an honest look at our motives, critique them, and even modify behavior if necessary?

² No. HS-12. *Households by Type and Size: 1900 to 2002*, U.S. Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/statab/hist/HS-12.pdf>. Accessed 2/12/2012.

³ “Contemporary Beachy Amish Mennonite Birth Rate Trends and Evaluations” by Cory Anderson. <http://www.user.shentel.net/coryaa/birthrates.htm>. Accessed 2/29/2012

Why?

What then are the reasons we want to prevent having children? The following list of reasons is intended not so much to overtly approve or condemn any particular motive, but to begin in our minds the process that was described earlier of getting to the root of *why*.⁴ The process begins with examining our *motives* in the light of what the Scriptures have to say about this topic. I believe that for the most part we well know what God thinks about this. The following list is probably incomplete, but here are a few possible motives for not wanting children:

- We dislike the stigma attached to large families. Large 15-passenger vans full of children are embarrassing spectacles, as are the string of children at the grocery store. People make jokes. Even Christian people chuckle, “Yeah, God said to be fruitful and replenish the earth, but he didn’t say it had to be done by one family alone!” Everyone “knows” that children in large families are deprived of proper attention and care. Obviously, too many children, not spaced apart enough, are “evidence” of poor planning and management on the part of the parents. Nobody wants that kind of image. Making sure there are two or three years between children is as important to our image as keeping our property landscaped nicely.⁵
- We may wish to pursue adoption or dedicate our lives to other ministry avenues. Some have suggested that with all the children in the world who are available for adoption, Christians should perhaps forego

4 Instead of *how*.

5 This observation is one of many which I gleaned from an e-mail discussion with a group of friends. Much of the content of this article comes from this exchange.

having, or at least limit the number of, their own children for the purpose of helping as many of these as possible. The adoption of children is without question as blessed a pursuit as that of having one’s own children. If there really are those who are willing to forego having a family of their own in favor of serving their fellow man in this way, it seems difficult to criticize this motive. This line of thought seems to imply that children can hinder ministry. It might be worth mentioning, however, that having children may open as many doors in ministry as it may seem to close. Perhaps having children interferes with our plans more than it hinders God in His plans.

- We do not view children as a blessing. Clearly, the Scriptures speak of children as a gift and blessing from the Lord. However, some parents may really view them as a bother. It is sad that a family should have any child who is not seen as a gift from God. Families, large or small, where there is not sincere love and thankfulness for each child are indeed a sad situation.
- We find it challenging to meet the needs of the children we already have. This is a very real giant that parents face. The responsibilities of parents, particularly of mothers, can at times be overwhelming. There is never a vacation for a mother. The clothing must be washed. The house must be cleaned. The meals must be prepared. This is in addition to the attention that must be paid to the physical needs of each child, as well as the educational, social, emotional, and spiritual needs. And although fathers can feel overwhelmed as well, often the mother is the one who bears the weight of this burden.

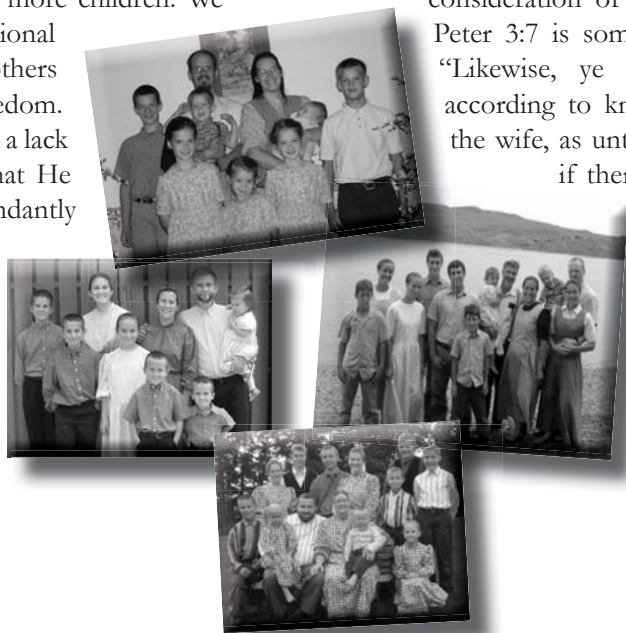
Have you ever noticed ...

- how the world seems to have more concern for animals than for humans?
- how there is a fine of up to \$5,000 for killing a bald eagle, yet abortions are acceptable?
- how our culture thinks it nothing to spend hundreds of dollars on pedigreed dogs, yet does not want children?

It is nothing new. Consider this quote from Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215):

But those who are more refined than these keep Indian birds and Median peafowls, and recline with peak-headed creatures; playing with satyrs, delighting in monsters. They ... overlook the chaste widow, who is of far higher value than a Melitaeon pup, and look askance at a just old man, who is lovelier in my estimation than a monster purchased for money. And though maintaining parrots and curlews, they do not receive the orphan child; but they expose children [ed. - leave them out to die] that are born at home, and take up the young of birds, and prefer irrational to rational creatures; although they ought to undertake the maintenance of old people with a character for sobriety, who are fairer in my mind than apes, and capable of uttering something better than nightingales; and to set before them that saying, “He that pitieth the poor lendeth to the LORD”; and this, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it to me.” ANF II, 278

- We face health issues. Pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing are often complicated by preexisting health conditions. Even in the best circumstances, every birth is some sort of health risk. Childbearing may be physically impossible for reasons that are out of our control. Scripture speaks of God opening and closing the womb. Having children is not always a matter of choice.
- We are afraid. We may fear childbirth. We may be afraid we cannot provide for more children. We may fear having a dysfunctional family. We may fear what others think. We may fear loss of freedom. Fear seems to be coupled with a lack of faith. Faith is believing that He is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” But fear militates against faith, and fear often leads one to trust in man’s wisdom rather than God.
- We can. With the advance of technology, we have easy access to effective birth control products. With the advance of science, we better understand the human body. Thus, we understand practices that help to prevent conception. We live in a modern Western society with new and “better” ways. We have health care choices that most people in history could only dream of. And so we prevent conception for no better reason than that we can.
- We may face financial issues. Children are expensive. When a child is born, it can cost a family anywhere between a few thousand dollars and everything they own. Each child is a financial risk. The possibility of sickness, injury, or other problem poses a constant financial hazard to a family. The cost of sufficient housing can be considerable for a large family. Even though as a whole we live in a financially prosperous society, economic success does not always translate into a family-friendly lifestyle. Stress, along with countless technological and social interferences made possible by affluence, encroaches on family time.
- We may have a better understanding of the responsibility of parents. Perhaps the parents of



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large families that we have observed seem to have had their large families almost by accident, without having a clear purpose and vision. Never before have we had so many resources, books, and sermons on child training. Perhaps one result of this is that some feel that they have a clearer concept than some others of the seriousness of parental responsibilities, leading them to be more intentional in their family planning.

- We feel that preventing conception reflects proper consideration of the husband for the wife. 1 Peter 3:7 is sometimes quoted in this regard: “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel ...” Even if there are no clear health, financial,

or other reasons to prevent having children, it is sometimes suggested that doing so is simply a loving gesture of courtesy and consideration towards the wife.

- We have been influenced by secular thinking concerning the problems of population growth. Our culture not only outright, but also subliminally, teaches that small families are the way to go. As conservative Christians, we may scoff at the dire predictions of earth-conscious environmentalists

who declare that having children at all is helping to doom the planet, but we may be succumbing to the more subtle influences that end up pointing us the same direction. Almost nowhere in our culture is having large families promoted. Have you ever seen an advertisement featuring a family with six or eight children? This thinking permeates our culture, and we may be shaped by it more than we realize.

- We don’t really know why. Just like some people seem to have had large families seemingly almost without thinking about it, we size our families smaller in the same sort of aimless way. We have no vision or strong compelling reasons to have children. Family does not excite us.
- We don’t have the time. A friend once lamented about the lack of time in his busy community, which is known for being saturated with Christian churches:

“The community is thriving, and there are seemingly always things to do, and good activities to be involved in. Committee meetings, PTF meetings, graduation ceremonies, school programs, ball games, prayer meetings, revival meetings, support group meetings, chorus practice, benefit auctions, fundraisers, and the list goes on. But it all comes with a price. With all this activity, there seem to be precious few evenings to simply spend at home. And even at home we have our distractions. E-mail, cell phones, and Facebook allow us to stay in touch with more people, from all over the world, than ever before. And so our already-stretched lives get stretched even more.”

Where in the world are we supposed to find time to have children? Educations need to be completed, businesses must be established, and of course the newly married must have time to enjoy and learn to know one another without distractions. Yes, certainly, children are wanted, children are valued, and children are blessings—when we find the time.

- We may lack the support of our community. Some communities are well known for the practice of having young ladies volunteer significant amounts of time and effort helping mothers with small children. Sometimes more experienced families are able to offer encouragement by example. Not all families are blessed with this sort of community support. In some cases, those who might be available to lend a hand to overwhelmed families might have other interests. But it is possible for a family to feel alone and overwhelmed, which makes the idea of having more children less appealing.
- We don't like giving up control. To leave open the question of how many children we will have seems irresponsible and scary. A woman of average health might conceivably have children as often as every year or two. Is managing this natural course of events any different from cutting one's hair, mowing the lawn, or taking Tylenol to help a headache?



The Bible calls debt a curse and children a blessing, but in our culture we apply for a curse and reject blessings. Something is wrong with this picture.

- We are selfish. Recently, a friend was telling my wife about the first years of their marriage. They waited a number of years to start their family, because they were enjoying the free lifestyle provided by two sizable incomes and no children. “We were selfish,” she said simply. Selfishness seems to be a primary reason that people don't want children. Other reasons may often be simply a cover for pure selfishness. Children interfere with our personal interests, our freedom, our time, our resources, and our plans.

As we have focused on our own hearts in this way, hopefully the Spirit of God has made the connections, or

in some cases revealed the disconnects, between our reasoning and the teaching of the Scriptures. As we allow this process to reach its completion, the course of our lives will be altered, perhaps radically, as we attempt to align our thinking and our actions with God's expressed word in relation to children.

In conclusion, there are a few things that should be clear to us in thinking through this issue. We understand that there has been a distinct

shift in family demographics in the recent past. We also know that, relative to other parts of the world and other times in history, we enjoy unprecedented prosperity and unparalleled access to health care. Financial success and generally improved health, however, have not caused an *increase* in family size in our society and in our communities; rather, the opposite is the case. We are wealthier and healthier than past generations, and therefore seemingly better able to sustain larger families, and yet our families are shrinking. It seems clear then that much of our reasoning in limiting our family size can be attributed to pure selfishness.⁶

In a widely circulated quote, Doug Philips notes another irony about our culture. “The Bible calls debt a

⁶ It seems that this discussion could be followed by one titled “Why We Want Children,” examining the motives we have for wanting children. In such a discussion, I think we would find that people have mixed reasons for wanting children, some of which may be as purely selfish as some of those we have mentioned here.

curse and children a blessing, but in our culture we apply for a curse and reject blessings. Something is wrong with this picture.”⁷ Clearly, our values as a culture are reflecting values other than those the Bible promotes.

A final clarification should be that it is not at all necessary to have children in order to be blessed of God. In fact, the single person or the husband and wife who are childless or whose family is limited by circumstances out of their control can expect God’s special attention. “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land” (Ps. 68:5,6).

There are single persons or childless couples whose “families” far exceed those of others both in number and in blessing. “Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord” (Is. 54:1).

If we were to act primarily by the values in God’s word and of His kingdom, instead of the self-centered, materialistic values of our generation and culture, how might we think and act differently in terms of planning our families?

If we were to act primarily by the values in God’s word and of His kingdom, instead of the self-centered, materialistic values of our generation and culture, how might we think and act differently in terms of planning our families? Fifty or a hundred years from now, what investment of ours will matter most?

May you advance on a journey that leads you toward what God wanted the world to be in the first place, when He spoke of a verdant earth filled with His creation, which would continuously glorify Him and bring Him pleasure.

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. Ge. 1:31

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Lu. 18:16 ~

7 As quoted in *QuiverX*, by James and Shannon French, Xulon Press, 2006.