

Be Fruitful and Multiply: Second Thoughts on Birth Control

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*The words bracketed and in italics were additions to the manuscript made during the lecture.

[Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak here today. Before I get to my manuscript I'd like to point out that I disagree with Pr. Galler that all of these topics are comfortable; I think mine is uncomfortable, but it may be that I made it more comfortable today. I'm not dealing with a lot of the controversial issues surrounding birth control, because it can be a very personal issue.]

Part I: Unless the Lord Builds the House

If there is one thing we can all agree on, it might be that we need more babies. Babies are good. But sadly, this is not something even Christians can all agree on today. It comes down to whether God makes babies or not. Don't ever take for granted the simplest teachings of the Bible. I was teaching confirmation class to some very devout seventh and eighth graders, when I said that God makes babies. They laughed at me, and said, "Pastor, we know where babies come from." It took me a good half hour to show them that it isn't proper to say that we make babies because God makes babies. Now it's not the time to give a philosophy lecture, but it is a basic Epicurean/materialist way of looking at things which acknowledges only the material cause to the exclusion of the efficient cause. In layman's terms, people think only of the means used to make it, and not the Maker who made it.

In the natural relations between a man and a woman, God often makes the expression of their love result in a child. This is a miraculous thing. It is the result of a law God has rooted in nature that He at the same time calls a blessing, "And God blessed them, and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'" (Gen. 1:28) It is so powerful a law that that God even makes children outside of wedlock when a man and a woman do what married people are supposed to do. This is how God sustains the human race, how the promise of the Gospel is kept alive (Ps. 48:13; 127:3; 144:12), how the world continues to be governed.

Some people adopt the awful position which says, "If God doesn't specifically condemn something in the Bible, then He has no opinion on the matter at all." I don't know who invented this way of thinking. It might just be plain laziness. I think it's a distortion of what Lutherans have traditionally called *adiaphora*, or matters of indifference. In any case, it is spiritually foolish to think that stopping God's order of creation should be viewed as a morally neutral thing. It is true that we should not weave doctrines from our own deductions apart from an express Word of God, since we may not ensnare pious consciences in doubt as to their salvation.¹ But the truth remains that God intends for children to be the result of a husband's and wife's love. The fact that there are difficult circumstances in which Christians question God's intention

¹ Cf. Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent, part III*, trans. by Fred Kramer (CPH: St. Louis, 1986), p. 34.

to give children doesn't give us the right to drop all moral consideration of the issue.² [*And this has happened to us.*]

There is an attitude among us, fostered from a very young age, that we are in control of everything. When I was a child, I remember people marveling that I came from a family of eleven boys and one girl. Christian men and women would ask me, even when I was only 8 or 9 or 10, "And how many children do you want?" I was always puzzled by this question, and I didn't know how to answer. I didn't know that I could make a baby at all. My mom and dad taught me that God gave them the baby, so I just figured that God would decide how many children I had.

Well, now I'm thirty with six children, and I don't think I'm any less naïve in the eyes of the world, nor am I any less confused with the questions I'm now asked as a father of six (the most notorious and offensive of which is "are you done yet?"). Christians aren't very consistent in their thinking. We all say every day, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth," but, as Luther says,

[W]e all pass over it, hear it, and say it. Yet we do not see or consider what the words teach us. For if we believed this teaching with the heart, we would also act according to it. We would not strut about proudly, act defiantly, and boast as though we had life, riches, power, honor, and such – [*I might add children*] – [from] ourselves... The world is drowned in blindness and abuses all the good things and God's gifts only for its own pride, greed, lust, and luxury. It never once thinks about God, so as to thank Him or acknowledge Him as Lord and Creator.

People don't want babies anymore. It's that simple. Thomas Malthus, who was a rationalist of the late 18th/early 19th centuries, is most famous for the theory that there are not enough resources to sustain population growth. Malthus was a pastor who wanted to alleviate the plight of the poor. He thought this could best be done by providing more resources to them. He then assumed that a lack of resources was due to overpopulation, and concluded that the population needed to be limited. Since his *An Essay on the Principle of Population* was first published in 1798, many thinkers have followed his logic to form their own views on society. Most notably, Charles Darwin claimed to have come upon his theory of the survival of the fittest while reading this essay.³

² "And we say that it takes a bit of moralistic fine tuning (to say the least) to claim that it is a mortal sin to destroy the fertilized egg but that it is a morally indifferent matter to do everything under our power to keep that egg from ever being fertilized, as if man and woman are in control up until the life begins and then we let God take over." Excerpted from *And God Blessed Them*, an unpublished essay by Rev. Rolf D. Preus (<http://www.christforus.org/AndGodBlessedThem.htm>).

³ "In October 1838, that is, fifteen months after I had begun my systematic enquiry, I happened to read for amusement Malthus on Population, and being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence which everywhere goes on from long-continued observation of the habits of animals and plants, it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be destroyed. The result of this would be the formation of new species." Barlow, Nora ed. 1958. *The autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809-1882. With the original omissions restored*. Edited and with appendix and notes by his grand-daughter Nora Barlow. London: Collins, p. 120.

Malthus thought that population might be tempered in a rational, Christian way. Population could be controlled if men and women remain single until a man could suitably support a family.⁴ The problem with this of course would be the passions of the men and women, which would require much diligence in restraining. Good luck with that.

From the obvious disgust every Christian should have for Malthus' rationalism, that he blames famine and poverty on God's creative work through procreation, and not on human greed and selfishness, we can discern the complete lack of faith Rev. Malthus displayed by laying such a great emphasis on financial stability as a prerequisite for marriage. While I certainly support the idea of a man learning a trade and being able to work to support his family (1 Tim. 5:8), the question of how much money is required to raise a family is completely relative to a man's own tastes and desires, a point that Malthus himself almost concedes.⁵

God does not will that a man support his family without working. That is the meaning of God's command to Adam after the Fall, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground..." Gen. 3:19. But Solomon writes in Psalm 127, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain that build it." We are to work for a living because God commands men to do this, but we are not to think that we deserve a living from God because of our labor. We look to God for our support, not to our labor. This is a very important point. Luther writes, commenting on this verse,

Solomon here wishes to sanction work, but to reject worry and covetousness. He does not say, "The Lord builds the house, so no one need labor at it." He does say, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain" [Ps. 127:1a]. This is as if he were to say: Man must work, but that work is in vain if it stands alone and thinks it can sustain itself. Work cannot do this; God must do it. Therefore work in such manner that your labor is not in vain.⁶ Your labor is in vain when you worry, and rely on your own efforts to sustain yourself. It behooves you to labor, but your sustenance and the maintenance of your household belong to God alone. Therefore, you must keep these two things far apart: "to labor," and "to maintain a household" or "to sustain"; keep them as far apart from one another as heaven and earth, or God and man.⁷

No doubt these words would have driven a practical statistician like Malthus crazy, as well they should. We are speaking here of faith against unbelief, trust versus idolatry, godliness with

⁴ Malthus calls this the preventative check, "The preventive check appears to operate in some degree through all the ranks of society in England. There are some men, even in the highest rank, who are prevented from marrying by the idea of the expenses that they must retrench, and the fancied pleasures that they must deprive themselves of, on the supposition of having a family. These considerations are certainly trivial, but a preventive foresight of this kind has objects of much greater weight for its contemplation as we go lower." Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 1798, (accessed from <http://www.esp.org/books/malthus/population/malthus.pdf>), p. 20

⁵ *An Essay* 21.

⁶ Consider also Philippians 2:12-13, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Our work is involved with our salvation, but does not cause it. This point is crucial to our very salvation. It is also crucial to the lives God's children lead.

⁷ Luther, Martin, *Exposition on Psalm 127*

(<http://lutheransandcontraception.blogspot.com/2010/09/luther-on-psalm-127.html>)

contentment against covetousness with greed. It is a simple matter of what we Lutherans confess in the meaning to the 1st Article of the Apostles Creed,

He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life... All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.

Man by nature now thinks that he has everything because he deserves it. This is part of the infection given by the devil to our father Adam. We think we are like God, knowing good and evil. This gives us an entitlement complex, so-to-speak, that our reason justifies. We eat bread from our sweat, and we learn somehow that if we sweat some more then we will get more bread, or sweeter bread at least. We then deduce that we get our bread from our labor.

This is unassailable logic of course, but of course God must tear it down. There is nothing that we have that we did not receive. God tells us to work, yes. He says, “[I]f any would not work, neither should he eat.” (2 Thess. 3:10) But we are not thereby to conclude that it is our work that actually gives us food. Neither are to we assume that our work builds our house and provides for our children. The Lord builds the house, or we build in vain. The Lord provides for our children, or we provide in vain.

Thinking that our good hard work gives us life through sustenance is idolatry, and it is idolatry of the worst sort because it looks pious. Hard workers are above those freeloaders who want only to sit around and do nothing, reaping where they have not sowed, robbing their fellow man of their sweat and blood, [*as happens daily in the welfare state*]. But really, trusting in our own hard work is denying God his prerogative as our maker and preserver. It is not man, but God, who *opens his hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing*, as Israel sings. (Ps. 145:16)

So also, it is not man, but God, who opens and closes the womb, as Jacob confessed to Rachel. (Gen. 30:2) A man works and God feeds him thereby, but a man should not say that he gave himself the food. God gave him the food. He prays and thanks God for it, and sanctifies the food thereby. A husband and wife enjoy the marriage bed, but they should not say that they gave themselves children. That is again idolatry, because it fails to recognize God as the giver and author of life, and gives glory and credit to the creature rather than to the Creator. God gave him the child. This is the meaning of Psalm 127:3-5a,

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So are the children of one's youth.
Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them;

Human reason gets very frustrated at this point. “Of course it’s up to us!” she screams. “You can talk all you want about God doing it, but the fact is we all know where babies come from.” Well, actually, no, most people today don’t realize that babies come from God. They think they

come from a purely material and physical process, giving no thought to the spiritual dimensions of what they are mechanically doing when they do what God gave a husband and a wife to do.

And that is precisely the problem today. There is no longer any consideration of the Creator in our contemplation of the created. This leads to the loss of human dignity. Without God man has no dignity, since he was created in the image of God. It might be more accurate to say that man loses any understanding of the dignity of God's creation. What God made is good, regardless of how our sin has infected it, but man sees less and less of the good the farther he gets away from understanding God's will in creation.

Part II: From Idolatry to Sexual Depravity

If you want to understand the general trends of today's sexual mores, why so many men of our culture are generally apathetic weaklings who are either bossed around by their wives or avoid having them altogether, why so many women of our culture do not guard their wombs from fornication as diligently as in times past, why so many children of our culture have lost all fear and reverence of their fathers, and why they care so little about what is true and so much about what makes them immediately happy, you need to understand what most people are worshipping. God has given our culture over to these behaviors because of their greater sin of idolatry. This is real wrath and punishment from God against all evildoers, as described in Romans 1. He punishes sin with sin.

It is idolatry that leads us to worship and serve the creature over the creator. Idolatry ultimately leads to a loss of the dignity of our bodies and of creation. The Israelites in the wilderness were tempted "to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods." (Num. 25:1b-2) Adultery and idolatry are often linked together in the Scriptures, but nowhere are idolatry and sexual immorality associated more shockingly than in Paul's indictment of heathen behavior in Romans 1,

[A]lthough they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened... Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Rom.1:21, 24-25)

God punishes sin with sin. Idolatry is the worst sin, and all sins are encapsulated in it. [*All sins are against the first commandment.*] Covetousness is, as Paul teaches, idolatry. (1 Cor. 5:11) You can expect then, when we are given to covetousness, that we will also be given to sexual immorality, and that marriage will decay.

Where does this idolatry come from, this greed? Some people like to point to the Industrial Revolution, and that may help us understand the form of the greed we are encountering today. The Industrial Revolution began a long process of the end of the domestic economy. Man relied on his labor being artificially valued by the profiteering practices of his employer. Some call this simple urbanization, but it never happened on such a scale as it happened 200 years ago, [*right around the time Malthus was writing.*]

This certainly provided the framework for the present circumstances. But with regard to the issue of birth control, the progression is quite simple (and I'm speaking in general terms): Man desires money. Man desires woman. Man desires to keep both money and woman. Man reasons that children will allow him only to keep woman and not the money. Man chooses to keep money over children so that he can have money and woman at the same time. When this happens over the course of several generations, the consequences can't be hidden.

You don't need the Industrial Revolution for this to happen, although increased technology has pushed women more and more out of the home to participate in the economy.

When men choose money over children they are believing that their money is more important than God's act of procreation. When they do this they are displaying two things. First, they show a lack of trust in God. In this lack of trust there is also a second something hidden which people do not see, especially not insensitive men. There is an attitude towards the role of women in their lives that is fostered by idolatry and worship of mammon.

The sweat of man's brow is now used more for himself than for others. He chooses to sweat and provide more for himself than for the children who come from his union to his wife. He may be able to buy a lot for his wife, but he won't be investing in his wife's natural labor, which is bearing and raising children at home. Now he has money and a woman who is still sexual, but without the purpose of procreation. His money is invested more and more in activities that do not support the raising of children, but rather the gratification of his own selfish desires.

When men stop looking at women primarily as mothers, the meaning of woman changes dramatically. They are still sexual beings, but their sex is not defined primarily according to its glory and power, namely the power to bear and nurture children, and the glory of ruling next to her husband over a family. Rather the female sex is viewed for the pleasure she brings to the man.⁸ She is permanently objectified. Feminists claimed that birth control would liberate woman, but in reality, it has only given her Adam's curse as well as Eve's, while at the same time depriving her of her honorable place among Eve, Sarah, Hannah, Elizabeth, Mary and all her mothers in the faith.

As seen in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, there is a natural progression from greed to sexual depravity. When men choose money over children, they choose money over women as well. When they worship the creature, the creature loses sight of the creator and thus the dignity of creation. This is why the more children are despised in a culture the more women are objectified for their sexual beauty apart from children. The more decadent and rich a society, the more Venus is worshiped. [*It's just simply true – look at New Testament⁹ Corinth.*] When Venus is

⁸ Consider only the invention of the word "sexy," and its prevalence on women's magazines seen at the grocery store. Cf. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sexy> /> This adjective was invented between 1920-1925, during a time when women began more than ever to leave the home and enter institutions traditionally held by men. This is also a time when Margaret Sanger's ethics was gaining momentum (she published *The Pivot of Civilization* in 1922), and the sexual ethics of Freud and others were widely read at universities in America. See Elasah Drogin, *Margaret Sanger: Father of Modern Society* (Cul Publications: New Hope, KY, 1986) and Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience: A Concise History* (McGraw-Hill, 2002), pp. 274-283.

⁹ Spoke in error "modern day" – meant New Testament.

worshipped, children are sacrificed to Molech, as Margaret Sanger's advocacy of birth control inevitably led to. Abortion is the best birth control.

Most of the demands of feminism simply reflect women following the men in their idolatry and worship of the creation over the creator, [*which is why I really don't like blaming things on feminism, because it all starts with the man. Who sinned first, Adam or Eve? Well, it was Adam, because he didn't take care of his wife.*] The results are what we see around us every day, the progression from idolatry to sexual immorality to death, as Rudyard Kipling's poem, *The Gods of the Copybook Headings*,¹⁰ prophesied nearly a hundred years ago in these concise lines,

On the first feminian sandstones, they promised the fuller life,
That started by loving your neighbor, but ended by loving his wife,
Till our women had no more children, and the men lost reason and faith,
And the Gods of the Copybook Headings said, "The wages of sin is death."

[*Truly prophetic verses.*]

God gives man and woman the desire for each other. This is a good thing and shows that every Christian who has these desires has the right and even the responsibility to find a spouse. [*That's what our Lutheran Confessions teach.*]¹¹ Perhaps you've heard a modern adherent to Darwin speak of how one's sexual desires are simply natural, and that to follow them is as moral as following the desire to eat or to sleep. There is always a hint of truth in lies. It is natural to eat and to drink. It is not natural to gorge oneself and to become obese or drunken. In fact, that is a sin. It is natural to sleep. It is not natural to sit around all day doing nothing and sleep more than you need to. In fact, that also is a sin, called sloth, and those who do this are called teenagers, I mean, sluggards.

So also, it is natural for one to have relations within the bands of matrimony, but it is not natural to have relations outside of the bands of matrimony. Nature teaches this. If a woman were to be left alone without her husband to give birth and take care of her children, it would be nearly impossible for her to survive with her child. The man is stronger by nature and more suited to work for her, to protect her, while her body is made to bear and nourish a newborn child. Nature teaches that sex should be within marriage because of children.

¹⁰ http://www.kipling.org.uk/poems_copybook.htm

¹¹ See *Luther's Large Catechism, The Ten Commandments*, paragraph 212, "For where nature has its course, as it is implanted by God, it is not possible to remain chaste without marriage. For flesh and blood remain flesh and blood, and the natural inclination and excitement have their course without let or hindrance, as everybody sees and feels. In order, therefore, that it may be the more easy in some degree to avoid in chastity, God has commanded the estate of matrimony, that every one may have his proper portion and be satisfied therewith; although God's grace besides is required in order that the heart also may be pure." See also *Augsburg Confession XXIII*, 5-8, "Christ says, Matt. 19:11: All men cannot receive this saying, where He teaches that not all men are fit to lead a single life; for God created man for procreation, Gen. 1:28. Nor is it in man's power, without a singular gift and work of God, to alter this creation. For it is manifest, and many have confessed that no good, honest, chaste life, no Christian, sincere, upright conduct has resulted (from the attempt), but a horrible, fearful unrest and torment of conscience has been felt by many until the end. **Therefore, those who are not fit to lead a single life ought to contract matrimony.** For no man's law, no vow, can annul the commandment and ordinance of God." My emphasis.

But nature doesn't teach us that sex should be within marriage apart from children.¹² Once you take children away, nature's teaching about what sex is for is muted. We need to understand this. When we habitually separate God's intent to create life from our union with our spouse we are removing the wholesome evidence of our one flesh union. This came to me as I was watching Isaiah one evening with Becky, my wife. I saw him smile and make an "aw-shucks" type of face that I have seen every one of our children make. I don't know if Becky or I make it, but it is clear that each of our six children is a mixture of both of us. They are proof that God has made Becky and me to be one flesh. [*Children are proof of the sexual union between a man and woman.*]

Children are the wholesome and salutary evidence of marriage. Marriage exists without children, this is true. There is nothing lacking in the one flesh union of a man and his wife if God does not grant them children. [*It is perfectly good.*] And yet children are the normal evidence of the one flesh union. When you remove this evidence of the sexual union, it will be replaced by whatever was chosen instead of children, which is the worship of the creation over the Creator.

Having children curbs a man's sinful nature. He must give up his own desires for the sake of his children.¹³ The failures of large families are harder to hide. It is humbling for a man not to be able to give his children what other men can give their children. It is humbling for a man to be denied the pleasures he enjoyed in life before his children came. [*It is humbling to have to rely on the charity of others.*] It is humbling, but it gives a man a dignity that his labor could otherwise not give him. When a man is working only to live for himself there is nothing dignified about that, [*despite what the Republican party might teach you – not that I'm a Democrat.*] This is why a single Christian man or woman who works alone emulates what a father or mother does by giving his goods in service of others. This gives the work dignity.

When men stop being fathers and sacrificing their own pleasures for their children, our culture has fewer role models to emulate who do sacrifice for their children. One person you can guarantee will nearly always exhibit self-sacrifice is the mother. Even if the father leaves, the mother remains to sacrifice for the baby. When the man fails, the woman steps up, and now she leads, [*as Deborah did in the Old Testament*]. She becomes the role model for all virtue in a culture where man has chosen to gratify his own desires rather than provide for the needs of his own.

¹² Perhaps this statement should be qualified. Nature also teaches the negative effects of promiscuity through disease and lack of self-fulfillment on the part of fornicators.

¹³ And this is a fruit or sacrifice of faith, as Luther describes the faith of Jacob, "Therefore the fact that that Jacob marries so many wives in the hope that God will alleviate his poverty and support him and his whole household is incredible confidence. Although it is very easy to marry a wife, it is very difficult to support her along with the children and the household. Accordingly, no one notices this faith of Jacob. Indeed, many hate fertility in a wife for the sole reason that the offspring must be supported and brought up. For this is what they commonly say: "Why should I marry a wife when I am a pauper and a beggar? I would rather bear the burden of poverty alone and not load myself with misery and want." But his blame is unjustly fastened on marriage and fruitfulness. Indeed, you are indicting your unbelief by distrusting God's goodness, and you are bringing greater misery upon yourself by disparaging God's blessing. For if you had trust in God's grace and promises, you would undoubtedly be supported. But because you do not hope in the Lord, you will never prosper...All government and all life rests on faith. But Jacob's example serves in a wonderful manner to awaken and strengthen this faith." (AE V 332)

Why don't men sing in our culture? Because men aren't the leaders in the homes anymore, and that means they aren't the leaders of the culture anymore, [as Pr. Woelmer pointed out about the three estates. *Whatever happens in the domestic estate, or the home, affects the state and the culture at large. So when men stop being the leaders in their homes they stop being the leaders in the culture.*] They gave that up when they said they didn't want women who were mothers, and children who would listen to the songs they sang. Why do girls dress so inappropriately today? Because their fathers let them. Why? Because they want their wives to dress that way, or they are intimidated by women who are simply trying to please the man. Either way, men stop being needed when they stop desiring children. When men aren't needed, they sulk away into their proverbial "man-caves," and too often imitate the complaining fathers of every television sitcom in the last twenty years.

When we stop desiring babies, we lose so much that we don't realize. We stop desiring God's creative work among us. The more we trust in how we build, the less we see the Builder. The less we see the Builder, the vainer our lives become on this earth, as we seek to construct meaning apart from how God has decided it be made.

Part III: The Baby Jesus, God's Antidote to Vanity

God knew that life in a fallen world would be vanity. He subjected all of creation to futility when he told Adam that the earth was cursed because of him. But man was given work to do, so that he might have hope during the days of his vanity. But his hope doesn't come from his work. His hope comes from the promise of children. He must listen to his woman scream in pangs of childbirth before he has hope. Woman was given increased pains in childbirth and she was told that her husband would rule over her. She must look to her sweating man as she waits in hope. Man sweats, woman screams, both hope. For what?

When God created the original family it consisted of one man and one woman. All authority on earth was given to the man and woman.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Gen. 1:22-23

God gives man authority over his creation after he blesses them with the command to be fruitful and multiply. Unless man, male and female, is fruitful, he cannot fill the earth and subdue it. Unless man is fruitful, his authority is not properly exercised.

And his authority has never been properly exercised. Before the first man and woman could be fruitful and multiply the serpent deceived the woman and led the man into sin. Death awaited them. Their entire life was now worthless. Creation was marred in ways beyond our understanding.

But God had mercy on his fallen creation. Man died spiritually in the Garden of Eden, but God soon brought them to life again by means of his living word, the first Gospel. God said to the devil in Genesis 3:15,

And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel.

Man had never been fruitful, but it was the promise of a Child, the Seed of the woman, which made life not utterly futile. This Child was not to come from man, but it was to be woman's Seed. [*Normally you don't have woman's seed, you have the fruit of the womb, you have man's seed, but God says, "woman's seed."*] Think of this. The first mention of a child in holy Scripture is of Jesus Christ, the son of a virgin, and this first child is not the result of a husband's and wife's desire for one another. He is not the result of procreation, but he gives all procreated life hope.¹⁴

It is Christ alone who can restore creation, since he alone can take away from us the sin that infects us, the crown of God's creation. But what God created was still good, it was only that God subjected the creation to futility after the Fall, as Paul says in Romans 8, [*where God is really commenting on the curse of Adam, "Cursed is the ground because of you." Listen to the "birth-language" in this:*]

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

When was creation subjected to futility? When Adam fell. But God subjected creation to futility in hope. Adam had this hope when he named his wife Eve after he heard the promise. Eve (*Chavvah*) means life in Hebrew. Eve had this hope as she kept in her heart the promise of the woman's Seed. She naturally assumed that she was the woman, and that it would be her seed that would crush the devil's head.

And so Eve, in the first childbirth said, "I have gotten a man, the LORD." Cain (*qayin*) comes from a Hebrew word meaning to get or to receive (*qanah*). She thought that she had received the Messiah that God spoke of. But Cain had a twin brother. [*And you can tell this because it doesn't say that he knew her again and she conceived again. Cain and Abel were twins. Cain had a twin brother.*]¹⁵ Abel came out next, showing that she had prematurely judged Cain to be the Messiah,

¹⁴ See Luther's beautiful discussion on this verse, AE 1, pp. 188-98.

¹⁵ Luther says it's impossible to know whether they are twins or not, "although it is rather likely they were twins." I think Eve was disappointed immediately by the birth of Abel, but Luther says, "Since the promise concerning a seed, Adam and Eve thought that it was to be fulfilled through Cain. But they supposed that after his brother had brought his entire undertaking to a happy conclusion, Abel would accomplish nothing; and so they called him *havel*." AE 1 243.

the one to crush the serpent's head. And so she named him Abel (*havel*), which means in Hebrew "vanity" or "futility."

Eve had waited for nine months in eager longing for the Son of God. She had groaned for him to be revealed. When he wasn't, she groaned out a word that now defines man's existence in this short of life of labor: vanity. And then Cain proved Eve's words even more wrong as the first result of the love between a man and a woman became a murderer.

And so that is what we all face today when we see our children. We give birth to sinners, and we are ourselves sinners. It is a vicious cycle of idolatry and chasing after vanity, as Solomon describes life in Ecclesiastes.

But there is hope for children, and there is hope in children, and we need to remember that. What is man that God is mindful of him? In order to understand any meaning or purpose in this life we must look to Christ. [*And the reason is that people say, "I don't want to bring children into such an evil world" – and actually I've heard pastors say this. But Christ proves this wrong, and that's my point in the next page or so.*] In order to understand the true value of children, we must look to Christ. The world will only value children as long as, and to the extent that, they give her joy and pleasure. [*So when children were an economic advantage, people decide to have more children; when they're not, they decide not to.*] On what basis do we think differently [*than this covetous world*]?

Christ is the hope of all creation. Psalm 8 describes him as the Son of Man, who was *deprived of God for a little while, and then crowned with glory and honor*. Then all things were put under his feet that were supposed to be under Adam's and Eve's feet, but weren't because of the Fall.

He is the Seed of the woman. He ends idolatry by worshipping only God and by loving his neighbor as himself, [*as the Christmas hymn goes,*

*And idol forms shall perish,
And error shall decay,
And Christ shall wield his scepter;
Our Lord and God for aye.]¹⁶*

He curses the devil with the blood of his bruised heel. He binds himself to our flesh and blood in the womb of the Virgin. By doing this He shows that the curse and the Fall have not prevented bearing children from being a blessing. If God chooses the womb [*in a sinful world*], then the womb is blessed, and so is its fruit.

Christ answers the woman's curse by sanctifying her work. He was served by a woman, and he received the service of Mary's womb, Mary's breast, Mary's sleepless nights, Mary's tears and prayers. It is certainly not without Christ in mind that Paul says to Timothy, "[Woman] will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control." (1 Tim. 2:15) It is not having babies that saves woman. Childbearing is the natural vocation of a woman to serve God in faith, love, holiness and self-control. Jesus' birth teaches this. All generations

¹⁶ *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 76 (CPH: St. Louis, 1941).

will call Mary blessed, who said, “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord.”¹⁷ So also, Christian women can be confident that they are God’s own chosen vessels to bring forth life into this world. A generation that doesn’t call Mary blessed is a generation that despises babies and the honor that women have in raising them.

Christ answers the man’s curse by sanctifying his work. He shows man what his work is for, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45) Pertinent also is the wonderful passage of Paul from Ephesians 5,

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Eph. 5:25-27)

As Luther taught, a Christian is perfectly free lord, subject to none, and at the same time the servant of all, subject to everyone. Christ’s own life of labor shows that work is honorable when it is done in service to the neighbor. A Christian man can do his work knowing that his labor pleases God, since through his work God provides for his wife and children.

And the work that Christians have as fathers and mothers is not limited to this old creation, but by virtue of the birth of Christ, His incarnation and vicarious suffering, death and resurrection for us, the work of a mother and a father is eternal, as they bring their children to the God who made

¹⁷ Consider these two verses of Paul Gerhardt’s wedding hymn, translated by John Kelly, modestly altered by Matthew Carver (2008):

5. O wife! the Lord has chosen you
That from your womb shall life anew
Increase the Church and build it
This wondrous work forever mounts,
The mighty word His lips pronounce:
What here you see, shall yield it
Handsome
Shall come,
Sons and daughters
To the waters
Of Salvation
Finding grace and good vocation.

6. Be of good cheer, for this decree
Is not a human father’s plea:
Our Heav’nly Father gave it,
Who loves us through the coming days
And who, when grief upon us weighs,
Will give us strength to brave it;
Blest end
He’ll send,
As we’re doing
And pursuing,
Or conceiving,
Wise and happy children giving.

them, provided for them and brought them to faith through his vessels of mercy, the father and mother.

People view children as a curse and not as a blessing, and so they seek not to be fruitful, but ultimately, they curse themselves further in idolatry and sexual depravity, [*and maybe even murder.*] And while nature itself can teach us the benefits having children and raising them brings to men and women, Christ alone shows how the curse of man's and woman's existence is turned into an eternal blessing for us.

Closing Remarks

In closing, I have just a few points to make. We need to reexamine our use of birth control. It is not a morally neutral matter. Pastors in the past have been negligent about preaching about this for a few reasons. First, because modern Protestant theology has asserted that the Bible says nothing about the matter. This position is being seen more and more for the naivety it displays. The Bible asserts creation and blesses the sexual union of a man and a wife with the command to be fruitful and multiply. Asserting that Christians can ignore this has done irreparable damage to our families and our homes, and thus to the proclamation of the Gospel in this land. We are left with the wholesale use of birth control by Christians without any moral consideration whatsoever. I have even seen pastors recommend to newly-wed couples to avoid having children until they become more financially stable, [*and that's wrong.*]

We need to trust in God as our Maker and preserver. Remember Lot's wife. She loved her life in Sodom, and she didn't escape the Judgment. We are strangers and pilgrims on this earth, as were all our fathers. We shouldn't be afraid to look a bit strange by having more children. This requires us to be willing to humble ourselves to receive charity as well as to give it to those in need, whenever we hear about them. If we spend more money on entertaining ourselves than on feeding the poor, then we must confess that greed has set its roots deeply in our hearts.

We should never assume we know why people have or have not had kids. God opens and closes the womb. We should pray more for pregnant women, for mothers with small children, and for barren women, giving thanks for their faithful service. Women today are taught to find glory outside the home. The Church needs to encourage barren women while at the same time maintaining the honor of motherhood.

We should pray more for men, that they be faithful to their marriage vows, and teach their children God's Word. They need to be ready to teach their children at a young age, so that their children grow up looking to them for guidance from God's Word.

Too much effort is spent on youth programs, where the children are usually already set in their ways. Churches spend thousands of dollars trying to keep self-absorbed teenagers interested in God via entertainment that models an ungodly culture. We give them more of the kind of attention that makes them the brats they are. They don't need more feminine, smother-you-with-love attention. They esteem themselves too much and for all the wrong reasons. They need manly, thus-saith-the-Lord attention, and they need it when they're young. We need to start early, bringing the family altar into our members' homes when the children are

little. Only God's Word can remedy the present lack of fatherhood. There is no worldly incentive to promote fatherhood's advantages right now.

According to some studies, prescription birth control has risks of being abortifacient, that is, causing the deaths of children conceived while using the medication.¹⁸ Christians should know this, and act accordingly.

One thing that I wish would end immediately, however, is joking around about how we're done having kids because giving birth is so painful, or they're so expensive, or "I told my husband that was the last one," or "I told my wife I couldn't handle any more." This kind of talk is unbecoming of Christians and frankly makes us look like a bunch of ungrateful heathen, who would speak of God's gifts of children in such crass and materialistic terms.

Children hurt. They hurt your wallet. They make you sweat more. [*They make you sick – it happened to me last week.*] They hurt your body. They give you pain. They hurt your heart. They give you sorrow. Children are a burden on us. And God calls them a blessing. Our sinful minds will never quite figure out why. It's more than the rush my heart felt when first I saw each one born. It's more than the spontaneous joy that comes when they smile at me. It's more than pride I feel when they accomplish something good, and it's more than the pain and the sorrow and sweat that come with a day's labor labored for them and my wife.

Children are a blessing because God became a child to bless us. It is a mystery we will weep over and laugh over, and never understand until this creation stops her groaning in birth pangs and reveals the freedom and glory of the children of God. In the mean time, God grant us humility and courage to live our lives serving one another in the grace of God. Our Heavenly Father forgives us all our sins so graciously for the sake of Christ, His Son. He will be with us in every trial we meet, especially as He promises to bless us with children.

¹⁸ Walter L. Larimore, MD; Joseph B. Stanford, MD, MSPH, *Postfertilization Effects of Oral Contraceptives and Their Relationship to Informed Consent* (http://www.polycarp.org/larimore_stanford.pdf); cf. also, <http://www.epm.org/static/uploads/downloads/bcpill.pdf>.