

GOD’S GREAT BLESSINGS: Procreation and Preborn Children

(Genesis 1:26-28, Part 2)

THAT Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was one of the greatest musicians of all time is a matter that is beyond dispute. However, what is often missed in the retelling of Bach’s life is the recognition of his colossal achievements in the realm of Christian fatherhood. Trained as a boy by his God-fearing father, Ambrosius, who was an extraordinary musician, and being descended from a long line of great musicians who also happened to be mighty men of faith, Sebastian Bach knew the spiritual power of family-based Christian discipleship. He, therefore, took upon himself the weighty responsibilities of both the musical training and the spiritual instruction of his own children.

Sebastian Bach loved children. He also knew the sorrows of the Cross of Christ. He was married twice. His first wife, Maria Barbara, died at the young age of 36, having given birth to seven children, three of whom died in infancy. Bach’s second wife, Anna Magdalena, was sixteen years his junior, but was, despite her youthfulness, a very beloved wife and mother. She gave birth to thirteen children, seven of whom died at early ages.¹ Therefore, Sebastian Bach had a total of twenty children, ten of whom died in infancy or early childhood. He loved a multitude of children; he suffered through the loss of many of them.

Is it not, then, wonderful and awe-inspiring to think of Bach as the father of such a large number of children? Are we not

¹ Hans Conrad Fisher, *Johann Sebastian Bach: His Life in Pictures and Documents* (eds. Christopher Pipe and Tim Dowley; trans. Silvia Lutz; redesigned ed.; Holzgerlinger, Germany: Hänssler Verlag, 2000), 115-116, documents the mournfully short lifespans of Anna Magdalena’s seven children who died at early ages. Two examples suffice to remind us of Sebastian and Anna’s tears: (i) “Christiana Sophia Henrietta, born and baptized in the spring of 1723 at Cöthen, died July 1, 1726, in Leipzig”; and (ii) “Christiana Benedicta, baptized on January 1, 1730, died January 4, 1730, in Leipzig.”

DIVINE HEARTBEAT

mesmerized by his mention, in a letter that he sent to an old friend, of his family making music together, with Anna Magdalena and his daughters doing the singing?² With what vivacious music did Bach, his wife, and his children fill his composing room—which was attached to their home in Leipzig? Can we not picture, in our minds, the family gathering in the evening time for a festive hour of doxological music playing? And would not the Bach family’s worship of God have been filled with the instrumental sounds of such virtuoso musicians that it could move a listener to tears of gladness and joy?

Here, then, is one of the critical ways in which the Christian piety of Johann Sebastian Bach indicts the modern Church. Namely, Bach asked God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, to bless him with an overflowing number of children, and, as a wise and pious man, he craved such a blessing. However, the modern Church, in stark contrast to Bach, has, quite capriciously, turned Her back upon the wonderful, worshipful, and even “musical” blessings of bountiful Christian procreation.

The great guilt of the modern Church regarding Her shunning of the blessing of God in procreation can thus be illustrated by Bach’s own family. For, it is the modern Church that says, “Smaller families are better.” It is, to Her shame, the modern Church that so audaciously claims that Christian parents have the right, if not the responsibility, to take willful and intentional measures to prevent the conception of children. Yet this attitudinal posture towards Christian procreation is the very antithesis of what brought so much life and joy into the Bach family music room.

Where, then, are today’s Christian proponents of contraception when the opportunity arises to peer, historically, into the family life of Johann Sebastian Bach? What Christian will have the cold-heartedness to claim that one or more of the children in the Bach family music room should never have been conceived?³ Which child should not have been allowed to exist? Is it that shy teenage boy,

² Gregory Wilbur, *Glory and Honor: The Musical and Artistic Legacy of Johann Sebastian Bach* (Nashville, Tennessee: Cumberland House Publishing, 2005), 193.

³ This argument is strengthened by the fact that Anna Magdalena and her surviving children faced poverty and hardship after Bach’s death. Should these extreme financial hardships of Bach’s youngest children have warranted a denial of their right to be conceived?

GOD'S GREAT BLESSINGS

playing the violin next to his beloved father? Is it that beaming young girl, sitting at the harpsichord next to her affectionate mother? Would the Bach “family orchestra” be better off with fewer members?

Would the Lord God really think the music better if several of the players had been denied existence through contraception? Or, is not God *delighted* by the *multitude* of instruments sounding in the Bach family music room, and especially by the instruments of the youngest players—those with the smallest fingers and the squeakiest violins?

There is, therefore, a great hypocrisy afoot in the modern Church, and it is crippling Her Abortion-Abolitionist efforts. This hypocrisy is seen, in glaring fashion, in the case of a “pro-life” married couple who attend church regularly, and who enthusiastically support their local crisis pregnancy center, but who, simultaneously, have only four pairs of hiking boots (one pair for each of them, and one pair for each of their two children) stored away in the garage of their large, extravagant house. They have, through contraception, traded the opportunity to have an over-sized shoe bin filled with ten, fifteen, or even twenty pairs of shoes (the pairs of shoes, of course, represent a large, overflowing number of children), for the greedy prospect of being able to afford their largely self-indulgent lifestyle. They are anti-abortion, to be sure. But they are simultaneously pro-contraception. And in the light of Holy Scripture, this is a great hypocrisy.

Evangelical Christians, in particular, have inherited the sinful practice of contraception from their immediate forefathers. This is now a generational sin, since it is being passed down from one generation of Christians to the next via common practice and bankrupt theological reasoning. Evangelicals have thus *inherited* the sinful culture of contraception that pervades their churches, and so are quite shocked to hear it exposed as sinful, rather than viewed as acceptable and normative. Therefore, the current generation of Evangelicals, if it desires to please God in this matter, must become like Gideon. It must be courageous enough to tear down the “family altar” of contraceptive ideals and practice. And, in order to do so, it must come to understand the intimate relationship between the doctrine of man—especially as man is created in the image of God—and the Lord’s blessing of bountiful procreation in Christian marriage.

DIVINE HEARTBEAT

THE IMAGE OF GOD AND FRUITFULNESS OF THE WOMB

It is most remarkable to note the very special way in which God ties the doctrine of human beings *as created in the image of God* to His love for *a multitude of children*. We have seen, in the previous chapter, that the “image of God” doctrine prohibits abortion, in all cases, on account of Genesis 9:6 (which prohibits the shedding of blood of all image bearers). We have also seen that to be created in the image of God means to possess a sub-rulership in the world (under the divine rulership of Christ), and that this sub-rulership ought to be exercised in defense of preborn children, in order to abolish abortion, and thus work to subdue nations under the good and merciful law of Christ. But there remains one more very important reflection on how the image of God in humanity speaks to the Abortion Holocaust in our world. It involves the inseparable connection between the image of God and the fruitfulness of the womb.

There is, indeed, a very special way in which the image of God in us speaks directly to God’s love for a multitude of children. Positively, the image of God in husbands and wives creates a yearning in their hearts for the maximum fruitfulness of the womb. Negatively, the doctrine of the image of God in Scripture, and especially in Genesis 1:26-28, creates an inseparable link between *the sin of abortion* and *the sin of contraception*.⁴ It affirms God’s love for a multitude of children, and thus commands human fruitfulness—a fruitfulness which both the sin of abortion and the sin of contraception violently destroy.

⁴ The present author writes the following as one who, himself, has had to repent of the sin of employing contraception (in marriage). His journey from seeing non-abortifacient (that is, non-abortion-causing) contraceptives as morally acceptable to seeing them as unbiblical and sinful has been a long and painful one. By God’s loving discipline and grace, he has repented of this sin of contraception. He confesses this sin, publicly, as a way of encouraging his fellow Protestants to consider, with humility and prayer, that freedom from the modern culture of contraception—which we, as Protestants, have recklessly immersed ourselves in—is both freedom from sinful bondage and freedom to live life much more abundantly.

GOD'S GREAT BLESSINGS

The Bible is *Contra* Contraception

The image of God is inextricably linked to procreation (the bringing of children into the world). This is the first imperative (i.e. grammatical form of command) in the Hebrew Old Testament, and it is *the first command that God gives to humanity in the Bible*. The image of God and procreation go together. They are not to be divided from one another:

God created man in His own image. In God's image He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them. God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:27–28)

This command of procreation is repeated to Noah after the global flood has decimated the global human population and reduced it to eight people. Noah, his wife, their sons, and their wives, are commanded to be fruitful and multiply:

God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and [fill] the earth." (Genesis 9:1)

The procreative command is thus a timeless, trans-cultural one. It is given to Adam and Eve. It is reaffirmed and reapplied to Noah, well before the time of the Mosaic Law. It is thus a command that is given to all of humanity, at all times in human history.

Furthermore, it must be observed that the command to be fruitful and multiply, through childbearing, is *never rescinded in the Bible*. It is always upheld in Scripture, from Genesis through Revelation. The Bible, from cover to cover, views all children as blessings from God. It never once suggests that large families, with a dozen or more children, are a burden to society or a hindrance to mission work. To the contrary, the Bible describes large families, the ones with many

DIVINE HEARTBEAT

children, as those who have received the special blessing of God.⁵ It also describes nations that have vast multitudes of youngsters as nations whom God has blessed:

I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you. Kings will come out of you. (Genesis 17:6)

And,

The children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them. (Exodus 1:7)

Two consecutive Psalms, 127 and 128, speak loudly about this truth of an increase of blessings that comes with an increase of the number of one's own children:

Behold, children are a heritage of the LORD. The fruit of the womb is [a] reward. As arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. They will not be disappointed when they speak with their enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3–5)

Your wife will be as a fruitful vine, in the innermost parts of your house; your children like olive plants, around your table. Behold, thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD. (Psalm 128:3–4)

⁵ The opposite of this, however, is not necessarily true. Parents who are unable to conceive any, or many children, or parents who have seen many of their children die at very young ages, are not, therefore, lacking the blessing of God. Actually, the Bible describes many righteous parents who desperately desire an abundance of children, but who are unable to have them, as being amongst some of the most blessed people in all of human history. Those who fear God, but nevertheless face barrenness or bereavement, are given this unique (albeit extremely pain-soaked) trial as a sign of their special relation to God. For particular examples of this, see: Genesis 18:10; 25:21; 29:31; Exodus 1:21; 2:9; Judges 13:2; Ruth 4:16-17; 1 Samuel 1:10 (and following); 2 Samuel 12:24-25; 1 Kings 17:23; 2 Kings 2:21; 4:16-17; Esther 2:7; Job 1:18-19; Psalm 113:9; Isaiah 7:14; 49:20-21; 54:1; Jeremiah 31:15-17; Hosea 1:8-10; Luke 1:5-7; 7:12-14; Hebrews 11:11.

GOD'S GREAT BLESSINGS

This is true of God's blessing upon Israel, and, specifically, upon those who fear Him, before the exile of the Jews in Babylon. But it is also true of the remnant who will return to Jerusalem after the exile:

I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and multiply. (Jeremiah 23:3)

Moreover, lest all of these biblical evidences concerning God's command for us to be fruitful and multiply through procreation be brushed aside as being "Old Covenant" in nature, and thus no longer binding in the New Covenant age, the words of the Apostle Paul must give us pause. Paul, the great missionary to the Gentiles, *does not* permit the use of "birth control," not even in the name of adapting the Gospel to the host cultures of the Gentiles (who, in his day, regularly practiced various forms of contraception).⁶ To the contrary, Paul simply reaffirms the Genesis 1:28 command to procreate in marriage:

Let no one be enrolled as a widow under sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, being approved by good works, if she has brought up children, if she has been hospitable to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, and if she has diligently followed every good work.
(1 Timothy 5:9–10)

⁶ Paul's mention of the sin of "sorcery" (Greek *pharmakeia*) in Galatians 5:20, following the sins of "adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry..." may well be a reference to the common use of certain potions and drugs, the likes of which certainly included both contraceptive drugs and abortifacients. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that the *Didache* (see *Didache* 2.2, in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* [ed. and rev. Michael W. Holmes; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999], 253), one of our oldest extra-biblical Christian documents, says, "...you shall not abort a child or commit infanticide," *immediately after* it commands, "...you shall not engage in sorcery [*pharmakeia*]." Also, Minucius Felix (2nd Century AD), in his *Octavius* 30 (*ANF* 4.192), describes "some women who, *by drinking medical preparations*, extinguish the source of the future man in their very bowels, and thus commit a parricide before they bring forth" (emphasis added).

DIVINE HEARTBEAT

Also,

I desire therefore that the younger widows marry, bear children, [manage] the household, and give no occasion to the adversary for insulting.
(1 Timothy 5:14)

The image of God in us summons our hearts to respond obediently to God's command to be fruitful and multiply. Every father and mother ought to desire as many children as God will allow them to have.⁷ That is, the image of God in us compels us towards abundant multiplication. We are to trust that God will provide all of our needs in Christ Jesus as we continue to ask Him to give us more and more children. In this way, we are to "*fill the earth*" with more and more image bearers (Genesis 1:28).

But what happens when men and women decide to sever the image of God in them from the command to procreate in marriage? What happens when Christians, especially, use contraception to prevent procreation, seeking to limit the number of children that they bring into the world? What happens when believers divorce intimacy in marriage (their one-flesh-ness) from God's desire for believing children?

*Did He not make you one, although He had the [remnant] of the Spirit?
Why one? He [seeks] godly offspring.... (Malachi 2:15)*

Contraception opens wide the door for abortion. Mother Teresa, in her famous speech at the 1994 National Prayer Breakfast in Washington D.C., spoke of a "living love" that husbands and wives ought to have for each other. She then said, "Once that living love is

⁷ The Bible does explain a very limited numbers of cases in which abstinence is required in marriage, at least for a time. Uriah the Hittite, for example, was righteous in his decision not to be intimate with his wife (and thus to abstain) while his spiritual/military duty beckoned him to stay focused on "*the ark, Israel, and Judah*" who were at that time "*staying in tents*" on the battlefield (2 Samuel 11:11). There are times, then, for abstinence in marriage. When a spouse is sick, wounded, grieving, or frail, or when both spouses agree to a limited season of deprivation and prayer (1 Corinthians 7:5), abstinence in marriage is required. But abstinence in marriage should never be used as a form of birth control. And intimacy in marriage should never be severed from *the desire to beget children*.

GOD'S GREAT BLESSINGS

destroyed by contraception, abortion follows very easily.”⁸ Mother Teresa was thus very wise in her ability to see the connection between contraception and abortion.

The truth is that when human beings willfully violate the command to “*be fruitful and multiply*” and to “*fill the earth*” (Genesis 1:28), they give rise to their sin nature’s (that is the nature that they inherited from Adam’s sin) inclination to destroy children. Instead of always viewing children as a blessing, humanity has been taught, by Satan, to view an overabundance of children as a burden. On large societal levels, people speak of there being too many children to feed, and thus a social responsibility towards population control. On smaller, family-unit levels, parents think that good parenting involves spoiling their children with an excess of material belongings, expensive athletic and extra-curricular programs, exotic vacations, constant entertainments, and costly college educations. They, therefore, conclude that large families are impractical. And, on individual, husband-and-wife levels, our culture has taught married couples that having more than two or three children (or, perhaps, six as a maximum for a wealthy family) would rudely intrude upon their self-centered concepts of recreational sex (that is, marital intimacy without procreative responsibility), social freedom, financial security, vocational ambition, and personal hobbies and enterprises.

Contraception points in a direction opposite that of the Bible. The arrow of fruitfulness and multiplication, whose sharp tip is forged by God in Genesis 1:28, points consistently throughout the Bible towards Christian homes that are “filled” with large numbers of children. It points towards churches “filled” with children, and towards nations “filled” with children. But contraception is a poisonous arrow that points in the very opposite direction. It points towards households, churches, and societies that are no longer “filled” full and overflowing with children.

Here, then, is the frightening connection between contraception and abortion. History tells us, very plainly, that whenever societies

⁸ In saying this, however, Mother Teresa was, as a loyal member of the Roman Catholic Church, advocating Natural Family Planning as an alternative to contraception. But Natural Family Planning is simply another form of contraception (albeit a less sinful form of contraception, since it at least leaves room for God to override the planned prevention) because it intentionally prevents the fruitfulness of the womb. It, too, is a sinful violation of the image of God in us.

DIVINE HEARTBEAT

untether sexual intimacy from the desire to procreate within the holy confines of marriage, which is exactly what contraception does, there always follow *unwanted children*. And where there are unwanted children, there are bound to be *abortions*.⁹ This was true in ancient Greece and ancient Rome. It is true today in such unthinkable quantities of occurrences that we must cover our eyes, in dismay, on account of it.

A nation whose husbands and wives do not desire to “fill” their homes towards overflowing with children will inevitably “fill” its land with the blood of children. Once the image of God in us is severed, by sin, from our created duty and privilege of bountiful procreation, humans begin to “fill” God’s earth not with children, but with the blood of the preborn, and the blood of infants:

Because they have forsaken Me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it to other gods, that they did not know, they and their fathers and the kings of Judah; and have filled this place with the blood of innocents, and have built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons in the fire for burnt offerings to Baal; which I did not command, nor spoke it, neither came it into my mind: therefore, behold, the days [of judgment] come....
(Jeremiah 19:4–6a)

⁹ The argument here is not of logical necessity. The use of non-abortifacient contraception does not logically necessitate the practice of abortion. There are, for example, many advocates of contraception who are vehemently opposed to abortion. The argument here, however, concerns the attitudinal shift that contraception brings about. If God has created intimacy in marriage in such a way that it should *never* be severed from the desire to procreate (and here we note that the Puritan pastor Richard Baxter points out for us that married couples who are intimate beyond the age of childbearing do not violate the underlying God-ordained conjugal desire to procreate), which is the historic Christian position, then *any* severing of intimacy in marriage from the desire to procreate produces a spiritual mindset that is counter to Genesis 1:28, and this spiritual mindset *necessarily undervalues children*. (For example, the question must be asked, “What ‘greater good’ can result from the use of contraception, a ‘greater good’ which, itself, outweighs the bringing of a brand new child into the world?”). The spiritual mindset produced by the practice of contraception creates a category of “unwanted children.” It is this category of “unwanted children,” in turn, that opens wide the door for abortion. (Or, to put the argument another way, Christians violate Genesis 1:28 whenever they decide that they, themselves, have the right to determine the “blessedness” [either in relation to themselves or in relation to the broader world] of their particular family size, instead of trusting God’s Word and providence for His own blessed determination of the fruitfulness of the womb).

GOD'S GREAT BLESSINGS

Contraception Condemned throughout Church History

This explains why all of the giant men of faith of church history (prior to the great Protestant compromise beginning in the 1930's)¹⁰ have associated the sin of abortion very closely with the sin of contraception. The anti-child mindset of both practices is an anti-life mindset. In the end, both practices are anti-God ones.

The quotes from church history about contraception are numerous, unified, and shocking to the contemporary ear. Hippolytus (c. AD 170-236), who was one of the greatest early pastors in Rome,¹¹ says of contraceptive drugs: "Whence [unmarried] women, reputed believers, began to *resort to drugs for producing sterility*, and to gird themselves round, so to expel what was being conceived...Behold, into how great impiety that lawless one [the heretic Callistus] has proceeded, by inculcating adultery and murder at the same time!"¹² Hippolytus here equates both abortion *and contraception* with "murder," which is a unified line of thought throughout church history. The intentional prevention of conception is seen as "murder" in the sense that it seeks to prohibit a particular human being, an image bearer, from coming into existence.

¹⁰ For the very disturbing story of how Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, used a combination of anti-Roman Catholic fear tactics and the propagation of "soft eugenics" to win mainline Protestant pastors over to her cause, see Allan Carlson, "Margaret Sanger Divides the Christians" in *Godly Seed: American Evangelicals Confront Birth Control, 1873-1973* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 79-112.

¹¹ The spiritual lineage of Hippolytus is significant. A. Cleveland Coxe, "Introductory Notice to Hippolytus," in *ANF* 5.7, says, "Hippolytus was a disciple of St. Irenaeus, St. Irenaeus of St. Polycarp, St. Polycarp of [the Apostle] John."

¹² Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Heresies* 9.7 (*ANF* 5.131), emphasis added.

DIVINE HEARTBEAT

The severe warnings from our spiritual fathers continue.¹³ In line with Hippolytus, John Chrysostom also equates contraception with murder: “Why sow where the ground makes it its care to destroy the fruit? Where there are many *efforts at sterility*? Where there is *murder before the birth*? ...For I have no name to give it, since it does not take off the thing born, but *prevent[s] its being born*.”¹⁴

During the Protestant Reformation, contraception was universally condemned. Martin Luther (1483-1546), the Father of the

¹³ Augustine of Hippo (354-430), does, disappointingly, make himself unique in church history by wavering on the actual personhood of a newly conceived baby in the womb. While still remaining opposed to all forms of abortion from conception onwards, he is nevertheless too heavily influenced by the Aristotelian tradition of Greek philosophy in his theory of developmental ensoulment; the rest of the early Church Fathers see the baby, from conception onwards, as fully alive and possessing a soul. (See the *Appendix* for quotations from the early Church Fathers on all forms of abortion as murder). Nonetheless, Augustine, in his *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 1.17 (NPNF¹ 5.270-71), has very serious things to say against the use of contraception in marriage: “They who resort to these [i.e. wrong desires and contraception], although called by the name of spouses, are really not such; they retain no vestige of true matrimony, but pretend the honorable designation as a cloak for criminal conduct. ...Sometimes, indeed, this lustful cruelty, or, if you please, cruel lust, resorts to such extravagant methods as to use poisonous drugs to secure barrenness [i.e. contraception]; or else, if unsuccessful in this, to destroy the conceived seed by some means previous to birth [i.e. abortion]. ...Well, if both parties alike are so flagitious [grossly wicked], they are not husband and wife; and if such were their character from the beginning, they have not come together by wedlock but by debauchery. But if the two are not alike in such sin, I boldly declare either that the woman is, so to say, the husband’s harlot; or the man, the wife’s adulterer.”

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans* 24 (NPNF¹ 11.520). Curiously, the translators of Chrysostom’s Romans homilies in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* series decided to substitute “abortion” for “sterility” in their English text. However, the Greek text reads, *entha polla ta atokia*, where *atokia* clearly means contraceptive “sterility.” For definitions of *atokios* as “a drugged beverage to produce barrenness” and “contraceptive...causing barrenness...medicine for causing it,” see, respectively: James Donnegan, *A New Greek and English Lexicon* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Co., 1840), 270; and Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (rev. and new ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 1:271. Note also the following quote in Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew* 28 (NPNF¹ 10.194): “...that which is sweet, and universally desirable, the having of children, they esteem grievous and unwelcome: many at least with this view have even paid money to be childless, and have maimed their nature, not only by slaying their children after birth, but by not suffering them even to be born at all.”

GOD'S GREAT BLESSINGS

Reformation, speaks of contraception with exceptional vehemence. He says that there are “many people” in his day “who do not want to have children,” a situation which he describes as “worse than barbarous.”¹⁵ He further says that, in his day, “most married people do not desire offspring,” which makes them “more wicked than even the heathen themselves.”¹⁶ They sin against the truth that “the purpose of marriage is not to have pleasure and to be idle but to procreate and bring up children. This, of course, is a huge burden full of great cares and toils. But you have been created by God to be a husband or a wife and that you may learn to bear these troubles.”¹⁷ He continues, “Those who have no love for children are swine, stocks, and logs unworthy of being called men or women; for they despise the blessing of God, the Creator and Author of marriage.”¹⁸ In sum, speaking of God’s command to have a multitude of children in the home, Luther says that “it is inhuman and godless to have a loathing for offspring.”¹⁹

John Calvin (1509-1564), another Reformation giant, is no less grave about the sin of contraception. Describing the sin of Onan in Genesis 38 as, at least in part, a sin of contraception, Calvin says:

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 on 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. This impiety is especially condemned, now by the Spirit through Moses’ mouth, that Onan, as it were, by a violent abortion, no less cruelly than filthily cast upon the ground the offspring of his brother, torn from the maternal womb. Besides, in this way he tried, as far as he was able, to wipe out a part of the human race. If any woman ejects a [preborn baby] from her womb by drugs, it is reckoned a crime incapable of expiation and deservedly Onan incurred upon himself the same kind of punishment, infecting the earth by his

¹⁵ Martin Luther, Commentary on Genesis 2:18, *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 1:118.

¹⁶ Martin Luther, qtd. in Charles D. Provan, *The Bible and Birth Control* (Monongahela, PA: Zimmer Printing, 1989), 34.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

DIVINE HEARTBEAT

semen, in order that Tamar might not conceive a future human being as an inhabitant of the earth.²⁰

Calvin thus draws the same condemnation upon contraception as he does upon abortion. The two are inextricably linked in his mind.

The list could go on and on.²¹ Up until the 1930's, all God-fearing and biblical Christians condemned the practice of contraception. Richard Baxter, one of Protestantism's finest pastors, says, "Another duty of husbands and wives is cohabitation and (where age prohibiteth not) a sober and modest conjunction *for procreation*."²² John Owen (1616-1683), one of the greatest of the Puritans, speaks of "conjugal duties" in marriage needing to be "subservient unto the due ends of marriage," which include "...the procreation of children."²³ And much later on, Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952), the posthumously renowned expositor, asserts that marriage "results in virgins becoming mothers," that "the propagation of children is the 'normal' end of marriage," and that "...we do not believe in what is termed 'birth control.'"²⁴

If church history is a courtroom, then there is a great cloud of witnesses testifying in this courtroom to the inseparable link between abortion and contraception, and also to the mandate of fruitfulness within Christian marriage. The concept of severing intimacy in marriage from the desire to fill our homes, overflowing, with children is unthinkable to the great men and women of church history. And, the very idea that a Christian may be pro-contraception (which means, literally, "positively-for-being-against-conception"), on the

²⁰ John Calvin, qtd. in *ibid.*, 15. Note that Calvin's anti-contraception exposition of Genesis 38:10 is *curiously omitted* in all of the modern editions of his commentary on Genesis.

²¹ For an impressive list of the giants of church history who are strongly opposed to contraception, see Bryan C. Hodge, *The Christian Case Against Contraception: Making the Case from Historical, Biblical, Systematic, and Practical Theology & Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 35-38.

²² Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter: with a Life of the Author, and a Critical Examination of His Writings* (ed. Rev. William Orme; London: James Duncan, 1830), 7:119, emphasis added.

²³ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (ed. Rev. William H. Gould; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1862), 24:405.

²⁴ Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, on Hebrews 13:4 (chapter 108), n.p. [cited: 25 March 2013]. Online: http://www.pbministries.org/books/pink/Hebrews/hebrews_108.htm.

GOD'S GREAT BLESSINGS

one hand, and “pro-life,” on the other, is more than just an oxymoron to them. It is a moral outrage.

The Image of God is *Pro Procreation*

The Bible commands us: “*Be fruitful and multiply*” (Genesis 1:28). It depicts families with more than a dozen children as having a great and abundant blessing from God. The Bible describes the birth of a child as one of the greatest joys in life. Jesus even compares childbirth to the joy of His own resurrection from the dead (John 16:21-22)! It is no wonder, then, that Martin Luther calls procreation “the greatest work of God.”²⁵

Our modern world is obsessed with money. We think that our perceived need for financial security prevents us from having houses that are overflowing with children.²⁶ This is an anti-Bible attitude. It cuts against the grain of Matthew 6:31-33:

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What will we eat?”, “What will we drink?” or, “With what will we be clothed?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first God’s Kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well.

The Bible delights in large families. When the book of 1 Chronicles says that “*God gave to Heman fourteen sons and three*

²⁵ Luther, Commentary on Genesis 2:18, *Works*, 1:118.

²⁶ Luther, in his Commentary on Genesis 30:2, *Works*, 5:332, confronts the sin of using contraception in order to avoid financial hardships in the home: “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 this 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.”

DIVINE HEARTBEAT

daughters” (25:5),²⁷ God announces this to us, through Scripture, with holy glee. The Bible describes the man Heman, with seventeen children, as a man richly blessed by his Creator. Also, righteous Job, whose previous blessings, once lost, are eventually restored to him in abundance, fathers a total of *twenty children*. This large number of children is portrayed in the book of Job as a great blessing from God (1:2; 42:13). In fact, as has been shown already, all throughout the Bible a multitude of children is seen to be a great blessing from God.

This means that even married church pastors and married Christian missionaries, who oftentimes speak of needing to limit their family sizes for the “greater good” of doing “the Lord’s work,” need to be sharply rebuked by the Jesus of Scripture:

Allow the little children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for God’s Kingdom belongs to such as these. (Luke 18:16)

There is no “greater good” for Christian married couples than the procreation of Christian offspring. Susanna Wesley knew this. She was, herself, the twenty-fifth of twenty-five children in her family. Therefore, giving birth to nineteen children was simply natural and biblical for her. Though she lost nine of them as infants—the sufferings of Christ were not foreign to her—she kept on obeying God’s command to procreate. Her *fifteenth* child was John, and her *eighteenth* child was Charles (who was born prematurely and barely survived infancy). John and Charles Wesley would grow up and help spark one of the most important revivals in all of British history, and their preaching would have a great impact on the First Great Awakening in America. However, had Susanna Wesley chosen financial security (the family faced hard financial circumstances at times) over obedience to Genesis 1:28, John and Charles Wesley would never even have been conceived.

God delights in a multitude of children. The greatest joy of Christian marriage is the bringing of godly offspring into the world. In the fruitfulness of the womb, there is great power. We, as Christians, will not change the world by getting fancier graduate degrees and amassing more and more material possessions. We will, like Moses’ parents, change the world for the sake of righteousness

²⁷ The present author is indebted to the ministry of Matt Trehwella, founder of Missionaries to the Preborn, for this insight.

GOD'S GREAT BLESSINGS

only by seeing the eternal worth of procreation for what it really is. God chooses not to save the world through “wise” and “powerful” adults. Rather, He chooses to save the world through little children.

THE IMAGE MARRED, THE IMAGE RESTORED

All babies, from conception onwards, bear the image of God. Therefore all human beings, in whatever capacities of rulership with which they have been endowed by God, are to work for the protection and nurture of all preborn children in the womb. Moreover, since the image of God includes the mandate of human fruitfulness, there should never be a separation within marriage between the desire for physical intimacy and the desire for more and more children. All pregnancies should be welcomed with mirthful wonder and awe. The idea of a married couple having an “unwanted” child, or choosing to limit the number of children that they bring into the world, should be anathema.

Yes, but now we see just how badly we have marred the image of God in us. It is not that we have accidentally bumped into the portrait of Christ, the image of God, which is hanging in the gallery of our hearts, thus scuffing it up a bit. No, as humans we have forcefully attacked the portrait. We have spit upon it, thrown refuse at it, and driven nails into it. Abortionists have taken needles to the wombs of pregnant mothers, and knives to the foreheads of preborn babies. Rulers have crafted laws that do not protect these weakest of the weak, but rather enable the mass slaughtering of them. And even parents have joined in this anti-life mentality by denying the blessing of houses filled to the point of overflowing with children, and trading that blessing for the lie of “achieving the greater good” through the use of contraception. In all of these things, we are now a people who are greatly bereaved of children.

Where, then, is hope? Have we marred the image of God in us beyond the point of restoration? Are we so addicted to the anti-child drugs and practices of this world that we may never return to the blessing of God-exalting families and churches, filled with children, again?

There is hope, but only the kind of hope that comes at an infinite price. The virgin Mary conceived a child. He kicked inside of Mary's womb. He was *the* Image of God in Mary's womb. After He

DIVINE HEARTBEAT

was born, He grew up into adulthood. He was *the* Image of God in the world. When people looked upon His face, they saw God.

Yet sinful humanity hated this Image of His Father. They hated His exposure of their sins. They despised His life of perfect holiness and perfect justice. Instead of worshipping Him, as God in the flesh, they attacked Him and beat Him:

Just as multitudes were appalled at Him, so His appearance was marred beyond that of a man, and His form beyond that of the sons of men.
(Isaiah 52:14)²⁸

The horror of human sin is that it attacks Jesus, who is *the* Image of God. He is not merely a portrait of His Father in Heaven. Rather, His flesh is the actual, living Image of His Father. And yet we, sinful humans, attacked that Image. The Jews plotted against Him and betrayed Him with lies. The Romans flogged Him and beat His face until it was so bloodied and abused as to be unrecognizable. Together, they spit upon and mocked the very Son of God.

This is the only hope of “image restoration” within us, and it comes at infinite cost. Jesus has been crucified for our sins. His blood, alone, can cover over all of the sins of abortion in our world. His sacrificial death, in our stead, is the only thing powerful enough to grant forgiveness to those who have had abortions—who have murdered their own offspring—and who are willing to repent of their crimes, and to believe in His name. At the Cross, Mary wept for her Son, whom she carried in the womb. Therefore, at the Cross, weeping mothers, who have been so cruelly betrayed by the lies of the abortionists, can find forgiveness for their sins.

Yet there is more. The hope of the Gospel is brighter still. Not only can the sins of abortion and the anti-child practice of contraception be forgiven at the Cross of Christ, but we must also believe and know that He has been raised from the dead! The body of Christ, the very Image of God, has been raised to life!

Therefore, since Christ is raised from the dead, we know that we, too, shall be raised from the grave: *“But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterwards those who are Christ’s at His Coming”* (1 Corinthians 15:23). Yet *“those who are Christ’s at His Coming”* also includes the precious, preborn children of the Abortion Holocaust.

²⁸ The present author’s translation.

GOD'S GREAT BLESSINGS

They shall be raised from the grave! Their bodies shall be rescued from the grave, and they shall live, everlastingly, with new and resurrected bodies in Heaven! The babies of the Abortion Holocaust shall be raised to everlasting life!

This also means that the image of God in us, which our sin has so horribly marred, can be restored to spiritual perfection in Heaven. The resurrected Christ is *the Image of God*, once crucified, now restored to eternal perfection. Therefore, we, too, can have the image of God within us revived and restored. We, who are born of the Holy Spirit and thus know Christ, are *“predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers”* (Romans 8:29). Since we have *“borne the image of [the man of dust],”* we also will *“bear the image of [the Man of Heaven]”* (1 Corinthians 15:49). We have taken off the old man, with its cravings for sins, and we *“have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge after the image of his Creator”* (Colossians 3:10). God works in us, through the Gospel of His Son Jesus Christ, to restore His image in us. And He who began a good work of image restoration in us, will see it all the way to completion on the Day of Christ Jesus.

To be human, then, is to be created in the image of God. It is to see all preborn children as created in God's image. It is, also, to desire the overflowing fruitfulness of the womb, for the glory of God. Yet most importantly, to be truly human is to worship Jesus Christ. He, alone, was fully human and fully God. He was the God-man in Mary's womb. He was, therefore, fully human and fully divine upon the Cross. And He was proved to be fully human and fully God through His bodily resurrection from the dead. *The Image of God*, Jesus our Lord, ascended into Heaven. *The Image of God*, the Lord Christ, shall return on the clouds in great glory. Thus to be truly human, created in the image of God, is to see the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, to reflect that glory into the world, and thus to worship Him forever:

But we all, with unveiled face, reflecting as a mirror²⁹ the glory of the Lord, are [being] transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

²⁹ This is Chrysostom's understanding of *katoptrizō* in his *Homilies on 2 Corinthians* 7 (NPNF¹ 12), 313.