

# **No Baby No Cry**

## **Christian Antinatalism**

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***For spiritual babes who want to have babies.***

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# Introduction

This book is for Christians, if you don't wear that label, trust me, this isn't for you. However if you do, then I very much hope you will read it - it doesn't really matter if you already have children, plan to have children or can't have children - the issues may be more relevant for some, but they are important for all.

I am going to make highly countercultural arguments relating to one of the most fundamental of human activities; some people will be upset, even angry. In my experience there are two main reasons why people get hot under the collar; either they take departure from convention as a personal criticism, or the argument reveals contradictions in their worldview. So please bear in mind that if you find yourself getting emotional, the problem may be with you.

The reason I am writing this book is because it has become apparent to me that there is a blindness on this subject, not just on the part of Christians but with people in general. All the literature on this subject points in one direction only, this book is the counterargument, the other perspective. This is not an uplifting feel-good book, but it is realistic. For a theologian or pastor to write this would be professional suicide, I do not have this encumbrance.

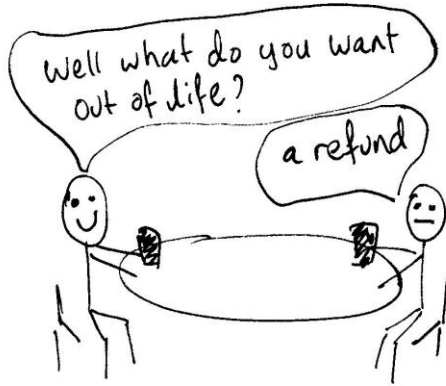
The book is divided into two parts.

## Part 1 - The Natural

Here I make arguments that apply to everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike. We will look at the motivations that lie behind the decision to have children, the consequences of that decision, and why not having children may be considered a more ethical choice. I want the reader to appreciate that everyone has a case to answer when it comes to this issue.

## Part 2 - The Spiritual

This is where I look at things from an exclusively Christian perspective. Comparing the ideas expressed in Christian culture and literature to what the Bible actually says, asking questions about the centrality of family and what the consequences of having children are in the Christian world view. This part of the book is the more important, but I would ask the reader to progress sequentially rather than jumping forward.



# 1. The Natural

Why having children is selfish and ethically dubious.

## 1.1 Choice and Responsibility

Prior to the widespread availability of reliable contraception, having a child was the unavoidable by-product of placating certain natural urges; while technically you could argue there is always a “choice”, a fair minded person would not consider it so. Now that contraception is available, accidents notwithstanding, to have a child is to make a positive decision.

Generally when a person takes an action which has implications for themselves or others, the onus is on them to justify the action.

For example; if I own a plot of land and wish to build a house on it, I need to apply for planning permission. I must explain my intentions in detail so they can be assessed with regard to their impact on others. Alternatively, if I wish to leave my plot of land empty, obviously no justification is required.

*Each side takes the position of the man who was arrested for swinging his arms and hitting another in the nose, and asked the judge if he did not have a right to swing his arms in a free country. “Your right to swing your arms ends just where the other man’s nose begins.” (Zechariah Chafee)*

Strangely when it comes to procreating, exactly the opposite seems to be the case; couples who do not have children are questioned, procreators get an automatic green flag - a pat on the back from friends and relatives, plus tax breaks from the government. I have even heard it described as “giving the gift of life”.<sup>1</sup>

For now I only make two points;

- 1) At the present time having children is (usually) a choice.
- 2) The people making that choice are obligated to justify it.

You may find yourself wondering who the injured party might be, don’t worry, we shall come onto that, but first a little detour into the minds of the protagonists.

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<sup>1</sup> The Gift of Life – See Appendix

## A Brief History of Contraception

Plants with contraceptive properties were used in Ancient Greece from the 7th century BC onwards and documented by numerous ancient writers on gynaecology, such as Hippocrates.

Restrictive legislation on birth control was continually employed by European governments throughout the period of mercantilism (16th to late-18th centuries) and formed the backbone of the populationist strategy of this era. The mercantilists argued that a large population was a form of wealth, making it possible to create bigger markets and armies.

Birth control was a contested political issue in Britain during the 19th century. Malthusians were in favour of limiting population growth and therefore promoted birth control through organisations such as the Malthusian League, while the idea was opposed by a variety of groups, for different reasons, from the socialists to the established church.

Contraception was legal in the United States throughout most of the 19th century, but in the 1870s the Comstock Act and various state Comstock laws banned the use of contraceptives.

In 1930 the Anglican Church's Lambeth Conference sanctioned the use of birth control by married couples. In 1931 the Federal Council of Churches in the U.S. issued a similar statement. The Roman Catholic Church responded by issuing the encyclical *Casti Connubii* affirming its opposition to all contraceptives, a stance it has never reversed.

By the 1950's numerous pharmaceutical companies were work on the oral contraceptive pill.

In 1965, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in the case *Griswold v. Connecticut* that a Connecticut law prohibiting the use of contraceptives violated the "right to marital privacy". In 1972, the case *Eisenstadt v. Baird* expanded the right to possess and use contraceptives to unmarried couples.

In the UK contraception has been available, free of charge, under the National Health Service since 1974.

## 1.2 Why do People have Children Anyway?

Since I started considering this topic, as the situation allowed, I have made it my business to ask people who have chosen to have children what their reasons and motivations were. Occasionally I got something unusual, however for the most part a clear pattern emerged with the reasoning falling into the following buckets:

- 1) Fulfilling emotional needs (usually women), typically;

*Babies are lovely.*

*Since I was young, it's what I've always wanted.*

*Having a family completes you.*

*I wanted someone to love, nurture etc.*

- 2) Self actualisation / Social proof (men and women);

*Being a parent is a great experience, you learn a lot about yourself, etc.*

*It seemed like the right time to start a family.*

*It's better [for me] to have more people like me around.*

*I did not achieve much, my children will achieve more.*

*It makes your old age better.*

- 3) Grasping at immortality (always men);

*I will live on through my genes.*

*I will live on through my ideas.*

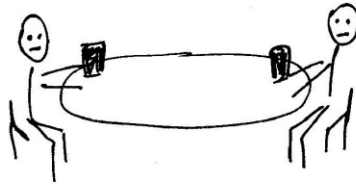
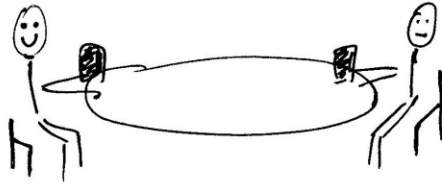
For every reason given above, ask the question, who is the beneficiary?

Contrary to being an altruistic act, deserving of our praise and congratulation, people have children because it makes **their** lives better. And, yes, creating a person because you “need someone to love” is selfish, however “right” it might feel to you.

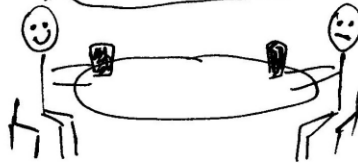
There are rationales that could be given which would not be selfish and one person I spoke to did actually manage it, however the overwhelming motivation for having children seems to come from a desire to improve the parent's life.



the purpose of life is to have children... and for those children to have children and so on...



Last man standing wins a toaster



While we are here, it is worth pointing out that although buckets 1 and 2 are selfish, bucket 3 is both selfish and false. Sure, some bits of the instruction set for your body (after random scrambling and recombination) will be present in your children, but that is in no way “you”, do yourselves a favour and get a book on genetics. Your cherished ideas are also heading for the waste bin, and it’s just as well, if ideas could be inherited in the way you imply then we’d still believe the earth was flat. I’m sorry but the notion that you can live on vicariously through your children is a vain hope indeed.

Let’s summarise the story so far;

- 1) People who choose to have children are obligated to justify that choice.
- 2) Reasons given for having children almost all centre on improving the lives of the parents in some way, i.e. are selfish.

Of course nothing I have said so far demonstrates that it is unethical to have children, sure the motivations are selfish, but could it not be the case that a selfish act is nevertheless beneficial for all concerned?

*"It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages." (Adam Smith)*

So where exactly lies the harm in having children?

## 1.3 The Gamble

How could something so natural be unethical? Quite easily, but first of all let's get the naturalistic fallacy out of the way because it comes up so often. The naturalistic fallacy is where we point to nature as the yard stick for what is moral or ethical - if the animals do it, then it must be ok.

Did you know that on starting a relationship with a lioness, a male lion will kill all the lioness' cubs? Nature doesn't have a say in what is right and wrong. If you have visited the zoo, you may have seen monkeys peeing into their own mouths, it's probably best not to use animals to define normative behaviour for humans.

"But everybody's doing it", again, it's a fallacy (argumentum ad populum), just because a behaviour is widespread that does not make it ok. Back in the day, slavery was universally practised, the argument was successfully made that the institution was immoral, now it is universally condemned.

So what then specifically is the problem with having children?

**Essentially, you are gambling with someone else's welfare. You do not know if the person you decided to create will have a good life.**

### 1.3.1 The Bad

Your child may be born with a major disability; they may be born mentally retarded, deaf or blind. They may be involved in a car accident, get an illness, catch a disease, suffer from depression, or have some other misfortune with money or love.

Every drunk in the bar, every cancer patient, every drug addict, every beggar you see on the sidewalk was the product of someone's choice. And we have not even considered the harm they may cause to others, the shoplifter, the rapist, the murderer.

In my experience most people are highly committed to wearing rose tinted spectacles, they focus almost exclusively on the good while ignoring the bad. They are glib and dismissive about harm that comes to others; they do not believe harm will come to them, even when statistical evidence contradicts them.

These people are easy to spot - they begin waxing lyrical about holidays and sunsets, as if a genocide, famine and war were somehow balanced out by an ice cream sundae - no doubt this is something of a defence mechanism, acknowledging negative possibilities is not conducive to positive mental states.

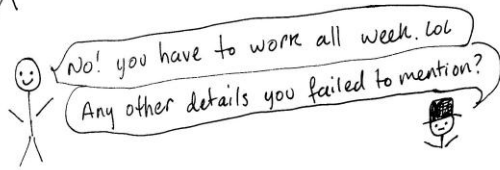
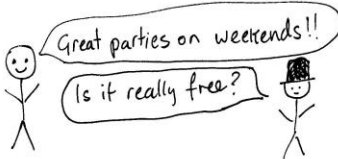
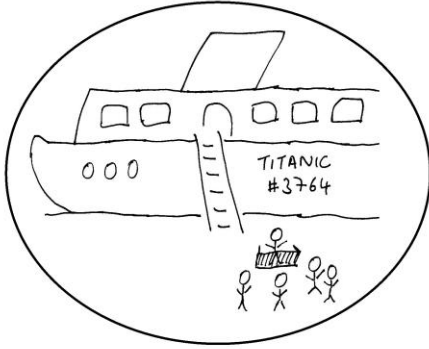
Ignore their words, look to their behaviour, and you will see a tacit admission that the world does hold the possibility of very real harm. A great deal of time, money and energy is expended in harm avoidance, much more than in the pursuit of pleasure.



If you are having difficulty making the connection between real world outcomes and your desire to have children, try looking at the world in a new way. When there are job losses at work, imagine that happening to the child you are so set on having. The ugly divorce is someone's child, both of them. The newscaster announcing a rape, that's someone's baby, both the perpetrator and the victim. The car accident you just drove past, the toilet cleaner on minimum wage, the man in the hospital ward dying of cancer, the casket being lowered into the ground. If I were to provide an exhaustive list it would fill the whole book, but I would rather you made your own - play this game for a week and it will break your rose tinted spectacles - it's not happy but it is honest.

### **1.3.2 The Good**

What can we say about the good things in life? I make this observation - that the majority of "good" experiences are simply the fulfilment of needs. I find a meal satisfying because I am hungry. Recreation alleviates boredom, relationships stave off loneliness, rest placates exhaustion, shelter protects from the cold, and so on. When we procreate, we create a lifetime of further need - a living deficit. To maintain life, these needs must be met, when the needs are not met, the deficit manifests as negative emotional states, i.e. suffering. Not all the "needs" are related to survival, unemployment is not life endangering but can have a profoundly negative psychological effect. Indeed it is to fulfil one of these "needs" that people have children in the first place; if you care to have the conversation with an infertile woman in her late 30s who wants children, you will see the emotional pain is very real. The point is most pleasures do not exist in and of themselves, they are the rectification of a problem, the fulfilment of a need - there is no net gain.





Unconvinced? I would like to suggest another game, on the following page there is an illustration of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, his schema is not exhaustive but it is a good start. For the next week take note of every positive experience you have and try to categorise it according to his schema, most will find a home.

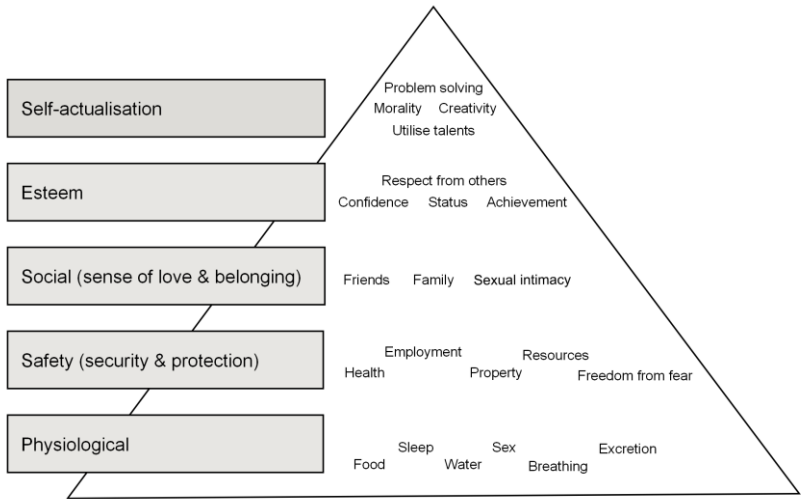
In fairness I think it would be wrong to say all pleasures are exclusively need fulfilment, we can fulfil and then exceed a need. For example water quenches thirst but this need also opens up the possibility of fine wine, a meal at a top restaurant is more than basic hunger alleviation. The pleasure is needs based, but part is bonus, how big that part is and what it is worth I will leave with you. In my estimation these everyday extras are small when compared with the very serious harm open to human beings.

Of course we can imagine fortuitous life events where the bonus part is massive; career achievements beyond all expectations, or winning the lottery for example. I acknowledge these are true positives but they are also very rare. Even in these situations the infliction of a reasonably common harm would be considered weightier than the benefit of the fortuitous event. If you were offered the certainty of winning £1M in the lottery or suffering a car accident such that you were blinded or crippled - which would you chose?

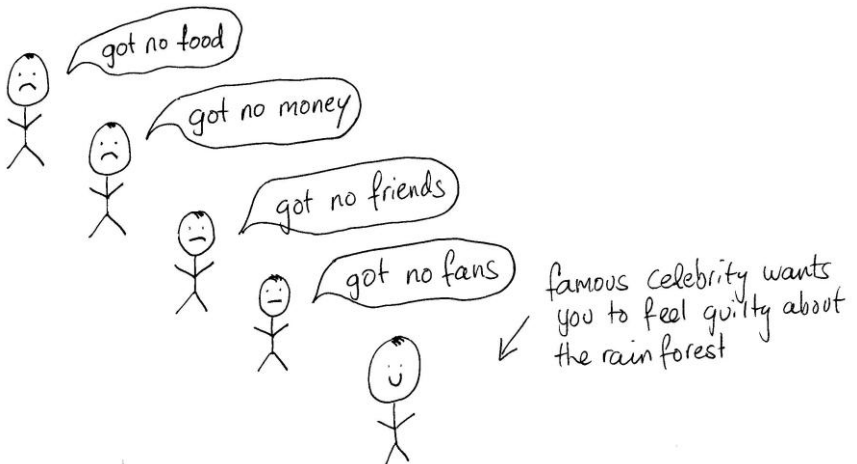
For the purposes of this argument the evaluation of the good in life is redundant, even if you believe that on some cosmic abacus the good and bad somehow balance out, you do not know what the outcome for your child will be. Terrible suffering does occur, and is only possible because of sentience - sentience that you decided to create. What makes you think you have the right to gamble with someone else's welfare?

This is where we are up to;

- 1) Parents make a positive culpable choice to have children.
- 2) They do this to make their own lives better.
- 3) With the possibility of creating a great deal of suffering as a result.



Above: An interpretation of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, represented as a pyramid with the more basic needs at the bottom.



## 1.4 To be or Not to be

We have considered the consequences of having children and why that is ethically problematic, now we need to consider the implications of not having children.

My position is that there is no problem with doing nothing, it is the person taking a positive action, affecting another, who must justify the action. If no child exists, no harm has been done - you do nothing and it stays that way. However I have heard numerous objections to exactly that, I want to address some of these and in the process add something to the argument<sup>2</sup>.

You will notice that these objections all centre around a common thread - the necessity of existence - a gut feeling that existence is good in and of itself, no matter what the experiences of the person. I believe this type of thinking is actually a manifestation of the innate fear of death hardwired into the biology of all human beings. Once a person exists, there is a strong physiological survival drive, an extant human fears death, they fear their own non-existence. For some people the general argument that it would be better for people not to procreate seems to challenge that survival drive, often triggering a strong negative emotional response. Let me be clear - I am not saying you would be better off dead. I am saying that no harm would have been done had you never existed in the first place. You cannot regret not existing if you do not exist.

Let's explore a few of the most common objections:

*Aren't you glad your parents had you?*

Do you see how illogical this question is? If my parents didn't have me, I would not exist and I would not know I did not exist. The person raising such an objection imagines themselves ceasing to exist, i.e. they are conflating their death with never having existed in the first place. Plainly it's nonsense.

*Well if you feel that way, kill yourself.*

Amazingly I have heard this time and time again - it's the product of a strong visceral reaction that left logic streets behind. Again, the rejoinder confuses the ending of an extant life with the life never having come into existence. Suicide - the ending of a life, is in no way comparable to a person never having come into

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<sup>2</sup> Less frequent objections are listed in the Appendix



existence in the first place. Consider the anguish it inflicts on the friends and relatives left behind, and the massive negative momentum required to overcome the person's survival instinct.

*If people took your ideas seriously the human race would end.*

I have to ask, so what? This reaction is yet another play on the same theme, we equate non-existence with our own death, we proxy our individual continued existence for humanity's as a whole. The thought of humanity's extinction fills us with a sense of dread and sadness. But don't let your biology fool you, a thought experiment will demonstrate these fears are irrational;

Do you regret that Mars is currently unpopulated? Probably not, chances are, it never entered your head. Do you mourn for the eons of time when there existed not one man on planet earth? I doubt it. It is a mistake to identify the continuance of the human race with your own, if people stopped having children no harm would be done.

*Well that's just life!*

Yes I know, that is what is under discussion - do we need more of it?

I cannot find a compelling reason for the creation of more life.

Do you imagine a queue of unborn children in the sky desperately waiting to be born?

Even if your child's life is good by Western standards, the best you can hope for is working 5 days a week, some fun on weekends and a couple of holidays a year, ultimately followed by old age, decrepitude and (probably a painful) death. Does the universe need more of this?

The creation of life is not an imperative. There is no logical reason why more sentient existence is better than less in any abstract sense. Rather, it is a very specific preference driven by the biological wiring and desires of the parents with respect to their own life situation. And that allows us to refine the argument;

- 1) Parents make a positive culpable choice to have children.
- 2) They do this to make their own lives better.
- 3) With the possibility of creating a great deal of **unnecessary** suffering as a result.

Some people would like to equate having children with a Forrest Gump box of chocolates *"Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get"*. The problem with the analogy is that all chocolates are pretty good - the reality however is that life can contain very serious harm. A better analogy would be that having children is like playing Russian roulette, with someone else - for your benefit.



## WORKSHEET

- 1) Imagine if you could press a button and each time add 1000 people to the population of China, would you push the button? How many times would you push it?

YES - And I would press the button \_\_\_\_\_ times.

NO - It's just not all that compelling to me.

- 2) Imagine you had the certain ability create 10 perfectly happy people at the push of a button, the only downside being that one person would suffer horribly all their life. Would you push the button, or would you find something else to do?

YES - I would push the button.

NO - I'd rather play scrabble.

## 1.5 Summary

By creating a life we subject that person to the harms of life. People will be hurt, some very badly. It seems to me that the only reason for creating lives is to fulfil psychological (and sometimes material) needs of the parents (and to some degree other relatives). It would take libraries to list the gamut of possible harms, ranging from genetic recombination errors at conception, to the last gasp of the dying. We deploy an array of mental gymnastics to avoid the implications of this truth, yet deep down we all know it at some level.

Contrary to the norms of our society the arrival of a child should be a time for sober reflection not cause for celebration. I will not congratulate people on gambling someone else's welfare in the hopes of improving their own lives.

I suspect most people reading this will hold that their own needs are a good enough reason to have children. If that is you, then I ask you at least acknowledge the self centred nature of the choice, and perhaps when your children are old enough you can explain why you took a flutter on life's roulette wheel.

## 2. The Spiritual

The previous section of this book explored the issue as it applies to everyone, in this section we will take a look at it from a Christian perspective. As you were reading through the previous section you might have found yourself thinking that the arguments against procreation do not apply to Christians, after all, there is no shortage of books and websites extolling the virtues, even the necessity of Christians having children. However by the end of the book you will see that these many voices are mistaken. Rather than ameliorate the issue, the Christian faith makes it more acute.

Bible verses are from the ESV unless indicated otherwise.

## 2.1 Putting Procreation in its Place

This chapter will consider the place of procreation in New Testament theology. Is it the norm? Is it expected? How important is it? Does it have spiritual benefit? How does it relate to marriage? What are the implications for parents and children?

### 2.1.1 Oh won't you have a baby for Jesus?

There is a strong feeling in the Christian community that having children is a highly virtuous undertaking. At the very least it is considered part of the normative Christian experience. The following quotes express the sentiment:

*"Should Christians be fruitful and multiply? I say absolutely. In fact, I would say this: the only instance in which Christians should not seek the gift of children would be in extraordinary ministry circumstances where perhaps having children would be ill-advised or dangerous."* (Daniel Akin, president, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary)

*"Except for those who are called by God to lead a life of singleness, God's ideal is that of a monogamous, lifelong marriage crowned with the gift of children"* (Dr Andreas Kostenburger)

If you browse a large number of similar texts you will find it is common to link marriage and children, in a kind of both or nothing logic, this is as old as the hills;

*"...in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.*

*First, It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name.*

*Secondly, It was ordained for a remedy against sin ....*

*Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society... "*

(Book of Common Prayer, Church of England)

In some parts of the evangelical church there is a positive clamour for more children, perhaps as a reaction to couples waiting longer to get married and then waiting longer again before starting families. Whole books have been written on the subject, I'm looking at one right now entitled "Starting Your Family, Inspiration for having Babies" by Steve and Candice Watters:

*"As believers, we all have the opportunity, and obligation, to cultivate spiritual children - spiritual fruit. But in marriage we are able to produce and reproduce spiritual children biologically."*

I could give a thousand more examples, the internet is packed with the same, I encourage you to go online and find your own. After reading enough of them you will begin to notice recurring themes, sometimes stated explicitly, other times hinted at;

- 1) Child bearing is a spiritual activity that God expects of most Christians.
- 2) Christians having children equals more Christians.
- 3) Your children are a gift from God.
- 4) Marriage is for having children, God means for the two to go together.

These articles often come with various supporting Bible quotes, but you will notice they are exclusively from the Old Testament - there is a reason for this, which we will get to shortly.

## 2.1.2 Bible Confusion

Before we carry on with our subject of baby making, we need to take a big detour - we need to get a basic grasp of how to read the Bible. The truth is that most Christians cannot read the Bible for themselves. Yes they know bits of the Bible, sometimes even off by heart, but they do not understand the whole book as one thing from beginning to end.

### 2.1.2.1 Mediated Memes and Church Culture

The **first** cause of this is that most Bible knowledge Christians have is mediated in some way, they get it via books, sermons, podcasts, radio, television etc. What you get when you listen to a sermon is an interpretation; this is entirely different to studying the text yourself. On top of this, most clergy are too lazy to study the Bible for themselves, they “borrow” their sermons from other preachers - I’ve been around long enough to hear the same sermons regurgitated by different preachers many times. This “recycling” of ideas is what leads to “Church Culture”, a bunch of memes that travel around with Christianity but have no basis in Christ’s teachings.

I will take a risk here and give you an example - if you tell someone you aren’t going to church on a Sunday, there is a very high chance that they will tell you the story of “*the coal taken out of the fire that went cold*” as a means of encouraging you back into church. If you point out to them this story is not from the Bible at all,

they will simply not believe that. This is Church Culture exemplified. If that particular story hasn't yet made an appearance in your life, don't worry it will soon enough.

There are many similar false ideas making the rounds. The problem with getting your Bible via the filter of Church Culture is that you will at best have a superficial grasp of what is going on in the Bible story, this is hardly surprising, after all, you are listening to someone else's interpretation.

### **2.1.2.2 Proof Texting & Fundamentalist Felt Tipped Pens**

The **second** reason that most Christians cannot read the Bible for themselves is less to do with idleness and more to do with mindset. "Fundamentalist" Christians believe that the entire Bible was written to them personally, every verse is read as a literal instruction to themselves, today. Never mind that the text has God talking to Joshua, or Moses or whoever. They go through the Bible looking for "proof texts", which they then diligently underline and memorize. They have no clue what the text actually means in context, but talk to them on an issue and the verses will come tumbling out. That's fine if you are a 12 year old, it's not so hot when you're an adult.

It's interesting that not only do a large number of Christians read the Bible this way, so do most Atheists. I had the misfortune recently of watching a YouTube exchange between a fundamentalist Christian and a diehard Atheist, they were arguing over the Old Testament Law regarding slavery, both argued under the misapprehension that this was something that Christians needed to defend, when clearly the Mosaic Law applies to not one single person alive today.

The problem with reading your Bible this way is that you will always have an incorrect grasp of where we are in God's plan, and be constantly misapplying scripture.

### **2.1.2.3 The Progressive Revelation**

Reading the Bible correctly requires us to recognise certain things:

- 1) Different parts of the Bible were written to different people at different times in different situations.

Very little of the Bible can be applied directly to you as instruction. God said things to Moses that are not meant to be taken in any way literally by you. Do you think God wants you to carry out sacrifices as per the Mosaic Law? Because that would

be outright blasphemy, seeing that the once-and-for-all sacrifice of his Son has now been made.

2) God changes how he relates and who he relates to.

Peter had a hard time with this, in Acts 11 we see him arguing with God - notice Peter is quoting Leviticus - God deals differently with people depending where they sit in the Bible. Your relationship to God is not that of Adam, or Noah, or the Israelites, etc.

3) God's revelation is progressive.

God reveals more of himself as the Bible story unfolds. I am not saying God changes his mind, God's plan has always been fixed, we just have to read verses in the context of his unfolding plan. It is not only that we learn more about God, we also learn more about the final outcome God is aiming at. These outcomes are all present in Genesis 1-2, yet every one of them morphs into something grander as the Bible story moves along.

Because understanding one of these transitions will be crucial for our procreation discussion, I will give two illustrations using unrelated themes.

- a) **The Land.** In Genesis 1-2 Adam is in a garden, the garden is his home. He sins and gets thrown out. But later we meet Abraham, God promises Abraham a land, his descendants get the land, but many of God's other pronouncements are at best only partially fulfilled. They have to wait a significant period of time before God starts hinting (Isaiah) about a transformed earth. The New Testament makes it clear that Christians will inherit the whole earth. At the end of the Bible we have a picture of God's people inhabiting a totally renewed heaven and earth.

That's the progression. It's the same but different, from a garden to a new heavens and a new earth.

- b) You can see the same development with **The Relationship.** Adam loses his relationship with God. But Noah gets something back, well, he gets rescued. Later we get to Moses and the people of Israel, they have something semi-permanent, the Ark and Tabernacle. Later we see the Temple and God's glory descends on it, but it's still an arms-length relationship. Jesus comes along and calls his disciples friends, brothers and sisters. At Pentecost God begins to dwell in his people. By the end of Revelation they see God face to face.



The theme is consistent but the object changes. God's final intention unfolds gradually as the Bible story progresses. We have to be aware of where Bible verses sit in this overarching timeline. If not, we will wrongly read verses to people earlier in the timeline, as instruction to us today.

### **2.1.3 The People**

The definition of God's people similarly changes as we go through the Bible.

We begin with Adam and Eve, thereafter progressing down an exclusive line of descent, through Noah until we get to Abraham. Here things change, God promises to make Abraham into a great nation. This promise is fulfilled physically through Isaac and his descendants, although even at this point there are strong hints that God's final object will not be based on blood lineage. After 400 years the Hebrews are numerous but enslaved, Moses brings them out to mount Sinai and they receive the Law and enter the Land. The primary means by which the people of God were multiplied was having children and raising them in the faith. Notice the overlap of themes; a physical people, a physical land that they conquered, and a covenant that they had to fulfil.

Sometime later, we see in the Wisdom Literature (c.950BC Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) dissatisfaction with the state of things. Many of God's pronouncements are only partially fulfilled or not fulfilled at all. 300 years go by before the prophets speak of further developments down the road (c.650BC Isaiah, Jeremiah).

The events of the New Testament mark a step change in how God relates and to whom he relates. The Kingdom of God switches from a physical nation by descent, to a spiritual nation by supernatural rebirth. Because of this, the people of God are no longer exclusively Jewish but are a Jewish/Gentile composite, consisting of people who have the Holy Spirit. They are sojourners on this earth, awaiting a supernaturally authored new earth. They are in a new covenant, which was supernaturally fulfilled by God working through Christ.

Within that generation, in 70AD God definitively terminates the old order of Nation, Law and Temple. From this point forward the only way to be part of God's people is to be "In Christ".

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, ends with a prophecy of God dwelling "face to face" with his perfected people ruling and reigning over the new earth.

### 2.1.3.1 Misunderstanding and Misapplication

Now that we have an understanding of how the Bible develops we see why so many “proof-texts” for procreation come from the Old Testament. Procreation did play a part in God’s plan for a people, but that no longer applies today.

Let’s look at this in detail, starting with the original sinless creation. Adam and Eve did not have children prior to the fall, but if they did, the children would have been sinless and they would have enjoyed the same intimate relationship with God that Adam and Eve did. It is in this context that Adam and Eve are told to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth.

At the fall of man, this no longer applies. Every child born from that point on inherited Adam’s broken nature. This can be clearly seen just 3 chapters later in Genesis 6 where God drowns almost all of humanity. Prior to the flood in verse 5 God states that:

*The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

In case you thought there was something magical in Noah’s DNA that meant he was exempt from the fallen nature, God repeats this indictment after the flood in Chapter 8 v 21:

*Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood.*

The story of Noah does not end with his victorious exit from the ark. It ends with him getting drunk, naked and passing out in his tent<sup>3</sup>.

When people say that God’s exhortation for Adam and Eve to “multiply and fill the earth” stands for all time, they forget his intention is for a people that reflect his glory. God does not want a multitude of sinful people. God’s reaction to sinful people is not to make more of them, it is to kill them.

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<sup>3</sup> And if I have understood the euphemism correctly – getting sodomised by one of his children.

Despite God's indictment of humanity, he repeats his instruction to "multiply and fill the earth" to Noah. Why is this?

The clue is in Genesis 3:15 you will notice that when God curses the serpent, he states:

*And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will crush your head,  
and you will strike his heel.*

It's enigmatic I will grant you, but within the curse, God is making a promise - the fall that the serpent caused, will be reversed, the offspring (or seed) of the woman will crush the serpent's head.

The theme of the offspring runs right through the Old Testament. This is just the first mention, it crops up again in God's promises to Abraham and David. It is spoken of by the prophets. He will be a king from the tribe of Judah and his kingdom will be eternal.

*Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)*

The offspring is Jesus - that is why your Bible is in two parts, one part is waiting for Jesus and other part is the biography of Jesus and what his life accomplished.

God's intention for a people will not be fulfilled by procreation, but through the life and work of Christ. It is for this reason that procreation was to continue, so that;

*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4)*

It was imperative that God's Old Testament people have children<sup>4</sup>. The same does not apply to you.

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<sup>4</sup> One of the essential links in the lineage of the Messiah was Isaac. This story is often rolled out to give hope to couples having problems conceiving. This is wrong; I will cover Isaac in the Appendix.

The particular individual, through which God's final objective for a people was to be realised, would not be born in isolation. He would be born into a nation that was under the supervision of God. That is physical Israel of the Old Testament, which starts properly with Moses. This nation was maintained and extended through procreation. Indeed the Mosaic covenant contains specific promises of fecundity.

God used this nation as a vehicle of revelation. It was given the law, priests, judges, kings and prophets. 38 out of the 39 books of the Old Testament come out of this context. Jesus does not arrive in a vacuum, he is born into a people who have a long recorded history with God, and an awareness of who God is and how he operates. You can think of the physical nation of Israel as scaffolding used to construct a building, it is necessary, but once the building is complete the scaffolding gets taken down.

The physical nation of Israel was not the final object of God's desire for a people. Even their own history was not for their benefit but so that God's children might learn from them;

*Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 1-11)*

Once Jesus completed his work the nation of Israel was no longer required. Although many Jewish people accepted Jesus as Messiah<sup>5</sup>, the nation as a whole, particularly the religious establishment rejected him. This was foreordained by God, and spoken of by the prophets<sup>6</sup>; Jesus prophesied both his rejection and the end of the nation (Matthew 25). This happened shortly after in 70AD, the temple was destroyed, the people scattered - Israel ceased to exist<sup>7</sup>.

The point is simple - they are not you. The Church is not a physical nation that maintains itself through physical progeny. The Old Testament verses that encourage procreation make sense in their context; they make little sense post Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> Except for Luke/Acts all the New Testament books were written by Jews

<sup>6</sup> Psalms 118:22-23 (see Matthew 21:42-43), Isaiah 8.14, Zech 11.4-14

<sup>7</sup> Some people see the modern day creation of the State of Israel in 1948 as having theological significance. I find that to be a very fanciful reading of scripture. However the issue is not the subject of this book, nor does it relate to the point I am trying to make.

In the New Covenant, people are added to the kingdom of God quite differently to Old Testament Israel - notice the direct contrast to physical procreation:

*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were **born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*** (John 1:10)

*Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** Do not marvel that I said to you, '**You must be born again.**' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:1)*

As you would expect, there are no New Testament verses extolling the virtues or necessity of having children<sup>8</sup>. There are however very many verses indeed about the importance of being born of the Spirit.

## 2.2 The New Birth

The mechanism by which people enter into God's Kingdom today is so central to New Testament thinking that it is talked about at length under various different names, the following are synonymous:

Born of the Spirit,  
The New Birth,  
The Second Birth,  
Regeneration,  
Being In Christ,

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<sup>8</sup> OK, there is one, but it means pretty much the opposite of what most people think it means. I will cover this in the Appendix.

Made Alive In Christ,  
Born Again,  
Spiritual Life,  
Alive in the Spirit,  
The Quickening<sup>9</sup>

As Jesus said, you must be born again. Without this happening in a person's life, they are outside the kingdom of God, they do not have the spirit, and they are not in God's family.

*You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*  
(Romans 8:9)

The how and why of the new birth is important to our discussion about children because there is wishful thinking on the part of many Christian parents that their children will become Christians. Often in discussions with others on this topic, people mention "the Christian hope" in response to my claim that having children is essentially gambling with the possibility that someone else will experience great harm.

Clearly if it were possible to guarantee your children's salvation then their life could not be "bad" in any ultimate sense that mattered, it could only be very good indeed. The entire argument presented in this book would fall apart and Christians should have as many children as possible.

However it is not true. You do not know if your child will be a Christian.

The consequences of being outside the family of God are somewhat unclear. This is complicated because of how the word "hell" has come about in English translations and because metaphors are employed around the concept. There are two credible views:

- 1) Some hold "annihilationism" or "conditional immortality", which say that God will eventually destroy the wicked.
- 2) The orthodox view is eternal damnation.

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<sup>9</sup> Yes really, if you read the old KJV. This term was ruined by a 1986 movie starring Sean Connery; let us never speak of it again.

If you hold eternal damnation, then having children is a very grave business indeed. You are gambling with infinite stakes.

## 2.2.1 Understanding the New Birth

Now that we have covered the essential part the new birth plays in salvation, let's look at it in more detail.

*... he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

John here distinguishes between true and false views of the new birth. I do not believe the list of false views is exhaustive; rather John is just picking three ideas that were around at the time. The main point John is making is that the new birth is something God does, not something to do with man.

### 2.2.1.1 The Flesh

Some Christians, no doubt because they love their children and want some assurance, have bought into the idea that where both parents are Christian, the children will also be Christian. Similar sentiments are expressed when people say things like “my child is a gift from God”, or “God made my baby”<sup>10</sup>.

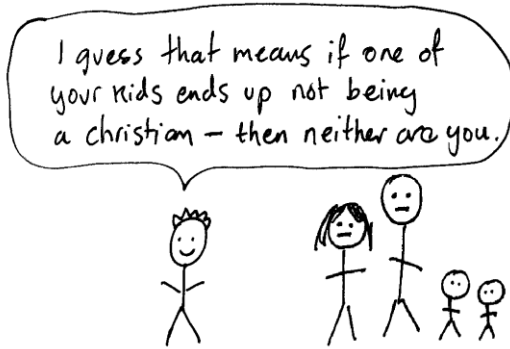
This is false. God created human beings with the capacity for procreation; **you** make children through sexual intercourse. Christians (just like everyone else) produce children from their “natural man” - the flesh. You do not make children from your “spiritual man”.

God has only been personally involved in making 3 (sinless) people; Adam, Eve and Jesus. When Adam fell, the human race fell, so that all born in the line of Adam (your children) have the sin nature.

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<sup>10</sup> This could be considered true but only in a very general sense, in the same way that God makes the sun shine and rain fall – he is the creator and sustainer of the universe – in him all things hold together.

# Household Salvation





### **2.2.1.2 The Blood**

In the Old Testament a (male) child was circumcised on the 7<sup>th</sup> day as a sign of the covenant and so they were inducted into God's people. (See Ex 4:25)

Similarly some think that a religious ceremony, such as infant baptism inducts a child into the people of God. But the new birth is not brought about by religious ceremonies. Fewer genuine Christians hold this view today, but it has been very widely held in the past.

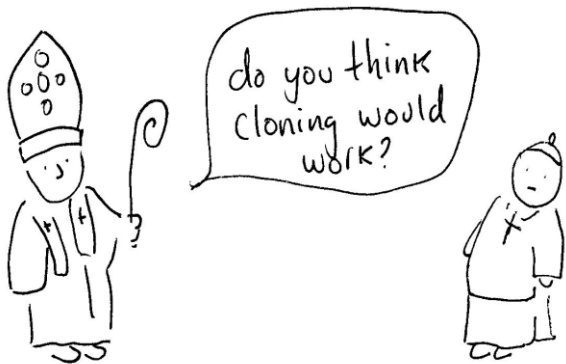
### **2.2.1.3 The Will**

The new birth is not by the will of man, it is not something a person can choose. This point is important because it is commonly held that if Christian parents model their faith successfully, the child will later "make a decision for Jesus". Worse yet, many Christian parents immerse their children in Church Culture, forcing them into services, reading books and attend prayer groups they do not wish to, all in the hope that they will somehow get born again through osmosis.

This is foolishness, being a Christian is not holding an intellectual proposition - i.e. to hold a particular belief about God. It is not outward conformity to a particular moral code. It is certainly not attending church. For sure, Christians do have particular beliefs and ethics, but that is not what makes them Christians. Only God can make someone alive spiritually.

You can so indoctrinate a child that they will be church attendees all their lives, but to what end? You can bring a child up to be a moral, productive member of society - and you can take credit for that - but the new birth is not within your gift.

I'm sorry, but there is no such thing as salvation by good parenting.



## Calvinists and Armenians

There has been a protracted debate within Christianity concerning the precise nature of salvation. Some people say that God chooses who to add to his family. Others say that people themselves choose by responding to the gospel message. For the purposes of this discussion, I do not think it particularly matters. The bottom line is that you cannot guarantee that your children will be Christians, either because God did not choose them, or they did not choose God.

If you think about it carefully, it seems to me that the ball must always, ultimately be in God's court. If we assume it is down to an individual to "make a decision for Jesus", God is in control of how much evidence the person is exposed to, if the evidence is insufficient to convince the person, God can supply more, or not, as he wishes.

From my own (limited) experience I am in the camp that holds the new birth is totally by the choice and action of God alone. I have seen people raised in Christian homes, where the parents made (as far as I can tell) a very reasonable effort to live their faith, but it has been of no avail. I have also seen people raised by radical atheists become Christians.

I will concede that there seem to be more Christians from Christian homes than is the average and I will talk more about that later. Where parents have 4 children 1 will almost certainly become a Christian and 1 will probably not.



## WORKSHEET

According to your own understanding, what is the ultimate consequence of being outside the family of God?

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What is the ultimate consequence of being in God's family?

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What would it mean to you for your child to end up outside?

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What would it mean to you for your child to be in the kingdom?

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A little curve ball here - Try to answer the above two questions from God's point of view rather than your own.

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From your own point of view, do you think it would be better never to have existed in the first place, rather than end up outside the kingdom?

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Of course you cannot know in advance, but hypothetically, is there any kind of value system that you feel you can apply? If all of your children ended up outside the kingdom would it have been worth having children? What if one child ended up in, but two ended up out?

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## 2.2.2 Marriage

What is Marriage? Is it a thing in itself, or is it bound up with having children? Many pastors will tell you the two go together - marriage is for children and children are for marriage. Take this gem from no less than the Church of England's (Episcopalians) Book of Common Prayer:

*"...in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.*

*First, It was ordained for the procreation of children.."*

In a certain sense this is true, but half the truth is no truth at all.

God created Adam and Eve in his own image, what is meant by "the image" is not specified, clearly Adam and Eve were not identical to God, but in some essential way they reflected who God is. God created a material universe and inserted a delegate "copy" of himself within it. All of the creation reflects God in the sense that it is his work, but Adam and Eve have the "Godness" in themselves.

These copies had the ability to procreate, i.e. make further copies of themselves, not identical but always having "the image", and so the glory of God would fill the earth.

The fall of man led to the image being broken, that is to say, it no longer correctly reflected God. This is not stated explicitly but can be clearly inferred; they were guilty before God, the relationship with God was kaput, they would experience pain, they were cast out of the presence of God, they lost their mastery over nature, they would experience death.

God's intention to have his delegate image rule the earth would (will) still come about, the rest of the Bible is essentially the story of how that happens. This is why Jesus is described as the second and last Adam. In Jesus, the image is once again on the earth, as Adam was tempted by the serpent, so too was Jesus. But more than Adam, Jesus the man is God incarnate<sup>11</sup>, where Adam fails, Jesus succeeds<sup>12</sup>. God's Son became like us, that we should again become like God. That is why the New Testament emphasises "being In Christ".

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<sup>11</sup> Colossians 1, 1 Corinthians 15.

<sup>12</sup> So why start with a dud? Good question, but that is not the subject of this book. Hint – ponder the two trees in the garden, consider that the knowledge of good and evil be experiential rather than intellectual.

## Being In Christ

This is not directly relevant, but to avoid confusion I want to clarify what “Being In Christ” means for the Christian. Clearly Christians are not perfect – so has the image of God been restored or not? What is going on?

Essentially your spirit is alive but your body (flesh) is dead, that is why God will renew the body at the resurrection (just as he will renew the earth). The resurrection of Jesus is the template for Christians. Just as the body of Jesus was renewed, so it will be for the Christian. This is the end of the Bible story, God’s intention has been fulfilled - his image has been restored in his people who rule and reign on the earth.

But you do not presently have a renewed body - as far as God is concerned, your sins have been forgiven because Jesus died as your substitute. Not only that, but all of Christ’s righteousness (good standing before God) is credited to you, our goodness is not our own. As far as God is concerned, it’s a done deal – providing you remain “In Christ”. However from your point of view there is a conflict, this conflict started when you were regenerated, you know what God wants and you feel that call strongly, but you are also subject to temptation to sin, you are pulled in two directions.

The Spirit wars against the flesh. This is why the New Testament contains so many exhortations to “follow after the Spirit”, “die to self”, “crucify the flesh”, these are all synonymous. This is what he meant when he said *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*. I am not saying that the degree to which we mortify the flesh determines salvation - I am saying this is what it means to be “In Christ”.

God's plan to bring people to himself through Christ has been fixed since the foundation of the world. This brings us to the real primary purpose of Christian marriage; it is a physical dramatisation of the joining of Christ and his People:

*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 splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." **This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

This is not some innovation introduced by Paul, check the Old Testament and you will find countless cases of God analogising himself as a bridegroom and Israel as the bride. Man's natural inclination is not toward fidelity, but toward fornication and adultery, as you would expect, God's way is exactly the opposite - life long fidelity to one partner within a marriage covenant. Christian marriage is a picture, the spiritual union to Christ is to be the same, *you shall have no other gods before me*, God is to be your ultimate affection and demands absolute fidelity.

### 2.2.2.1 What's the point of Sex?

Sex is primarily for marriage, not for children. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 7;

*The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

Physical intimacy cements a marriage, it protects the exclusivity of the marriage. If Paul wanted to talk about the importance of having children as part of marriage, then this would have been the place to do it. I understand that contraceptives were not widely available 2000 years ago, so children would be the natural result of sex, however I would have expected him to say something. The silence speaks volumes.

A Curious Verse – 1 Corinthians 7: 13-16

*If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. **For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.** But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?*

At first glance it might appear that this contradicts what we said earlier with regard to salvation being God's action in an individual's life. However that cannot be the case because it would go against everything in the New Testament, including other writings by the same author.

Notice the context; he is talking specifically to the situation where someone became a Christian while married to an unbeliever. He ends by telling the Christian not to feel compelled to try and force the unbeliever to stay (as would be the case if two Christians were married). If the Christian is holding onto the unbeliever in the hope that they will become a Christian – Paul reminds them, this is by no means certain.

Although the wording is strange, I believe the "holiness" references are to the marriage, not to the persons. In other words he is simply saying; from God's point of view it's as if you married another believer and had children with them, your marriage is as valid in God's eyes as a marriage between two Christians, therefore do not feel that you need to dissolve the marriage just because you have become a Christian.



## 2.2.2.2 Why Get Married At All?

At the end of his chapter on marriage Paul talks about whether to get married at all. I believe Paul's rationale for not doing so can be equally applied to having children.

*25 Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. 26 I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. 29 This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, 30 and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, 31 and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.*

*32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. 33 But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. 35 I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.*

Paul starts out by stating that what he is about to say is not to be taken as revelation, but his personal feeling on the matter. Contrary to most pastors in the church today, Paul is very relaxed about marriage. Are you married? That's ok. Are you single? That's ok too. Hey, if you really want to get married - go ahead - just understand it will bring a bunch of problems all of its own. Verses 29 to 31 allude to the Christians being under some kind of pressure, Paul is saying "keep your eye on the ball", know what's important. In verses 32 to 35 he says marriage is a worldly thing and therefore something of a distraction from God. He's not saying it's bad, just that it's an option some people might want to forgo - including himself.

What do you think Paul would say about having children, it's pretty obvious isn't it?

You don't have children? That's ok, keep it that way if you can. You want to have children? It's not a sin, just understand it will bring a bunch of problems - be sure to keep your eye on what's really important.



## WORKSHEET

Paul says the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife.

List 5 examples or ways in which this can be the case.

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List 5 examples or ways in which this is also true with children.

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### 2.2.3 Summary & Thoughts

We have come to the end of the chapter, time for a recap;

We saw that the Bible verses that are used to convince Christians of the importance of having children come from the time prior to Jesus. We noted that God's revelation of himself, how he relates and who he relates to, changes and expands as the Bible story progresses. God may have dealt with physical lineage in the past, but now that Jesus has come it no longer works that way.

We looked at the New Birth - the mechanism by which people are added to God's family today - this is something supernatural God does and has nothing to do with morals, upbringing, ancestry or religious ceremonies.

We looked at Christian marriage and saw that it is primarily an illustration of something much more than itself - being joined to Christ. We noted that to Paul, marriage or having children are options that are open to a Christian, but it is the relationship with God that is really important.

Let's re-examine some of the memes prevalent in Christian Culture in the light of our studies:

1) Child bearing is a spiritual activity that God expects of most Christians.

Child bearing is not a spiritual activity; it is a natural function common to all people. Nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus (or anyone else) encourage the production of progeny.

2) Marriage is for having children, God means for the two to go together.

Human marriage is a thing in itself, it is a picture that points to God's marriage to his People. Modelling this does not require a Christian to have children. It does not matter if you have children or not.

3) Christians having children equals more Christians.

The nation of Israel was increased by having children and bringing them up in the Law of God. You might be able to stack out a church using this method, but that is not how people become Christians. People come into the family of God by the New Birth, something God alone does.

4) Children are a gift from God.

Children are not made by, nor are they a personal gift from God. God has only got involved three times; Adam, Eve and Jesus. Your children are the product of sexual intercourse, just like you are, and just as you inherited the sin<sup>13</sup> nature from your parents, so too will your children inherit it from you.

This chapter looked at the place of procreation in the New Testament. We found having children is barely mentioned because it is of little spiritual import. Having children is the production of sinful people, the same as you can find by opening your front door. Why then the plethora of books, videos and websites exhorting procreation? That will be addressed in the next chapter.

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<sup>13</sup> Sin – See Appendix.

## 2.3 Little Problems

In the previous chapter we looked at the place of procreation in New Testament theology, we found procreating to be of no spiritual significance. However, even though the actual business of having children is spiritually neutral, children can be the loci of spiritual problems.

### 2.3.1 Sanctifying the Flesh

Why has procreation been elevated to the position it has?<sup>14</sup> Is this a problem?

Yes, it is a problem. It points to a spiritual problem in the people doing the elevating.

As I pointed out previously, parents primarily have children to fulfil psychological needs, I acknowledge that these desires can be very strong, but I also need to point out that they come from your flesh. These desires are not different in type to the desire for money, sex, a house, a career, social status, etc.

Everyone has these kinds of needs, I am not saying it is wrong to have these impulses - but I will say, that if your life is dominated by them, to the point where God is an afterthought, then you have strayed far from the narrow way that is Christ.

Christians intuitively realise that indulging and elevating these cravings are contrary to the spirit, but instead of being honest with themselves about this, they being to adulterate their life by incorporate these desires into their Christianity.

This is not peculiar to the desire for a family, the exact same process can be seen with other things. Let me show you how the process works with an unrelated one - wealth.

A young man has a desire for money, he knows it provides security and will make his life more enjoyable in many ways, so far so good. If money comes your way, so much the better - we are not ascetics after all. However the young man has not been doing so well in his career, his friends are outperforming him, they all own cars, some have bought their first house. This grates with the young man and he beings to experience the spiritual poison that is envy. The desire for wealth starts to

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<sup>14</sup> If you want to see just how far this can go, check out the “quiverfull movement”.

dominate his thinking. Until now he has been attending a small chapel with straight forward Bible teaching, he moves to a church that “speaks to his needs”. The preacher at his new church **indulges** his desire, many of the talks focus on subjects such as career and promotions. He is told that God wants him prosper, the preacher uses a clever **justification** for this, he says that he is to be blessed financially so that he can be a blessing to others. The young man immerses himself, reading books, consuming media as well as listening to the new preaching. He is told that he will be a blessing to others by his financial giving to the church, he is told that as he faithfully pays his tithe every week God will bless him financially. In the young man’s mind his desire for God and his desire for wealth are now one and the same. But the reality is that God is no longer the centre of his affections, rather God has become a mechanism to fulfil his desire. And so the young man has become an **idolater**, and every time he pays his tithe he is committing spiritual adultery. In the end it didn’t work anyway, the young man never became rich, he just lost 10% of his income - he also lost God.

Notice that you do not need to attain the object of your desire to be an idolater, the desire itself is enough if it replaces your desire for God.

People want to “sanctify” their desires and their idols. The particular passion or object dominates their thinking, they consume religious publications that justify it, they work it into their Christian theology, and they give it a prominence out of all proportion to God’s revelation.

The dynamic is definitely at play when it comes to family, and I know it is endemic in the church because of the vast number of publications on the subject - it’s simple supply and demand - stuff gets written because people want to read it.



## WORKSHEET - Desiring Children

How many hours a week do you think about having a family?

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How many hours a month do you spend reading books / listening to podcasts / browsing web pages related to this subject?

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Is it your expectation, that at the right time, this is something God will deliver on?

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How important to you is having a family?

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How would you feel if God told you flat out that he does not want you to have children?

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If you are at (or near) the point at which you will not be able to have a child (because of age, fertility) - how does this make you feel towards God?

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How do you feel when you see someone with young children?

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If you already have children, then the temptation will be to idolise your family. It is no light thing to replace the creator with a creature. I don't want you to feel left out, so I made a worksheet just for you.



## WORKSHEET - Idolising Children

How much family centric media do you consume a month?

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How important is getting your children into the right school - what are you prepared to do?

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How often do you talk about your children's achievements? Are you competitive about this with other parents?

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How much of your social time is spent with other parents vs non-parents?

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What comes first - your family or God's family?

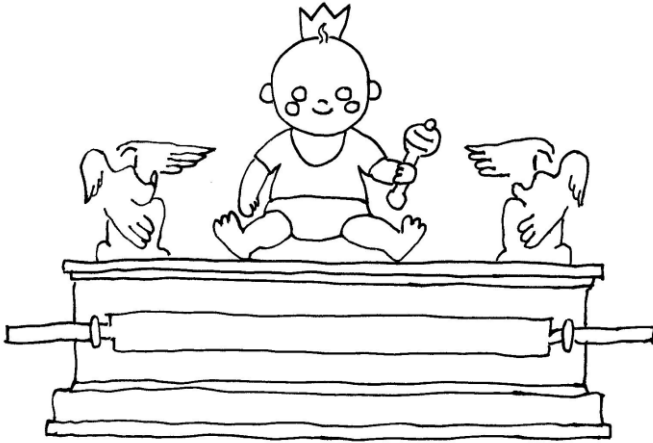
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How would losing a child affect your relationship with God?

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An idol is something that takes God's place. As surely as the sun rises in the morning, what is in your heart will lead to action. If you doubt the power of an idol consider this - that Adam ate from the tree that God told him not to eat because Eve gave him the fruit. Eve was deceived, but Adam was an idolater. Adam placed his marriage partner into a higher position than he placed God.

## 2.3.2 Crucifying the Flesh

The New Testament approach to natural passions and desires are somewhat different from what is bandied about in Christian Culture. These desires are not to be coddled and given a lick of Christian paint - they are to be killed.

*Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (Mark 8)*

The doorway to heaven is a grave. The journey may or may not involve you having children. Dying to self is more than just not sinning, it's your whole life, it is saying goodbye to hopes and dreams and following Jesus.

## 2.3.3 The Church Children

We have talked about how strong desires for things of this world can draw an individual away from God and end in idolatry. We will now consider the issue from the point of view of the local congregation.

### 2.3.3.1 Crèche vs. Pulpit

As far as I can tell from the Bible, the point of church (the local congregation) is for the fellowship of believers to; worship, study, pray, reprove, partake in the Lord's supper, become more like Christ, equip the body, evangelise<sup>15</sup>. The remit is quite narrow. Almost without question, a church with a large number of children will have a crèche, Sunday school, mothers and toddlers group, and possibly a "youth ministry"<sup>16</sup>.

I do not think these things are wrong, however these additions should not be accepted uncritically. Given finite resources, there is a limit to what can be achieved. When expanding into what amounts to a social program it is typically

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<sup>15</sup> There is debate over exactly what activities the local congregation should undertake, some people would suggest a much shorter list, the precise definition doesn't matter for the purposes of this discussion.

<sup>16</sup> All recent innovations – Sunday school in 1870, the Youth Pastor in the 1930s.



defended as part of evangelism, but was that the rationale at the outset or is this merely a post-hoc justification? This is a relatively minor point, but still something worth thinking about.

### **2.3.3.2 Playing Let's Pretend**

A much more serious issue is how parent-child relationships affect the body of Christ in the local congregation. The issue here is very similar to the one I made earlier in this chapter with regard to the individual, a strong desire for children can warp your Christian life, likewise an incorrect attitude toward your offspring can warp your church's life.

Because of their great love for their children, the idea of them being lost is very hard for parents to take psychologically. As a result parents are tempted to play a game of "let's pretend". They bring their children to church and pretend that they are Christians, everyone else is expected to play along with this. Very soon ceremonies such as infant baptism, or confirmation, or whatever, attain a semi-meaningful status. Notice the wording of the ceremony will often include something like "we welcome you into the church family". Even worse, parents and the youth pastor can apply great pressure to a child or teen to "make a decision for Jesus", this involves making them attend services, church meetings, hitting them over the head with a Bible and threatening them with hell. As we have already discussed, being a Christian is not the acceptance of an intellectual position, you cannot argue or educate someone into the family of God.

The problem with bringing up kids as Christians when they are not, is problematic, for both the children and the church. If the parents do a really good job, you end up with a church full of unregenerate people who know chapter and verse, they have an outward conformity to Christian morality but they do not know God. Over time the nature of the church will change, you end up with a kind of blend of Christians and Church Children. Inevitably the church will slide toward emphasising outward behaviour and an intellectual position because that is accessible to everyone. At this point the church is doing religion, not Christianity. In all likelihood the church will slide further, because even if a Church Child is well versed in the Bible their concerns are necessarily worldly (they don't know anything else), you end up with social church.

I am not saying that you should not bring your children to church, or send them to Sunday school, or read the Bible with them. I am saying that it is God who saves, not you. Don't apply pressure, do not indoctrinate or brainwash. If you spend 15 years banging them over the head with a Bible, how will you know their conversion is genuine? How does it benefit someone to believe they know God because they

attend church and can quote chapter and verse? Will you let God do his thing, or will you take the matter into your own hands?

If your kid gets to their late teens and it starts becoming abundantly clear that God hasn't done the work, you have to let them go. It's not like they haven't had enough exposure to the gospel. No doubt you had great Christian aspirations for your child, for sure it's a disappointing scenario, that is why you should consider the eventuality before having children. There are really only two families in this world - God's and the Devils - In the end our human families will prove transitory and insignificant, every person's true and lasting family is one of these two. Know that God is divisive. Do not blur the lines of salvation - in your own mind, or in the congregation by playing let's pretend. It dishonours the genuine work of God and you are effectively encouraging your child to lie.

I am sympathetic to a teen in this situation<sup>17</sup>, it is a difficult place to be, the only culture they are familiar with is the one you have brought them up in, and they are beginning to realise that it is not one they can ultimately be part of unless they maintain a charade for the rest of their lives, you must not encourage that. I know people in their 20s who regularly attend church, they have told me privately they do not believe in God at all, they stay for the familiarity and the social aspects. A church like this will take on a progressively more worldly outlook, there will be repeated gross sin (they cannot help it), and it will end up affecting genuine Christians. Encourage your child to value honesty and to be honest, with themselves and others, and to find their own path - who knows what God might do later on.

Hey, if you can't handle the idea of your children going to hell, there is a simple answer - don't have children.

*"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10)*

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<sup>17</sup> Been there, done that.



### 2.3.4 Summary

It's the end of the chapter, time for a recap.

First we looked at the risk that children, or desiring children can pose to a believer. Although these desires are natural, they have a proper place, elevating an object or the desire for an object above God is idolatry.

Second we looked at how parent's desires for the good of their children can adversely affect the local congregation.

The things discussed in this chapter do not need to be a problem - they all turn on the same fundamental issue - Is God genuinely number one in your life? All Christians say that he is, but their actions, attitudes and conversations give them away. Most evangelical Christians are sharp enough not to be taken in by the prosperity gospel (which is certainly idolatry) but turn a blind eye when it comes to the other idol Jesus warned about - family.

## 2.4 The Meaning of Life

If having a family is not a primary purpose of a Christian's life - then what is?

*What is the chief end of man?*

*Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. (Westminster Catechism)*

That is a pretty good one line definition - but what does that mean?

### 2.4.1 In this World

God is glorified by his people, individually and collectively.

#### 2.4.1.1 Individually

Whole books have been written about what the Christian life looks like, keeping it brief, these are the highlights - A Christian;

- 1) Knows<sup>18</sup> God - through the new birth, the revelation of the Spirit, the word of God.
- 2) Relies on God - has faith<sup>19</sup> in Christ's work on the cross for forgiveness and righteousness.
- 3) Is becoming like God - by following after the Spirit, dying to the values of the world, mortifying the flesh. (Concrete example - Galatians 5:13-24)

God is glorified because in a world that rejects him, there are people who believe him, trust him and follow him.

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<sup>18</sup> Know – not in the factual sense of knowing about – but to have personal dealings with.

<sup>19</sup> Faith – not a leap of faith, that is to accept an intellectual proposition without evidence – but faith as in trusting someone you know. You cannot have faith in God without knowing God.

## 2.4.1.2 Collectively

The Church<sup>20</sup> is the body of Christ, of which he is the head:

- 1) The Church is the organism through which Christ presently expresses himself on earth. The individual members of the body have varied functions and gifting, so that the whole can correctly manifest Christ. (In detail 1 Corinthians 12:4-31)
- 2) The Church is a sign to the angels, of things to come and of God's wisdom - *so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 3:10) - The Church is a sign that all things will be brought together under the headship of Christ<sup>21</sup>.

## 2.4.2 In the World to come

In a general sense all people will glorify God, but he will be especially and eternally glorified through his people.

### 2.4.2.1 All People

All people will glorify God by revealing one of two aspects of his character. The people in the Lamb's book of life will demonstrate God's grace. The people not in the Lamb's book of life will demonstrate his judgement.

*What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory* (Romans 9:22-23)

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<sup>20</sup> Never, ever, confuse The Church with an institution or a bunch of people meeting in a club house on Sunday night. I use capitalisation vs lowercase in the event of referring to a congregation as when we talk about the church down the road.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix

## 2.4.2.2 His People

God will be glorified through the glorification of his people. Remember back in Genesis, God's intention is for a people that reflect who he is - this is the fulfilment of that intention.

*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:17)*

Specifically the glorification of God's people includes;

- 1) Being fully conformed to the image of Christ, which necessitates renewed bodies.
- 2) The renewal of creation - i.e. the new heavens and earth.
- 3) Have an intimate relationship with God
- 4) Reigning with Christ<sup>22</sup>.

These ideas are intertwined. God made Adam and Eve in his image to rule (have headship over) the creation. When they rebelled, they broke the image in themselves and, as an effect of their headship, they also broke the creation. They lost their position and their relationship with God. God is glorified in that his original intention will be perfectly fulfilled in his people.

*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 adoption as sons, **the redemption of our bodies.** [...] For those whom he foreknew he also **predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:16-29)*

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix – Ephesians 3:10

*Then I saw **a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away**, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem<sup>23</sup>, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, **“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”***  
(Revelation 21)

### **2.4.3 Summary**

We have come to the end of this very brief chapter. Nothing I have said here is directly related to having children, but it only seemed fair, that if I was going to make the case that having children is not God’s central purpose for your life - that I also tell you what is.

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<sup>23</sup> A picture of God’s people.

### 3. Conclusion

This is the end my friend. No doubt much more could be said on this subject, but I'm not a fan of long books, so why write one? Let's review the journey from start to finish.

In the first part of this book we looked at the issue of procreation as it pertains to everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike. In the age of freely available contraception, having children is a choice. We saw the motivation for children was to fulfil various psychological needs of the parents, people have children because it will make their lives better in some way. We discussed the realities of life, and that by creating a life you necessarily expose that life to the potential of many great harms.

We asked if there was harm in not having children, we found that where no child existed<sup>24</sup> no harm was done, except the thwarted desires of would be parents.

It follows quite logically that because you do not know if your child will experience one of the many great harms in life, when you create a life you gamble with someone else's welfare, with the motivation being your own gain.

That is certainly selfish and ethically dubious, but society passes it off as "the wonderful gift of life". It is not a gift, a gift can be refused, it is the imposition of sentence. How popular would Christmas be if the gifts were mandatory and some of the boxes contained cancer, rape, divorce and bankruptcy? On this subject, human beings seem to suffer from an inability to comprehend what is right before them, in plain sight.

Moving on to the second part of this book, we considered the issue from an exclusively Christian perspective. We noticed that literature advocating progeny used Bible verses exclusively from the Old Testament. Upon investigation we discovered that in the New Covenant people are added to God's kingdom by spiritual rebirth not procreation, unsurprisingly there are no New Testament verses that extol the virtues of having children. We also looked at marriage and found it was a physical picture of a spiritual reality, also noting the apostle Paul had a relaxed take-it or leave-it attitude toward the institution.

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<sup>24</sup> Even though I argued it in Part 1, people just cannot get their heads around this, so once again – you cannot regret not existing. If you did not exist, you would not know you did not exist.



Having examined the Bible it is clear that the centrality accorded to procreation in church thinking is misplaced. It is nothing more or less than the production of sinful people - who, like the rest of humanity will be lost if God does not author new life in them. Rather than contradict the arguments in the first part of this book, this understanding adds to it - the Christian worldview adds this particular and very significant harm, the possibility that you will create someone who will suffer eternal loss.

Next we explored problems that children, or the desire for children can cause. We looked at a natural tendency to elevate our needs and desires, which ends in idolatry when they replace God as occupying the top spot in our lives. We also considered a similar temptation to redefine Christianity (individually and in the church) to accommodate unbelieving children. These potential problems are less compelling as a direct argument against having children because they are within the individual's ability to avoid. However in another sense they are more significant - procreation as an act in itself is spiritually neutral, a bit like blowing your nose - idolatry however will bar you from heaven.

Finally, having removed "family" as a central theme of life, we briefly looked at what God's purpose for a Christian actually is.

So I have to ask - how badly do you need to fulfil your desire for babies, knowing that you are making sinful people, some of which will suffer very great harms in life, and some of which will suffer the eternal judgement of God?

Perhaps you never thought about it this way before. For you, "children" conjure up images of cute babies and playing happy families, that is certainly true, but what I have said is also true. Procreation is a very sober thing.

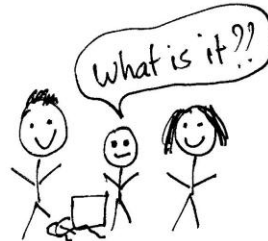
*Proud father, beaming mother, behold their bundle of joy,  
Parents and friends gather round, to bring it little toys.  
It may have once bemused you, that I won't shake your hand,  
But now that you have read this book, I hope you understand.*

## 4. Appendix

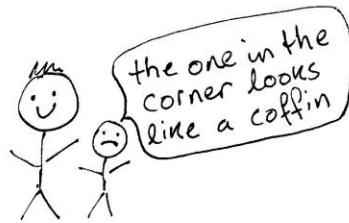
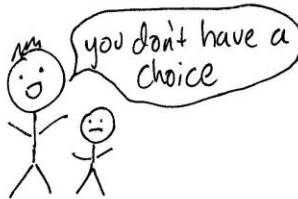
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## A) The Gift of Life

Christmas would not be as popular if....



Christmas would not be as popular if...



## B) Less Frequent Objections to Part 1

These objections are less common, but have come up a number of times:

*But my children will pay your pension.*

Quite an insidious objection really. With a global population of 7 billion, nobody needs \*your\* children to do anything. The objection is akin to someone robbing a convenience store and giving me part of the loot, in an attempt to make me complicit. This isn't even a counter argument - it's a bribe.

*If your life sucks so badly you should ...*

Can you find single place where I have used personal experience or anecdotal evidence to make the argument? The argument has nothing to do with me, or my life. Nowhere do I refer to my own life experience. So why say something like this?

Basically this is deflection. When a person finds the conclusion of an argument objectionable, but cannot fault the argument, they will often try to find fault with the person making the argument.

The technical term for this is *Ad hominem circumstantial* - claiming someone is in circumstances such that they are disposed to take a particular position. This is fallacious because a disposition to make a certain argument does not make the argument false. In this case, it's a double error, as you don't even know what my circumstances are.

*But we take risks with other people's welfare every day, I risk hurting someone every time I drive my car.*

True, but driving usually does not result in harm. Procreation does, even in the very best case possible, there is the guaranteed harm of the person dying. Notice also that there are stringent controls to prevent harm while driving; seatbelts, MOT, driving test, driving license, compulsory insurance, speed limits, revocation of license for bad driving. There is a certain trade off in all activity between risk and utility, the greater the risk the more controls we put in place, procreation however seems to be the exception.

There is also the nature of the choice, once a person exists they have needs, you choose to drive (probably) to fulfil one of these needs (get shopping), but when you create a new life, you create a lifetime of more needs. This is why it is difficult to make analogies to procreation - it is somewhat different.

## C) What is Sin?

Christians use the word “sin” frequently; original sin, born into sin, the sin nature, as well as talking about various “sins”. The use of the word can be somewhat confusing, because different (but related) ideas are meant in different contexts. Because this concept is central to the Bible, and to what I have said in this book, I would like to explain it in detail.

It is easy to understand “sins”, when we are talking about concrete acts that transgress a moral code, such as fornication, theft, murder etc. This is something everyone, Christian and non-Christian can get behind.

Most people’s understanding of the issue ends at this point, if a person commits “a sin”, such as murder for example, they are a bad person, if they live a life devoid of such transgressions, they are deemed a good person. However, the Bible’s treatment of the topic goes much deeper. The external acts are the result of internal corruption, this is the “sin nature”, also called the “flesh”, the “soul man”, the “old man” and the “natural man”. This corrupt nature, that is present in all people, was the result of the fall. When Adam turned away from God, toward the devil, a fundamental change took place - he swapped the fatherhood of God for the fatherhood of the devil. It has been that way ever since, humanity has taken on the characteristics of its father. When Jesus called people the children of the devil, it was not an abstract insult, but a precise description:

*They said to him [...] We have one Father - even God. Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

(John 8:41)

It is this perpetual heritage of the human race that is being referred to when we talk about the “sin nature”, “original sin”, or being “born into sin”. The darkness within the human heart is what leads to impure thoughts and finally concrete immoral action.

*For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.*

(Mark 7:21)

This sin nature outworks in; covetousness, malice, envy, strife, murder, deceit, gossip, slander, lies, greed, boasting, selfishness, and every kind of evil. As Paul says in Romans 1, they are foolish, faithless, heartless, and ruthless. If this sounds like behaviours discussed in part 1, it should, this is the human condition.

*Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:13)*

Notice the relationship between the three things being talked about. The sin nature (the flesh) gives rise to sinful desires (internal) which lead to sins (concrete external actions). I think most people have some grasp of this, even if they are not Christians. Stealing is illegal, greed is not, yet we do not hesitate to criticise a greedy person, we all know one leads to the other. Fornication follows lust, murder follows hate, we intuitively recognise something is wrong before the final outworking comes to pass. It is less common for people to question the source of the sinful desires in the first instance, we can't help it, they seem to just pop into our minds. This is the point where the Bible parts company with the unbeliever, God doesn't just have a problem with concrete sins, he doesn't just have a problem with the desires, he has a problem with the sin nature itself - the flesh. It's true that a person cannot help what they are, but that does not change what they are. God is hostile to the sin nature, period - the degree to which it outworks is a secondary issue.

## D) Abraham, Sarah and Isaac

The famous Bible story of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac is rolled out quite frequently when couples are trying to conceive but cannot.

At first glance it might seem appropriate. Abraham and Sarah wanted a child. They had faith in God. Eventually God makes this possible in a miraculous way.

If that is your estimation of what took place then you have entirely missed what is going on in this story.

Read Genesis 17 - 22

Firstly, God made a specific promise to Abraham, that he would have a child, God has not made such a promise to you. There is a tendency in Christian circles to “trust” God for things (a spouse, a child, a career) which he has not promised. If you go down this path you are setting yourself up for disappointment.

Secondly, the promise God made, has a context. This is the child through which God’s plan will be progressed. God has promised to make Abraham into a great nation and a blessing to all peoples of the earth. It is not only Abraham’s hopes and dreams that are on the line here. The very plan of God stands or falls on Abraham having this child. Do you suppose your inability to have children carries the same weight?

Thirdly, this isn’t any child. Isaac is a foreshadowing of Christ in the Old Testament;

Isaac had a supernatural birth, naturally impossible, but made possible by the power of God. Both Abraham and Sarah were too old to conceive, Abraham actually laughed at the angel when told he would have a son, and the angel said, you will, and you shall call him Isaac<sup>25</sup>.

Take your son, your only son Isaac, who you love.

*[God] said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” (22:2)*

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<sup>25</sup> The name Isaac means Laughter



The only son language is odd, given that Abraham had two sons.

God's instruction to Abraham to kill his own son seems bizarre, but it gets stranger, he has to travel to a specific place to act this out, It took them 3 days to get there (verse 5).

The son carries the wood, the father carries the knife.

*And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.*

Of all the things which could have been written in the account, consider how strange it is that this detail is recorded.

God substitutes a ram for the boy<sup>26</sup>. Just as Abraham is about to sacrifice his son, the angel stops him. He looks and sees a ram caught in the thicket, Abraham sacrifices the ram instead of his son.

*So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."*

Looking back from the New Testament it's clear what is going on, it's a dramatisation of God's intention to send **his** only son to die as a sacrifice for sin.

Once we get to the Mosaic covenant we have animals being sacrificed en-mass perpetually to cover Israel's sin, but already in Genesis 22 we have a strong hint to what God's final solution for sin will involve.

So Isaac was promised by God, was absolutely fundamental to the plan of God, and is a type of Christ.

I hope you can see that what we have with Abraham, Sarah and Isaac is a very special situation, one that a Christian should not appropriate.

While we are in this part of the Bible, let's talk about circumcision. Here we have another command from God that seems highly bizarre on first reading. It is clear that God intends this to be the sign of the covenant - but why this? Why specifically is lopping off the end of your manhood the sign?

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<sup>26</sup> As he does with Israel's first born in the last plague on Egypt.

*And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: **Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.** He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. **Every male throughout your generations**, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." (Genesis 17:9)*

Circumcision is the cutting of the flesh of the male sexual organ.

Consider carefully what has just played out:

In chapter 15, God has promised Abraham a son, God has personally sworn an oath to do this. That is the implication of the enigmatic ceremony in verses 7 - 17, the lantern that passed between the carcasses in the darkness, is God himself.

In chapter 16, no child has yet arrived, they are impatient, and decide to take matters into their own hands. Abraham sleeps with a slave woman Hagar, and so father's his first son Ishmael.

The next time God speaks to Abraham he tells him to cut the end of his manhood off.

Abraham commends Ishmael to God, that the promises might be fulfilled through him. But God says NO, your barren<sup>27</sup> wife will give you a son, and through that son, the promises shall be fulfilled.

Abraham's attempt to "help God out" by sticking his organ into Hagar is rejected, and now he's got a permanent reminder of that fact.

God intended the situation to become totally impossible from a human point of view, so that the birth of Isaac would be by God's power, not of mans. You might say Isaac was born of the Spirit, not the flesh.

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<sup>27</sup> Now that Abraham has proved his fecundity, the "problem" is obviously with Sarah.

Why was the ordinance a permanent one, for all generations? Because Isaac was only a shadow, a sign, of what God intended to do later.

Barren women don't conceive, and neither do virgins. Jesus was conceived without any help from the male organ, God cut it out altogether.

*"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be borne will be called holy - the Son of God."* (Luke 1:35 Angel to Mary)

*do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [...] he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.* (Matthew 1:20 Angel to Joseph)

## E) She Will Be Saved Through Childbearing

I mentioned that there were no verses in the New Testament extolling procreation. The reader may object with reference to 1 Timothy 2:8-15, verses famous in feminist circles. As we shall see, all is not what it seems:

*I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness - with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. **For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing - if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.***

A plain reading of the text might suggest that women can be somehow saved through having and raising children.

But that would be wrong. It would also go against the rest of scripture - from start to finish, never, anywhere, does anyone suggest such a thing. It would also be heresy - because the only thing that can save a person is faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. So now that we are absolutely clear on what this **does not mean**, let us take a look again at the text.

Paul is talking about church practice. He's specifically talking about the roles of men and women. He makes a distinction, that women should not teach or exercise authority over a man. So far so good, this is pretty clear.

Following this he gives his rationale. That rationale in its entirety is grounded in Genesis 1-3. When we see an author refer to another part of scripture like this, we need to go look it up, because we are expected to import some of the meaning into our understanding of the text under consideration.

Paul references **two** distinct points from Genesis, then he **balances** what he has said with a **third**.

Paul is moving very fast here, and it is in missing the fact that Paul's **third** point is meant to give balance to the first two points, rather than compliment them that leads to confusion.

**First**, Paul quotes the creation account - The man was formed first, then the woman.

Consider fully what Genesis says about this:

The man and the woman were not created together, the man was created, then the woman was created later. The woman was not created independently; she was created as a derivative of the man (and when men and women marry they are joined again, but I digress). Also she was created as a helper to the man.

This is God's order and Paul wants this reflected in the Church, a woman shall not have authority over a man.

**Second**, Paul quotes the account of the fall - the woman was deceived.

The woman was deceived by the serpent and through this deception the serpent gained access to the man. Why did the serpent go for Eve rather than go directly for Adam? The implication is that the deception would not have worked had the serpent gone directly for Adam. Notice something here, this is before the fall, the woman was in no way compromised in the way we are now. Paul is saying that there is a principle here; a man is less likely to be deceived.

These two points make up Paul's rationale for why a woman shall not teach or have authority over a man in the spiritual life of the church.

The next word "Yet" makes it clear that the **Third** point Paul makes will juxtaposition the previous two.

Paul's mind is still in Genesis, indeed he's just a few verses on. After the fall, God pronounced a curse on the man and the woman, here is the full text:

*The Lord God said to the serpent,*

*"Because you have done this,  
cursed are you above all livestock  
and above all beasts of the field;  
on your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.  
I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel."*

*To the woman he said,*

*“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children.  
Your desire shall be for your husband,  
and he shall rule over you.”*

*And to Adam he said,*

*“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife  
and have eaten of the tree  
of which I commanded you,  
‘You shall not eat of it,’  
cursed is the ground because of you;  
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
By the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread,  
till you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
for you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.”*

It's all negative, apart from that very enigmatic reference about the offspring:

*I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.*

I will quote it again from a different translation:

*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her  
Seed; It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel.*

God is talking to the serpent - and he says **her** seed - Adam is not mentioned.

Without going into all the details, this is the first prophecy in the Bible regarding Jesus Christ.

*When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.*

*Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He said not, "and to seeds," as though many; but as though one: "and to thy Seed," who is Christ.*

Paul has just reminded us that the woman was made as a derivative helper for the man. He has also reminded us that the woman was an easier target for spiritual deception than the man, that the fault of the woman led to the damnation of the human race - and he could have left it at that - but the Holy Spirit inspires Paul to remind us that salvation also came through a woman.

A woman was central to the fall and a woman was central in salvation, doing something only a woman could do. Following a long line of women from Eve, one day there would be a woman - Mary - who would birth the incarnation.

## F) Other New Testament Verses

There are no verses in the New Testament that promote procreation as a kingdom activity, however there are verses that talk about having children, let's take a look.

**Ephesians 6:1-9.** Having covered doctrine in the first half of Ephesians, Paul moves onto application. Part of this covers the relationship between parents and children. Children, obey your parents, honour your father and mother. Parents, do not provoke your children to anger. If you do have children, the New Testament has things to say on how to relate to them and how to raise them. This in no way suggests that procreation is a spiritual activity. Paul also includes instruction on how masters and slaves should relate, however slavery is not a spiritual activity. If you have children there is a godly way to relate to them, If you own slaves there is a godly way to relate to them, but the owning of slaves is not something we need to do to complete our Christian walk.

**1 Timothy 3, Titus 1:5, 6.** Paul lists the requirements for an elder in the church.

*He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?*

*[must be] above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.*

There is some debate on how to interpret these verses, you could read them as absolute literal requirements, i.e. an elder must be married to a single woman, his first spouse, must have children, all of which must be believers. If you go down that road you end up in a strange place. The apostasy of an adult child (either doctrinally or morally) forces the resignation of an elder in the church.

It seems much more reasonable to me, that Paul is describing in a general sense what an elder will look like. This is Paul's guide on how to weed out bad candidates. Notice that Paul explains why he is giving the criteria; "If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church", the point is that someone who cannot even manage their own family, will certainly not be able to manage a whole church.

In the same way, I do not think that having children or being married is a requirement for an elder. However being married to the wrong person (v11) or having unruly children is certainly a reason for rejecting a candidate.



**1 Timothy 5:14** *“So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.”*

The context is the inclusion of widows on a kind of early church welfare rota. Paul wants to insure that only those who really need the help are enlisted. In verse 4 he disbars widows with children or grandchildren; the children should take care of the situation, not the church. In verse 9 he disbars widows younger than 60 years of age, he would rather they get married and take care of a house hold than burden the church. This is about limiting early church welfare, not proscribing Christian behaviour. Remember, this is a world without modern contraception; married people would have children in the natural course of events.

## G) Ephesians 3:10

God's plan, the end of which was obscure in ages past, has now been revealed. The culmination of that plan is to bring all things in heaven and on earth under the headship of Christ. That unity of headship is demonstrated now in The Church, where he has brought all of his people (Jews and Gentiles) intimately together into one body. Just as he has presently joined all men under his headship, he will also join heaven and earth.

Read the whole of Ephesians.

The recurring theme is "in the heavenly places"

*[...] he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, **which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*** (Ephesians 1:7-10, compare Colossians 1:15-20)

*That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.* (KJV, Ephesians 1:10)

*to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.* (Ephesians 1:10 NIV)

God's plan, for the fullness of time - that is to say his eternal plan - is to unite both men and angels under the headship of Christ<sup>28</sup>.

*In him we have obtained an inheritance [...] were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it* (v11-14)

There is an inheritance that Christians have not yet acquired, but they are alive in the Spirit and have therefore already experienced something of the reality of the world to come.

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<sup>28</sup> Obviously not referring to fallen angels or unregenerate men.

*having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (v18)*

Paul wants them to know about that inheritance, he is not talking about forgiveness, adoption, sanctification, but something else.

*what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead **and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places**, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (v20)*

God did much more than raise Christ from the dead, he seated him at his right hand. Jesus is now sitting on a throne, the authority of which surpasses that of any other power in the heavens or on earth, and his position is permanent.

*And he put all things under his feet and **gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.** (v22)*

This is interesting - Paul is now talking about The Church. Christ personally is the head, but The Church is his body.

As I have said elsewhere, believers are spiritually joined to Christ in a very fundamental way, the closest earthly picture available is a marriage. *For it is said, "The two will become one flesh". But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.* (1 Corinthians 6 16-17)

The Church is his fullness - in some way The Church completes Christ, magnifying him, giving him fuller expression.

*God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - **and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus**, so that **in the coming ages** he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-7)*

Not only has God saved the Christian, he has also "raised us up with him and seated us with him" in heavenly places - the same thing that is said of Christ in v20, is now applied to Christians – they do not experience this personally yet, but because of the spiritual joining, i.e. being "In Christ", they are there positionally. You might say it's already a done deal, and in "the coming ages" it will be a fact.

What are they are "seated" on?

*The one who conquers, I will grant him **to sit with me on my throne**, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Revelation 3:21)*

*If we have died with him, we will also live with him;  
if we endure, **we will also reign with him**; (2 Timothy 11)*

*Or **do you not know that the saints will judge the world**? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? **Do you not know that we are to judge angels**? (1 Corinthians 6)*

This is the inheritance that Paul wants them to comprehend. Because believers are so joined to Christ - they are his body - they will also rule with him.

Paul then moves on to talk about how Christ has united two separated peoples together - Jews and Gentiles - into one body, The Church, of which he is the head (Ephesians 2:11 - 3:8)

*and [so] to bring to light for **everyone** what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, (Ephesians 3:9)*

*so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. According to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:10)*

God's plan is "realized" (finished, completed) in the work of Jesus - The Church is the final achievement of God's plan.

Even though The Church has not yet been physically raised and are not presently ruling, because Jesus **has** been physically raised and **is** presently ruling - and we are In Christ - **it is certain to follow** for us too.

When this occurs, there will be one united household of God. And so in the fullness of time all things in heaven and on earth will be united under the headship of Christ.

As he has united all men together, he will unite all things in heaven and earth under his headship.

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named (Ephesians 3:14 ESV)*

The word “every” here in the ESV does not really make sense, I prefer “all” or “the whole”. Much better the KJV;

*For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
Of whom **the whole family in heaven and earth** is named.*

## H) So You Still Want to Have Children

As I have mentioned, there is harm in not having children - the emotional suffering of unfulfilled desire, primarily, of the would-be-parents and to a lesser degree grandparents and siblings. I freely acknowledge this desire can be very strong in some people. If that applies to you or your spouse, you will probably consider that the harm to yourselves, in forgoing children, is greater than any potential harm that may befall those children. This is selfish, but it is also understandable.

I offer the following points for your consideration before you go ahead.

**Understand that life contains the possibility of your child suffering real harm. Russian roulette is a good analogy, 5 chambers are empty, the 6<sup>th</sup> is loaded.**

If your child is born and grows up healthy, be grateful for that.

If your child is born with problems, or suffers harm at some point, understand that your gamble was not different from other peoples; your child caught the bullet, that's all.

If your neighbour's child caught the bullet instead of yours, don't think it's because you are better or God loves you more - you are a gambler playing the same game at the same table, it could just as easily have been your child.

**Be honest about your motivations for having children, rather than dressing up the exercise as an altruistic act of virtue.**

Don't ask your children to be thankful for you having them, after all, we both know you did it for yourself.

Claiming a selfish act to be selfless is dishonest - keep it real, it is what it is.

**Resist the temptation to change what God has said, to what you would like him to have said.**

You will be tempted to elevate your making of babies to a spiritual act that glorifies God, don't do it.

Believe and affirm what God has said, that all people are born sinful and can only be saved by God working in them.

Do not listen to people or read literature that misapplies, distorts or contradicts what God has said.

**Be prepared to accept the unacceptable - that your child may not become a Christian.**

You need to be able to psychologically handle this very real possibility, reconciling it with the consequences within your particular worldview.

Make up your mind, before you even try for children, that you will not put an unbelieving child above God. Do not manipulate the faith to accommodate a difficult situation.

Know that salvation is of God alone. You can bring your child up to be an honest, decent, moral person, but the salvation of your child is between them and God.