

Is It Sinful for a Married Couple To Not Have Children?

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Question: "I read an article that said that it is moral rebellion to deliberately not have children when you're married. The article said that to think that you could have marriage and sex but no kids is to defraud God's design. Are we doing anything wrong by not having children? And as a result, not dealing with the pain and challenges that can come from having kids? Is it the motive that must be questioned? I'm worried."

Discussion:

Tim: So what do you think? Children? No children? If we marry, a man marries a woman, are they commanded that if physically possible, they should have children? Let me ask you a question. (Incomplete thought) Let's suppose this. Let's suppose you get married, and you have seven children, and then the doctor says to the wife, if you have any more children, you're probably not going to make it. It's probably going to kill you. Is it ok to stop having kids? On what basis? Because you've got to be careful here. Because whatever basis you say it's right to stop having them... (incomplete thought) Let's take the seven down to two kids, or down to one or down to none. So, is that basis for which we stopped having children at seven, does it also work for not having any at all? And if my wife's health and so maybe both of our health should be taken into question, is it that it might cause premature death to have children? If the chances are high enough of that? And when does the reason become invalid and who sets that standard? So Pedro, you're nodding up and down.

Pedro: No, I wasn't.

Tim: Oh, you were. So come on. Look, I'll just tell you, if I have seven children and the doctor tells me your wife probably isn't going to make it, somebody could come along and say well, brother, you've got to live by faith. Well, yes, I do. But living by faith - I have faith in that doctor and what that doctor told me seems to line up with the physical evidence that I'm observing in my wife, and the reality is I believe him because it's not like I'm looking at my wife and she looks like a specimen of health, and yet he's telling me she's deathly sick. I'm looking at my wife and I'm seeing what he's saying is true. My wife isn't what she used to be. My wife is declining physically. I recognize this. Would I stop having children after 7? I would. On what basis? See, we're not just a checklist kind of people. It's not just show me in the Bible where it says that. It's like love your wife as Christ loved the church. So, look, I'll let you men define what love to your wife looks like. In my estimation, that would be love for my wife.

But ok, let's say we don't have any kids. And my wife says, oh honey, can we just not have kids? (incomplete thought) There's going to be so much pain and so many challenges that would come from having children. Can we just not have any? Ok, if you're going to say well,

that's not loving your wife if you let her get away with that. On what basis would you say that? (Incomplete thought) If somebody was going to say that we're defrauding God's purpose, what do you think they're alluding to? Genesis. Be fruitful and multiply is what was told to - who was it told to? Adam, Noah, Jacob... at least those three I know that it was said to. Be fruitful and multiply.

Ok, well let me ask you this. Do you take that as a commandment? If you say yes, then how is marriage optional? Do you see what I'm saying? Be fruitful and multiply. If that's a command, then that sounds like it's a command for every man to get married. And in fact, if you go a little ways after it talks about being fruitful and multiply it says some words concerning marriage that sound pretty much like the same kind of command. Let the man (do something). Anybody know what it says? It says that the man is supposed to leave the father and mother. And the thing is it doesn't say, if he gets married. It just says he's supposed to do it. So does that mean everybody should get married? Or does that mean that until Paul came along in 1 Corinthians, everybody was supposed to get married? See, you've got a problem with that because remember when the disciples said, oh, if that's true, we'd be better off not being married. And what did Jesus say? You remember the situation? Rich, young ruler. Isn't that where it comes up? No, where did He talk about that? Where does Jesus talk about some are eunuchs? Is that right after the rich, young ruler? I think it is. But He says not everybody can accept this saying. Oh, no, it's Matthew 19. Excuse me. Matthew 19 after that whole discourse on divorce. Isn't that where it is? And that's when the disciples said whoa! You know, if this is the case, we're better off not marrying, and He says not everybody can receive that. Some are eunuchs. Even then. Even before Paul came along and wrote to the Corinthians, the reality is there were people who didn't get married.

So here's the thing. If be fruitful and multiply is a command to multiply, you would think that it would have by necessity included the commandment to marry, which if you actually look at what's being said about marriage, it sounds like the same kind of command that be fruitful and multiply sounds like. And yet when you move away into the New Testament, you find that marriage certainly isn't required. In fact, Paul thought people may be even better off not doing it. Jesus was never married. Barnabas was never married.

(from the room) Isn't it kind of reminiscent of 1 Timothy 4? About those forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence - like it's kind of the law.

Tim: Well, somebody was laying down a law forbidding marriage, because obviously the Catholic church, demonic doctrines are going to come in and the Catholic church is a great example of that. But I guess the point that I'm trying to get at here is ok, we have things in Scripture said about being fruitful and multiplying. You've got something said, what is it Psalm 123 or 127 or something about the quiver being full. Here's the thing. Women who didn't have children, wanted children. Scripturally. Can you think of anybody in Scripture that purposely did not have children? I can think of one person. And God killed him. But it wasn't just because he looked at the commandment: Be fruitful and multiply, and said no! It was: Raise up seed for your brother, and he said no. One of the sons of Judah. You remember him? You remember Perez is

in the Messianic line. And his father was Judah; his mother was Tamar. You remember the whole incident with Tamar? She disguised herself as a prostitute. Got impregnated by her father-in-law. Well, there were sons there. The first son, the second son... and the first son died, and so Tamar was given to the second son, and then that son Onan had to raise up seed to his dead brother, and he wasn't willing to do it and God killed him.

But see, that's different. He wasn't just disobeying the commandment to have children, he was disobeying the commandment to raise up seed for his brother. So, it's a different situation. But other than that, I can't think of any place in the Old Testament where people willingly didn't want children. In fact, if anything, it was a curse if you didn't have children. It was looked down on. You remember how it was with Sarah in her old age. Or you remember how it was with Rachel when Leah's bearing all sorts of children, and Rachel can't have any. They all wanted children. Or you think about Elizabeth when you come into the New Testament. It just seemed like it was the norm. It was the blessing. The idea of somebody not wanting children was like just unheard of.

So, here's the thing. Again, we don't just live by a checklist. What I would want to know - even in the New Testament, having children is assumed. Like, you get the qualifications for elders and deacons, it's just assumed that they have children. It doesn't mean they have to have children. But it's just assumed that they do. Or you know you get the older women teaching the younger women there in Titus, and it's just assumed that older women are supposed to teach the younger women to love their husbands and their children. The children are assumed. (in response to comment): Right, the widows being enrolled in 1 Timothy 5, it's assumed that they raised children. They were the wife of one husband. And they raised children and they showed hospitality and washed the feet of the saints. But it's just assumed.

But here's the thing, Paul comes along and says, in this present distress, I would say that it's better if you didn't even marry, and obviously if you don't marry, you're not having children. (Incomplete thought) What's the present distress? Let's say there was a severe persecution taking place right at that time. Paul says, look, in light of the distress, in light of the fact that Christians are being chased all over the place, and they're being hunted down... I'll tell you, it's best not being married because if you have a family in that kind of situation, let's say you already got married and then you hear Paul say that. And it's like, well, we're married and so we're going to keep our vows here, but in light of this present distress, we do think it's best not to have children; not to bring them into this. I don't want my wife pregnant. Jesus even said something about you should hope that you're not with child or it's not on the Sabbath at certain times when the Romans are going to come in. Why? Because it's difficult to travel. If you're in a time of heavy duty persecution, Christians are on the run. You've already gotten married. You've got to keep those vows. But you come to recognize, you know, it might not be in our best interest.

Here's one of the things to consider. Back in those days, maybe you can correct me on this, I don't know anything about birth control in those days, but I can tell you this, that if a man and a

woman are married, one of the first things that Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7 is that they need to not withhold their bodies from each other. Well, back in those days, I don't know what forms of birth control they had, but you're not supposed to withhold yourself from each other, and so, you know, the birth control thing - when did that come in? I don't know. I don't know. I've never researched it. I don't know the issues. Obviously, those things come into the equation now maybe in ways that they didn't 2,000 years ago. I can tell you this, you better not be killing your children. Any type of birth control that is abortive even as a third or fourth option of preventative is (incomplete thought). I will tell you that if it is ever found out in our church that somebody is using that form, it is a disciplinary matter undoubtedly, unquestionably. Any form of birth control that even remotely can be abortive. For the life of me, I can't figure out why in the world things like this even come up for debate among genuine Christians. Maybe they don't. Maybe genuine Christians would abominate the idea of murdering their children. Maybe there's ignorance too. But I think birth control ends up being part of the equation.

But here's the thing, if a Christian couple said that they didn't want to have children, if they told me it was because of the present distress, and they're on the phone with me, and they happen to be over in North Korea and they're on the run and they're living in the marshes - ok, I understand that. I'm not going to fault that. If they say, you know what? God just pressed upon us to adopt, and we've adopted 14 children, and we've always believed that's what God wanted us to do. There's so many children without parents. You know what? I would not question that. But if somebody's like, just give me the easy life. Yeah, you know what, you probably need children. I mean, I would probably pastorally be encouraging them to have them.

And we've run into that situation. James may remember a situation we ran into several years back when somebody that most of you probably know - he and his wife weren't having children, and just looking at the normalcy of it in Scripture, it's like why would you not? But, you know, if somebody's in a ministerial position of some sort - they're a pastor or deacon, I think it's good for men in those positions to be married and have wives - not that it's absolutely mandatory, but I think it's good. It tends to set a good example. And look, it's not like you have to have kids to be able to counsel on kids. It's not like you have to be married to counsel on marriage. Paul wasn't married and he gave counsel on marriage and on kids. So, you know, you don't want to say you can't tell me anything about that. Look, truth is truth, no matter who's telling you. But it is helpful to have experiences. There's no question about that. But you know, if I'm getting the feeling that somebody's making that decision because they just want ease, oh brethren, through much tribulation... So if you opt out of children because you're looking for the easier path, and you're truly a child of God, don't believe you're on the easy road. The Lord will see to it that that's not going to happen. Pastorally, if I was sensing that somebody was not having children because of some kind of worldliness; some kind of selfishness; I would probably want to put my finger on that. Any other thoughts?

(from the room) I don't remember if you hit on this or not but as far as the verse: Be fruitful and multiply. Is there a way we should view that in the New Testament. I mean Israel is a physical nation taking this lineage to have Christ, a physical people. We're now looking to not just make

physical children but spiritual children. Is there any way we could take that text and view it in the New Testament through that lens?

Tim: Well, we could just spiritualize it, much like marriage has all these spiritual realities. We could spiritualize it.

(from the room) For people who do spiritualize it, are you comfortable with that? Or do you feel like they don't actually have biblical grounds to do that?

Tim: Well, I think Jesus basically was saying be fruitful and multiply in His Great Commission. But whether it's taken from that and if somebody took it and said, well, that's all that means to me today as a New Testament believer. Well, really, I would just say this: The fact that Paul tells people not to marry is indirectly a call to not bear children too. And so, I guess that's the tension I feel there. (Incomplete thought) Just think with me here. He's clearly indicating that for the sake of serving the Lord, it would be best not to be married. You can be more fully devoted to the Lord then. I would say if a married couple didn't have children, and seriously they were concerned about serving the Lord, and they weren't having the children in order to serve the Lord in a certain capacity, is there a place to use Paul's same argumentation to make that case? It's an off-handed way, and I recognize he directly did not say that. And then I recognize you also have the other aspect that you have a man and a woman and the two are supposed to be giving their bodies to one another. Typically, the natural result of that is children. And obviously some unnatural action has to be taken, to prevent that from happening. It's the kind of thing that I think we all have to wrestle with these questions and we have to come to a place (incomplete thought).

It's kind of like Romans 14 where Paul is saying that let everyone be persuaded in his own mind. We want people that are convinced. And so you want to wrestle through. And the thing we have to be honest about, is really seriously looking at what Scripture says and what God's will is - not just what our will is. Not just going in with our will already made up or our lifestyle already determined in our own minds. And then we're just looking for the way to validate our lifestyle. This doesn't just end. It's be fruitful and multiply. And so, the question doesn't only come up with whether you have any children; it comes up again after you've had one, or two, or three, or four... Every family in the church is wrestling with this. And look, this question comes up and all you have to do is talk to the men and the women, and what you're getting is some families, they're going on to six and seven; And some you see four, five, six... they stop. And there's no more. Why? Something happened? And not only has something happened, decisions are being made. And people are wrestling with God's Word, and they're wrestling with the truth here. I would say in our church those who believe that you should keep having children until God stops giving them to you are the exception. I personally only know of like 2 or 3 that have taken that position. It's just something we all have to wrestle with.

I can tell you this, when I got to the point where I wrestled with it, it's like the Lord just gave me a sense of peace. And I know that's very subjective, but look, I wanted ten children from the very

beginning. My wife can tell you that. And when the time came and I sought the Lord in the matter, it wasn't like there was even a wrestling. As much as I wanted ten children, it was like the Lord just affirmed it that it was right to stop there. And I know that's very subjective. But a lot of this is going to be. We have to wrestle through these things, and we have to take it before the Lord. I'll tell you this. If you go before the Lord, and your will is surrendered, you really want His will. You really do. That doesn't mean you don't have preferences. But you're really surrendered. The Lord's going to guide you. The Lord will take you in the path that you need to go. The Lord will make things obvious. He'll bring the right counselors. He'll bring the right Scripture to bear on your conscience. You just cry out to Him. You keep your conscience guided and immersed in Scripture all the time. Scripture, Scripture, Scripture... the last thing you need to be doing is talking to your worldly relatives or your worldly co-workers. That's not what guides conscience. It's Scripture. It's God's Word just washing your mind, washing, washing, washing. Being renewed, being renewed. Being guided by a sense of God's will and God's purpose.

And you know, I'm studying Scripture all the time. I can tell you from the time that we had Joy until now, I would have liked to have had more children. But I've never second guessed whether we did the right thing or not. After all the studying of Scripture, it's not like, oh, you know this cloud that we did the wrong thing. We sought the Lord. I believe the Lord guided us.

(from the room) You don't need to give details, but weren't there objective reasons? Not just subjective?

Tim: Yes, there were. I mean I went through all the objective - the objective reasons. Basically, we had a newborn, a one year old, a three year old, and a five year old. And you know, a lot of times when families were like that, they had nannies and stuff. We didn't have that. We didn't have anybody. (Incomplete thought) And I was working full time as an engineer, trying to be involved in the ministry, we lived out in the country and we were in the woods, so I was clearing trees and putting water lines in. I'd come home from work and go right out. A lot of times, I wouldn't change my work clothes. I'd just put my boots on and straight out to try to get every bit of daylight I could out of the day. And Ruby's got, I think, two in diapers, plus a three year old and a five year old. And now, with the five year old, homeschooling starts. And she's just wiped out. She said I have to start homeschooling now and can we please stop? You know, that coming at a guy that over and over and over, if she told you how many times I said we're having ten kids, I probably said it ten times ten times ten times. I'd tell it to everybody. We're having ten kids. And so when she came in it was like, I don't know if she thought she was going to get hesitation, but it was just like the Lord confirmed it that it was out of love for my wife.

What time do we have? Brethren, I'll tell you this. The families in the church that are convinced that they need to keep having children, I don't try to unconvince them. Those who take: be fruitful and multiply and they feel like that is a commandment of God to them to keep having children, amen. We all have to wrestle though these things, and what I want is a church full of people with conviction. What I want is people who know why they're doing what they do. That's Romans 14. And you know what's interesting about Romans 14 is some people keep the day,

some people don't keep the day. Some people eat the meat, some people don't eat the meat. Not everybody's doing the same thing. But Paul said I want you all convinced. In other words, I want you all to be people of conviction. You say, well, is that safe? Having a church full of people with conviction when sometimes when their convictions aren't right? Or when their convictions don't line up? Well yeah, that's healthy. That doesn't mean you should have a conviction about the Trinity that's different from all the rest of us. It doesn't mean you have different thoughts on justification by faith. We're not talking about that. We're talking about number of children; we're talking about meat; we're talking about observing days, not observing a day. We're talking about things like that. And we should have a people full of conviction. Because what is a people full of conviction? It means they're exercising their discernment. They're finding out the good and the bad. What that tells you is you're getting mature people. And it all the more reflects the maturity when I strongly believe that I can have four children, and you strongly believe that you should keep having children till your wife is dead, and we can both look at each other and hug each other and say, "Hi, brother." And I'm not saying that there's any men in the church that would go that far. Ok.

Father, we pray to make us a people of the Word. Make us people of the Book. People that it could be said of us, Lord, I think of Bunyan, it was said of him that you could cut him anywhere and he would bleed Scripture. And Lord, I know when people have moved here to our church they oftentimes are amazed at how even the youngest believers among us know so much Scripture. And Lord, I pray that would just continue all the more. Lord, not to puff us up. But may we know the Scriptures truly in a way that humbles us; in a way that we see Your glory; in a way that our God is big, Lord; in a way that our lives would be guided by that lamp unto our feet. Please, guide us by Your Word, Lord. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.