

## NOT HAVING BABIES, NOT AN OPTION

---

---

### *Question*

In one of his articles, Dr. Budziszewski stated that one way to be impure within a marriage is to "refuse the gift of children." Additionally, I recently purchased and read Dr. B's helpful book *How to Stay Christian in College*. While I found most of the book easy to figure out, I was a little puzzled by Dr. B's assertion that "unless you're biologically incapable, never [having children] is not an option." I just wonder why "be fruitful and multiply" necessarily applies to every individual. My question to Dr. Budziszewski is, "What obligates every married couple to have children?" And also, does Dr. B's opinion on this issue have anything to do with his studies on natural law?

### *Reply*

Thanks for your excellent question. Here is the passage from the book to which you're referring:

Part three of the "Who can I marry?" question is that you have to marry someone who will make a good parent. Lots of young Christians get hung up on this point – they say "But what if we plan never to have children?" Sorry; unless you're biologically incapable, never is not an option. God commands spouses to be fruitful and multiply. It's one of the purposes of marriage, one of the ways that it glorifies Him. So if you're a man, you need to be looking for a woman who would make a good mother, and if you're a woman, you need to be looking for a man who would make a good father.

There are two ways to argue the point: One is from Scripture, which is sometimes called "special" revelation because it is given specially to the community of faith to guide us to Christ and safeguard us from error. The other is from natural law, which is sometimes called "general" revelation because it is made dimly available to every human being. I'll use both ways.

The scriptural reason why deciding not to have children is not an option for couples is that when God commanded us to be fruitful in Genesis 1:28, no exceptions were

either stated or implied. On the contrary, not only in this verse, but throughout the Bible, children are viewed as a joyful gift, and barrenness as an affliction. To offer one's body to God as an occasion for His creation of a new human life is a profound expression of obedience, cooperation and trust. As Mary said to the archangel Gabriel on hearing that she was to bear Jesus, "I am the Lord's servant; let it be to me as you have said." And let us not forget that hers was a "crisis pregnancy" in an even deeper sense than the usual.

To argue from general revelation rather than special revelation is to appeal to considerations which can be known even apart from Scripture – although they can usually be found in Scripture too. Surprisingly, the Bible does not make the claim that nobody can know anything about God's moral requirements except by reading the Bible. In fact it tells of a number of other ways in which God has made them known, including the principle of the harvest (that every sin has consequences) and the plan of our physical and emotional design (the purposes that are plain from the way we are put together).

For example, even without referring to Scripture it is easy to see that having children changes us in a way we desperately need to be changed. For those who are called to celibacy God provides other means of transformation, but for those who are called to marriage, children are the plan. They wake us up, they wet their diapers, they depend on us. Willy-nilly, they knock us out of our selfish habits and force us to live sacrificially for others.

Children are a necessary and natural continuation of the shock to our selfishness which is initiated by marriage itself, for although it is true that the spouses can live sacrificially for each other, by itself this love is not enough; it turns too easily inward rather than outward to the world. You see, as time goes along, married folk who refuse to offer themselves to God for the gift of children become even more selfish than they had intended. Instead of two selfish Mes they merely become a single selfish Us, so they have really not got far outside themselves after all.

Does it have to happen that way? Yes. We were designed to live a certain way, and when we try to live in another, it doesn't work. Anyone can see that sex not only produces children but also brings about an exquisite enhancement of the unity of the spouses. What we dare not forget is that this is a package deal. By trying to separate the two purposes, seeking the unity but refusing the gift of children, we still get a kind of unity, but it goes bad; it ferments, turns sour, and begins to stink.

My criticism does not apply to infertile couples, who are childless through no fault of their own. But when we deliberately separate the intimate and the procreative sides of sex, we make ourselves like those ancient Romans who tried to separate the social from the nutritive side of dining. They served more food at feasts than anyone could digest, offering their guests peacock feathers for purging between courses.

These things have always been recognized among Christians, even in the ceremony of marriage. The modern refusal of the gift of children comes neither from faith, from hope, or from love. Nor does it come from "care for the earth" or any of the other secular nostrums that are offered in its defense. It is nothing but selfishness, the desire to have everything our way. Through marrying and having children, by contrast, we identify with all those mothers and fathers, all those mothers of mothers and fathers of fathers, through whose self-giving we ourselves have received the gift of life, and we pass that gift on into hands we do not see. We link ourselves with all past and all future generations, confident of the providence of the Lord our God, Who was, and is, and is to come.

Thanks again for writing.

Grace and Peace,  
Professor Budziszewski

---

Copyright © 2000 J. Budziszewski 2000. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. This article originally appeared in *Boundless.org*.