

Guidelines for Family Planning

1. Family planning is a responsibility which every married couple faces. Many in our world consider parenthood as something to be avoided. We view parenthood and family planning as a sacred obligation. Yet, with all our planning, conception can only take place as God in His wisdom permits it. We must humbly acknowledge that all our children are gifts from God. *"Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward"* (Psalm 127:3). A child who is conceived contrary to the parents' planning should also be welcomed and loved as a gift from God.

2. God's Word teaches that bearing children is a significant purpose for marriage. Therefore we *must* emphasize the high calling of parenthood. A Christian couple should plan *for* children and assume the responsibility of rearing them for God. *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth"*(Genesis 1:27, 28).

Privileges demand corresponding responsibilities. Contrary to popular thinking, God bestows a special blessing upon the Christian woman who is willing to submit to the responsibilities of bearing children. *"Notwithstanding, she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety"* (1 Timothy 2:15). *"I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children"* (1 Timothy 5:14a).

3. We have no specific directive in the Word as to the number and frequency of children in a family. This will vary from family to family and is a personal matter between the individual couple and God. However, in Genesis 1:28 God commanded Adam and Eve to *"Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth"* which would increase the population. God's Word pictures large families as being honorable and blessed and we dare not stigmatize those whom He has thus blessed. *"Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they*

shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (Psalm 127:3-5). "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways. For thou shall eat the labor of thine hands; happy shall thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house; thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord" (Psalm 128:1-4).

4. The Scriptures teach that life begins at conception. *"For thou hast possessed my reins; thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:13-16). Note the personality in "Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb."*

Observe also in Luke's Gospel the life of the babe in Elisabeth's womb. *"And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me: For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy" (Luke 1:41-44).*

5. All human life is sacred. *"God giveth to all life and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). There is a difference between the prevention of life and the destruction of life. The use of any method of birth control which destroys life following conception is sin. "Thou shall not kill." (Exodus 20:13). We also believe couples should be counseled against using contraceptive means that would endanger the physical welfare of the wife or husband, since their lives are sacred too.*

6. Marital relations afford many opportunities to exercise the spiritual grace of self-control. If contraceptives are needed, they still can never furnish a suitable alternative to personal discipline. *"And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things" (1 Corinthians 9:25a). "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life: that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Peter 3:7).*

7. Sexual relations in marriage are an expression of marital love and should not be limited to the purpose of reproduction. Respect and mutual consideration are vital in the responsibility of husband and wife to one another. Sexual relations or abstinence must be by mutual consent. *"Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud [deprive] ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency"* (1 Corinthians 7:3-5).

8. Couples should sincerely seek God's will and be fully persuaded in their own minds regarding how He would have *them* proceed in family planning. Our Christian liberty must be exercised in the fear of God and not for self-gratification. *"Therefore, whether ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."* (1 Corinthians 10:31).

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