

Question: Since the Bible says we should “be fruitful and increase in number,” does this mean people are sinning if they choose to have only one child or no children at all?

According to the Bible, the command to “be fruitful and increase in number” was first given to humanity at the very beginning of God’s creation when there was a need to populate the earth (Genesis 1:28). The same command was repeated to Noah and his family immediately after the Genesis flood when they were the only humans who survived the flood (Genesis 9:1). However, we now live in a world with over 7 billion people competing for limited resources.

The problem of over-population endangers the health of our environment, spreads life-threatening diseases and contributes to poverty and world hunger. Over-population is also a factor in the increase in crime, corruption and war. The Bible reflects not only God’s concern about a sufficient population to rule over his creation but also his concern for the poor, for justice among his people and for the good of the environment. There is no reason to believe God intended the command to “be fruitful and increase in number” to apply to people today in the same way as to the generations who first lived on earth.

Our God has taught us that we have a responsibility to see that our children are properly cared for and taught to know and honor the God who made us. Anyone who intentionally conceives children when they do not have the ability to feed, clothe and educate them is being irresponsible. The Bible teaches that the children and grandchildren of those who are widows in need should “first learn to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family” (1 Timothy 5:4). In this same context, we are told, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). I presume that “his immediate family” includes young children who cannot care for themselves along with elderly, needy widows. We cannot obey these instructions if we intentionally put ourselves in a position where we cannot provide for our families and either end up having to place them in the custody of the state or else leaving them to suffer in poverty.

Certainly there is nothing wrong with a couple choosing to have children or not to have children. There is nothing in God's word that should lead us to believe that either choice is sinful. However, every couple should weigh carefully their responsibility toward God and their children. This should include a consideration of the kind of world we now have as well as our ability to provide for our children (Ephesians 6:4).

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