

## Marriage, the Family, and Spiritual Warfare

### Vatican II on the Family in the Modern World

*The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family. ... The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one. For the good of the spouses and their offspring as well as of society, the existence of the sacred bond no longer depends on human decisions alone. For, God Himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. All of these have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole. (Gaudium et Spes, nos. 47-48)*

### Introduction

Andreas Köstenberger: "I am aware of no current volume on marriage and the family that provides even the most cursory treatment of spiritual warfare. Regularly, the focus is on fulfilling one's partner's needs in marriage, improving one's communication skills or resolving marital conflict. From reading any of these books, one would never know that spiritual warfare is a vital issue in marriage and the family. *Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Spiritual warfare has been a part of married life and child rearing almost from the beginning.*"<sup>1</sup>

### The Devil Has Attacked the Family From the Beginning

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "*Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'*" And the woman said to the serpent, "*We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'*" But the serpent said to the woman, "*You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.* Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. (Genesis 3:1-6)

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<sup>1</sup> See Andreas Köstenberger, "Marriage and Family in the New Testament," in Ken M. Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 278-282. Because Köstenberger is not a Catholic, several of his interpretations of New Testament passages are erroneous; however, the section of his article on "Marriage, the Family, and Spiritual Warfare" is extremely insightful and inspired this talk.

### **Pride, Falsehood, and Accusation in the Family**

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "*The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.*" Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "*The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.*" (Genesis 3:8-13)

### **The Fall of the Family: Spiritual Warfare, Suffering, Work, and Death**

The LORD God said to the serpent, "*...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*" (Genesis 3:15-16)

### **The Devil and Hatred Between Siblings**

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain... And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, *sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.*" (Genesis 4:1-7)

### **A Bride Who Has Issues: the Story of Sarah**

Sarah, the daughter of Raguel... had been given to *seven husbands, and the evil demon Asmodeus had slain each of them before he had been with her as his wife.* [T]he maids said to her, "Do you not know that you strangle your husbands? You already have had seven and have had no benefit from any of them. Why do you beat us? If they are dead, go with them! May we never see a son or daughter of yours!" When she heard these things, she was deeply grieved, even to the thought of hanging herself. (Tobit 3:8-10)

### **A Groom Who Is Afraid: the Story of Tobias**

The angel [Raphael] said to the young man [Tobias], "Raguel... your relative... has a daughter named Sarah. I will suggest that she be given to you in marriage..." Then the young man said to the angel, "I have heard that the girl has been given to seven husbands and that each died in the bridal chamber. Now I am the only son my father has, and I am afraid that if I go in I will die as those before me did, for a demon is in love with her, and he harms no one except those who approach her. *So now I fear that I may die and bring the lives of my father and mother to the grave in sorrow on my account.* And they have no other son to bury them." But the angel said to him, "...Now listen to me, brother, for she will become your wife; and do not worry about the demon, for this very night she will be given to you in marriage. When you enter the bridal chamber, you shall take live ashes

of incense and lay upon them some of the heart and liver of the fish so as to make a smoke. Then the demon will smell it and flee away, and will never again return. *And when you approach her, rise up, both of you, and cry out to the merciful God, and he will save you and have mercy on you. Do not be afraid, for she was destined for you from eternity.* You will save her, and she will go with you, and I suppose that you will have children by her." When Tobias heard these things, he fell in love with her and yearned deeply for her. (Tobit 6:13-14)

### **Spiritual Warfare and the Wedding Night of Tobias and Sarah**

When they had finished eating [the wedding supper], they escorted Tobias in to her. *As he went he remembered the words of Raphael, and he took the live ashes of incense and put the heart and liver of the fish upon them and made a smoke. And when the demon smelled the odor he fled to the remotest parts of Egypt, and the angel bound him.* When the door was shut and the two were alone, Tobias got up from the bed, and said, "Sister, get up, and let us pray that the Lord may have mercy upon us." And Tobias began to pray, "Blessed are you, O God of our fathers... You made Adam and gave him Eve to be his wife as a helper and support. From them the race of mankind has sprung. You did say, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; let us make a helper fit for him.' And now, O Lord, I am not taking this sister of mine because of lust, but with sincerity. Grant that I may find mercy and may grow old together with her.' And she said with him, "Amen." Then they both went to sleep for the night. (Tobit 8:1-9)

### **The Devil and *Porneia***

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. It is well for a man not to touch a woman. But because of the temptation to sexual immorality (Greek *porneia*), each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, *lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control.* (1 Corinthians 7:1-5)

### **The Devil and Anger**

Be angry but do not sin; *do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil....* Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:26, 31-32)

### **Spousal Love and Fruitful Prayer**

Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, *in order that your prayers may not be hindered.* (1 Peter 3:1-7)

### **St. Paul on the Family and Spiritual Warfare**

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. *Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.* For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. *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, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.* Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference 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. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but *bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* (Ephesians 5:25-6:1)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. *For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.* Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore,

having girded your loins with *truth*,  
and having put on the breastplate of *righteousness*,  
and having shod your feet with the equipment of *the gospel of peace*;  
besides all these, taking the shield of *faith*, with which you can quench all the  
*flaming darts of the evil one.*  
And take the helmet of *salvation*,  
and the sword of the Spirit, which is *the word of God.* (Ephesians 6:10-20)

### **Conclusion<sup>2</sup>**

1. Wake up to the fact that there is a battle going on.
2. Know your enemy's tactics.
3. Use the right weapons.
4. Remember that Christ is already the Victory!

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<sup>2</sup> Köstenberger, "Marriage and Family in the New Testament," 281.