

Married Children
(Mark 10:2-16)
Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. We have come to a portion of the gospel in Mark 10 that is primed to be esp. juicy and interesting for Christian legalists, so-called Christians who can't help but base their identity as Christians through adherence to the Law. I don't say this in any way to discount the Law. We are to strive to honor the good and holy Law of God (in fact, let's not even say "strive," we are *commanded to keep it period*), but we are also to acknowledge its primary use: it is intended by God to crush us and to show us our sin. In this way, instead of confessing puffy pride, we would confess our sin in all humility; and the one doing this is the one received by our merciful God.

How many are clear about this? How many continue to treat the Law of God as God calling us to do our best and hopefully after grading us on the curve, possibly deciding that our good outweighs our evil? "No!" says the Word of Christ. "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20)

Instead, the Lord gives His Law to us in order to serve His ultimate purpose for us: so that when the sweet Gospel is proclaimed, we would rise up from the depths and rejoice in the greatness of the forgiveness of all our sin that the holy Law reveals. Jesus forgives sinners who have broken God's holy Law!

But as long as we are stuck on ourselves and our performance, Mark 10 will be misused by Christian legalists. "Let's see, how do I measure up? And for that matter, how do *you* measure up?" In his book *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer points out that the knowledge of good and evil is the basis for human nature's love for judging others. Not simply judging between good and evil (which we are called to do), but to carry this to the point of condemnation: to judge others in order to put ourselves above.

The religion of the sinful flesh is judgment. It pretends to love what is right while hating one's neighbor. It is the grandest form of religion and it is of the devil. We love the Law, that is, we love to use it in the wrong way, esp. to feel that we've arrived to the pinnacle while others still grovel. That way, we feel better about ourselves while our so-called self-righteousness is raising a stench up to heaven. But the Lord did not permit the Pharisees to trap Him nor did He allow them to place man's teaching over and above the teaching of God.

First they wanted to carry on this idea that it was ok for a man to divorce his wife.

No it wasn't. Moses had to deal with hardened hearts. Their condition was that they were unteachable. They had closed minds. So what Moses conceded – this certificate of divorce – was at least a way of preventing further abuse towards a woman. At least the woman would be able to verify that she had been dismissed and not that she forsook her husband and – furthermore – that she was no longer married to this man who believed he just *had* to dismiss her.

Second, however, was the need for greater correction. The Pharisees represent our culture today: marriage is temporary.

No it isn't. God yokes the man and the woman for life! God makes them one and He considers this a permanent earthly union. They are no longer two, but one, not for a few years while "being in love," but until one of them dies. The Pharisees who were again, very religious, wanted to discount this basic reality. They were fighting against God. They wanted to ignore what He had said in Genesis. And how we need to see and understand the gift that is marriage. The longer I am married to my wife, the more I realize she is truly my complement, the one that the Lord has yoked me to is the one He intends for me to view as His gift to me from heaven. And if your spouse is the one to whom He has yoked you to; if our spouse is His gift to you from above, then how can this be temporary? It is a permanent yoking, it is a life-long gift.

And what continues to amaze me is the Lord's master-plan for a true complement. Traci makes-up for all of my short-comings. Where I am too emotional, she is more even-keeled. Where I worry too much, she takes one day at a time. This past week she spoke of wanting to get a certain medical exam. I started to complain about some of our health concerns. She quickly challenged me, "What about giving it to the Lord?" The list of complementary helps is endless. God knew what He was doing. He knew what He was doing when He brought you together with the one you are with now. You are complements to each other. You make each other whole. And of course you challenge each other. That's what complements do.

Luther wrote concerning his wife Katie: "When I look at all the women in the world, I find none of whom I could boast as I boast with joyful conscience of my own. This one God himself gave me, and I know that he and all the angels are pleased when I hold fast to her in love and fidelity."

In Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages* he identifies that some register love or feel they are receiving love when they receive words of affirmation. This is one of my "love languages." Traci knows it. On Wednesday, March 16th, 2005 at 8:34 am, she sent me this email:

"Honey, I want you to know how much I love you and admire you. The Lord has an amazing servant in you. I personal[ly] don't know [of] anyone better. Your patience to work with people,

your dedication to getting out the word is unbelievable, and the passion you have is beautiful to see. I support you 100%. I want to help you in any way I can. I love you.”

Now of course she is assuredly phenomenally biased and I certainly do not deserve any of these amazing compliments, but how do you think I felt when I read these words? I quite simply thanked God for His gift to me. She is from heaven. This is the way we should see our spouses. Does this mean that I’m intimating that this is our marriage: always sunshine and roses? Of course not. But even through the storms and the pain, I’ve seen how I’ve needed how she completes me. This kind of gift God intends would be had for the all the days a couple is together alive.

Third, Jesus later further elaborated to his disciples: if the man divorces his wife – for a reason other than those reasons in Scripture which permit divorce [we find the qualifications outside of Mark 10 in Matthew 19 and 1st Corinthians 7] – then the man not only sins against himself, but he causes his wife to sin as well. And this scenario can work both ways: the wife could also commit such sins.

The Law was mounting:

1. The sin in divorce is hardness of heart, being unteachable, and having a closed mind towards God.
2. The sin of divorce violates the Word and will of God which reveals that marriage is permanent, not temporary.
3. The sin of divorce leads one to sin not only against oneself, but to sin against the other.

So the Christian legalists start to play the check-the-box game. How have I demonstrated my Christianity by showing to myself and to the world that my performance is better than yours? This is the game that is played. But it is all wrong.

We go further into the context of Scripture and we realize that we may justify a decision to divorce if we are the offended party when adultery is committed against us (Matthew 19) or when malicious desertion occurs against us (1st Corinthians 7). We check-the-box and we stand as those who might be sinners, but not as bad as *those* sinners.

God won’t play our game.

I got a call from a very upset Christian woman. She had discovered that her husband was looking at another woman. She confronted him in regard to the sin of lust. It was more than a glance. She was right and he was busted. She called me irate: “Pastor, doesn’t Scripture say that if a man looks lustfully at a woman that [that man] has committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:28)?!” My answer: “Yes, the Scriptures do teach that.” “Well then,” the woman was

quick to jump on the fact, “then I have every right to ask him to leave!” She was mad and she was serious. She was hurt and she wanted to retaliate. We spoke for some time and prayed. They reconciled. Years later, they are still together by the grace of God.

I tell the story, however, because it is just too easy to sin and if our warped goal is to somehow demonstrate that it’s ok for us to pick up a stone to kill the woman caught in adultery (John 8), then we are in for a big disappointment about our imagined self-righteousness. Jesus said then and says now very simply, **“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”** (vs. 7) And after they had all dropped their stones, the older ones first and the younger ones following (the older ones always have greater opportunity to see their sin), then the Lord said to the woman, **“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”** She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, **“Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”** (vss 10-11)

Jesus came to the Samaritan woman as recorded in John 4. Jesus eventually said to her, **“You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had four husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”** (vss 17-18)

The Law was used as a bridge to introduce her to her need for grace and to show Himself as her Savior. Not as the One who condemns, but as the One who forgives. Jesus loved this woman who couldn’t check the right boxes anymore...she was just a sinner and the Messiah came for sinners.

The Word of God won’t let us play the game. James 2:10 states, **“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”** That means we are all accountable for the sin of wrong divorce. All of us. And for that matter, we are accountable for all other sins to boot.

We can’t play “let’s compare our holy resumes.” It doesn’t work that way since James 2:10 teaches that all our resumes are the same: they say “sinner, accountable for all of it” in red ink on the top.

But my brothers and sisters, God has made marriage holy in spite of our sin. Jesus has married us His bride the Church. We are all married to Jesus. We are the holy ones yoked to Him. He no longer holds our adultery against us: the fact that every one of us here have been unfaithful to Him while lusting after the false gods of this life. Our adultery is covered by His love; our adultery is covered by His blood. Our sin has been nailed to the cross, because our Savior was nailed to the cross. Our holy Bridegroom has saved us, redeemed us, and made us spotless.

Who can believe this? The two sections in this gospel from Mark 10 are not unrelated. Only married children can get it. Only those given faith (not those playing the judgment game).

Jesus said of the little children: ***“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” (vs 15)*** Little children are helpless; they don’t pretend to be able to stand for themselves. They are completely dependent. They need grace.

We see our sin and we see that we cannot stand. We are helpless like little children. We aren’t strong enough to make ourselves righteous. It is easy for such a little child to already feel condemned. We can’t save ourselves. But then as we wait for the condemnation, something else happens, Jesus takes us in His arms and blesses us, laying His hands of compassion and mercy on us. He refuses to condemn and insists to cover us with His blood; He refuses to judge; but rather imputes His overflowing life (and in this way the judgment that takes place is on Him FOR US); He refuses to play the check-the-box game for holiness, and instead gives us His perfect holiness as He wraps us into Himself (our holiness in Him is beyond the boxes, the boxes can’t contain such holiness).

We are now in Christ, children married to the Savior. We are married children in a permanent marriage, a Godly marriage, a holy marriage, with a spouse that will never leave us, never forsake us.

If you are married right now. This is not about your past. This is not about your history. It is about your now. Now you are in Christ, rejoice! And see your status as a married child-of-God flow over into your marriage with your spouse on earth. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church (Eph. 5) and wives, respect your husbands (Eph. 5). And love each other as Jesus has loved you and loves you now: unconditionally...permanently.

And if you are not currently married, then know that nevertheless you *are* a married child: you are married to the Lord. And it is a glorious marriage; it is a beautiful marriage and its love is unconditional...and permanent.

And for all of us here, you are once again invited to the marriage feast: come to your marriage feast with hungry hearts to receive the body and blood of your Savior for the forgiveness of ALL your sins. You are invited, look you have the wedding band on your finger, that is, you are baptized. You are invited, look His Word has filled your heart and mind once again; He is the Lover of your Soul who speaks the powerful “words of affirmation” called the Gospel, a Word that raises the dead. Come, married children, come celebrate your eternal marriage to the Lord, the One who loves you with an everlasting love.