

Receive the Kingdom of God as a Little Child!

Matthew 10:2-16

There is a growing trend of people being buried with their cell phones. Noelle Potvin, a counselor for a funeral home in Hollywood, Calif., said, "It seems that everyone under 40 who dies, takes their cell phone with them."

Pam Vetter an LA funeral planner says, "I've seen people leave their cell phones on and tell me that they're going to call their loved one later."

The wife of John Jacobs continues to pay the monthly bill for the cell phone that she left in his casket in 2005. She had his cell phone number carved onto his tombstone. Now there's something to remember in your relationships.

We thank the Lord that salvation is possible, relationships can continue, but it doesn't come through technology.

Mark Twain once said, "Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture which they cannot understand; but as for me, I always notice that the passages in Scripture which trouble me the most are those which I do understand."

Perhaps you have a passage which bothers you, because you understand it. I understand this one and it bothers me and maybe there's one that bothers you. If there is, you can really be glad about it.

Though we are dead because of the things we did against God, he gave new life with Christ (Eph 2:5) God's solution is not to preserve the dead, but to raise the dead

This happens to be about divorce. And thousands of pages have been written in books over the years, looking at it from different angles. I would say that every one here has been impacted by divorce in your own family, or friends. You know how tragic that can be. And the upshot of course was trying to make themselves look good in the process.

To be sure, the OT reading for this day from Genesis attests to it. The Epistle lesson, Hebrews 2:13, however, adds a new perspective to our text. There it clearly states that disobedience of God's law has consequences and no violator shall escape its just punishment. It also announces our salvation perfected through Christ's suffering, as by his obedient death on the cross he paid the price for our sinful imperfection.

The Pharisees have habitually been looking for opportunities to put Jesus to the test and trap hi in his own words. Neither the Pharisees or the Herodians, or even the disciples seem to grasp the actual purpose of Jesus' mission. Instead they see him as a threat to their own little fiefdoms.

The Pharisees had in fact built a fence around the law in order to establish and preserve their own manmade traditions. The stringent tradition of the elders imposes strict regulations on the pious and religious, leaving many curious loopholes for the shrewd and meticulous interpreters of the law.

In our text, a question about divorce and the Mosaic provisions for it appeared out of the blue, as the Pharisees tested Jesus. These teachers of the law prided themselves on their association with the great law-giver Moses and invoked his stipulations in their defense. Jesus cut across the catalog of the Jewish legal tradition with a direct appeal to the law, pointing out their callous, cold-heartedness the law's divine intention. Beyond Moses, Jesus points to the higher law of creation, the divine constitution of marriage as a lifetime union of one man and one woman. Neither man nor woman has a mandate for divorce, and marriage shall remain indissoluble. If Moses permitted divorce at all, it was he who was bending the rules as the people were hardening their hearts.

Moses may have tolerated divorce, but he had not authorized it. Even the Mosaic provisions, if read carefully, would point the accusing finger at those at those searching for a justifying cause of divorce. Divorce was permitted in accordance with the provisions of Deuteronomy 24:1. It was a protective provision for the woman who had been repudiated by her husband.

The Jewish tradition has since built its own fence around the law. The school of Shammai argued that something shameful was sufficient cause for divorce. Hillel and his followers watered that down to the extent that anything that caused annoyance and embarrassment to a husband was a legitimate ground for writing a certificate of divorce from his wife. Experts in the law can be experts in the art of bending the rules. Nevertheless, the question on divorce the Pharisees posed to Jesus in this context was mere trickery and hostile in its intention.

Hard heartedness is a deliberate determination not to abide by the will of God.

As in divorce, human selfishness threatens our proper relationship to God and fellow human beings. In this case we have not outgrown the moral and ethical stature of those who have gone before us. Sin therefore is crouching at our door as well.

Jesus is greater than Moses, wiser than Solomon, and greater than the temple. He is the greater interpreter of Moses. In him all the law and the prophets find their proper meaning and fulfillment. Jesus has come not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. His coming into the world under the law, and becoming sin before God in our place is evidence that he accepts us as his own. On his merits we enter God's presence with boldness, and have no need to bend the rules for our convenience.

For those who are impacted by divorce and by all the other things that scripture mentions about us, we don't need new explanations or rationalizations concerning our lives. We need new life. We are sinners, and we are many times hard-hearted.

In Romans 3:19-20 the situation of our life is made clear. You and I can be glad Paul's letter didn't stop with these verses. "This stops excuses and brings the whole world under God's judgment, because no one can be made right with God by following the law. The law only shows us our sin." There's no one in this room who is not exposed as a sinner by God's law.

Aren't you relieved Paul didn't leave the corpse on the table? Paul brings the light when he says:

“But God has a way to make people right with him without the law and he has now shown us that way...God makes people right with himself through their faith in Jesus Christ. This is true for all who believe in Christ, because all people are the same: All have sinned and are not good enough for God's glory, and all need to be made right with God by his grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made right with God by his grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made free from sin through Jesus Christ. God gave him as a way to forgive sin through faith in the blood of Jesus' death. This shows that God does what is right and fair...”

And then we come to the last part of the Gospel. Some parents bring their children to Jesus to be blessed and the disciples try to send them away. He's busy teaching on some important subject, divorce, and can't be bothered.

The disciples, acting as his minders, his entourage, try to shoo them away. They seem not to remember his embracing a child not too long before and insisting that in receiving a little one they were welcoming him. Hence the anger of Jesus directed toward the disciples.

The children are not to be prevented from approaching him “for of such is the Kingdom of God.”

The nature of that kingdom of God is mind-boggling. No one here deserves to be in it. We have all fallen short. And yet Jesus wants us in it.

Children cannot earn, or perform any useful work. Any benefit they receive can only come to them as a pure gift. If, then, children are the paradigm recipients of the Kingdom, this means that it comes to everyone as a pure, unmerited gift from God.

When Jesus summons us to repent and believe in the good news of the Kingdom, that news melts our hardened hearts and by the power of God's Spirit we come to believe that God is so good, so generous as to give the Kingdom. Our renewed relationship with God is extended to all other aspects of life. We are given fresh starts and great gifts of life.

Christ can't stand the thought of his kids rotting in the cemetery. So he comes in and calls us out. We are the dead, and he is the dead raiser. Our task is not to get up but to admit that we are dead. The only ones who remain in the grave are the ones who don't think they're there.

God gives us a new heart and takes away our hard-heartedness when we come to the Lord's Table to receive what Christ has to offer us...himself, for the forgiveness of sins. He doesn't turn his children away.

Joy in the Christ Life,

David E. Hinck, pastor FGS