

# Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

**Who Says? Moses and Jesus**

**Mark 10:2-16**

**Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost – Proper 22**

**Analysis by Michael Hoy**

2Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” 3He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” 4They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” 5But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. 6But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ 7‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” 10Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; 12and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” 13People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. 14But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 15Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” 16And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

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## DIAGNOSIS: Moses says...

### Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Is it lawful?*

The first sign of a problem is evident in the question of the Pharisees, “is it lawful...” Already in our speech, in our questioning, there is an indication of life-behavior that is being governed by particular rules and/or principles that have legalistic roots. It is “legalistic,” as we will see, because it does not take seriously just how damning the law can be. The confessors called it *opinio legis*, the “leaning toward the law.” The problem is not only a problem for the Pharisees. It is deeply rooted in the lives of Jesus’ disciples, who themselves question Jesus (v. 10).

### Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Testing (and tested)*

With this legalistic inquiry, the Pharisees are seeking to “test him [Jesus]” (v. 2). But they are unaware how, even in the questioning, they are themselves being tested. Jesus can perceive their hearts and responds with a question that exposes the source of their life’s inquiries: what Moses (the Law, the Torah) says. Do they know what Moses says? Absolutely! But they are only able to establish a surface relationship with Moses. They can quote Moses, but they really do not understand him. And Jesus establishes just how much they (we?) are being critiqued by that very Law of Moses at the level of our “heart”: “*Because of your hardness of heart Moses said...*”

### Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *What God says and does (via the Torah)*

Jesus doesn’t stop with Moses. He goes on to another section of the Torah, the book of Genesis, to explain what *God* did “in the beginning.” “*God* made them male and female.” “What *God* has

joined together, let no one separate.” At the root of our problem is our alienation from what God has intended all along. One may note, in the specifics of this text on the matter of divorce and the status of children, Jesus’ own testing of the heart (also for the disciples) underscores a righting of relationship, and leaving no option for superiority of males, or the inferiority of women and children. There is “righting” by God on the grounds of the Torah itself. But because it is righted in the Torah does not make it finally right for us-not even ultimately for those who have been regarded inferior in life. It only leaves us judged.

## **PROGNOSIS: Jesus says...**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** – *What God says and does in Jesus*

The critical judgment is overcome by Jesus’ own response to those who are judged by the Law: “Do not stop them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.” The fact that it is children who serve as the foil to the legalistic desire to get justified is fitting. Children are incapable of defending themselves. This is precisely the case for all of us (legalists all) who are under the Law’s judgment! Jesus takes us into his (cruciform) arms and hands, and blesses us.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** – *Receiving (= Passing)*

While we have been restricted by our failing the test of Moses and the Law, in Christ we get to pass into blessing by faith. This is the “receiving” of the kingdom of God as a gift, like children who depend upon a protector. Trusting that Jesus the Christ is the one who covers our beings means that we don’t have to defend, or justify, ourselves. Do we know what Jesus says? Absolutely! It is a Word of promise which we receive by faith.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution)** – *Answering with*

## *blessing*

For all who are questioning in life “is it lawful?”, there is an answer that we can bring that can see them well beyond the law: an answer of blessing. What we have to bear is an answer to a much more profound question behind “what is lawful,” namely, “what makes *right*?” The righteousness of Christ is a gift freely given, though it cost Christ plenty (and may cost us in the sharing). But the final answer is an answer that enfolds one and all in the loving arms and hands of Jesus the Christ, using our arms and hands as the “body of Christ” in the world.