

Series: God & Our Culture #1525

Title: Mark 10.13-16

Jesus & The Children

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. We remain in our current series on God and Our Culture and our current topic is gender and sex. How many genders are there? We have established from Genesis chapter 1 and other texts, the Bible is clear, there are only two genders: male and female. Genesis 1, verse 27 says, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." And, we have learned that, contrary to the transgender ideology, gender and biological sex are the same in the Bible. They always go together.

And remember that Jesus Himself, in two texts found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, affirms there are only two genders and gender and sex are related to one another. This is why it is blasphemous to God to teach to children how to transgender. And yet, as we talked about at the end last time, this is exactly what is going on in our schools *and*, most tragically, in many *homes*. Parents are pushing their own children right into the ever growing transgender movement. Today, in the fourth of four points I am leaving with you concerning Jesus' response to all this, I want to show you how offensive and sinful these parents and teachers and the broader culture is being towards God who made each child in His image and made them either male *or* female. Furthermore, I want you to see Jesus model for us God's way of dealing with children. Let's learn from Him.

I want to read from Mark's Gospel. The Gospel of Mark, chapter 10, verses 13-16. This is Mark 10 beginning in verse 13, "**And they were bringing children to [Jesus] so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, 'Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.' ¹⁶ And [Jesus] took [the children] in His arms and *began* blessing them, laying His hands on them.**"

As we discuss this, I want to take a bit of a different approach than I usually do. I want to draw out of these verses the general tenor of how Jesus treats children. We will not have time to go verse-by-verse or word-by-word here and study this with depth. Of particular interest are verses 13, part of 14, and 16. And to begin with, in verse 13 who were those who "were bringing children to Jesus"? The answer is their parents. It was common for Jewish parents to bring their children to a prominent rabbi or to the elders of the synagogue so a blessing could be pronounced upon the little ones. This is still true today in many religious traditions. It is a moment of great pride and joy – cameras capture these moments – when a child is blessed in a church, a synagogue, a temple, or mosque. It is a moment many parents cherish.

Within the Hebrew Bible (what we call the Old Testament) blessings upon children were common. In Genesis 9 Noah blessed his children, in Genesis 27 Isaac and the blessing of Jacob and Esau, and in Genesis 49 Jacob blessed his children. Genesis 49, verse 28 reads, "**All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him.**" This tradition continued in the New Testament. Jesus was a prominent rabbi and so the parents came to Him with their children. Besides, Jesus had a reputation for loving children and welcoming them.

In the chapter before this one, Mark 9, verse 36 as Jesus was teaching the twelve disciples we read that, quote, "**Taking a child, [Jesus] set him before them, and taking him in His arms, [the Lord] said to them...**" That's Mark 9.36 and notice how the Lord took up the child in His arms. When I imagine this I feel such joy. The Son of God cradling a little boy. Oh the wonder of the love this child must have felt. We of faith, we look forward to that day in eternity when Jesus Christ shall encompass us in His arms of love; the warm, physical embrace we seek from the One we love the most and *the One* who loves us most deeply.

And then in Matthew 21, when the children were shouting, **“Hosanna to the Son of David,”** Jesus affirmed the children. He welcomed their praise of Him. So not only was Jesus a prominent teacher and rabbi, He was also a man whose reputation was to welcome young people, to love, and cherish them. We will see this as the story continues. But it was their parents who brought these children to the Lord.

It is, perhaps, interesting to note that Mark chooses a word that is a general term for children. And over in Luke’s Gospel the word he uses more specifically referred to young infants or new borns. So we should think about a mother passing her new born son or daughter to Jesus. Imagine the crowds who were pressing in on Him and then many parents rushed up with their offspring and hoisted even infants into the arms of the Lord. And it was Christ’s delight to receive them. Mark 10, verse 13 continues, **“They were bringing children to [Jesus] so that He might touch them...”** This was very intimate and personal. Jesus touched these kids. He held them in His arms, He hoisted them onto His lap, and He embraced them.

This is a picture of the love God has for all His sons and daughters. I am thinking of the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans and Galatians when he encourages us to cry out to God in prayer saying, “Abba! Father!” Abba meaning Dada or Daddy and Papa. To truly love a child is to give that little one to Jesus. Have you presented your sons and daughters to the Lord? Have you prayed diligently for them to know Christ; to be saved by Him, to love and worship and serve Him? Have you, from before the time they were even born (when they were in the womb) and certainly since their birth read to them, told them the (true) stories of Jesus from these same Gospels? Do your children know how much Jesus loves them and welcomes them to come to Him?

As we used to sing, Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. In the church in which I grew up for many years we had a vibrant Sunday school attended by kids from many different ethnicities, coming from all over the world. This was Boston in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when many immigrants made their way into the city, and our church had the vision and the passion and competency to reach so many with the Good News of the gospel. And we had a woman in the church, a dear woman, a grandmother who stood out as being the most passionate amongst us – a true champion for children and families.

Her name was Pearl Gayle. We used to call her Ms. Pearl. She is well into her 80s now, and still attends this same church. When I was older, by then into my late teens, the church made a decision to stop picking up children at their homes and bringing them to the church via a big school bus. Pearl was livid! She saw this (correctly, by the way) as a major setback for the children’s ministry. And I will never forget her confronting anyone who disagreed with her. She used to bellow in this loud and persuasive voice, “The children! What about the children?” You can hear down the corridors of the church. “The children! What about the children?”

I often think of her when I read about Jesus letting the little children come to Him. Like Ms. Pearl we all ought to be doing everything we can to bring our children and grandchildren and our nieces and nephews and the kids in our neighborhood and schools and playgrounds to Christ. We can be sure Jesus will accept them with open arms.

That’s what our Lord did here in Mark 10, verse 13 but the disciples were not happy about this. The end of the verse says, “But the disciples rebuked them.” Ah, the disciples, we are familiar with them. We see ourselves in them. They felt the children were an interruption in the busy ministry of the Lord. They and their parents needed to be stopped. This word in Greek for rebuked is an intense form of the verb meaning to censure or reprimand. The disciples had the opposite reaction of their Master. They rebuked, they censured, and they reprimanded the parents for doing such a thing.

Ah, being the opposite to Pearl Gayle in that same church we had a man who was like these disciples. I will change his name to Billy. He flat out perceived children as trouble and he did everything he could to keep the children’s ministry to a minimum. And he was a deacon in the church in a Baptist tradition which made him a leader. Limiting the budget for the kids ministry, re-formulating Sunday School, taking away that bus...making sure children kept quiet, sat up, and paid attention during the services, this sort of attitude. You can imagine how he got along with Pearl!

He was particularly fond of angrily scolding mothers of newborns who did not whisk their crying or otherwise out-of-sorts infants out of the service more quickly. He was like a self-appointed disciplinarian. And he was harshest with his own children. Kids were a nuisance. They interrupted the adults too much. They had to be kept in line. Well, every time I read the disciples response to these parents in this story Mark tells, I think of Billy. Pearl, how Christ-like she was. Billy, how much like the disciples he was.

What was Jesus' response to the disciples? We will find out next time. And we will continue with this text and apply it to today's parents and children. Join us then because God Is.

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