

An Afternoon Sark Attack

by Chris Coursey

Jen and I drove over one hour for what we felt was a good opportunity. We were to meet an influential leadership team interested in bringing recovery to their church. These ministers seemed highly motivated to help frustrated, hurting and broken individuals find hope.

After placing meal orders, the team raised several questions then brought up a specific scenario with a woman in an abusive marriage. I expressed the importance of a married couple surrounding themselves with community support and the value of protection and shelter when danger arises. I shared my experience and success stories. One leader in particular asked to hear our theology on divorce. I responded how we like to see couples fully restored but that doesn't always happen. Jen and I offered specific steps they could take to provide protection, accountability and adequate intervention for their situation. Red faced, the leader intensely pressed, asking to talk about whether divorce was allowed or sinful. He sharply inquired, "Do you believe God would encourage a marital separation?" He became abrasive. A knot formed in my stomach. The team adjusted uncomfortably in their seats as tension filled the air. Our words and responses increased his instability. He began to cite Scriptural passages. I recognized his relational circuits were off, he desperately needed Skill 13. He stopped relating and began attacking. Our conversation was going nowhere fast. His demeanor grew piercing and his approach crushing. Soon, the meeting ended. My knot remained.



"What happened?" I asked Jen on our drive home. I felt run over by a Mack truck. The leader's urgency to discuss theology while the rest of the team sought to examine options for the endangered woman seemed unbalanced. Jen and I felt compassion for the woman and her situation. We compared our meeting to a group of life guards debating the best rescue techniques while a swimmer splashes and drowns. I practiced Skill 13, a helpful solution when encountering trouble, and remembered the angry synagogue ruler who rebuked Jesus for healing on the Sabbath a crippled woman stuck for 18 years.¹ This thought comforted me as Jen and I realized our experience is all too common in Christian circles.

Most of us likely received a "good Christian beating" at one time or another. The kind you leave feeling misunderstood, judged and condemned. You scratch your head and ask, "What just happened?" There is an active ingredient present when people claim to know the right thing to do and fail to bring life to a situation. The Life Model calls it "the picker", the New Testament Greek word is *sarx*. The picker is our own understanding, our determination of what is good and evil independent of God. Apart from God we cannot discern good from evil, right from wrong. Any attempt to do so results in misguidedness. Simply, the sark is our ability to believe we are doing right when in fact we are producing death.

The sark is one of the simplest concepts the Life Model teaches also one of the more controversial. All too often the Body finds itself ensnared in controversy over topics that should not be so confusing while congregants starve, wither and die. Some people have difficulty with the *sarx/sark* concept because they believe they alone can determine the right thing to do. It is not uncommon to confuse the sark with intellect nor is it uncommon to misunderstand this concept that is found in over 150 places in the New Testament and often translated *flesh*. Apart from 3 occasions where sark refers to carnal or carnally, every case where sark is used refers to man in his fallen state.² One common error often made in terms of the sark is that if we admit we cannot discern good from evil apart from God then some feel this diminishes human will or God's omnipotence and sovereignty. Others think it somehow lessens the role of faith.

Historically there were times when the people of God thought they were doing right but the results were catastrophic. Some used to quote Paul to justify slavery and abuse. Murder and injustice were common against Jewish families since the time of Christ, with many Jewish people slandered as "Christ killers". Even Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned

1 Luke 13

2 Alexander Snyman, <http://www.gospel-herald.com/sarx.htm>

to death by leaders using Scripture and fabrications to justify themselves. It is no surprise that Skill 13 was accessible to Stephen in his last moments and with heaven's perspective he prayed for his accusers. There is no shortage of examples that accumulate with each new day. Ironically, many people admit to Christian wounds from individuals in the church who, oftentimes, have a solid knowledge of Scripture. Sadly the sark was involved. It was not uncommon for Jesus to encounter teachers who memorized the Torah Scroll but failed to recognize its Author. Leaders who knew Scripture but brought death rather than life. ³

Looking back at my interaction with this pastor, I feel compassion for him. All of us have sark moments and true compassion comes with seeing people as they are then helping them become a better version of themselves. I could have stood in the pastor's shoes that day. Each of us needs mercy and grace. I have heard it said that grace is receiving what we do not deserve while mercy is not receiving what we do deserve. It would be great for this article to be flawless and bulletproof so that none of us could be triggered and I could not be wrong. In a world where all of us have sarks this will not happen. I acknowledge there is no shortage of ink to spill on this topic, but it seems appropriate to end with Dr. Wilder's words, *This process of letting your body define good and evil is referred to in biblical language as listening to the sarx or sark. This word is often translated "flesh" or "meat." The flaw in the sarx/sark is not that the body is bad, but that the brain can only use old information for its evaluation. The brain predicts the future based on accumulated information about the past. If you have bad data you will make bad predictions and malfunction.*