

Date: January 17, 2010

Title: What Are We Christians Supposed to Do, Again?

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Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8-12; 1 Co 2:13-16(NLT)

**8** Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.**9** Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it.**10** For the Scriptures say, "If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies."**11** Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it.**12** The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers. **But the Lord turns his face against those who do evil.**"

1 Peter 3:8-12 (NLT)

**1 Corinthians 2:13-16 (NLT)** <sup>13</sup> When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. <sup>14</sup> But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means. <sup>15</sup> Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others. <sup>16</sup> For, "Who can know the Lord's thoughts? Who knows enough to teach him?" But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

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I have chosen two passages of scripture for this morning, but my primary focus is going to be on the first one. In this passage Peter is sort of writing the conclusion to the advice he gives to several different groups in society. The first Group he singles out is Slaves. Peter tells those who are reading his letter that if you are a slave, submit yourself to the authority of your master. This could easily be the beginning of a great conversation about whether the Bible sanctions slavery or not, but that is not where I want to go with this.

The next group to whom Peter addresses his letter is to wives and husbands. An unfortunate reality of the time that this was written was that wives were little more than slaves in the society. Peter's advice to the wives is that they submit to their husbands and to the husbands he says, honor your wives. This could be the beginning of a great conversation about what it means for wives to submit to their husbands and husbands to honor their wives, but we will leave that for another day as well.

After writing about slaves and wives and husbands, Peter sort of sums it up by addressing the more general "Christians." I jumped over the first three to this one because this is the one that applies to all of us. I encourage all of you to take some time to read the other three, but for today I want to concentrate on Peter's advice to Christians. Peter was writing to the church and even though he was writing 2000 years ago, I think we should read this letter as a letter written to us personally as we do what we can to become Christ's church in our corner of the world.

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The passage opens with Peter telling us that we are supposed to be of one mind. Now what in the world do you suppose Peter meant by that? "All of you should be of one mind." *Unity, agreement, and harmony* are words that

come to mind. But I also have words like *brainwash*, *lockstep*, *dysfunctional codependent family* and *cult* come to mind as well.

I want to look closely at this notion of being of one mind so as to understand what Peter was getting at, because ***being of one mind*** can go in some fairly destructive directions. Start talking about “one mind” and it’s pretty easy for me to conjure up images of radical fundamentalists and extremists. Hitler managed to get most of Germany to be of one mind and look where it led. And then there are those folks who believe that they have all the answers and are very happy to feed those answers to anyone who is willing to become of one mind with their political or religious view.

If we read only the first sentence we can use this notion of being of one mind as a way to draw our battle lines and protect our point of view from those who might pull us out of one mind or threaten to break us into several competing minds. So, by itself, simply being of one mind is not necessarily a good thing.

But Peter helps us out though, in the next three sentences he gives us some indication of where he wants us to go with this. He writes, “*Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters.*” And then continues, “*Be tenderhearted and keep a humble attitude.*” When Peter says, *Sympathize with each other* he is saying consider the other person. The new King James Version translates it: “have compassion.” Sympathy and compassion come from having some notion of what another person is going through. Loving someone like a brother or sister means that you care deeply about that person. And being tenderhearted and keeping a humble attitude should keep a person from being too judgmental and overbearing. Then, Peter continues on with his version of “turn the other cheek.” If someone insults us, we are not to retaliate and come back with insults; instead we are supposed to pay them back with blessing.

So, apparently at least in this case, a sympathetic and loving spirit has something to do with the *one mind* we are supposed to have. Even when there is a part of us that wants to wring the neck of our Christian Brothers and Sisters we are to send good their way instead of evil.

And that brings me to the next thing... this notion of evil. Peter writes, "If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies.<sup>11</sup> Turn away from evil and do good."

Maybe what we are to take from this is that we need to figure out what is evil and then stay away from it. I think that is part of it, but how exactly do you decide what is evil? O, that is easy for some things like rape, murder and child molestation. We can all be of one mind about obvious things but what about when it comes to less obvious things.

For example, some people thought George Bush and Dick Cheney were evil. Some people think Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton are Evil. Some people might point to verses in the Bible and say that people who get divorced or even eat pork are evil. In the story of Job, his friends were convinced that he must have done some evil deed to get the punishment that came to him. When Jesus healed a blind man the disciples were asking who's evil caused his blindness, his own or that of his parents'? (John 9:1)

We have all these notions about what constitutes evil and how God either punishes us for it while we are alive or how God will punish us for it when we die or how God forgives us if we believe in Jesus. We have all these notions, and somehow, according to Peter we are supposed to take our notions of what is evil and avoid speaking it and avoid doing it.

And you know what I think? I think that when we read this little passage of scripture it puts us in a real paradoxical bind because in many respects we are simply not capable of doing what Peter tells us we need to do. He writes:

“If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies.<sup>11</sup> Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it.<sup>12</sup> The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers. **But the Lord turns his face against those who do evil.**”

When I read this at first, it looks ok, but the closer I look at it, the more uncomfortable I get because I realize that I am not capable of discerning evil... at least not every time, and even when I discern it, I don't always avoid doing it. You probably don't have this problem, but I say and do things from time to time that I later realize were evil. I may not have meant them to be evil, but that's more or less how they turned out.

I do want to enjoy life and to see many happy days that Peter promises. I do want God's ears open to my prayers and I don't want God's face turned against me... So, what am I to do; what are we to do? How do we navigate our way through these stormy theological waters?

- One way we can do it is to simply give up. That's right, we admit that nobody knows what is evil and what is good, so there's no need to try to figure it out. “I'm going to live my life and if people don't like it then that's too bad for them, it's just who I am.”

- Another strategy we can use is to pour over the scriptures and make a comprehensive list and try to get it all worked out so we can be assured we will never do some evil act.

That first way we might say is the way of the Atheist and the second way that of the super religious, but I think that Jesus would have us go a third way and this third way is what I believe Peter is after. This third way is the way of Christ.

When Peter says we are to be of one mind, I believe that what he means is that we are to have the mind of Christ; not necessarily the mind of each other or the mind of a charismatic leader, but the mind of Christ. And this is challenging for all of us because the mind of Christ is challenging to understand.

- The mind of Christ is not something you try to imitate after studying the scriptures and making a list of “mind of Christ” behaviors. Scripture is important but it’s not the only thing.
- The mind of Christ is not just a feeling we get after we pray to God. Our feelings and our experience are important, but we can’t rely upon them exclusively.
- The mind of Christ is not something that we learn from our church doctrine or from what our grandmother tells us to be true, though we do find that the traditions of our faith can be helpful as we try to discern the mind of Christ.
- The mind of Christ is not something that we simply figure out based on some sort of logical premise or philosophical argument, though certainly we can use logic to help us decide our course of action and belief.

All of these things are important. We actually need all of them. We can best have the mind of Christ when we open ourselves up to the leading of the Holy Spirit through all of the things I just mentioned. When we pray, study, think, and consult others with the goal in mind of letting Christ live in and through us we can be of one mind. And the irony of this is that you and I can have opinions that differ significantly about everything from what the Bible says about Homosexuality or woman leading worship or Gay Marriage or even abortion and still be of one mind. This may seem totally contradictory, but I really believe that if we attach our loyalty so completely to the mind of Christ and ask sincerely to be led, instructed and empowered by the Holy Spirit we will be able to discern evil and to stay away from speaking it and doing it because it is Christ living in us and not us trying to live like Christ. I guess another way to say it is we can only have the mind of Christ when we allow Christ to have our minds.

As a pastor I get a lot of questions that people have about various things they read in the bible or hear on the news. I probably have more opinions than I should about these things, but I have read a lot and I have thought about a lot of things and I have prayed about a lot of things. I can give you my opinion about a lot of things, but what I am realizing as I grow in my faith is that my opinion is nothing more than my opinion.

My course of action is what I choose to do with the life God has given me and I want the course of action to be as good as it can be.

But what is most important of all isn't so much what I think about things, or even what I do about my thoughts, but rather most important of all is the source that gives me life and then shapes and molds that life in me. And when I recognize that the source of my life is Christ, and when I draw my life from that source, I can't help but to be more sympathetic with others, I can't help but love each person more like a brother or sister. I'm more

tenderhearted and I am more likely to keep a humble attitude. It's not the easiest thing I've ever done. My mind is as prone to wandering away from the mind of Christ as the next person's, but certainly the most rewarding.

I said last week that we are in the process of building a church. It's our church in one respect, but much more importantly, it is Christ's church. We will have our disagreements from time to time. We have a lot of differing opinions about things, but one thing I hope we can all agree on is that more than anything, we all are striving to be of one mind and that one mind is the mind of Christ.