



Matthew was a tax collector. Tax collectors were hated by the Jewish people because they were Jews that extorted money from their own people for the Roman Empire. They were paid handsomely for this dirty job. We see here in Matthew's autobiographical account what sort of friends Jesus made Himself available to and his desire for real connection across normally, polarizing divides. Notice how He subverts the us-versus-them posturing by saying: all you need is need.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
-Galatians 3:28

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."
-Proverbs 27:17

Scripture Reading

Matthew 9:9-13

Diversity and Conflict in Friendship

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Discussion

1. Recall a time you entered into a meaningful friendship across ethnicity, age, race, gender, class, temperament. How did it change you? What did that relationship show you about yourself? If you haven't experienced this, what stands in the way? What are some practical steps you can take?
2. What do you think about the All Souls Grievance and Conflict Guide? What stands out to you as particularly difficult or unnatural?
3. How have you felt intimidated by someone with more money than you? Do you recall a time you looked down on someone with less than you? How does Jesus being the source of true wealth shape these interactions? What is another "issue" (position on abortion, sexual orientation, political party, etc.) that has shut down the potential of friendship for you and a person you disagreed with? How does Jesus' posture toward the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11 change that? (In John 8, Jesus does not condemn the woman, nor deny Scripture's teaching.)

Sources

- Read [Befriend](#) by Scott Sauls
- Study All Souls Grievance and Conflict Guide <https://goo.gl/AfJV5Y>
- Meditate: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Matthew 20:25-28

Closing Prayer

Diversity & Conflict in Friendship

Review: We have discussed how friendship is a form of love marked by mutual vulnerability and mutual intimacy and shared affinities. Spiritual friendship has a shared affinity for God and, more specifically, an affinity for Christ who laid down his life for us and calls us friends. We are able to love as a true friend, genuinely caring for the other person (not simply friends for utility or for pleasure) when we know Christ's self-giving love for us. Last week we looked at the significance of Jesus coming in person and committing to deepening relationship with a relatively small group of friends. We wrote down a list of "active friends" we would like to deepen connection with using social media but also other non-digital ways of connecting. Today, we look at how Jesus had a diverse friend group and how He uniquely brings about unity while honoring diversity in His reconciling work.

Diversity in Jesus' friend group:

- Peter "the man of action" vs. John "the man of understanding" (John 21: John is first to notice it is Jesus. Peter is first to jump in the water and swim to Him). How do action-oriented people try understanding-oriented people and vice versa?
- Superstitious Nathanael vs. Doubting Thomas (John 20: Thomas famously said I will not believe unless I can put my fingers in his wounds. Imagine a guy like Thomas sharing a boat with superstitious Nathan. John 1: All Nathanael had to hear from Jesus is where he was sitting just before they met, under a tree. I love Jesus' response when Nathan believes: Jesus is like 'Wow, you are easily impressed, just wait you will see greater things than this. We haven't even gotten to the miracles, yet!')
- Ethnic/racial diversity particularly in Mark, a North African (see Oden's The African Memory of Mark)
- Political diversity: Matthew was a tax collector whose livelihood was tied to Roman rule and Simon the Zealot was a political agitator for Jewish freedom from Rome
- Class/Work diversity: fishermen, tax collector, Mary Magdalene was a former prostitute
- Gender: John 11 reveals a close relationship to the presumably single women Mary and Martha

The blog *Stuff White People Like* makes self-deprecating satirical jokes directed at a white audience, and in the excerpt below, the subject of "diversity" is broached, highlighting an interest in "diversity" that is more cosmetic than real, more recreational than relational, more token than authentic because it requires zero self-reflection or change from the ethnic majority:

White people love ethnic diversity, but only as it relates to restaurants. Many white people... will spend hours talking about how great it is that they can get Sushi and Tacos on the same street. But then they send their kids to private school with other rich white kids, and live in neighborhoods like Santa Monica or Pacific Palisades. But it's important to note that white people do not like to be called out on this fact. If you run an ethnic restaurant you can be guaranteed repeat business and huge tips if you act like your white customers are adventurous and cultured for eating food that isn't sandwiches or pasta.

Galatians 3:28 has been used to say things like "God is color blind" or some similar, well-intentioned phrase that tries to say diversity doesn't matter that much. Galatians 3:28— "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." God loves diversity. God *is* diverse: Father, Son, Holy Spirit— three in one. God's creation reflects His love for diversity. Did you know there are 440 known species of sharks? Did you know there are 20,000 species of butterflies? God delights in diversity. Jesus gathered a diverse group of friends.

So what does Galatians 3:28 mean? What does that say about *how* we interact with the diversity in our friendships?

Augustine explains how we may understand unity and diversity in Christ at the Lord's Supper (from Sermon 272):

In the visible object of bread, many grains are gathered into one just as the faithful (so Scripture says) form "a single heart and mind in God" [Acts 4.32]. And thus it is with the wine. Remember, friends, how wine is made. Individual grapes hang together in a bunch, but the juice from them all is mingled to become a single brew. This is the image chosen by Christ our Lord to show how, at his own table, the mystery of our unity and peace is solemnly consecrated. All who fail to keep the bond of peace after entering this mystery receive not a sacrament that benefits them, but an indictment that condemns them [1 Corinthians 11:23-32]. So let us give God our sincere and deepest gratitude, and, as far as human weakness will permit, let us turn to the Lord with pure hearts. With all our strength, let us seek God's singular mercy, for then the Divine Goodness will surely hear our prayers. God's power will drive the Evil One from our acts and thoughts; it will deepen our faith, govern our minds, grant us holy thoughts, and lead us, finally, to share the divine happiness through God's own son Jesus Christ. Amen!