

How Would Jesus Drive?

by Dwight McCormick

“You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.”
-Matthew 7:5

Sunday afternoons following worship my family and I make our weekly pilgrimage to Wal-Mart. We brought this ritual with us to Ohio because in West Virginia it is state law. One Sunday afternoon as I was driving across the entrance road to the parking lot of Sam Walton's store I was unaware of the moral lesson I was about to learn.

The entrance is a side road that runs between the busy North Bechtle Avenue and the lot that serves as parking for a series of shops in a several block long plaza. In order to access the lot you have to make a left hand turn across what is often a busy stream of traffic that requires a good degree of attentiveness and assertiveness as well.

After I made the turn to cross in front of some oncoming traffic I had to stop quickly behind a car in order to keep from hitting it. I was forced to stop after having just gotten across the line of traffic in time. The driver who was behind me did not wait to make the turn. He did stop in time to keep from hitting us, but he had turned into oncoming traffic before it was safe to do so. He was assuming that his quick turn in front of someone would give him an unimpeded path into the parking lot. He was wrong. Because I was directly in front of him and trapped from going any further, he was left in harm's way.

His response was an angry one. He honked his horn several times in rapid succession and then laid on it as he sped around me into a lane of oncoming traffic. His car was one of those huge SUVs boasting 10 gallons to the mile. It was an ugly Ford that was sea foam green with beige trim. Apparently someone in Detroit hated Eddie Bauer or they wouldn't have made that color combination an option. It was the bridesmaids dress of paint jobs.

I glimpsed the back of his car as he went by and spotted an Ichthus, one of those little silver fish symbols that signifies the person who is driving the car or at least the person who put it on the car wanted to advertise that they were a Christian. Ichthus is an acronym of Greek letters that stands for Jesus Christ God's Son Savior.

If you've driven a car in the late 20th or early 21st century then you've seen one on a car. It looks like this:

I INTEND TO INSERT THE SIMPLE TWO ARC DRAWING OF THE SYMBOL.

In the early Church under the rule of the Roman Empire the Ichthus served as a greeting between fellow believers. It was used to indicate you could safely identify as Christian to the other person without fear of punishment. One person would draw one of the arcs of the fish in the dirt or sand. If the other person were also a Christian, then they would complete the fish by drawing the other half of the symbol. The fear of punishment was from the very real danger that you would face death for your beliefs. In Rome Christians had to be careful because of that whole throw Christians to the lions, stone them, or crucify them because they were a follower of Jesus thing.

Contemporary persecution of Christians takes on milder forms of torture like having to explain away things Pat Robertson says or

having to repeatedly hear in the news about Fred Phelps picketing funerals because he happens to hate homosexual people.

But I digress. The Ichthus on the back of this guy's car made something inside me snap. Being 40 years old and MOSTLY over testosterone fueled bursts of anger when something didn't go my way I felt as if I was in a position to confront my fellow brother in Christ. I told my wife I was going to go speak to him, admonish him, and possibly smite him as well. After all at least I was smart enough not to put any markings on my car that would indicate I am a Christian. That way when I made stupid driving decisions people wouldn't find one more reason to call Christians hypocrites.

Sarah my wife did not agree that I was cool headed enough to go and speak to the other driver. Nor did she see any purpose or gain in my doing so. She is nearly always smarter than me when it comes to taking things easy and being peaceful and even-tempered. I imagine that may go without saying if you've read very far in this book.

She will often choose to avoid confrontation by deciding which battles to fight. In this instance she suggested that I let it go. I think she gave me sage filled loving piece of advice along the lines of: "Oh will you get over yourself, stop acting like a child and just go buy the toothpaste so we can get our girls some lunch." Strong in the force is she. She's like Yoda only real, younger, taller, not as green, and infinitely more attractive. Other than that she's just like him.

So Being 40 and NOT COMPLETELY over my testosterone driven bursts of anger I decided to go over to his car anyway. I walked up to the door of his vehicle and yelled at his closed window "WHAT DOES THAT FISH ON THE BACK OF YOUR CAR MEAN TO YOU?" He was stuffing his face with some Taco Bell and was a man of at least 58 years of age. I was as surprised at his angry response as I

was at my own anger. I think I expected him to display shame, or penitence. Instead it became apparent that his anger at having to drive around me had only grown at my having approached his car. I began to feel like this might actually lead to a physical altercation. It felt a bit like a junior high or grade school fight where both kids are really mad but neither one really wants to fight because they're afraid. That's the look we exchanged the moment before he got out of his car. Only after you're an adult instead of getting in trouble with your parents over fighting you begin to think about your deductible and assault charges.

As a rule of thumb I will often imagine whatever choice I make being in the local paper saying "Local pastor caught..." then fill in the blank with whatever behavior I'm weighing in my mind as appropriate or inappropriate. I wasn't thinking about that in that moment though.

I was dumbstruck that he even exited his car. He was dressed in his Sunday clothing as though he too had just come from church. All the more reason I thought I was in the right. After all I think Jesus said "Forgive others as God has first forgiven you, but before you forgive make sure they other person knows that they are wrong and you are right." -Jambalaya 3:57.

He jumped out of his car to come at me and said "How DARE you come up to my car when I'm with my family!" Inside I thought "Well what about you acting like a horses ass in front of your family with your display of driving and lack of courtesy and patience?" I hadn't yet reflected on my own curse filled tirade in my car in front of OUR family before I'd gotten out on my mission of self-righteousness.

I began to retreat physically but smugly repeated "WHAT DOES THAT FISH ON THE BACK OF YOUR CAR MEAN TO YOU? HUH? YOU DON'T ACT LIKE IT MEANS A THING!" I thought I had gotten the last word.

He shouted at my back "Don't come near my car and start talking to me about...." Then I turned around and repeated one last time "WHAT DOES THAT FISH MEAN TO YOU? YOU JUST RAN YOUR CAR AROUND ME and laid on your horn WHAT DOES THAT FISH MEAN TO YOU?"

He never did take responsibility for having made a bad choice. I walked away and thought. "I can't believe this guy's gall. Acting out in anger with family in the car, and on a Sunday, in a Wal-Mart parking lot of all places, after coming from church, a grown man."

Just then I caught a glimpse of myself in a reflection of a car passing by at that moment. I saw the angry look on my face. I noticed the adrenaline rushing through my veins and felt my pulse in my forehead. I slowed my pace, stepped inside the store and began taking deep breaths.

As if in a movie the lyrics to the Michael Jackson song "Man in the Mirror" started echoing from my memory. "I'm gonna make a change for once in my life, it's gonna feel real good, gonna make a difference, gonna make it right..." I'm just messin' with you. I'm corny but not THAT corny.

Instead I went into the store still angry and feeling a rush of fear. By the time I reached the checkout lane and made my purchase I had calmed down to a degree. Then I began to think what a moron I was to have felt justified in confronting a grown man in public over behavior that I myself was exhibiting, poor impulse control.

As I left the store I made the conscious effort to seek this man's car out and go apologize to him for my part in what had happened. I saw his car but no one was in it. As I walked past the rear hatch I glanced down to notice there in the left hand corner of the tailgate was a Bass Pro Shop sticker and not an Ichthus.

When I got to my car after checking for myself in the vanity mirror I asked my wife if I had a log stuck in my eye. She laughed and said “Constantly”.

