

The Distinguishing Mark

Love Like Jesus, Message #5, John 13:34-35

INTRODUCTION

You have likely heard the term “distinguishing mark”. It is defined as “a visible distinguishing identification mark that is any identification mark on your body by birth (a birthmark) or indelible scar in clothed condition. To give you some examples, it can be a mole on your hand, a cut or mark on the forehead, a permanent tattoo or a scar on your hand/arm” (<https://www.comparism.com/what-is-visible-identification-mark/>).

That describes a physical distinguishing mark. In the same way, followers of Jesus can be identified by distinguishing marks. Various examples appear through out the Bible, but there is a single distinguishing mark that we can prioritize. That’s not just my opinion. That’s what Jesus said in our text. In John 13, Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover together, He washed the disciples’ feet, and then Judas left to betray Jesus. Between that time and Jesus’s prayer time in the Garden, Jesus taught His disciples many things. Warren Wiersbe called it “Christ’s farewell sermon” (Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary) and Constable said that “Jesus now began to explain what He expected of His disciples during His absence from them” (Constable, Constable’s Notes on the Bible).

What stood out to Jesus? What did He think was essential to give His disciples the last night He was with them? What did Jesus identify as the distinguishing mark of His followers?

Follow along as I read John 13:34-35.

BIBLE

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

John 13:34-35 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/jhn.13.34-35.KJV>

INTRODUCTION

Wow! What a statement! Love for one another as Christ loved us is the distinguishing mark of His followers. This was a key theme of this farwell sermon. Warren Wiersbe noted that “the word love is used only twelve times in John 1-12, but in John 13-21 it is used forty-four times” (Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary)!

Jesus identified His commandment as new. New, in this context, means fresh as opposed to worn out. At least three aspects of the newness of the command are apparent.

First, the commandment was new in its dispensation. Loving God and others was commanded in the Law recorded in the Torah. It distinguished a law-abiding Jew from others. Now, Jesus said that it would distinguish His followers from others.

Second, the commandment was new in its dimension. Loving God and others as Jesus loved us is empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Third, the commandment was new in its demonstration. As Jesus loved was His instruction.

What characteristics describe the love of Jesus we are to share?

While Jesus interacted with His disciples in the upper room the night leading up to the betrayal in the Garden, Jesus gave this “new commandment” to His disciples. Let’s examine the “new commandment” and find characteristics in God’s word that describe the love we are to share with others.

1. A SACRIFICING LOVE (SEE JN. 15:12-13; EPH. 5:2; 1 JN. 3:16-18)

EXPLANATION

Soon after all of this took place that night, Jesus demonstrated the ultimate sacrifice of love. He, literally, laid down His life for us. Jesus revisited His command to love later the night He was betrayed and tied it to the ultimate sacrifice.

BIBLE

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

John 15:12-13 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/jhn.15.12-13.KJV>

EXPLANATION

This clearly impressed John who penned these words and, later, this exhortation to believers.

BIBLE

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

1 John 3:16-18 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/1jn.3.16-18.KJV>

EXPLANATION

John defined God's love by the sacrifice of Jesus for us, and the application of God's love as our sacrifice for others. Is this accomplished by literally dying for others as Jesus did? Not in John's thinking. John saw our way of demonstrating God's love through sacrificial giving.

APPLICATION

Loving others as Jesus loved us is demonstrated through sacrificial giving for the good of someone else. It is giving to meet a need that cannot be met. If you have food, you should give food to the hungry. If you have a roof over your head, you should give to shelter others who do not. If you have more than you need to live, you should give to those who do not have enough to live. Sacrificial love like that distinguishes the follower of Jesus from others.

2. A DEFERRING LOVE (SEE ROM. 12:10)

EXPLANATION

Look at Romans 12:10.

BIBLE

“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;”

Romans 12:10 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/rom.12.10.KJV>

EXPLANATION

“Honour” comes from a word that means a value, a price that is paid, esteem, give dignity. “Preferring” means to lead the way for others or give deference.

APPLICATION

A major consideration in our treatment of others is the value we assign them. We are exhorted to assign a premium value on others that leads us to defer to others, and lead others through doing this and taking initiative. Sounds a lot like what Jesus demonstrated as He loved us.

3. AN EMPATHIZING LOVE (SEE 1 COR. 12:26-27)

EXPLANATION

Paul penned these words in 1 Corinthians 12:26-27.

BIBLE

“And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”

1 Corinthians 12:26-27 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/1co.12.26-27.KJV>

APPLICATION

One of the major struggles we have connects to the aspect of empathy. We tend more often to focus on ourselves through envy and comparison. This has become a major problem related to the rise of social media. Negative social comparison, also called the Fear Of Missing Out, represents a major concern of researchers that leads to increased depression, decreased well-being, poorer body image, and increased eating disorders.

Why?

Because we struggle with a natural tendency to compare and envy others. Someone else rejoices over a promotion, raise, weight loss, new relationship, or life victory and, if we struggle with these, we do not rejoice with them in their blessing - we envy it. Someone else shares their hurt, burden, or loss with us and, if we struggle with these, we turn it to ourselves and illustrate why we have it so much worse.

Love like we should demonstrate is empathetic. Empathy is the ability to relate to someone else and share in their experience. Jesus, in His love for us, did just that!

4. A SERVING LOVE (SEE GAL. 5:13)

EXPLANATION

Look with me at Galatians 5:13.

BIBLE

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”

Galatians 5:13 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/gal.5.13.KJV>

APPLICATION

Our Christian walk should be distinguished through loving service. Just before Jesus revealed this commandment to His disciples, He demonstrated it. How did John 13 begin? A declaration of Jesus's unending love, followed by His humble service through washing their feet, and concluded with His declaration that they should follow His example.

What example did He set?

Love! If you love, you will serve.

5. A REDEEMING LOVE (1 PETER 3:8-9)

EXPLANATION

Peter penned this in 1 Peter 3:8-9.

BIBLE

“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.”

1 Peter 3:8-9 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/1pe.3.8-9.KJV>

APPLICATION

Not giving people what they deserve, but not just not giving. Is it our tendency to just try to ignore others when they hurt or mistreat us? Just move on? God calls us to something even higher. When you are treated evilly, railed against...give a blessing.

What did Jesus do? He was opposed, falsely accused, spat upon, beaten, scourged, whipped, and nailed to a cross. He was evilly mistreated, railed on, tortured, and killed. What He did do? “Father, forgive them.” That’s what He said! That’s how He prayed! We took His life; He gave us life. We sinned against Him; He shed His blood to wash away our sin.

6. A RECIPROCATING LOVE (SEE 1 JOHN 4:7-11)

EXPLANATION

Then, look with me at what John penned in his first epistle.

BIBLE

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”

1 John 4:7-11 KJV

<https://bible.com/bible/1/1jn.4.7-11.KJV>

APPLICATION

Love as the other person loves us? No, more than that.

Love as we love ourselves? No, more than that.

Love as we want to be loved? No, more than that.

Love, like God loved us!

So often we reciprocate to others as we receive. That's where many of us live regularly. God calls us to something much higher. Love others just like He loved us.

CONCLUSION

Tertullian, who was born about 80 years after John penned his account of the Gospel, reported that the pagans of his day (a century after this Gospel was published) said of Christians, 'See how they love one another'" (Bruce, as cited in Guzik, Enduring Word Commentary)!

That's what I want for people to say about us and our church. Even more, that's what Jesus wants. That is the distinguishing mark of His followers.