

## The Mark of a Christian

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Maundy Thursday / Maundy Thursday; Love; Brotherly Love; Lord's Supper; Passover / John 13:34-35

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## Introduction

The story is told of a soldier in the army of Alexander the Great.

The soldier was brought before the great world conqueror for a court-martial.

When the emperor had listened to the charges and the evidence, he turned to the soldier facing condemnation, and asked, "What is your name?"

"Alexander!" was the reply.

Again the emperor questioned, "What is your name?"

And the second time the soldier answered, "Alexander!"

With a cry of rage, the emperor roared, "I say, what is your name?"

The soldier answered for the third time, "Alexander!"

The great general angrily replied, "You say your name is Alexander? You are found guilty of your crime as charged, and now you must pay the penalty. Either change your conduct or change your name, for no man can bear the name of Alexander, my name, and do the things that you have done" (Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* [Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996], 1138).

The followers of Jesus were first called "Christians" in Antioch ([Acts 11:26](#)).

For the past two thousand years, followers of Jesus have been called "Christians."

There have been times when Christians behaved badly. They have brought disgrace and dishonor to Jesus' name.

How do Christians bring honor to Jesus' name?

On the night of his betrayal, when Jesus celebrated the final Passover and inaugurated the first Lord's Supper, he told his disciples what was the distinguishing mark of a Christian.

## Scripture

Let's read [John 13:34-35](#):

**<sup>34</sup> “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

## Lesson

[John 13:34-35](#) tells us what is the mark of a Christian.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Content of the Mark of a Christian (13:34)
2. The Effect of the Mark of a Christian (13:35)

### I. The Content of the Mark of a Christian (13:34)

First, let's note the content of the mark of a Christian.

Jesus said, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another”** ([John 13:34](#)).

Jesus' new commandment was that the disciples **“love one another.”**

But, in what sense was this a **“new commandment”**?

The Old Testament already called God's people to love their neighbors (see [Leviticus 19:18](#); [Deuteronomy 6:5](#)).

Jesus' **“new commandment”** was not new in *time* but in *quality*.

Jesus had loved his disciples deeply for almost three years. They had seen how he loved everyone who came to him.

That is why Jesus said, “**Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.**” Jesus demonstrated the quality of love for his disciples.

Moreover, they were about to witness within twenty-four hours Jesus’ sacrificial love when he laid down his life as a substitutionary sacrifice for them.

So, Jesus wanted his disciples to be marked by **love**.

What does this love look like in practical terms?

Francis A. Schaeffer suggests in his book *The Mark of the Christian* two very simple things.

*First, Jesus’ disciples love one another when they say they are sorry.* When I make a mistake or when I have sinned against my fellow Christian, I need to go to him and say, “I am sorry.”

That may seem simple. But it is hard to do.

I watch my daughter teach our grandchildren about this. One grandchild takes a toy from another without asking. The second child screams. My daughter says to the first child, “Give the toy back. And say, ‘I am sorry.’ ”

Do you think the child happily returns the toy? No. And even more difficult is saying the words, “I am sorry.”

Friends, this is simple. But it is profoundly meaningful.

One expression of love is seen when I have wronged my fellow Christian by quickly saying, “I am sorry.”

*And second, Jesus’ disciples love one another when they forgive one another.* Though it is hard to say, “I am sorry,” it is even harder to forgive.

Jesus insisted, however, that Christians must forgive one another. An unwillingness to forgive is the antithesis of love.

It certainly calls into question one’s profession of faith.

I read a story about a seminary student in Chicago. He wanted to work in some kind of ministry but the only job he could find was driving a bus on Chicago’s south side.

One day a gang of tough teens got on board and refused to pay the fare.

After a few days of this, the seminarian spotted a policeman on the corner, stopped the bus, and reported them. The officer made them pay, but then he got off.

When the bus rounded a corner, the gang robbed the seminarian and beat him severely.

He pressed charges and the gang was rounded up. They were found guilty.

But as soon as the jail sentence was given, the young Christian saw their spiritual need and felt pity for them.

So he asked the judge if he could serve their sentences for them. The gang members and the judge were dumbfounded.

He explained, "It's because I forgive you."

His request was denied, but he visited the young men in jail and led several of them to faith in Christ (Galaxie Software, *10,000 Sermon Illustrations* [Biblical Studies Press, 2002]).

That is the power of forgiveness.

There are other characteristics of genuine Christian love, of course. But these two are profound.

## II. The Effect of the Mark of a Christian (13:35)

And second, let's observe the effect of the mark of a Christian.

Jesus went on to say in verse 35, **"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

This is an astonishing statement.

Jesus did not say that people would know that we are Christians by our doctrine. Doctrine is vitally important. But people who don't know theology can't evaluate whether it is correct or not.

Jesus did not say that people would know that we are Christians by the size of our churches. Some people prefer larger churches. Other people prefer smaller churches. But that is not what marks a Christian.

Jesus did not say that people will know that we are Christians by the quality of our ministry programs. They may help. Or they may hurt. But that is not what marks a Christian.

No. Jesus said that people will know that we are Christians by our love for one another. The kind of love that is tangible, visible, and demonstrated to our brothers and sisters in Christ makes an indelible impression on people.

When Ronald Reagan was Governor of California, he introduced Billy Graham at a rally in southern California. He said:

“There is no need in our land today greater than the need to rediscover our spiritual heritage.

“Why is a representative of government here? To welcome with humble pride a man whose mission in life has been to remind us that in all our seeking, in all our confusion, the answer to each problem is to be found in the simple words of Jesus of Nazareth, who urged us to love one another” (William J. Federer, *Great Quotations: A Collection of Passages, Phrases, and Quotations Influencing Early and Modern World History Referenced according to Their Sources in Literature, Memoirs, Letters, Governmental Documents, Speeches, Charters, Court Decisions and Constitutions* [St. Louis, MO: AmeriSearch, 2001]).

## Conclusion

Let us love one another.

Let us be marked by love.

And let the world sit up and take notice of our love for one another. Amen.