

Title: "The Mark of the Christian"

Key verse: John 13:34-35 — Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another." (NASB)

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again. Sometimes when I have spoken to you, I have told you about the Christian study center in England where I spent some time studying many years ago. The place is called L'Abri Fellowship, a ministry that was founded by Francis Schaeffer, a Christian missionary and theologian. Their basic philosophy is that the Bible has something to say about every aspect of life, so you can go there to study any topic from a Christian perspective, whether it is theology or family life or Christian ethics or science or modern philosophies. They have many taped lectures and a large collection of books. On the PowerPoint screen, I have a picture from their website of one of the rooms of the study center in England. I spent many hours in that room and I have read some of those books.

One day, while I was browsing through the bookshelves, I came across a book with an intriguing title. This captured my attention. The title was "The Mark of the Christian." *The Mark of the Christian*. It was a small book and the author was Francis Schaeffer himself. The title of the book told me that there was some kind of mark that would distinguish a Christian from other types of people. I was really curious about what this "mark" might be. What is this mark? Surely it isn't some kind of tattoo on your forehead saying "Christian," is it? No, of course not. What is this "mark" that would distinguish Christians from other types of people?

So, I took the book off the bookshelf and sat down to read it. Here are the opening lines of the book: Christians have not always presented a pretty picture to the world. Too often they have failed to show the beauty of love, the beauty of Christ, the holiness of God, and the world has turned away. Is there then no way to make the world look again—this time at true Christianity? ... How should we show the world that we are Christians?

Through the centuries, people have displayed many different symbols intended to show that they are Christians. They have worn marks in the lapels of their coats, hung chains about their necks, and even had special haircuts. But there is a much better sign — a universal mark that is to last through all the ages of the church till Jesus comes back.

At the close of his ministry, Jesus made clear what was to be the distinguishing mark of the Christian until His return ...

And then Schaeffer quotes John 13, verses 34 and 35 (NASB) — Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another."

Verse 35 again — "By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another."

This is the distinguishing mark, by which all people will know that we are Christians: that we have love for one another. In today's message, I am going to share with you some of Francis Schaeffer's thoughts, but also some of my own thoughts on this topic. The first thing Schaeffer points out is that Jesus' words here are a commandment. And commandments, unfortunately, are something that we have the capacity to forget or ignore. If we fail to follow Christ's command here, it doesn't mean we aren't Christians. But what it does mean is that non-Christians will be unable to identify us as

Christ's followers, because we are not bearing witness to having the distinguishing mark of a Christian: love. We need to constantly keep in mind the necessity of making sure the world can see our love for one another.

I am reminded of something I learned in my studies of Christian history. In the ancient world, family members were very dedicated to caring for other members of their own family, but normally did not take care of non-relatives, even neighbors who were in need. However, in the Christian community, Christians did often take care of non-relatives who were sick or otherwise in need, and very often Christians also cared for their non-Christian neighbors in these ways. This deeply impressed the non-Christians and attracted many people to the Christian faith.

When I look back at John 13:34, I note these words: Jesus says, "... Even as I have loved you..." *Even as I have loved you.* This means: *In the manner that I have loved you,* that is the way in which we are to love one another. In several different ways, Jesus showed love to His disciples. In the immediate context of the story in John chapter 13, I see at least two examples of Jesus' practical expression of His love for His disciples. This scene occurs while Jesus and His disciples are eating the Passover meal, the evening before His crucifixion.

John 13:1 says, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that His hour had come that He would depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." It says here that Jesus loved "His own," meaning His disciples. And He loved them "to the end."

They start eating the Passover meal, and then Jesus does something unexpected. Verses 4 and 5 say that Jesus "got up from supper and laid His outer garments aside; and He took a towel and tied it around Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began washing the disciples' feet and wiping them with the towel which He had tied around Himself."

It was customary in those days for guests at a meal to have their feet washed by one of the servants in the household upon arrival at the house. Roads were dusty, and feet were often dirty when people arrived at a home. So, usually, a slave or household servant would be assigned the task of washing the feet of the guests. However, at this Passover meal with Jesus' disciples, no one had washed their feet. So, Jesus got up from the table and did the task Himself. The disciples were surprised at this, but Jesus had a lesson to teach them.

Verses 13 to 17 — "You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord'; and you are correct, for so I am. ¹⁴So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you. ¹⁶Truly, truly I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

When I share this story with you, it is not my intention to advocate that we wash each others' feet. However, what I wish to focus on is not the foot washing, but on this thought: being sensitive to the needs of our Christian brethren. Here at the Passover meal that night, none of the disciples seemed to be aware that this important task of hospitality had not been done. Their feet were dirty, but no one thought to be the one to wash their feet, no one but the Teacher Himself. I see this as a lesson in being sensitive to the needs of our Christian brethren.

In verse 15, Jesus says, “For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you.” Jesus has given us an example ... an example of being sensitive to others’ needs. And to be humble enough to serve other people. In verse 16, Jesus says, “a slave is not greater than his master,” nevertheless, in Jesus’ example, the master served His disciples.

I told you that I saw at least two practical examples of love which Jesus displayed during this last Passover meal with His disciples.

The first was His being sensitive to their needs. The second has to do with a wayward member of His group of 12 disciples.

In verse 1, John tells us that Jesus “... loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” *Jesus loved them to the end.* Every one of them. Even the one who was planning on betraying Him. Verse 2 says that the Devil had “...already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him.” And yet Jesus included Judas when He washed the disciples’ feet. He included Judas in the Passover meal. In spite of being included among the 12 disciples for the past three years and in spite of Jesus’ love for him up until this last meal, Judas’ heart was bent toward betraying Jesus. Judas was given every opportunity to remain a disciple, but in the end he rejected Jesus’ love.

Likewise, we ought to give everyone we share the gospel with every opportunity to respond positively. But in the end, we have to remember that the choice is theirs whether or not to put their faith in Christ.

Well, I have spent a lot of time in John chapter 13. But this theme of Love is found throughout the Scriptures. In Matthew 22:35-40, we read this —

And one of them, a lawyer [an expert in the Law of Moses], asked Jesus a question, testing Him: ³⁶“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” ³⁸This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

The first commandment is from Deuteronomy 6:5. The second commandment is from Leviticus 19:18. We love God, our creator, first and foremost. And because each one of us is made in God’s image, we must love our fellow human beings as well: our neighbors, Christians as well as non-Christians.

1st Thessalonians 3:12 says, “And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you.” Love for our fellow Christians ... and love for all people.

In his first letter, the Apostle John has some encouraging words for us, but also some very hard-hitting words.

1st John 4:9-13 — “By this the love of God was revealed in us, that God has sent His only Son into the world so that we may live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [the atoning sacrifice] for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one

another, God remains in us, and His love is perfected in us. ¹³By this we know that we remain in Him and He in us, because He has given to us of His Spirit.”

It is God who first loved us, and He sent His Son into the world to save us, to be the sacrifice for our sins. Verse 10 reminds me of Romans 5:8 — “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Back to 1st John 4, verse 11: because God loved us, we ought to love one another. Verse 12: God’s love is *perfected in us*, if we love one another and “God remains in us.” And verse 13: *we have His Holy Spirit within us*.

However ...

1st John 4:20-21 — “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and yet he hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

²¹And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God must love his brother also.”

These are strong words. John often speaks in stark black-and-white language. He is impressing on us the notion that it is a huge contradiction for us to say that we love God while we are in a state of hating our brother. Maybe you have a legitimate complaint against your brother. But you shouldn’t harbor hatred in your heart for any length of time. God loves you and forgives you. You should do likewise and forgive your brother. One part of the Lord’s Prayer says this (Matthew 6:12) — “And forgive us our trespasses, as we also have forgiven those who trespass against us.”

That was a word on personal relationships. Let’s look at another problem that sometimes arises: an insensitive heart. I told you earlier that we should be sensitive to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

Look at 1st John 3:16-18 — “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷But whoever has this world’s goods and sees his brother in need, and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

How can the love of God be in someone who has the ability to meet the needs of his brother, and yet closes his heart against him?

I am reminded of Galatians chapter 2, when the Apostle Paul was first beginning his ministry among the Gentiles, the leaders of the church in Jerusalem gave him their seal of approval. In Galatians 2:9-10, Paul writes, “And recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas [Peter], and John, who were reputed to be pillars [of the church], gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised [the Jews]. ¹⁰They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.”

That last line has always struck me: “Remember the poor.” Remember the needy, those lacking this world’s goods. Within the crucial task of evangelization — spreading the good news of salvation in Christ — Paul, Barnabas, James, Peter, and John were agreed that meeting the needs of the poor was an essential element.

In our day, we also must remember that there are poor people who need help, practical help with living. Early in my life as a born-again Christian in my college days, I adopted an attitude from my mentors which I now consider to be unbalanced. I was taught that the only important thing in our interaction with non-Christians is sharing the gospel message with them and saving their souls. I was taught to have a low view of what was called “the social gospel.” The “social gospel” was defined as having an emphasis on feeding the poor and advancing other social causes instead of on evangelizing and saving souls. Social concerns, I was told, was part of what liberals were doing, not us Bible-believing conservatives. Well, it may be true that “the social gospel” has gone off track, but I came to realize that my negative attitude toward social concerns was an unbalanced and an incomplete view of the Christian life. It took me a few years to grow out of that narrow viewpoint and unlearn some of the things I had been taught early on. Fortunately, I had also been taught to read through Scripture over and over again, and so with my habit of frequent reading through the whole Bible, I found verses like Galatians 2:9-10 and 1st John 3:17, which helped me reorient my mind and to eventually understand that meeting people’s practical needs was a part of a balanced Christian lifestyle, a part of a complete Christian ethos.

We must remember that meeting the practical needs of people shows the world that we care ... that God cares.

Again, 1st John 3:17-18 — “But whoever has this world’s goods and sees his brother in need, and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in him? ¹⁸Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. Our love needs to be physically seen, not verbally uttered.

I began this message with a reference to Francis Schaeffer and his little book which impressed me so much. Most of today’s sermon has been my own thoughts on John chapter 13 and some related verses in 1st John and elsewhere.

However, let me conclude with Schaeffer’s comments on another passage in the Gospel of John that defines this “Mark of the Christian.”

In John chapter 17, we have what has been called “The High Priestly Prayer” that Jesus prayed after He and the 11 disciples left the Upper Room to walk toward the Garden of Gethsemane. In this prayer, Jesus is praying to God the Father for His disciples ... and for any new disciples that will embrace the Christian message through the testimony of these eleven.

John 17:18-21 (NASB) — “Just as You sent Me into the world, I also sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, so that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰I am not asking on behalf of these alone, but also for those who believe in Me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one; just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

Look at verse 21 again: Jesus is praying that the Christian disciples *may all be one* ... just as the Father and the Son are one ... *so that the world may believe that the Father has sent Jesus Christ into the world.*

When the group of Christian disciples are truly One, then the world knows that the Father really sent the Son into the world. This is another essential “Mark” of true Christian disciples.

What does this oneness look like? Let me share with you what Francis Schaeffer has to say about verse 21 here.

The unity described here is not an organizational unity. You won't find one overarching church organization that covers all Christians. There are many cultural, linguistic, and political issues that would make such an organizational unity impractical. And the so-called "ecumenical movement" is not the right way to achieve this unity, since it seeks to do so by compromising too much in the area of essential doctrines.

Schaeffer describes this unity as being a visible, observable love that true Christians have for other true Christians, even across denominational lines. Despite the bitterness that sometimes accompanies arguments over doctrinal differences, when Christians move to genuinely forgive one another, this can be a powerful witness to the world.

It is not only in the area of doctrinal differences that Christians have sometimes been in conflict with fellow believers. Schaeffer tells the story of an evangelical denomination in Germany during World War 2 which saw a split among its members about how to respond to the Nazi government's efforts to control religious groups. Some churches in this denomination chose to compromise with the government while others decided not to compromise. Those who compromised rode out the war years relatively comfortably, while those that did not compromise suffered persecution, with most families seeing relatives sent to the concentration camps. After the war, how did these two groups reconcile with each other? The church leaders gathered and every man spent several days alone in prayer and contemplation, searching his own heart. Each of us knows the secrets of our heart, and we know that we are imperfect in many ways, that we have each failed Christ in one way or another and need His forgiveness. After several days of prayer, these men gathered together again, understood their need for forgiveness, and they realized that their group was One again.

1st Peter 4:8 — "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins."

Colossians 3:12-14 — "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so must you do also. ¹⁴In addition to all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

In addition to all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Let me close my sermon today with the key verse, John 13:35 — "By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another."