

Marks of a True Disciple

The Love of the Disciple — The Mark That Remains

John 13:34-35

Over the past few weeks, we've been looking at what it truly means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We've considered His call... the cost... and the continuance of the disciple — what it means to follow Christ for a lifetime.

As we come to this next truth, we're brought to something that is not just part of discipleship — it is something that defines it.

There are many things in life that change — seasons change... circumstances change... even the roles and responsibilities we carry can change over time.

But there are some things that must remain constant, and one of those — perhaps the clearest mark of a true disciple — is not found in what we say... but in how we love each other.

In our text, the Lord Jesus gives a command to His disciples that would outlast His physical presence with them... and would define them even after things around them began to change.

This morning, I want us to consider this truth:

The Love of the Disciple — The Mark that Remains.

I. A COMMAND THAT IS GIVEN (v. 34A)

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another...”

A. The authority of the command

1. This is not a suggestion — it is a command from a Superior to an inferior; from the Commander-in-Chief to a soldier.
2. This comes from the Lord Jesus Himself — it is not optional... it is not conditional... it is not personality-driven.

John 14:15

¹⁵ If ye love me, keep my commandments.

1 John 4:21

²¹ And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

3. Many believers treat love as something that “happens” — Jesus presents it as something that is required.

B. The nature of the command

“A new commandment”

1. This raises the question: “Wasn’t love already commanded?” The answer is “Yes”:

Leviticus 19:18

¹⁸ Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I *am* the LORD.

2. So what is “new” about it?
 - a) It’s not new in existence — it’s new in expression.
 - b) The commandment is new because it is now defined and demonstrated in Christ Himself. (More on this in the next point.)

C. The context of the command

1. This command is given the night before the cross in the upper room after Judas has gone out to the disciples who will soon face confusion and change.

John 13:1

¹ Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.

2. Jesus gives this command in a moment of impending separation (John 14:1).
3. When the Lord Jesus knew that things were about to change for His disciples, He did not give them a strategy; He did not give them a structure; He gave them a command to love one another.

D. The scope of the command

“That ye love one another”

1. This is directed to believers and is the life of the church. It is not abstract, but something that is to be visible.

1 Thessalonians 4:9

⁹ But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

2. This is not theoretical love, or love from a distance, or loving only when it's easy. This is daily, practical, visible love among God's people.

E. The weight of the command

This command would be impossible if the Lord had not also given us the measure of it.

II. A COMPARISON THAT IS GROUNDED (v. 34B)

“As I have loved you”

A. The standard of this love

1. This isn't *love as others deserve*, but love “as I have loved you.”
2. The measure of our love is not ourselves — it is Christ.

John 15:12

¹² This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

3. Under the old command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Under the “new commandment”: Love others as Christ has loved you.

B. The demonstration of this love

1. Jesus didn't just define love — He demonstrated it.

Romans 5:8

⁸ But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 3:16

¹⁶ 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.

2. What does this Christ-like love look like?
 - a) It is sacrificial

- (1) He gave Himself
- (2) Love costs something
- b) It is undeserved
 - (1) Given to sinners
 - (2) Not based on worthiness
- c) It is enduring

John 13:1

¹ ... he loved them unto the end.

C. The depth of this love

The Lord Jesus didn't love His disciples because they deserved it — He loved them because they were His.

D. The impossibility of this love (in the flesh)

1. Without Christ and left to ourselves, we cannot love like this. Our love is conditional, limited, and self-protective.
2. This kind of love is produced by the Spirit of God.

Galatians 5:22

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love...

E. The implication of this love

1. When the Lord gave this command, He was not preparing them for a moment when everything would stay the same... He was preparing them for a moment when everything was about to change.
2. He was telling them, when that moment comes,

this is how you must treat one another.

- Christ did not just command love — He became the measure of it.

III. A COMMUNITY THAT IS GUARDED (v. 34C)

“That ye also love one another”

A. The focus of this love

1. This command is directed within the body — “one another” — believers loving believers.
2. The clearest place the world sees Christ is not just in individual believers — but in how believers treat each other.

1 Thessalonians 4:9

⁹ But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

Romans 12:10

¹⁰ Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

B. The function of this love

1. It guards the church from division, bitterness, misunderstanding, and self-centered interests.
2. Without this love, truth becomes harsh, differences become divisions, and preferences become problems.

C. The expression of this love

1. Loving one another means:

- a) Bearing with one another (patience with weakness) — Eph. 4:2
- b) Forgiving one another (not holding grudges) — Col 3:13
- c) Serving one another (putting others before self) — Gal. 5:13

2. This love is lived out in daily relationships with other believers.

D. The testing of this love

1. This is hardest to do when there is misunderstanding; when there is change; when there is uncertainty.
2. There are times in the life of a church when everything feels settled. And there are times when things begin to shift... When expectations change... when plans change... when people are unsure what lies ahead...

It is in those moments — not when everything is easy — that this command becomes most important.

E. The guarding power of this love

1. This love guards the spirit of the church. It keeps hearts right; keeps unity intact; and it keeps the focus on Christ.

Philippians 2:2

² Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.

2. When love is present, a church can walk through

change without losing its unity.

- When a church loves one another in that way, it does not just affect the church — it becomes a testimony to the world.

IV. A CHARACTERISTIC THAT IS SEEN (v. 35)

A. The visibility of this mark

“By this shall all men know...”

1. The world is watching, whether we realize it or not.
2. The identifying mark of a disciple is seen before it is heard.

Matthew 5:16

¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

B. The distinctiveness of this mark

“By this...”

1. Not by knowledge alone, nor by activity alone, nor by outward form alone. Jesus didn't say, “By your preaching... your programs... or your preferences.” He said, “By your love one for another.”
2. Without this kind of love, truth sounds empty; service becomes mechanical, and the church loses its testimony.

C. The authenticity of this mark

“Shall all men know that ye are my disciples”

Love is not what makes us disciples — it's what proves that we are.

1 John 3:14

¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not *his* brother abideth in death.

D. The testing of this mark

1. When is this seen most clearly?
 - a) Not when everything is smooth and predictable.
 - b) But when things change; when emotions are involved; and when people must choose how to respond.
2. The world may not understand our doctrine — but it understands how we treat one another.

E. The enduring nature of this mark

“By this shall all men know”

1. Circumstances change; people come and go; roles shift, but this mark must remain.

Colossians 3:14

¹⁴ And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

2. When everything else changes, this is what must stay the same.

Conclusion:

The Lord made it clear that the way His people would be known... would not be by their circumstances... but by their

love one for another.

And the truth is — there are times in the life of a church when that love is especially important.

There are times when things shift... when the Lord, in His providence, brings changes that we may not have expected... but that He has fully ordered according to His will.

And in those moments, what matters most is not that everything stays the same, but that we continue to walk in truth, and that we continue to love one another as Christ has loved us.

Because that is the mark that remains.