

THE DISCIPLINE OF LOVE: THE DISTINGUISHING MARK

(John 13:33-35; 1 John 4:7-21)

Series: "The Disciplines of a Godly Life" (Part 16)

...Today it is common to use all sorts of symbols to indicate one's favorite team, country, company, associations and more. This has also to be true for the church through the centuries as we see the symbol of a fish, a dove, and a cross marking one as belonging to Jesus.

...However, according to the Bible, there is one mark that ought to chiefly designate a follower of the Lord Jesus. What is this mark? This mark is not a cross, nor a fish, it is love. Christians are to be known chiefly by one's love for the Lord, their love for fellow believers, and their love for all neighbors, even one's enemy. LOVE!

...Through the years John's Gospel has been called many things, but none more fitting than "The Gospel of God's Love." This is God's love letter to the world and if so, John 3:16 and John 13:33-34 are its heart.

TWO CONVERSATIONS ABOUT LOVE DIRECTING YOU, CHRISTIAN, TO DISPLAY GOD'S LOVE TO ALL.

...Love is the mark of a genuine believer!

I. Jesus In Preparing His 11 Disciples For His Absence...Called For Love. (Jn.13)

A. Note the context:

1. This is the night of Jesus' arrest. The Disciples had spent the evening together, and after Judas left to do his evil deed, Jesus prepared the men for His coming absence...
2. Jesus called them, "Little children"...a term of endearment. Then He told them "I will be with you only a little while longer...and you cannot come" (v.33)

B. What is the connection between this verse announcing His departure and the next verse? Note:

1. Since Jesus was about to depart from the world, the world was going to lose the only true example of love the world had ever known. "God is love," and Jesus is God.
...Jesus was about to prove this love by dying on the cross, be resurrected and leave.
...How then would the world ever see love demonstrated when He left for glory?
...It's as if Jesus said, "I am going, therefore you must be as I have been in the world."
2. The disciples were to transfer the love they felt for Jesus to one another.
...The vertical love of disciples for the exalted Christ must be expressed horizontally in their love for all others, especially for fellow believers.
...Moreover, the horizontal love, which is seen by others, is proof of the vertical love.

C. Jesus' command to love is both an old command, but newly enhanced. (vv.34-35) (Leviticus 19:18)
...This old command was raised to an entirely new significance by Jesus. In three ways:

1. It was given a new object. Not just fellow Jews, but for all neighbors everywhere.
...As Christians display love for each other, the unbelieving world will notice. (v.35)
...In a world utterly segmented, the church composed of all sorts of people united together sitting at one table (Communion) arrests the attention of the world.
2. It is to be exercised according to a new measure. "As I have loved you" (Jesus)
...Jesus' sacrificial love is the new measure. (1 John 4:10) "This is love, not that..."
...Look again at 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and see Jesus. "Love is patient"...Jesus is patient, "Love is kind"...Jesus is kind, "Love does not envy"...Jesus does not envy. (Now substitute your name...to do so is humbling because we do not love as Jesus)
3. It is made possible through a new power. The Holy Spirit enables us to love.
...This is the life of Jesus in each believer. How we need this! Impossible without...

II. John Revisits Jesus' "New Commandment" Providing An Exposition Of It. (1 John 4)

- ...Peter interrupted Jesus' explanation commanding love, so Jesus has John provide us with some details. The letter of 1 John can be called the exposition of the command to love. John gives us reasons to love...
- A. The first reason why we should love one another is love is God's nature. (1 John 4:7-8)
...His point is that if we are truly born again, we will resemble our Heavenly Father in this.
 - B. The second reason why we should love is that love led God to God's gift. (vv.9,11)
...By nature we were dead and blind in sin, but God sent His Son to rescue us from our sin.
...Since this is how God displayed His love for us, so we who have tasted it are to do likewise.
 - C. The last reason why we should love one another is that God's present and continuous activity is to love. God is done creating the world, Jesus will not die again, but His love continues forever.

SO WHAT? WHAT DIFFERENCE SHOULD THIS MAKE IN MY LIFE?

1. If you claim to know Christ as your Savior and yet find hate in your heart, be very careful, you may be self-deceived and still lost in your sin. The Bible tells us this..."Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness." (1 John 2:9) Daily ask the Lord to examine your heart and confess the sins He brings to your mind. Confess and forsake your hatred.
2. Love is the mark of a genuine believer. It is not your love, something you must "work up." No! It is the Lord loving others through you. The Holy Spirit produces this in your heart. It is so beautiful!
3. Read through 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and substitute your name...asking the Lord to work in you so that others will see Jesus. ..."I am patient, I am kind, I do not envy, I don't have to have my own way, I am not irritable, I am not resentful..."
4. Jesus, God's only Son, gave His life on the cross for sin. His death can take the place of yours. You must see yourself as the sinner that you are and therefore under God's holy righteous wrath. Either you will pay for your sin, or you will receive total and complete forgiveness through the payment Jesus made. Don't delay, come to the cross and receive as a gift eternal life through Jesus Christ alone.

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How have you experienced God's change in your life since salvation? Particularly, how have you sensed God's love flowing through you to others? To those in your family, school, work, and world; has there been a change? How? What might others say about you in this?
2. How have you been the recipient of God's love from the hands of another? Can you think of a specific event or time when God's love came to you from another believer?
3. Do you agree that at times we struggle in loving those who despise or hate us? What practical things can we do at such times? Give examples from your own life?
4. God's love is simply amazing! When you think about it what thoughts and emotions come to mind? Does meditating upon it cause you to soar in your heart?