

Life of Love

Excerpts from *Mark of a Christian* by Francis Shaefter

What is this Mark?

At the close of his ministry, Jesus made clear what was to be the distinguishing mark of the Christian until His return: "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:33-35).

Notice that what He says here is not a statement or a fact. It is a command which includes a condition: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." And if this is involved, if you obey, you will wear the badge that Christ gave. But since this is a command, it can be violated. The point: while it is possible to be a Christian without showing the mark; if we expect non-Christians to know that we are Christians, we must show the mark. Speaking to the church some years later, the same John who wrote the account above says: "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another" (1 John 3:11). John in effect says: Don't forget this ... don't forget this! This command was given to us by Christ while He was still on earth. This is to be your mark. [...]

Loving our Brothers and Sisters

If Jesus had commanded so strongly that we love all people as our neighbors, then how important it is especially to love our fellow Christians. If we are told to love all people as our neighbors then surely we can understand how overwhelmingly important it is that all men and women be able to see an observable love for those with whom we have these special ties. The apostle Paul makes the double obligation clear in Galatians 6:10: Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. He does not negate the command to do good to all people. But it is still not meaningless to add, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. This dual goal should be our Christian mentality, the set of our minds; we should be consciously thinking about it and what it means in our one-moment-at-a-time lives. It should be the attitude that governs our outward observable actions. [...]

The Quality of our Love

The church is to be a loving church in a dying culture. How, then, is the dying culture going to consider us? Jesus says by this shall all people know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another. In the midst of the world, in the midst of our present culture, Jesus is giving a right to the world. Upon his authority he gives the world the right to judge whether you and I are born-again Christians, on the basis of our observable love toward all Christians. That's pretty frightening. Jesus turns to the world and says, "I've something to say to you. On the basis of my authority, I give you a right: you may judge whether or not an individual is a Christian on the basis of the love they show to all true Christians."

In other words, if people come up to us and cast in our teeth the judgment that we are not Christians because we have not shown love toward other Christians, we must understand that they are only exercising a prerogative which Jesus gave them. And we must not get angry. If people say, "You don't love other Christians," we must go home, get down on our knees, and ask God whether or not what they say is true. And if it is, then they have a right to have said it. [...]

The Final Apologetic

What is the final apologetic? “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 7:21). This is the final apologetic [our ultimate defense].

In John 13 the point was that, if an individual Christian does not show love toward other true Christians, the world has a right to judge that he or she is not a Christian. Here Jesus is stating something else that is much more cutting, much more profound: We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus’ claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians. Now that is frightening. Should we not feel some emotion at this point? [...]

Visible Love

What, then, does this love mean? How can it be made visible? First, it means a very simple thing: It means that when I have made a mistake and when I have failed to love my Christian brother, I go to him and say, “I’m sorry.” That is first. It may seem a letdown—that the first thing we speak of should be so simple!

But if you think it is easy, you have never tried to practice it. In our own groups, in our own close Christian communities, even in our families, when we have shown lack of love toward another, we as Christians do not just automatically go and say we are sorry. On even the very simplest level it is never very easy. If I am not willing to say, “I’m sorry,” when I have wronged somebody else—especially when I have not loved that person—I have not even started to think about the meaning of a Christian oneness that the world can see. The world has a right to question whether I am a Christian. And more than that, let me say it again, if I am not willing to do this very simple thing, the world has a right to question whether Jesus was sent from God and whether Christianity is true. [...]

The One True Mark

Let us look again at the biblical texts which so clearly indicate the mark of the Christian: “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:33-35). “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). What then shall we conclude but that, as the Samaritan loved the wounded man, we as Christians are called upon to love all people as neighbors, loving them as ourselves.

Second that we are to love all true Christians in a way that the world may observe. This means showing love to our fellow Christians in the midst of our differences, great or small, loving them when it costs us something, loving them even under times of tremendous emotional tension, loving them in a way the world can see.

In short, we are to practice and exhibit the holiness of God and the love of God, for without this we grieve the Holy Spirit. Love, and the unity it attests to, is the mark Christ gave Christians to wear before the world. Only with this mark may the world know that Christians are indeed Christians and that Jesus was sent by the Father. But each one should be careful how he builds.

Relevant Scriptures:

Mark 12:29-30	Greatest Commandment
Romans 5:8	But God demonstrates his own love for us in this...
Romans 12:17-21	Do not repay anyone evil for evil...
1 John 4:10	This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and...

Discussion Questions:

1. What aspects of the article surprised you, encouraged you, or challenged you?
2. God is the source of love. With this understanding, is there anything in your life that you need to change in order to better connect with God? The more specific, the more dynamic.
3. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-7. What areas do you need to work on in your relationships so that you can better live a life of love, as reflected in these verses? How can you do this?
4. How can you be accountable to live a life of love right now? Can you think of anyone who could hold you accountable?
5. Ask yourself often, "Why do I do what I do? and Who do I do it for?"