

## **“THE MARKED CHRISTIAN.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Text for the Sermon: John 13:34-35**

### **Introduction:**

The context for our text this evening is the Upper Room and the Last Supper. These words flow out of a last supper, out of a love feast instituted for all His disciples in all ages and in all places.

**John 13:34-35** 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. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

In His last words alone with the disciples before leaving the earth, Jesus says something of immense importance. He speaks of a great and rare and invaluable grace, love one another. Love one another, a new commandment.

But is this really new? Haven't we been told to love before? Leviticus 19:18 says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." What does it mean when our Lord and Master commands us with what He calls a new commandment? Notice with me *four ways* in which this is a new command.

### **New mark.**

Fish symbols are nice, crosses are good, little doves are fine. Bumper stickers, tee shirts, all well and good. But if we were to ask Jesus what symbol or mark or badge we should wear and show, He will answer with one word: love. By this mark you will be known as my disciples.

Notice, what the new mark is not. It is not spiritual gifts, not our ability to teach or lead or intercede or show mercy or heal or prophecy or speak in tongues or give. And the mark is not miracles, we are not known as Jesus' disciples by our powers or signs and wonders. The mark is not our intellect or wisdom.

The mark is the simple grace of love. A grace available to the poorest, the lowest, the weakest. A grace available in fullest measure to every disciple. Where there is no love there is no grace, no Spirit, no regeneration, no Christianity. Isn't that what Paul meant in I Corinthians 13?

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

You want to see signs and wonders? Love one another.

You want to see miracles? Love one another.

You want to see mountains move? Love one another.

You want to see lives transformed? Love one another.

You want to see the glory of God fall on this place? Love one another.

You want to see the world turned upside down? Love one another.

You want to see Jesus come back? Love one another.

You want to see Jesus? Love one another.

### **New Standard.**

Before, the standard was love your neighbor as yourself, but now the bar has been raised. A new and higher standard, as yet never known, is put in place, “love even as I have loved you.” The command is new in that it is backed up by a new example, a much higher example than ever before.

Think of all the ways Jesus loved His disciples, spending time with them, speaking kindly to them, comforting them, confronting and correcting them, praying for them, standing up for them, being incredibly patient with them, compassionately bearing their failings and shortcomings. Just before this Jesus had washed their feet, and soon He will show them a greater love, a love that is even unto death.

The new standard says, as we have been so loved, so let us love one another.

### **New object.**

Instead of love your neighbor, Jesus says to His disciples, love one another. Does this mean we don't have to love our neighbor anymore? Of course not, the Good Samaritan story still stands. Does this mean we don't have to love our enemies anymore? Of course not, the Sermon on the Mount still stands.

What is new here is clearly stated in the words of Paul in Galatians 6:10, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

What is owed to all, is especially and specifically and particularly owed to our brothers and sisters in Christ. There is a closer bond of love, a greater warmth and zeal for those of the house of God. We are to love each other here even more than those out there.

### **New audience.**

This is the test of Christianity before the world. “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Francis Schaeffer in his powerful little booklet, *The Mark of The Christian*, put this new audience in pretty bold relief. “In the midst of the world, in the midst of our present dying 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” (p. 13).

Jesus basically says to the world, “World, on the basis of my authority I give you the right to judge whether or not a person is a Christian on the basis of how they show love to each other.”

That’s pretty scary. You and I sometimes, maybe even oftentimes, fail to love each other. That doesn’t mean we aren’t Christians. But it does mean that the world has the right to make the judgment that we aren’t. Jesus knows who are His and who aren’t. He knows the heart. But the world will judge, rightly or wrongly, on what they see.

That means love has to be evident in our conversations, in our tempers, in our mannerisms, in our behavior at home, at work, at school, on the road, in public and in private, with family and friends, in all of our conduct where ever we are in life. And specifically and especially this must be evident in all of our dealings with other Christians.

This means we get rid of all envy, malice, jealousy, gossip, bitterness, unforgiveness, anger, slander, covetousness, lust and impurity, strife, dissensions, divisions.

When we love one another we proclaim the true God before a watching world. We prove Christ. Never does the world see Jesus more clearly than when it sees love flowing freely among believers. Like the old praise song, “they will know we are Christians by our love.”

### **New heart.**

God only commands what He then enables. So with a new command comes a new heart. When He says to us “love one another,” He also gives a new desire to love one another. It’s in us because the Holy Spirit is in us. We need only ask for the power and strength and courage to act on it.

Here is the point, we cannot love God and we cannot love each other without help. We can’t do it by ourselves. Love for God and each other is the passion and work of the Holy Spirit.

**Ezekiel 36:26-27** “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

This is the new commandment for the new community of God who has received the new covenant that is inaugurated in the Last Supper. Our love is a reflection of our new status and experience as the adopted children of God. This new command cannot be lived out unless we appropriate supernatural resources. God has designed us to be dependent, to need help from Him. If we neglect Him we will dry up and fail.

### **Live life responsively.**

Relying on the Holy Spirit love one another more and more.

**1 Thessalonians 4:9-10** Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, [10] for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more.

More and more. Paul even goes so far as to pray for us “That your love may abound more and more with knowledge and depth of insight” (Philippians 1:9).

What does that mean? Here is one thing I think it means. God is going to continue to give us more and more real life opportunities to show the world our love for one another. And these opportunities will come in at least *three* varieties or flavors.

### **First, they will come in the form of differences.**

God loves to use His church as a testing ground and training ground for love. He loves bringing together a big mix and assortment of people of all shapes and sizes,

of all ages and stages, from every walk of life, with different views and perspectives and opinions.

If we were all the same or all agreed about everything love would be easy. But then maybe it wouldn't really be love. So here we are a bunch of people with a bunch of differences— differences about politics, about music in worship, differences about raising and disciplining and educating our children, differences about how to spend money, about Biblical and theological issues, and on and on.

In this we are no different than the rest of the world. Everyone has different views, outlooks, experiences, convictions, etc. What is at issue is how we handle and deal with those differences.

It's easy to forget that God is in the midst of these differences creating opportunities for love. If I see real life opportunities as occasions to get angry or impatient or frustrated or discourage or offended or put off or proud or whatever, then I miss that God was there testing and proving whether or not I bear the mark of love.

The bigger our differences, the bigger our love needs to be. The world needs to see the difference between how we have our differences and how the world has their differences. They need to see us doing differences differently, having our differences in open, honest, loving ways.

### **Second the opportunities will come in the form of needs.**

The physical, emotional, spiritual, financial needs in our midst are God-given opportunities for love and compassion, they are another test. They are not just poor choices or bad decisions, they are God-ordained events to draw out the compassion of His people, just like end of life events. Luke shows us the early church falling in love in daily practical, costly, real ways. Meeting needs was more important to them than personal possessions.

**1 John 3:16-18** “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. [17] But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? [18] Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth”.

God gives us opportunities again and again in life to show and prove our love and the world is watching.

### **Third, the opportunities will come in the form of sin.**

We are all sinners, every last one of us. Our God will have nothing to do with utopias or pie in the sky, or illusions of a perfect church. It is actually grace that God will not permit us to live in a fantasy world of how great and wonderful we all are. A church that cannot learn to love in the midst of sin is no real church. Sin created the opportunity for God to show us the greatest love ever shown, and our sin against each other creates daily opportunities to reflect that great love.

So here is the test. Who will say, "I am sorry. Please forgive me." Who will lead the way with a forgiving and reconciling spirit? Who will nip gossip in the bud before it gets a foothold? Who will gently confront a critical spirit? Who will show the world what the forgiving, reconciling love of Jesus looks like?

Be on the lookout for more and more opportunities to practice and pursue love. Stir up love, outdo each other. Cultivate it, plant it, water it, tend it, fertilize it, make it more fruitful. Excel in this when we differ in opinions or practice, when we look at things from different perspectives.

Let us put on a new mark based on a new standard to love one another in a way that the watching world will see and say, "They have been with Jesus."

**Prayer:** Jesus thank you for your selfless, sacrificial, forgiving love. Thank you for showing us the way, for denying yourself for our sake, for having no limit to what you would do, for showing us how to forgive even those who denied and rejected you.

Jesus, forgive us we pray. Forgive our squabbling and bickering and nitpicking, our cross words and quick tongue, our daily grumbling and complaining.

Let's be marked men and women, marked by your love, and enable us to excel in this love for one another to the point that we might see a great revival and outpouring of salvation as this grace of love flourishes in the hearts of Christians.