

Identifying Christ's Disciples

John 13:34-35

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Introduction: Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, died on June 18, 1956. He lost his life while rescuing another person from drowning. He died so that another might live. Though the circumstances were sad, the manner of his death reflected the motive for his living. He once said, "Soulwinners are not soulwinners because of what they know, but because of Whom they know & how well they know Him & how much they long for others to know Him." He was committed not only to evangelism, but to Scripture memorization & the follow-up of new converts, that is, discipleship. Let's assume that all those who have put their faith in Christ as Savior are "disciples." Is that the end? No, it is only the beginning. God's desire for His children is that they "be discipled" – growing in & toward spiritual maturity. Such a process of discipleship lasts a lifetime, culminating when growth in Christlikeness results with the believer in heaven being like Christ (I John 3:2). Thus, all believers, being disciples, are to be involved in the process of discipleship. Discipleship is not an option, but rather the obligation of every believer whom God has predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29). Could it be explained this way? "Disciples are converts; discipleship comes later; that is, a disciple is one who has been evangelized & the later process of growth is called discipleship" (Wilkins). Christ says, "*If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed*" (8:31). The word "*continue*" can be translated "abide" & suggests that the believer is to dwell in God's Word, allowing it to have a permanent influence in his life. What will be therefore the evidence of such "abiding"? In John 13:34-35, Christ speaks of the identifying characteristic, the distinguishing mark, of "disciples" – "*...if ye have love one to another.*"

I. **Who** are we to love? - The identification > the people to love - "*...that ye love one another*"

A. The associations:

1. Christ is speaking to His disciples

- a. Repeated in John 15:12, "*This is My commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.*"
- b. Referred to in I John 3:10-11, "*...for this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*"

2. The context is dealing with believers

- a. Compare Galatians 6:10, "*household of faith*" with Ephesians 2:19, "*household of God*"
- b. Consider Hebrews 6:10, "*For God is not unrighteous to forget your work & labor of love which ye have shewed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints.*"

B. The applications - cf. Matthew 22:39, "*...thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*"

1. Those in our church - I Peter 1:22 > Do we really love one another?
2. Those in our community - Matthew 5:43-48 > Do we truly love the lost?
3. Those in our "castle" (home) - Ephesians 5:21-6:1 & Titus 2:3-5 > Do we love those in our family?

II. **How** are we to love? - The illustration > the pattern for love – "*...as I have loved you.*" [To love is not new, but to love as He loved is new - How did Christ love us? Consider Ephesians 5:25-29]

A. With a **sacrificing** love - "*...as Christ loved the Church, & gave Himself for it.*"

1. Christ sacrificed:

- a. His love declared - John 13:1, "*...having loved His own ...He loved them unto the end.*"
- b. His love demonstrated - John 10:11 & 15, "*...the Good Shepherd giveth His life...*"

2. How much do we sacrifice in our love for others, those in:

- a. Our church? b. Our community? c. Our castle (home)?

Are we willing to sacrifice of our time, transportation & treasure? When was the last time you made a "sacrifice" of your time or effort?

- B. With a *sanctifying* love - "...that He might sanctify & cleanse it..."
 - 1. Christ reproves, rebukes, & restores:
 - a. The picture of spiritual cleansing - John 13:4-17 (Foot-washing today? Daily cleansing?)
 - b. The purpose of spiritual cleansing - Revelation 3:19, "As many as I love, I rebuke & chasten: be zealous therefore, & repent" (cf. Ephesians 5:27).
 - 2. How much of a sanctifying influence do we have on others?
 - a. By our exhortation - Hebrews 10:24-25
 - b. By our encouragement - Galatians 6:1-5
- C. With a *satisfying* love - "...but nourisheth & cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church."
 - 1. Christ feeds & feeds for His church:
 - a. Provision > spiritual (Matthew 4:4) & physical (Philippians 4:19)
 - b. Protection > by His presence (Hebrews 13:5-6) & His power (Phil. 4:13)
 - 2. Do we supply others with provision & protection?
 - a. Husband's provision of love, loyalty, & labor (support) - cf. Ephesians 5:25, 29
 - b. Husband's protection by learning (I Peter 3:7) & leading (Joshua 24:15)

III. **Why** are we to love? - The indication > the purpose of love - "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples..."

The distinguishing mark or identifying characteristic of believers (cf. Acts 4:13). "All men will know that they are Jesus' disciples if, & only if, they have love one to another" (Morris).

A. The **absence** of love > I John 3:14-15

- 1. Profession without practice
- 2. Saying but not showing

B. The **actions** of love > I John 3:16 & 18

- 1. In deed, a practical demonstration
- 2. In truth, a Biblical determination

"Tertullian (an early Church historian) tells us that the heathen commented on the Christians: 'See, they say, how they (the Christians) love one another' " (Morris).

C. The **assurance** of love > I John 4:7, 11, & 12

- 1. The source of Biblical love - Romans 5:5 (the assistance of God's Spirit in us)
- 2. The surety of Biblical love - I John 5:1-3 (the assurance that God's love is in us)

Summary: "When our brethren stand in need of help from us, & we have an opportunity of being serviceable to them; when they differ in opinion & practice from us, or they are any ways rivals with or provoking to us, & so we have an occasion to condescend & forgive, in such cases as this it will be known whether we have this badge of Christ's disciples" (Henry).

Conclusion: Christ commanded His disciples & therefore continues to command us today to love one another. He tells us who to love, by identifying the people. He tells us how to love, by illustrating the pattern. And He tells us why to love, by indicating the purpose. Are you demonstrating God's love to those in your church, your community, your castle? Are you exhibiting the love as Christ loved us, with a sacrificing, sanctifying, & satisfying love? Could you be identified as one of Christ's disciples on the basis of your love for others?

Perhaps you have never experienced God's love in the sending of His Son to be your Savior. You cannot truly love Him, or others, without first accepting His love for you (I John 4:19). If you are not saved, why not trust Christ today & know the true meaning of God's love expressed in Romans 5:8, "But God commendeth (showed, proved) His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." John explains it this way, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, & sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:10). That "propitiation" is a 'satisfactory sacrifice', Christ taking our punishment & death on the cross that we might be saved (I Peter 2:24 & 3:18).

If you are saved, are you obeying this "new commandment" of Christ? Are you evidencing discipleship in your life by loving others as Christ loves you?