

# The Mark of the Christian

By Francis Schaeffer

Christians have not always presented a pretty picture to the world. Too often they have failed to show the beauty of love, the beauty of Christ, the holiness of God, and the world has turned away. Is there then no way to make the world look again-this time at true Christianity? Must Christians continue to stand with arms folded, presenting to men and women a tarnished image of God-a shattered body of Christ? How should we show the world that we are Christians?

Through the centuries, people have displayed many different symbols intended to show that they are Christians. They have worn marks in the lapels of their coats, hung chains about their necks, and even had special haircuts. But there is a much better sign - a universal mark that is to last through all the ages of the church till Jesus comes back.

## 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 Neighbor

The command at this point is to love our fellow Christians. But there is another side of Jesus' teaching: We are to love our fellow human beings, as human beings. We are to love all people, in fact, as neighbors. All people bear the

image of God. They have inherent value, not simply because they are the objects of Christ's saving work, but because they are God's creation, in God's image. All people are our neighbors, and we are to love them as ourselves. We are to do this on the basis of creation, even if they are not redeemed, for all people have value because they are made in the image of God. Therefore, they are to be loved even at great cost. This is, of course, the whole point of Jesus' story of the good Samaritan. On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. Teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life? What is written in the Law? he replied. How do you read it? He answered: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself. You have answered correctly, Jesus replied. Do this and you will live. But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, And who is my neighbor?

In reply Jesus said: A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. Look after him, he said, and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have. Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers? The expert in the law replied, The one who had mercy on him. Jesus told him, Go and do likewise. (the gospel according to Luke; chapter 10, verses 25-37)

## **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.

## A Delicate Balance

Very often the true Bible-believing Christian, in emphasizing two humanities - one lost, one saved, one still standing in rebellion against God, the other having returned to God through Christ -has given a picture of exclusiveness which is ugly. There are two humanities. That is true. Some men and women made in the image of God still stand in rebellion against him; some, by the grace of God, have cast themselves upon God's solution. Nonetheless, there is in another very important sense only one humanity. All men and women derive from one origin. By creation, all bear the image of God.

In this sense, all people are of one flesh, one blood. Hence, the exclusiveness of the two humanities is under girded by the unity of all men and women. And Christians are not to love their believing brothers and sisters to the exclusion of their non-believing fellows. That is ugly. We are to have the example of the good Samaritan consciously in mind at all times. The first commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind. The second commandment bears the universal command to love people. Notice that the second commandment is not just to love Christians. It is far wider than this. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

First Thessalonians 3:12 carries the same double emphasis: May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. Here the order is reversed. First of all, we are to have love one toward another and then toward everyone else, but that does not change the double emphasis. Rather, it points up the delicate balance - a balance that is not in practice automatically maintain for true Christians only. If we look again at the command in John 13, we will notice some important things. First of all, this is a command to have a special love to all true Christians, all born-again Christians. From the scriptural viewpoint, not all who call themselves Christians are Christians, and that is especially true in our generation. The meaning of the word Christian has been reduced to practically nothing. Surely, there is no word that has been so devalued unless it is the Word of God itself. Central to semantics is the idea that a word as a symbol has no meaning until content is put into it. This is quite correct. Because the word Christian as a symbol has been made to mean so little, it has come to mean everything and nothing.

Jesus, however, is talking about loving all true Christians. And this is a command that has two cutting edges, for it means that we must both distinguish true Christians from all pretenders and be sure that we leave no true Christians outside of our consideration. But we must be careful of the opposite error. We must include everyone who stands in the historic-biblical faith whether or not he or she is a member of our own party or our own group. But even if a person is

not among the true Christians, we still have the responsibility to love that one as our neighbor. So we cannot say, "Now here's somebody that, as far as I can tell, does not stand among the group of true Christians, and therefore I don't have to think of him any more; I can just slough him off." Not at all. That one is covered by the second commandment.

## **The Quality of Our Love**

The second thing to notice in these verses in John 13 is the quality of the love that is to be our standard. We are to love all Christians As I have loved you. [Jesus says] The love he exhibited is to be our standard. We are to love all true Christians as Christ has loved us. When we consider this, either of two things can happen: We can just say, "I see! I see!" and we can make a little banner and write on it, "We Love All Christians!" and show it off when anyone looks at us. How ugly. Or we can find something exceedingly more profound - something that will take a great deal of time to cultivate; a great deal of thinking and praying about it.

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.

## **Dealing With Our Failure in Love**

We must be very careful at this point, however. We may be true Christians, really born-again Christians, and yet fail in our love toward other Christians. As a matter of fact, to be completely realistic, it is stronger than this. There will be times (and let us say it with tears), when we will fail in our love toward each other as Christians. In a fallen world, where there is no such thing as perfection

(until Jesus comes), we know this will be the case. And, of course, when we fail, we must ask God's forgiveness.

But, Jesus is not here saying that our failure to love all Christians proves that we are not Christians. What Jesus is saying, however, is that, if I do not have the love I should have toward all other Christians, the world has the right to make the judgment that I am not a Christian. This distinction is a vital one. If we fail in our love toward all Christians, we must not tear our heart out as though it were proof that we are lost. No one except Christ Himself has ever lived and not failed. If success in love toward our brothers in Christ were to be the standard of whether or not a man is a Christian, then there would be no Christians, because all men have failed. But Jesus gives the world a piece of litmus paper, a reasonable thermometer. There is a mark which, if the world does not see, allows them to conclude, "This person is not a Christian." Of course, the world may be making a wrong judgment because if the man is truly a Christian, as far as the reality goes, they made a mistake.

## The Final Apologetic

But there is something even more sober. And to understand it we must look at John 17:21, a verse out of the midst of Christ's high priestly prayer. Jesus prays, 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. In this, his high priestly prayer, Jesus is praying for the oneness of the church, the oneness that should be found specifically among true Christians. Jesus is not praying for a humanistic, romantic oneness among people in general. Verse 9 makes this clear: I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. Jesus here makes a very careful distinction between those who have cast themselves upon him in faith and those who still stand in rebellion. Hence, in the twenty-first verse, when he prays for oneness, the "they" he is referring to are the true Christians. Notice, however, that verse 21 says, That all of them may be one... The emphasis, interestingly enough, is exactly the same as in John 13 not for a part of true Christians, but for all Christians not that those in certain parties in the church should be one, but that all born-again Christians should be one. Now comes the sobering part: Jesus goes on in this twenty-first verse to say something that always causes me to cringe. If, as Christians, we do not cringe, it seems to me we are not very sensitive or very honest, because Jesus here gives us 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. 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?

## **Honest Answers, Observable Love**

Of course, as Christians we must not minimize the need to give honest answers to honest questions. We should have an intellectual apologetic. The Bible commands it, and Christ and Paul exemplify it. In the synagogue, in the marketplace, in homes, and in almost every conceivable kind of situation, Jesus and Paul discussed Christianity. It is likewise the Christian's task to be able to give an honest answer to an honest question and then to give it. Yet, unless true Christians show observable love to each other, Christ says the world cannot be expected to listen, even when we give proper answers. Let us be careful, indeed, to spend a lifetime studying to give honest answers. For years the orthodox, evangelical church has done this very poorly. So it is well to spend time learning to answer the questions of those who are about us. But after we have done our best to communicate to a lost world, still we must never forget that the final apologetic which Jesus gives is the observable love of true Christians for true Christians.

While it is not the central consideration that I am dealing with at this time, yet the observable love and oneness among true Christians exhibited before the world must certainly cross all the lines which divide men. The New Testament says, Neither Greek nor barbarian, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither male nor female (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). In the church at Antioch, the Christians included Jews and Gentiles and reached all the way from Herod's foster brother to the slaves; and the naturally proud Greek Christian Gentiles of Macedonia showed a practical concern for the material needs of the Christian Jews in Jerusalem. The observable and practical love among true Christians that the world has a right to be able to observe in our day certainly should cut without reservation across such lines as language, nationalities, national frontiers, younger and older, colors of skin, levels of education and economics, accent, line of birth, the class system in any particular locality, dress, short or long hair among whites and African and non-African hairdos among blacks, cultural differentiations, and the more traditional and less traditional forms of worship. If the world does not see this down-to-earth practical love, it will not believe that Christ was sent by the Father. People will not believe only on the basis of the proper answers. The two should not be placed in antithesis. The world must have the proper answers to their honest questions, but at the same time there must be a oneness in love between all true Christians. This is what is needed if men are to know that Jesus was sent by the Father and that Christianity is true.

## **True Oneness**

In John 13 and 17, Jesus talks about a real seeable oneness, a practicing oneness, a practical oneness across all [denominational/organizational] lines, among all true Christians. The Christian really has a double task. He has to practice both God's holiness and God's love. The Christian is to exhibit that God exists as the infinite-personal God; and then he is to exhibit simultaneously God's character of holiness and love. Not His holiness without His love: this is only harshness. Not His love without His holiness: that is only compromise. Anything that an individual Christian or Christian group does that fails to show the simultaneous balance of the holiness of God and the love of God presents to a watching world not a demonstration of the God who exists but a caricature of the God who exists. According to the Scripture and the teaching of Christ, the love that is shown is to be exceedingly strong. It is not just something you mention in words once in a while.

## **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.

## **Dealing With Division**

How well have we consciously practiced this? How often, in the power of the Holy Spirit, have we gone to Christians in our own group and said, "I'm sorry"? How much time have we spent reestablishing contact with those in other groups, saying to them, "I'm sorry for what I've done, what I've said, or what I've written"? How frequently has one group gone to another group with whom it differed and has said, "We're sorry"? It is so important that it is, for all practical purposes, a part of the preaching of the gospel itself. The observable practice of

truth and the observable practice of love go hand in hand with the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. I have observed one thing among true Christians in their differences in many countries: What divides and severs true Christian groups and Christians--what leaves a bitterness that can last for 20, 30, or 40 years (or for 50 or 60 years in a son's or daughter's memory)--is not the issue of doctrine or belief that caused the differences in the first place. Invariably, it is a lack of love--and the bitter things that are said by true Christians in the midst of differences. These stick in the mind like glue. And after time passes and the differences between the Christians or the groups appear less than they did, there are still those bitter, bitter things we said in the midst of what we thought was a good and sufficient objective discussion. It is these things - these unloving attitudes and words--that cause the stench that the world can smell in the church of Jesus Christ among those who are really true Christians.

If, when we feel we must disagree as true Christians, we could simply guard our tongues and speak in love, in five or ten years the bitterness could be gone. Instead of that, we leave scars - a curse for generations. Not just a curse in the church, but a curse in the world. Newspaper headlines bear it in our Christian press, and it boils over into the secular press at times--Christians saying such bitter things about other Christians. The world looks, shrugs its shoulders, and turns away. It has not seen even the beginning of a living church in the midst of a dying culture. It has not seen the beginning of what Jesus indicates is the final apologetic--observable oneness among true Christians who are truly brothers and sisters in Christ. Our sharp tongues, the lack of love between us--not the necessary statements of differences that may exist between true Christians--these are what properly trouble the world. How different this is from the straightforward and direct command of Jesus Christ--to show an observable oneness that may be seen by a watching world!

## **Forgiveness**

But there is more to observable prayer than saying we are sorry. There must also be open forgiveness. And though it's hard to say, "I'm sorry," it's even harder to forgive. The Bible, however, makes plain that the world must observe a forgiving spirit in the midst of God's people. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus himself teaches us to pray, Forgive our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Now this prayer, we must say quickly, is not for salvation. It has nothing to do with being born again, for we are born again on the basis of the finished work of Christ plus nothing. But it does have to do with a Christian's existential, moment-by-moment forgiveness for our sins on the basis of Christ's work in order to be in open fellowship with God. What the Lord has taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer should make a Christian very sober every day of his or her life: We are asking the Lord to open to us the experiential realities of

fellowship with himself as we forgive others. Some Christians say that the Lord's Prayer is not for this present era, but most of us would say it is. And yet, at the same time, we hardly think once in a year about our lack of a forgiving heart in relationship to God's forgiving us. Many Christians rarely or never seem to connect their own lack of reality of fellowship with God with their lack of forgiveness to others, even though they may say the Lord's Prayer in a formal way over and over in their weekly Sunday worship services.

We must all continually acknowledge that we do not practice the forgiving heart as we should. And yet the prayer is Forgive us our debts, our trespasses, as we forgive our debtors. We are to have a forgiving spirit even before the other person expresses regret for wrong. The Lord's Prayer does not suggest that when the other person is sorry, then we are to show a oneness by having a forgiving spirit. Rather, we are called upon to have a forgiving spirit without the other person having made the first step. We may still say that this individual is wrong, but in the midst of saying that person is wrong, we must be forgiving. We are to have this forgiving spirit not only toward Christians but toward all people. But surely, if it is toward all people, it is important toward Christians. Such a forgiving spirit registers an attitude of love toward others. But, even though one can call this an attitude, true forgiveness is observable. Believe me, you can look on a person's face and know where that one is as far as forgiveness is concerned. And the world is called on to look upon us and see whether we have love across the groups, love across party lines. Do they observe that we say, "I'm sorry," and do they observe a forgiving heart? Let me repeat: Our love will not be perfect, but it must be substantial enough for the world to be able to observe or it does not fit into the structure of the verses in John 13 and 17. And if the world does not observe this among true Christians, the world has a right to make the two awful judgments that these verses indicate: That we are not Christians, and that Christ was not sent by the Father.

## **When Christians Disagree**

What happens, then, when we must differ with our brothers in Christ because of the need also to show forth God's holiness either in doctrine or in life? In the matter of life, Paul clearly shows us the balance in 1 and 2 Corinthians. The same thing applies in doctrine as well. First, in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 he scolds the Corinthian church for allowing a man who is an active fornicator to stay in the church without discipline. Because of the holiness of God, because of the need to exhibit this holiness to a watching world, and because such judgment on the basis of God's revealed law is right in God's sight, Paul scolds the church for not disciplining the man. After they have disciplined him, Paul writes again to them in 2 Corinthians 2:6-8 and scolds them because they are not showing love toward him. These two things must stand together. I am thankful that we have the record of Paul writing this way, in his first letter and his second, for here you

see a passage of time. The Corinthians have taken his advice, they have disciplined the Christian, and now Paul writes to them, "You're disciplining him, but why don't you show your love toward him?" He could have gone on and quoted Jesus in saying, "Don't you realize that the surrounding pagans of Corinth have a right to say that Jesus was not sent by the Father because you are not showing love to this man that you properly disciplined?"

A very important question arises at this point: how can we exhibit the oneness Christ commands without sharing in the other people's mistakes? I would suggest a few ways by which we can practice and show this oneness even across the lines where we must differ.

## Regret

First, we should never come to such difference with true Christians without regret and without tears. Sounds simple, doesn't it? Believe me, evangelicals often have not shown it. We rush in, being very, very pleased, it would seem at times, to find other people's mistakes. We build ourselves up by tearing other people down. This can never show a real oneness among Christians. There is only one kind of person who can fight the Lord's battles in anywhere near a proper way, and that is the person who by nature is un-belligerent. A belligerent man tends to do it because he is belligerent; at least it looks that way. The world must observe that when we must differ with each other as true Christians, we do it not because we love the smell of blood, the smell of the arena, the smell of the bullfight, but because we must for God's sake. If there are tears when we must speak, then something beautiful can be observed.

Second, in proportion to the gravity of what is wrong between true Christians, it is important consciously to exhibit an observable love to the world. Not all differences among Christians are equally serious. There are some that are very minor. Others are overwhelmingly important. The more serious the wrongness is, the more important it is to exhibit the holiness of God, to speak out concerning what is wrong. At the same time, the more serious the differences become, the more important it becomes that we look to the Holy Spirit to enable us to show love to the true Christians with whom we must differ.

If it is only a minor difference, showing love does not take much conscious consideration. But where the difference becomes really important, it becomes proportionately more important to speak for God's holiness. And it becomes increasingly important in that place to show the world that we still love each other. Humanly we function in exactly the opposite direction: in the less important differences we show more love toward true Christians; but as the difference gets into more important areas, we tend to show less love. The

reverse must be the case: as the differences among true Christians get greater, we must consciously love and show a love which has some manifestation the world may see.

So let us consider this: is my difference with my brother in Christ crucially important? If so, it is doubly important that I spend time upon my knees asking the Holy Spirit, asking Christ, to do His work through me and my group, that I and we might show love even in this larger difference that we have come to with a brother in Christ or with another group of true Christians.

## Costly Love

Third, we must show a practical demonstration of love in the midst of the dilemma, even when it is costly. The word love should not be just a banner. In other words, we must do whatever must be done, at whatever cost, to show this love. We must not say "I love you," and then - bang, bang, bang! So often people think that Christianity is only something soft, only a kind of gooey love that loves evil equally with good. This is not the biblical position. The holiness of God is to be exhibited simultaneously with love. We must be careful, therefore, not to say that what is wrong is right, whether it is in the area of doctrine or of life, in our own group or another. What is wrong is wrong anywhere, and we have a responsibility in that situation to say that what is wrong is wrong. But the observable love must be there regardless of the cost.

The Bible does not make these things escapable. First Corinthians 6:1-7 reads: If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another - and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?

What does this mean? The church is not to let pass what is wrong; but the Christian should suffer practical, monetary loss to show the oneness true Christians should have rather than to go to court against other true Christians; that would destroy such an observable oneness before the watching world. This is costly love, but it is just such practicing love that can be seen. Paul is talking

about something which is observable, something that is very real: the Christian is to show such love in the midst of an unavoidable difference with his brother that he is willing to suffer loss - not just monetary loss (though most Christians seem to forget all love and oneness when money gets involved), but whatever loss is involved. Whatever the specifics are, there is to be a practical demonstration of love appropriate to a particular place. The Bible is a strong and down-to-earth book.

A fourth way we can show and exhibit love without sharing in our brother's mistake is to approach the problem with a desire to solve it, rather than with a desire to win. We all love to win. In fact, there is nobody who loves to win more than the theologian. The history of theology is all too often a long exhibition of a desire to win. But we should understand that what we are working for in the midst of our difference is a solution - a solution that will give God the glory, that will be true to the Bible, but will exhibit the love of God simultaneously with His holiness. What is our attitude as we sit down to talk to our brother or as group meets with group to discuss differences? A desire to come out on top? To play one-upmanship? If there is any desire for love whatsoever, every time we discuss a difference we will desire a solution and not just that we can be proven right.

## **The Difference of Differences**

A fifth way in which we can show a practicing, observable love to the world without sharing in our brother's mistake is to realize, to keep consciously before us and to help each other to be aware, that it is easy to compromise and to call what is wrong right, but that it is equally easy to forget to exhibit our newness in Christ. This attitude must be constantly and consciously developed - talked about and written about in and among our groups and among ourselves as individuals. In fact, this must be talked about and written about before differences arise between true Christians. We have conferences about everything else.

Who has ever heard of a conference to consider how true Christians can exhibit in practice a fidelity to the holiness of God and yet simultaneously exhibit in practice a fidelity to the love of God before the watching world? Have you heard of sermons or writings which carefully present the simultaneous practice of two principles which at first seem to work against each other: (1) the principle of the practice of the purity of the visible church in regard to doctrine and life; and (2) the principle of the practice of an observable love and oneness among all true Christians? If there is no careful preaching and writing about these things, are we so foolish as to think that there will be anything beautiful in practice when differences between true Christians must honestly be faced?

Before a watching world, an observable love in the midst of difference will show a difference between Christians' differences and other people's differences. The world may not understand what the Christians are disagreeing about, but they will very quickly understand the difference of our differences from the world's differences if they see us having our differences in an open and observable love on a practical level. That is different.

Can you see why Jesus said this was the thing that would arrest the attention of the world? You cannot expect the world to understand doctrinal differences, especially in our day when the existence of truth and absolutes are considered unthinkable even as concepts. We cannot expect the world to understand that on the basis of the holiness of God we are having a different kind of difference, because we are dealing with God's absolutes. But when they see differences among true Christians who also show an observable unity, this will open the way for them to consider the truth of Christianity and Christ's claim that the Father did send the Son. As a matter of fact, we have a greater possibility of showing what Jesus is speaking about here, in the midst of our differences, than we do if we are not differing.

Obviously we ought not to go out looking for differences among Christians; there are enough without looking for more. But even so, it is in the midst of a difference that we have our golden opportunity. When everything is going well and we are all standing around in a nice little circle, there is not much to be seen by the world. But when we come to the place where there is a real difference, and we exhibit uncompromised principles but at the same time observable love, then there is something that the world can see, something they can use to judge that these really are Christians, and that Jesus has indeed been sent by the Father.

## **Love in Practice**

Let me give two beautiful examples of such observable love. One happened among the Brethren groups in Germany immediately after World War II. In order to control the church, Hitler commanded the union of all religious groups in Germany, drawing them together by law. The Brethren divided over this issue. Half accepted Hitler's dictum and half refused. The ones who submitted, of course, had a much easier time, but gradually in this organizational oneness with the liberal groups their own doctrinal sharpness and spiritual life suffered. On the other hand, the group that stayed out remained spiritually virile, but there was hardly a family in which someone did not die in a German concentration camp. Now can you imagine the emotional tension? The war is over, and these Christian brothers face each other again. They had the same doctrine, and they had previously worked together for more than a generation. Now what is going to happen? One man remembers that his father died in a concentration camp

and knows that these people in the other group remained safe. But those on the other side have deep personal feelings as well.

Then gradually these brothers came to know that this situation just would not do. A time was appointed when the elders of the two groups could meet together in a certain quiet place. I asked the man who told me this, "What did you do?" He said, "Well, I'll tell you what we did. We came together, and we set aside several days in which each man would search his own heart." Here was a real difference; the emotions were deeply, deeply involved. "My father has gone to the concentration camp, my mother was dragged away." These things are not just little pebbles on the beach; they reach into the deep wellsprings of human emotions. But these people understood the command of Christ about this, and for several days every man did nothing except search his own heart concerning his own failures and the commands of Christ. Then they met together. I asked the man, "What happened then?" And he said, "We just were one." To my mind, this is exactly what Jesus speaks about. The Father has sent the Son!

## **Divided but One**

The principle we are talking about is universal, applicable in all times and places. Let me, then, give you a second illustration - a different practice of the same principle. I have been waiting for years for a time when two groups of born-again Christians who for good reasons find it impossible to work together separate without saying bitter things against each other. I have longed for two groups who would continue to show a love to the watching world when they came to the place where organizational unity seems no longer possible between them. Theoretically, of course, every local church ought to be able to minister to the whole spectrum of society. But in practice we must acknowledge that in certain places it becomes very difficult. The needs of different segments of society are different.

A problem of this nature arose in a church in a large city in the United States. A number of people attuned to the modern age were going to a certain church, but the pastor gradually concluded that he was not able to preach and minister to the two groups together. Some men can, but he personally did not find it possible to minister to the whole spectrum of his congregation - the counterculture people and the far-out ones they brought, and at the same time the people of the surrounding neighborhood. The example of observable love I am going to present now must not be taken as an "of course" situation in our day. In our generation the lack of love can easily cut both ways. A middle-class people can all too easily be snobbish and unloving against the counterculture Christians, and the counterculture Christians can be equally snobbish and unloving against the middle-class Christians. After trying for a long time to work together, the elders met and decided that they would make two churches. They

made it very plain that they were not dividing because their doctrine was different; they were dividing as a matter of practicability. One member of the old session went to the new group. They worked under the whole session to make an orderly transition. Gradually they had two churches, and they were consciously practicing love toward each other.

Here is a lack of organizational unity that is a true love and unity which, the world may observe. The Father has sent the Son!

I want to say with all my heart that as we struggle with the proper preaching of the gospel in the midst of the twentieth century, the importance of observable love must come into our message. We must not forget the final apologetic. The world has a right to look upon us as we, as true Christians, come to practical differences, and it should be able to observe that we do love each other. Our love must have a form that the world may observe; it must be visible.

## **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 Christian have 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.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3

LAMENT Weep, weep for those Who do the work of the Lord With a high look And a proud heart. Their voice is lifted up In the streets, and their cry is heard. The bruised reed they break By their great strength, and the smoking flax They trample. Weep not for the quenched (For their God will hear their cry and the Lord will come to save them) But weep, weep for

the quenchers For when the Day of the Lord Is come, and the vales sing  
And the hills clap their hands And the light shines Then their eyes shall  
be opened on a waste place, Smoldering, The smoke of the flax bitter In  
their nostrils, Their feet pierced By broken reed-stems . . . Wood, hay, and  
stubble, And no grass springing, And all the birds flown. Weep, weep for  
those Who have made a desert In the name of the Lord.