

The Church – Its Distinguishing Marks

When a person comes to faith he enters into a relationship with other believers. Accordingly, there should be a shift in mentality similar to that of an independent single man who takes a wife and within a few years finds himself with several children. His thinking doesn't just change in the sense that he now "takes his family into consideration;" rather, his thinking changes in that he simply can no longer define himself or interpret his pattern of living in isolation from those he loves and is committed to. This mentality ought to characterize every professing Christian as well.

The church can be spoken of as either the invisible or the visible church. The "invisible" church consists of all who have truly placed their faith in Christ. The visible church consists of all those on earth who at any given time profess true faith. This means that within the visible church there is a mixture of the saved and the unsaved, the true believer and the merely professing believer. In Matthew 13:24-26 Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away." Wheat and tares are two plants that outwardly look almost identical to each other. Their differences only become apparent as the plants mature. However, according to Jesus, both plants exist in the kingdom of God and are allowed to grow together until the harvest (Matt. 13:30). In this case, "the kingdom of God" must refer to the visible church, for at the end of the age the believers and unbelievers will be separated and the unbelieving cast from God's presence (Matt. 7:22-23). In Matthew 13:47-50 Jesus said, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Once again, Jesus tells His disciples that in this age the kingdom gathers "fish of every kind," including bad fish, that will need to be sorted through at the end of the age. In 1 John 2:19 it speaks of antichrists who were part of the visible church. John says, they "went out from us, but they were not really of us." "Went out" implies that at one time they were considered "in." Acts 20:30 says, "from *among your own selves* will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them." Once again, those with twisted doctrine came "from among" the outward Christian community (also see Jude 1:12; II Pet. 2:1). In other words, unbelievers may be, and actually are, members of the visible church.

So how are we to recognize the true church?

There are a number of marks of a true church. I will list only two. The true church can be recognized by (1) what it is at its center and (2) by the virtues the people exhibit.

God's church is built upon the doctrine of the apostles (I Cor. 3:10-11; Eph. 2:20, 3:4-5). When the early disciples gathered, the Scriptures tell us "They were continually devoting themselves to the *apostles' teaching*" (Acts 2:42).

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The center of the apostles' teaching was Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:17 Paul writes that Christ sent him "to preach the gospel, and in verse 23 he said "we preach Christ crucified."

The gospel is defined in I Corinthians 15. In verses 1-4 Paul says, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

D. A. Carson in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 15:1–19) makes the following observations about the description of the gospel in this passage:

(1) The gospel is Christological; that is, it is Christ-centered. In Matthew's Gospel, for instance, Christ himself is Emmanuel, God with us; He is the long-promised Davidic king who will bring in the kingdom of God. By His death and resurrection He becomes the mediatorial monarch who insists that all authority in heaven and earth is His alone. In John, Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father except through Him, for it is the Father's solemn intent that all should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. In the sermons reported in Acts, there is no name but Jesus given under heaven by which we must be saved (cf. Acts 4:12). In Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, Jesus is the last Adam, the one to whom the law and the prophets bear witness, the one who by God's own design propitiates God's wrath and reconciles Jews and Gentiles to his heavenly Father and thus also to each other. In the great vision of Revelation 4-5, the Son alone, emerging from the very throne of God Almighty, is simultaneously the lion and the lamb, and He alone is qualified to open the seals of the scroll in the right hand of God, and thus bring about all of God's matchless purposes for judgment and blessing. So also here: the gospel is Christological. John Stott is right: "The gospel is not preached if Christ is not preached."

(2) The gospel is theological. . . I Corinthians 15:1-19 does not simply say that Christ died and rose again; rather, it asserts that "Christ died for our sins" and rose again. The cross and resurrection are not nakedly historical events; they are historical events with the deepest theological weight.

To be saved from our sins is to be saved not only from their chaining power, but from their consequences—and the consequences are profoundly bound up with God's solemn sentence, with God's holy wrath. Once you see this, you cannot fail to see that whatever else the cross achieves, it must rightly set aside God's sentence, it must rightly satisfy God's wrath, or it achieves nothing. The gospel is theological.

(3) The gospel is biblical. "Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, . . . he was buried, . . . he was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*" (I Cor. 15:3-4). The Scriptures (in the context this is the OT) tell of the gospel. (cf. Isa. 53:5-12; Lk. 24:25-27; Acts 8:32ff; 17:2ff; 26:22)

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(4) The gospel is historical. We are not saved by theological ideas about Christ; we are saved by Christ himself. . . the resurrection is historical: it takes place in history, even if it was caused by God's spectacular power when he raised the man Christ Jesus from the dead, giving him a resurrection body that had genuine continuity with the body that went into the tomb. This resurrection body could be seen, touched, handled; it could eat ordinary food. Nevertheless, it is a body that could suddenly appear in a locked room, a body that Paul finds hard to describe, ultimately calling it a spiritual body or a heavenly body (1 Cor 15:35-44). And that body was raised from the tomb by the spectacular, supernatural, power of God—operating in history. In short, the gospel is historical.

(5) The gospel is personal. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are not merely historical events; the gospel is not merely theological in the sense that it organizes a lot of theological precepts. It sets out the way of individual salvation, of personal salvation. "Now, brothers," Paul writes at the beginning of this chapter, "I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved" (1 Cor. 15:1-2).

Lastly, Paul calls the gospel that which is of *first importance* (1 Cor. 15:3).

In Romans 3:21-24 Paul says, "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus"

In this passage as well, the Gospel finds its center in the work of God in Christ. The Gospel is about what God did for us in Christ, not what God does in us or through us. Placing the Gospel at the center, therefore, means that we will give God the credit for our salvation. The Gospel gives the glory to God alone, for God's grace is the sole sufficient cause of our salvation. Finally, speaking the Gospel in a way that places Christ at the center means that we must acknowledge that a person's salvation is brought about alone through faith (see Rom. 1:17), as a means of receiving the benefits of Christ's work on the cross.

This is the primary mark of the true church. But the true church is also discerned by the observation of changed lives. Although many examples could be given of changed behavior, in a general way, Christians are often identified by the enduring virtues of faith, hope, and love— the Christian triad of character. Paul repeated these three traits together quite often.

- 1 Corinthians 13:13 But now abide **faith, hope, love**, these three; but the greatest of these is love.
- 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your **faith** is greatly enlarged, and the **love** of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and **faith** in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.

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- 1 Thessalonians 5:8 But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of **faith** and **love**, and as a helmet, the **hope** of salvation.
- Colossians 1:3-5 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your **faith** in Christ Jesus and the **love** which you have for all the saints; because of the **hope** laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel,
- Ephesians 1:15-18 For this reason I too, having heard of the **faith** in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your **love** for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the **hope** of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,
- 1 Peter 1:20-22 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your **faith** and **hope** are in God. Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere **love** of the brethren, fervently **love** one another from the heart,
- Hebrews 10:22-24 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of **faith**, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our **hope** without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to **love** and good deeds,

Faith:

There are a number of words in the OT that are translated as faith. Each word gives a slightly different nuance of meaning and each contributes to the picture of what faith in God is. We will look at two of them.

1) *Aman* (אמן)

In its original meaning, *aman* is used of a mother, nurse or attendant of a child (e.g. Num. 11:12). It is also translated as “to carry” or “to hold” (e.g. Isa. 60:4) and indicates security. In its broader usage it means “to secure” or “fasten.” In Isaiah 22:23 it says, “And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house,” meaning that the dynasty will not die out. It is secure. It is firm. In Isaiah 33:16 it is used of waters of a stream that do not give out. Because the stream does what it is supposed to do it is called *aman*. Likewise, in Jeremiah 15:18 *aman* is negated and refers to a “deceptive stream” whose waters are not reliable.

Thus the basic meaning of *aman* is certainty or dependability. There is assurance that whatever is spoken about is all that it is supposed to be (TWOT –51). Therefore, objectively, belief in God is that which assures us that God is God. Subjectively, it is the acceptance of the relationship He has to us.

2) *Betah* (בטח)

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The basic idea of *betah* is a state of security resulting from having someone or something in whom to place confidence. The OT prophets use the word often to contrast the security that comes from relying in God with the folly of relying on other things.

The pagan religions all had some sort of mechanism whereby they could manipulate their deities, but the OT saints recognized that God was good and in total control of man's destiny. He could be relied upon.

The Bible lists many sources of false security.

- ◆ Man – Ps. 118:8; 146:3; Pro. 25:19; Jer. 17:5
- ◆ Wickedness – Isa. 47:10
- ◆ Riches – Ps. 52:7; Pro. 11:28
- ◆ Military power – Deut. 28:52; Ps. 44:6; Isa. 31:1
- ◆ Religion – Jer. 7:4, 8, 14
- ◆ One's own righteousness – Ezek. 33:13; Hos. 10:13

The one who trusts in God will be delivered from his enemies (Ps. 22:4), their prayers will be answered (I Chr. 5:20), they will walk in straight paths (Prov. 3:5), they will be given joy and gladness (Ps. 16:9), and they will know inner peace (Ps. 4:8).

In the NT Jesus speaks of both great faith and little faith.

“Little faith” according to Jesus

In Greek the word for little faith is *oligopistos* (ὀλιγόπιστος). *Oligopistos* (ὀλιγόπιστος) probably does not refer to the size of the faith but to the quality of the faith. For example, in Matthew 17:20 the disciples' faith was ineffectual in casting out a demon. It was described as *oligopistos* (ὀλιγόπιστος), which is translated as “little faith”. However, in the same verse Jesus tells them that if they had the faith of a mustard seed (i.e. the smallest amount of faith imaginable) nothing would be impossible for them. The contrast cannot be between little faith (which the disciples possessed) and tiny faith (which they needed), but between deficient faith and true faith. Jesus was not saying they needed to conjure up more faith to cast out the demon. He was saying that even the smallest faith would do as long as it was a pure faith.

According to Matthew 6, when we worry about the necessities of life, such as food and clothing, we are said to have little faith. In Matthew 6:25 Jesus says, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” His words of assurance begin with “Therefore” because the promise of daily provision is based on what He has just said in verse 24. Namely, Jesus assumes that His disciples will not serve wealth, but God. Based on this orientation of life He assures us that we need not worry, for God is acutely aware of our needs. If our needs are on His mind, they need not be on ours.

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Jesus' logic is compelling. If we worry, we have learned nothing from natural creation. The world around us testifies of God's provision. The birds receive their fill each day (6:26), and the plants are clothed with beauty (6:28-30). If they, which are of very little value in comparison to us, are cared for by God, why should we worry that God won't take care of us? Furthermore, in a very practical sense, worrying about these things doesn't accomplish anything anyway. We might worry about when we will die, but worrying doesn't prolong life (6:27). In reality, worry is an insult to God for it assumes either that He doesn't know what we need, or doesn't care. How many parents forget that their kids need food and clothing? What good parent would willfully deprive their children of such things? To presume that God is less aware of our needs than an earthly parent is essentially pagan (6:32); it is a sign of "little faith" (6:30).

Secondly, when we believe that we are a pawn in the midst of uncontrolled circumstances we are said to have little faith. Matthew 8:23-27 tells the story of Jesus and the disciples crossing the Sea of Galilee and being confronted with a life-threatening storm. Jesus was sound asleep in the back of the boat as it was battered by the wind and waves and began to fill with water. When death seemed imminent, the disciples cried to Jesus to do something. Even though calling to Jesus demonstrated faith in His ability to help, Jesus still rebuked them and said they had little faith. Why? They didn't lack faith in Jesus' ability to save, but they failed to see that it was impossible for Messiah to die in a storm when His work remained undone. They acted like the elements were out of control and they were just pawns caught in a deadly game of chance. They only looked at their circumstances, but did not realize that the One with them in the boat was in complete control all along (8:27; Psa. 127:25-30).

Thirdly, we are said to have little faith when our faith wavers. Matthew 14:31 is the story of Peter walking on the water. In the story, Peter is both a good example and bad example of faith. He is a good example, because he believed that through Christ he could do the impossible. However, he is also a bad example of faith because once he was out of the boat and started walking, he then doubted Christ's ability to keep him from sinking. Weak faith is wavering faith. As James said, "the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (Ja. 1:6-8).

What made "little faith" little? Little faith limits the power of God to our experience. It only trusts what can be seen, touched, or heard but cannot envision anything beyond that. It is a feeling that circumstances are out of control. It is worrying about the future. It is faith that believes to a point, but then wavers. All of these demonstrate that our faith is *oligopistos* (ovligo,pistoj), or "little faith."

"Great faith" according to Jesus

Just as it helps to look at deficient faith, it also helps to look at perfected faith, or what Jesus calls "great faith." In the book of Matthew there are two places where great faith is demonstrated. In the first story, found in Matthew 8, great faith is faith that recognizes the authority of Christ and responds to it without hesitation.

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In Matthew 8 Jesus is approached by a centurion who asks Jesus to help his servant who was paralyzed in bed and suffering. Although most Bibles translate Jesus' reply as a statement, "I will go and heal him," it is more probable that Jesus answered with a question (the Greek allows for either); "Shall I ("I" is emphatic in Greek) go and heal him?" (Matt. 8:7). The question was to clarify exactly what the centurion was after (i.e. did he want prayer or healing) and to reveal what degree of faith stood behind the request.

The centurion's response reveals a profound understanding of the nature of Christ's authority. As an appointed official of the Roman Empire, the centurion had the emperor's authority backing his commands. Therefore, any soldier that disobeyed him was in effect disobeying the emperor. In the same way, because Jesus was under God's authority, the centurion knew that when He spoke, His words carried the authority of God Himself. Jesus' word was all that was necessary to bring about healing.

The greatness of the centurion's faith was not that he believed that Jesus could heal, or even that he believed that Jesus could heal from a distance. The greatness of his faith was in that he recognized God as the source of Christ's authority and responded to it without hesitation. Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour (Matt. 8:13).

The second incidence in Matthew where Jesus speaks of great faith is in the story of the Canaanite woman. What makes this story so unique is that the woman first must face apparent hostility and indifference from both the disciples and Christ before her request is granted. Matthew says that when the woman came begging Christ for help, "He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, 'Send her away, for she cries out after us'" (Matt. 15:23). Jesus then told her that He could not help her because the time for blessing the Gentiles had not yet come, The blessings promised to Israel had to first be offered to Israel (Matt. 15:24) and she was a Gentile dog. Unbelievably, the woman does not contest anything Christ has said. Her masterful response reveals her faith; "Yes Lord," she says, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table." Gentile dog that she is, she is confident that she is not worthy to sit down at the Master's table, but at least she is still hopeful that she might receive a crumb of the general mercies of God.

Jesus responds with emotion, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

What made this woman's faith great was that in spite of opposition she clung with tenacity to the grace of God in Christ. Jesus' words and resistance clarified the nature and depth of her faith. What may appear harsh in its historical setting proves to be an example of faith that should be imitated.

What makes great faith great? Great faith is faith that believes in spite of the circumstances. It persists even when it appears the Master has said, "No!" It is faith that understands who Christ is and the authority He possesses.

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These are the elements present in the examples of faith in Hebrews 11, as well. Men and women of faith believe God and act. They trust God for the future. When Noah was warned about the coming flood, by faith he built the ark (Heb. 11:7). Abraham was called to a place he had never seen before, but by faith he went (Heb. 11:9-10). Even though his wife was well beyond the age to bear children, Abraham believed by faith that God would provide the son He had promised (Heb. 11:11-12). By faith he also offered up Isaac to God because he even believed that God could raise the dead (Heb. 11:17-20). By faith Moses, Rahab, and numerous others obeyed God though there was no tangible evidence that His promises would be fulfilled.

Just as these walked by faith, so also God expects us to walk, trusting Him for the unseen future before us. As the writer of Hebrews says, let us, therefore, lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:1-2).

Hope:

In the Bible there is no neutral concept of expectations of the future. The future is seen to be either for good or bad (TDNT, II, 522) and can lead to hope or fear.

There are three words for “hope” in Hebrew, and all were used by NT writers in the same sense. In all three, hope is closely linked to trust (faith). It is the expectation of good. It has a tenseness, or yearning, in it in which the thing waited for is emphasized. In relationship to the believer it is a tense waiting for a concrete goal.

Isaiah states this idea well: “And I will wait on the LORD, Who hides His face from the house of Jacob; And I will hope in Him” (Isa. 8:17). Isaiah’s faith expresses a tension – one in which one does not see, but yet believes.

Hope apart from God is both deceptive and dangerous, for only God does not err in His promises. This is why works-based religions, including the Rabbinic understanding of Judaism, failed to generate hope. When someone must reach a standard to receive future blessings there can be no real hope, for there is no assurance that one has measured up to what is necessary to gain life. This is where Christian hope is radically different than religious hope. The Bible doesn’t place our hope in us, but in Christ! In Colossians 1:27 Paul says it is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Likewise in I Timothy 1:1 he says, “Christ is our hope.” Peter tells us we have been “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). Our hope is secure because it is not dependent on us achieving a standard of righteousness; it is dependent on Christ who became our righteousness. The only way our hope would fail is if Jesus had failed. We don’t fix our future hope on us, rather as 1 Peter 1:13 says, “fix your hope completely on the grace brought to you.”

II Corinthians 1:20 assures us that all the promises of God are “yes” in Jesus Christ. Christian hope is the anticipation, the expectation of the promised benefits which flow from the gospel. The Bible speaks of

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the hope of salvation (I Thess. 5:4, 5, 8), the hope of eternal life (Tit. 3:4-7), the hope of resurrection (Acts 23:6, 24:15; Rom. 8:23, 24; I Thess. 4:13, 14; I Pet. 1:3, 4), and the hope of glory (Rom. 5:1, 2; Col. 1:27; II Thess. 2:14-17). Faith emphasizes assurance (Heb. 11:1) while hope emphasizes the anticipation of the things of which we are assured. "Hope is the expectation that all God's promises to us and for us will (soon) be realized. It is trusting – and waiting – on God" (Beacon, p. 265). So God's people in a mature church will be a happy and patient bunch, having their eyes and affections fixed on the glorious future which is theirs in Christ.

Love:

The third member of the triad of Christian virtues is love.

Jesus said, "you shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets." (Matt. 22:37-40).

The terms "heart, soul, mind" are to be taken cumulatively, as meaning love to the utmost degree; with all that is within us (Ps. 103:1) (A.B. Bruce, 277). They are not mutually exclusive, but overlapping categories. Together they demand that the love of God come from the whole person, from every faculty and capacity (Carson, 464; Broadus, 458; MacArthur, 339). "'Love God with all your heart" means: Find in God a satisfaction so profound that it fills up all your heart. "Love God with all your soul" means: Find in God a meaning so rich and so deep that it fills up all the aching corners of your soul. "Love God with all your mind" means: Find in God the riches of knowledge and insight and wisdom that guide and satisfy all that the human mind was meant to be." (Piper)

Love for your neighbor is measured by love for yourself. When a person is hungry he feeds himself, when he is thirsty he gets a drink. He doesn't just think about water or food, he actively seeks to satisfy the desire (Eph. 5:29).

As Piper says,

All of you have a powerful instinct of self-preservation and self-fulfillment. You all want to be happy. You all want to live with satisfaction. You want food for yourself. You want clothes for yourself. You want a place to live for yourself. You want protection from violence against yourself. You want meaningful or pleasant activity to fill your days. You want some friends to like you and spend some time with you. You want your life to count in some way. All this is self-love. Self-love is the deep longing to diminish pain and to increase happiness. That's what Jesus starts with when he says, "as yourself."

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. . . In other words, Jesus is not just saying: seek for your neighbor the same things you seek for yourself, but also seek them in the same way—the same zeal and energy and creativity and perseverance. As you long for food when you are hungry, so long to feed your neighbor when he is hungry. As you long for nice clothes for yourself, so long for nice clothes for your neighbor. As you work for a comfortable place to live, so desire a comfortable place to live for your neighbor. As you seek to be safe and secure from calamity and violence, so seek comfort and security for your neighbor. As you seek friends for yourself, so be a friend to your neighbor. As you want your life to count and be significant, so desire that same significance for your neighbor. As you work to make good grades yourself, so work to help your neighbor make good grades. As you like to be welcomed into strange company, so welcome your neighbor into strange company. As you would that men would do to you, do so to them.

This kind of love is supernatural. All men, naturally, without exception, simply do not "love God" and put Him first in any sense. Though we are commanded to love Him twenty-four hours every day, as sinful men we never consciously do one single thing our whole life for the express purpose of glorifying God. We live to please ourselves and have no thought of our indebtedness to God. Furthermore, we do not love others as God expects. We may love our children and sacrifice for them, but we do not love our neighbor with the same zeal and energy and creativity and perseverance that we seek for our own good. Therefore, Christian love is evidence of new life and becomes the mark of a true believer, and the invisible church. 1 John 3:14 says, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death." In 1 John 4:10-11 it says, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Love is evidence that we know God: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God (1 John 4:7). It is the evidence that we are followers of Christ. In John 13:34-35 Jesus says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Love is the mark of the truly saved.

SUMMARY/ CONCLUSION

Only God can see the hearts of men and only He knows who possesses true faith. Nevertheless, the Bible tells us that there are signs that we can look for in discerning what a local assembly of believers should look like. They should be a people that see Christ and the gospel as central. And they should have marks of Christian character that display a changed life – in general terms these marks are faith, hope, and love.