

The Badge of the Believer

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“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you...” (John 13:35). Have you ever thought about how Jesus could have finished that sentence? How would His followers be identified? What would be their defining characteristic?

“If you wear a cross?” A lot of athletes wear crosses around their necks, but you better not read their lips when the umpire makes a bad call. “If you put a fish magnet on the back of your car.” I’ve seen some of those cars cut me off on the freeway just like those that had something vulgar on them. The thing Jesus said would cause all men to know His disciples was their love for one another.

If the FBI came to your house, you would demand to see their credentials. If the police said to open up in the name of the law, you would look for their badge. What is it about love that makes it the badge of the believer?

Love obeys. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another” (John 13:34). It was not a new suggestion. It was not a new feeling or emotion. Love is a commandment. It is what Jesus reduced all of the Law and the Prophets to when He was asked, “What commandment is the foremost of all” (Mark 12:28)? The Savior answered, “You shall love” (Mark 12:30-31). Love is not freedom of expression or the ability to do whatever makes you happy. It is obedience to the command of the Lord.

Love is a decision to obey. “Husbands, love you wives” (Eph. 5:25). There is no qualifying statement at the end of that verse. You choose to love and fulfill what you promised on your wedding day. “Teach (encourage) the younger women to love their husbands” (Tit. 2:4). How do you teach or encourage something that is not a decision? Love one another. That’s a command from Jesus, just as surely as “Repent and be baptized.” If you love Him, obey this commandment.

Love imitates. “Even as I have loved you, that you love one another” (John 13:34). That’s what made this a “new commandment.” The love your neighbor was a precept of the Law of Moses (Lev. 19:18). But to love as Christ loved elevated this to a new level. Jesus had already demonstrated His love to them. He washed the feet of Peter, someone who would deny Him three times later that same night. He washed the feet of Judas, someone he knew would betray Him. Why would He do that? Because He loved them.

Love does not discriminate. We don’t get to choose who we love and who we don’t. “God so loved the world...” (Jn. 3:16). “God demonstrates His love toward us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Yet, some say, “I just can’t love

him.” Then you don’t love God. Others say, “I don’t love her anymore.” Then you are not imitating the love that Jesus has shown for you. Love is the badge of the believer because it is what makes us look like our Master.

Love convicts. “By this all men will know that you are My disciples” (John 13:35). Men would see their love for another and be convinced. The apostles had shown themselves to be selfish and independent. To love one another would demonstrate to the world that their transformation into selfless servants was complete. Because they loved Jesus, they learned to love one another.

What makes love so convincing and convicting? It is a love that “believes all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). You think the best about your brother or sister instead of assuming the worst. It is a love that “speaks the truth” (Eph. 4:15). It is not saying what is true to be hurtful but saying what needs to be said out of love for their soul. Would the way you speak about your brethren convict others? Would they conclude that you are a disciple of Jesus? We can convict the world through our love for one another.

Can you think of a better compliment that someone could give this church? “They teach the truth.” We can do that and not have love. “They worship according to the pattern.” We can do that and not have love. “They love one another.” It’s the badge of the believer. “For now abide faith, hope and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). Wear yours proudly.