TITLE: Defining Mark of a Christian

TEXT: John 3:16; Jn 15:13;Ro. 5:8; Ephe. 4:32-5:2; Ephe. 5:22-25; Jn. 14:23; 1st Co. 13:1-8

INTRODUCTION: If there is one defining mark of Christianity that separates it from all other forms of religion, that defining mark would have to be love.

The whole basis for our faith rest on this one supreme fact...

**John 3:16 (NIV) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

This is a love that all but defies our finite understanding, a love that transcends our human comprehension...

**"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son**.

God so loved you, God so loved me that He gave His one and only Son to die for your and my sin!

It is almost impossible to illustrate this kind of love..

But let me try….

Example: You and your oldest son go on a weekend

fishing trip, while you are gone a thief breaks into your

house, steals everything that you have, kills your wife and remaining children, and then he is caught, tried and convicted of the crimes that he has committed against you.. As the judge pronounces the just sentence for his crime, his sentence is death... He must pay for his crimes against you with his own life..

You are sitting at the trial with your son and as the sentence is passed down you have such compassion, such a love for this man that did all this to you and your son equally shares your compassion and love for this man...

Justice demands that the sins of this man be atoned for...He must pay for what he did with his own life...

Your son whispers something in your ear and with tears in your eye you nod in agreement and approach the judge...

You tell the judge that you want this man’s life to be spared and that you will give the life of your only remaining son to take this man’s place on the gallows,

You have such a love for this one who sinned so grievously against you that you are willing to sacrifice the life of your only remaining son --give his life for the life of the one who sinned against you!

You are willing to allow your son to stand in this man’s place, to stand in for this man’s sins that were done against you...

And all this was your son’s idea....For what this young man whispered in his dad’s ear was...dad, I want to take this man’s place. I have compassion for him, I hate what he did but I love him....

This kind of love defies our understanding. We can’t fully comprehend it, yet this is exactly what Jesus did for each and every one of us.

Folks, Scripture says that we all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God!

We have all sinned and all our sin is against God.

The just penalty for sinning against an all holy, all righteous God is eternal death, eternal separation from God in hell.

God had compassion on His fallen creation; He loves us with a tremendous love...

He loves us so much that He came to die in our place. He came to stand in our place of judgment to pay the price for our sin. And what He did He did willingly, of His own free will and choice....

Think about it? The one sinned against willingly and sacrificially, giving his life for the very ones who sinned against him..

**John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.**

**Roma 5:8 (NIV) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

It is important for us try to grasp this love that God has for us as best as our finite minds can, because once we accept this love, once we accept what Christ did on the cross for us, once we have accepted Jesus as the Lord and savior of our life, then we are called to love others with the same kind of love that God has for us...

**Ephesians 4:31 - 5:1 (NIV)** **31Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.** **32Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.**

**1Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children** **2and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**

If we are called by the name of Christ, If we are a Christian, then we have been called to:

**Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children  2and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us**

We have been called to love others just as God loves us.

God has given us a human institution where we can nurture and learn to love as God loves us.

God has given us the institution of marriage and family.....

**Ephe 5:22 (NIV) Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.**

**23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.**

**24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.**

Martin Luther in “The Later Years and Legacy,"

has this to say long after the death of his wife...

***“If I should ever marry again, I would hew myself an obedient wife out of stone.”***

I think Luther was speaking to the difficulty that we as human beings with a fallen nature have with being submissive to anyone. Pride, focus on self will always interfere with our ability to truly be submissive.

What does this command for wives to be submissive to their own husbands have to do with the love of Christ being manifest in your life?

**Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.**

**Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.**

Wives, as a Christian, what is it that motivates you to submit yourself to The Lord?

Is it not your love for Him! That is what should

motivate all of us as Christians to come to a place of submission to Christ.

If we aren’t submissive to Christ then we really don’t love Him!

**John 14:23 (NIV) Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.**

**24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.**

If we love the Lord we will submit ourselves to Him by submitting ourselves to what He teaches us through His Word.

The love of Christ is manifest in our life when we are obedient to His Word and His will....

When Jesus said, **Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.** He is simply saying, wives love your husbands with the love of Christ!

I once heard of a woman who woke her husband in the middle of the night, and said, "Henry, wake up. I just had this terrible nightmare. I dreamed I was at an auction for husbands. One husband brought $10,000 and others sold for sums in the millions."

That's all it took to get him awake. He asked, "Well, Honey, what were husbands like me bringing?"

She said, "That's what was so disturbing. They were taking ones like you, tying them in a bundle, and selling them for a dollar a bunch."

You see ladies; this command may not necessarily be an easy one to obey...

Some of you are thinking, but Lord you don’t know my husband! (Yes He does)

The point is ladies, to love your husband the way that

God has commanded that you do, with a love that is willing to submit, will literally take the love of Christ that He has placed within your heart when He placed His presence in your heart the day that you were saved.

I believe it was Sally Conway who once said:

***“It's easier to serve your mate if you envision your loving Lord rather than your flawed spouse. Picture yourself doing it for Jesus. The imposition then becomes an honor.”***

Wives, as you voluntarily take a submissive role in your relationship with your husbands then by your actions you will be showing your love for Christ.

**25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.**

Guys, how is it that we, as Christian husbands have been called to love our wives?

**Husbands, love your wives Just as Christ loved the church!**

How is it that Christ loved the Church?

Just picture in your minds Jesus hanging on the cross!

He loved her sacrificially! He gave Himself for her! He laid down His life for her!

He put her needs far above that of His own!

As she helped put Him on the cross he cried out in her behalf, **Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing…**

The love that Christian husbands have been called to have for their wives is the same kind of love that Christ has for His Church!

There is nothing that Jesus wouldn’t and didn’t do for His bride the Church.

Jesus loved His Church even when His Church wasn’t all that lovable…

You ladies here this morning make be thinking, well, if my Husband would love me with the love of Christ then I would be more willing and able to submit to his role of authority within the home....

And you husbands may be thinking, well, if my wife would be submissive to my role of authority in the home then I would be willing and able to love her with the love of Christ.

There is some truth to that statement. When a husband loves his wife with the genuine love of Christ a wife is going to be more willing to place herself unto submission to his authority within the home, and as a wife is submissive unto her husband the husband is going to be more willing to love his wife with the love of Christ…

Ones obedience to God in this area will make the others obedience in this area more likely and vice versa!..

That is the way that God intends for it to work.

But what we need to understand is that the commands are individual ones and they are not conditional on the other person…

Notice it doesn’t say---Wives be submission to your husband if your husbands are all that you expect them to be!

Nor does it say---husband love your wives with the love of Christ if they are all that you expect them to be!

Scripture says...Wives submit unto your husbands as to the Lord (Period).

Husbands love you wives just as Christ loved the Church (Period).

Wives, even if your husband isn’t loving you with the love of Christ----If you are going to be obedient to and please God you need to be submissive to your husband regardless…

Husbands, even if your wife isn’t submissive to you within the home---If you are going to be obedient to and please God you need to love her with the love of Christ anyway…

Personal obedience to the Word of God is never dependent upon someone else’s obedience to the Word of God.

If our goal is to be obedient to Gods Word and His will then we simply obey regardless whether anyone else obeys Gods word or not..

Wives your relationship with God is just that...It is your relationship with God!

Husbands, your relationship with God is just that---It is your relationship with God!

When we stand before God to give an account for our life, she didn’t --so I didn’t or he didn’t-- so I didn’t isn’t going to cut it!

Each of us will be responsible for how we personally and individually responded or failed to respond to fulfilling Gods commands in our lives..

And in this case in Ephesians chapter 5 where God speaks to Christian husbands and wives He is really saying the same thing....

Wives love your husbands with My love---Husbands love your wives with My love....

Let My love rule and reign in your heart in all of your

Relationships…

The love of Christ, the love that God has called us to as Christian Husbands and Wives is best described in 1 Co. 13, the love chapter....

First Paul tells us of the importance, the necessity,

of love in the life of a believer...

**1Cor 13:1 (NIV) If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.**

**2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.**

**3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.**

Paraphrase---it is not the good that we do that is important but it is what motivates us to do the good that we do that means everything!

What is to always be our motivation is our love of and for Christ.

Next we have this love defined…

**4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.**

**5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.**

**6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.**

**7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.**

**8 Love never fails.**

To really understand what love is we need to first understand what love is not!

Love is not impatient! Love is not unkind! Love is not envious! Love is not boastful! Love is not proud!

Love is not rude! Love is not self-seeking! Love is not easily angered! Love doesn’t keep a record of wrongs!

Here is the way that it works--

As Christian Husbands and wives if we are impatient with each other than the love of Christ is not in us..

If we are unkind to one another then the love of Christ is not in us..

If we are envious, boastful, or proud toward our mates then the love of Christ is not in us..

If we are rude then the love of Christ is not in us.

If we are self-seeking, seek to fulfill our will at the expense of our spouses, and then the love of Christ is not in us.

If we are easily angered at our spouse then the love of Christ is not in operation in our life.

If we refuse to forgive then the love of Christ is not in us.

If there is one thing that will destroy the love of Christ in our life and destroy a relationship, a marriage, quicker than anything else it is un-forgiveness and Keeping a record of wrongs.

In marriage counseling one thing that always seems to be at the forefront of any marriage that is in trouble is

un-forgiveness and the keeping record of wrongs.

Some people have an amazing ability to keep records of wrongs done to them....

Well, on January 5th 1989 at 4:23 pm he did this or she did that....

Why is it so hard for us to forgive wrongs done to us?

We take these wrongs done to us, bury them deep in our heart and refuse to let them go.....

Maybe there are times when we may bury the hatchet, so to speak, but we bury the hatchet with the handle sticking up out of the ground and exposed so that we can reach down and grab it anytime that we want to....

Scripture says that we are to forgive just as we have been forgiven..

How is it that God has forgiven us? Freely, completely, no strings attached. When God buries the hatchet, he buries it handle down. He removed it from His sight so that it will never surface again!

That is the forgiveness that we have been called to as Christians. To forgive just as we have been forgiven!

Totally and completely, hatchet buried handle down so that it is cannot be pulled up again..

Hard for us to do? Often it is impossible for us to do!

But we serve a God who delights in doing the impossible..

Paul said that we can do all things through Him who gives us strength. All things---even forgive the UN-forgivable!

It is what can and will happen as we simply allow the love of Christ to rule and reign in our hearts.

This morning, men, do you want to the husband that God has called you to be? Ladies, do you want to be the wife that God has called you to be? Do we want to be the Christian that God has called all of us to be?

Then we must strive to love with the love of Christ!

Patrick Morley once said:

***“The height of our love for God will never exceed the depth of our love for one another.”***

Often times when we hit a wall in our relationship with God, when we just seem to grow stagnant in our relationship with the Lord, or it seems like for every step we take forward we take two steps backward, it is often simply because the love of Christ is not in operation in our life the way that it should be... We are not allowing Him to love others through us...

Often times when we have problems in our marriages and relationships with others it is but the symptom of a personal relationship that is not right with God.

Basketball player Mark Price said:

***“Marriage isn't going to fulfill you. Only a relationship with Christ will. When you come to that realization, it can free you to really love your spouse.”***

If your relationship isn’t all that it can be then allow Jesus to make it all it can be... Allow Christ’s love to flow through you into your relationship...

We can’t change our spouse or anyone else anymore then they can change us...But God can

We haven’t been called to change them....We have been called to love them with the love of Christ

Ruth Graham said it was a great day in her life when she realized it was not her job to change her husband. She said "It was my job to love Billy and God's job to change him."

Scripture says that...

Love covers a multitude of sin.. The love of God covers the multitude of our sins, and the love of God manifest through us covers the multitude of the sins of others, as we allow Christ love to manifest itself in our life by being willing to forgive just as we have been forgiven......

Is the love of Christ ruling and reigning supreme in our hearts and lives this morning?

In this New Year will we resolve to love with the love of Christ Jesus?

A New Year’s resolution truly worth making…..To love as He loves us…..