

## **The Gospel of John (83) The New Commandment**

### **Introduction:**

We have arrived in our study of the Gospel of John to our Lord's words to His disciples (apostles) in John 13:31 through 38. Here we read that our Lord gave a "new commandment" to His people by which they were to order their lives as His disciples. Lives characterized by obeying this commandment identify and distinguish true disciples of Jesus Christ. This is the "sign", the indicator, the proof, that may be displayed before the world that we are the followers of Jesus Christ—true Christians. Here is our passage we will consider today:

So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. <sup>32</sup>If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. <sup>33</sup>Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you. <sup>34</sup>A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

<sup>36</sup>Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?"

Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward."

<sup>37</sup>Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake."

<sup>38</sup>Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times." (John 13:31-38)

We will consider this passage employing the following outline:

1. The immediate glorification of the Son of Man (13:31-32)
2. Jesus' announcement of His soon departure from them (13:33)
3. Jesus' new commandment to His disciples (13:34f)
4. Peter's inquiry and his expressed willingness to follow the Lord" (13:36-38)

\*\*\*\*\*

### **I. The glorification of the Son of Man (13:31-32)**

This episode opens with a word regarding the departure of Judas Iscariot. John wrote, "*So, when he had gone out.*" After Judas had left in order to execute his plans to betray Jesus, our Lord then began to speak with His eleven disciples in detail and clarity that He had not done so previously. Judas' departure seemed to free Jesus to speak freely. This is so much the case that, generally, our Lord's interaction with His disciples, beginning here with John 13:31 and continuing through John 16:33, is regarded as the farewell discourse of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Until Judas had departed from Him, Jesus did not disclose Himself fully to His disciples, as He then proceeded to do. **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote:

---

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of the scholarly debate over the past two centuries about the nature of this discourse, see Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), pp. 476-482. I see no spiritual benefit to our people in rehearsing these issues in these notes.

The presence of wicked people is often a hindrance to good discourse. When Judas *was gone out*, Christ said, *now is the Son of man glorified*; now that Judas is discovered and discarded, who was a spot in their love-feast and a scandal to their family, *now is the Son of man glorified*.<sup>2</sup>

And then Matthew Henry drew forth this principle: “Note, Christ is glorified by the purifying of Christian societies: corruptions in his church are a reproach to Him; the purging out of those corruptions rolls away the reproach.”<sup>3</sup>

We have before us the personal and intimate disclosure of Jesus as the Son of Man to them who believe on Him and follow Him in their lives. But the word that Judas had gone out also serves as a clear demarcation between the episode of the supper that had just ended, and the discourse (or monologue) that now begins. This discourse is applicable for Jesus’ disciples only.

**Edward Klink** gave a good description of the literary context of this last discourse of Jesus. This is set forth in his introductory comments on the passage before us, John 13:31 through 38.

This pericope is the first of eight sections of the farewell discourse proper. It functions as a prologue, offering an opening announcement about the person and work of Jesus and the expected response of the reader/hearer. The farewell discourse was given a complex introduction (13:1-30) through which the context for this intimate monologue of Jesus is given. At this intimate gathering, after washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus begins to give His final instructions to the children of God, the people of the new covenant. In this part of the farewell discourse, Jesus locates His person and work within the glory of God, formally introduces and explains His departure, and gives a new commandment that serves to demarcate the people of the new covenant from the rest of the world. The disciples—and the readers—are exhorted to make a radical commitment to Jesus and to loving one another, something which Peter himself is exhorted to see as not only difficult but as requiring the work that Christ must still finish.<sup>4</sup>

And then Klink provides the main idea of our passage: “

Out of Christ’s love for Christians they are given the commandment to love one another. Christian discipleship is grounded in the work of God (not one’s own work) and is an expression of the nature of God Himself.<sup>5</sup>

The first statement that Jesus made after Judas “had gone out” is of His own glorification. Jesus declared, “*Now the Son of Man is glorified...*” (13:31). Here the Lord Jesus speaks of His glorification, a theme that has been quite prevalent in this Gospel.

**John 8:54.** “Jesus answered, ‘If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing. It is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’”

**John 11:4.** “But when Jesus heard it he said, ‘This illness (of Lazarus) does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it’”

**John 12:23.** “And Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.’”

---

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 5 (Fleming H. Revell Company, n. d., originally 1721).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 600.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 601.

**John 12:28.** “‘Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’”

In the passage before us, however, the Lord explains the nature of His glory and how it is best displayed. This is in commitment and love.

Jesus first declared, “So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now *the Son of Man* is glorified...” This was the way that Jesus commonly referred to Himself. It is used 71 times in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). It is used but 11 times in John’s Gospel, this being the last instance in verse 31. Jesus used this reference to Himself exclusively as the promised Messiah. He used it to refer to Himself as the Messiah, the promised King of Israel. But this title enabled Him to declare Himself the Messiah in a way that His disciples only in time came to understand, as the true nature of His person and work as the Messiah was revealed to them. Here in John 13:31 Jesus was declaring that the time had arrived for Him as the promised Messiah of Israel was to be glorified, that is, to enter into His promised role as “King”, as Lord over heaven and earth, Lord over all in the spiritual and physical realm. He was about to enter into the glory that He had with the Father, even before the creation of all things (see John 17:5). But Jesus was not simply returning to His former glory, but He was being glorified as a Man, yes, the God/Man, but as Jesus of Nazareth He was about to be glorified.

Again, **verse 31** reads, “So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “*Now* the Son of Man *is glorified*...” This glorification of the Son of Man was commencing “now”, in His arrest, trials, sufferings and death upon His cross, in His resurrection and glorification. The entire Passion of Jesus, from here to His exaltation to the Father is a singular event. This was made clear in John 12:23 when Jesus had declared, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.”

The “now” of 12:23 is explicitly that of the exaltation, as 12:31-32 makes clear: the glorification of the Son of Man takes place in His “lifting up” on the cross and to the throne in heaven; hence the “ruler of this world” is dethroned (“now”!) and believers are drawn to the exalted Savior...<sup>6</sup>

But not only did Jesus declare that His hour of glorification had arrived, but He also declared that in His glorification, His Father is also glorified. Again, **verse 32** reads, “So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, *and God is glorified in Him*.”

God glorified the Son of Man in making His self-offering effective for the race; therein God was glorified in the perfect obedience and love of the Son, which was however at the same time a revelation of the love of God to humankind<sup>7</sup>

God the Father was glorified in His Son in that the Son was fully faithful in His obedience to His Father even through terrible suffering and death. He glorified His Father as worthy of complete submission and obedience. The Son of Man would not reserve His commitment to submit and obey God the Father regardless of the most horrendous consequences for His refusal to surrender or compromise.

But God the Father was not only glorified through our Lord Jesus’ complete surrender and obedience unto His death upon His cross, but the Father was also glorified in that all of His attributes were on display in the crucifixion of his Son. Through His death, Jesus glorified the Father’s attributes of absolute holiness, justice, mercy, goodness, wisdom, love, and wrath. In fact, it is in the death of Jesus Christ where the glory of God most fully revealed is. It is certainly true that His very person is the revelation of God. All that He thought were God’s thoughts. Every word He spoke was a word of God. Every act that He performed God was working through Him. But some of Jesus’ words and some of His actions did not manifest to the world the glory that was His. Some of His words did not reveal God to men, but hid God’s glory from them. And

---

<sup>6</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, **John**, second edition, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 246.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

although all of His actions were works of God, not all His deeds manifested the glory of God as others. But in what act of Jesus was the glory, that is, the knowledge of God most clearly and fully manifest? The answer is in the sacrificial death of Jesus that secured the salvation of His people.

This is set forth before us in the latter portion of the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. Here we read of the final destiny of the people of God, dwelling together with God and His Son Jesus Christ. We read of the glory of God shining forth to give light to thee place. Here is **Revelation 21:22f.**

But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup>The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. *The Lamb is its light.*

One day when we are dwelling together with God in that glorious city that He has prepared for us, there will shine about us a great light, even the very glory of God, which will continuously enlighten our minds and warm our hearts with the knowledge that our God dwelling among us, His people. And from where does that glory originate? Christ as **the Lamb of God** provides the light. Wherein is the glory, the knowledge of God most clearly and fully manifest in Christ? In God's sending His Son to secure our salvation through His death.

One day we will see clearly the glory of God as radiating from the Lamb. I would like us, however, to have a glimpse of this glorious scene set before us today. It will need to be something we see with the eye of faith, and the portrayal of the glory of the Lamb is set before us in the Holy Scriptures.

We then read that the glory that the Son gives to His Father is reciprocal, for the Father in turn glorifies His Son. **Verse 32** reads, *"If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately."* Again, here is the idea that the God/Man, even the Son of Man, is going to be glorified by the Father even "in Himself." One sees here an affirmation, "that God would glorify the Son of Man... by taking up His glorified humanity to fellowship with Himself."<sup>8</sup> It is always very important that we understand that in the person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God taking in union to Himself our human nature, brought about the glorification of all those in Him. This is set forth in detail in the second chapter of Hebrews:

<sup>5</sup>For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. <sup>6</sup>But one testified in a certain place, saying:

“What is man that You are mindful of him,  
Or the son of man that You take care of him?  
<sup>7</sup>You have made him a little lower than the angels;  
You have crowned him with glory and honor,  
And set him over the works of Your hands.

<sup>8</sup>You have put all things in subjection under his feet.”

For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. <sup>9</sup>But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

<sup>10</sup>For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. <sup>11</sup>For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, <sup>12</sup>saying:

---

<sup>8</sup> F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 293.

“I will declare Your name to My brethren;  
In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.”

<sup>13</sup>And again:

“I will put My trust in Him.”

And again:

“Here am I and the children whom God has given Me.” (Heb. 2:5-13)

The eternal Son of God was for a time made lower than the angels, that is, in His incarnation. But the result was Him lifting humanity--all those in Him, far above the angels in stature and authority. Paul wrote,

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

<sup>18</sup>For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. <sup>19</sup>For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. (Rom. 8:16-19)

We cannot comprehend the nature and degree of glory that will be conferred on us as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, as adopted sons and daughters of God. It will be to the wonder of all, probably especially to ourselves.

## II. Jesus' announcement of His soon departure from them (13:33)

We read in **verse 33** our Lord's words to His disciples, *“Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you.”* Jesus began this saying by addressing them in affectionate terms. He called them, “little children.” This, of course, was not a patronizing expression, but one of tenderness and concern. It also conveys the idea that He knew of their ignorance and their incapability of fully understanding what He was about to declare to them. He was breaking the news to them that the remaining time that He would be among them was short-lived. He said, *“I shall be with you a little while longer.”*

But then He declared to them something that He had already said on another occasion, but to another group of people—the Jews, that is, the unbelieving Jews. It was on an earlier occasion Jesus had made this same announcement to the Jewish leaders who sought to arrest Him. In **John 7:30-36** we read that Jesus was in the temple teaching the people. He made the claim that only He knew God (the Father) who had sent Him. He declared forthrightly that they did not know Him. We then read their response:

<sup>30</sup>Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. <sup>31</sup>And many of the people believed in Him, and said, “When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?”

<sup>32</sup>The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him. <sup>33</sup>Then Jesus said to them, *“I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. <sup>34</sup>You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come.”*

<sup>35</sup>Then the Jews said among themselves, “Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? <sup>36</sup>What is this thing that He said, ‘You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come?’” (John 7:30-36)

Jesus said very similarly in the next chapter the same words. In **John 8:21** we read of our Lord again speaking to unbelieving Jews who were seeking to arrest Him,

<sup>19</sup>Then they (the Jews) said to Him, “Where is Your Father?”

Jesus answered, “You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.”

<sup>20</sup>These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come.

<sup>21</sup>Then Jesus said to them again, ***“I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.”***

<sup>22</sup>So the Jews said, “Will He kill Himself, because He says, ‘Where I go you cannot come’?”

But now here in **John 7:33** and **34** we read that Jesus declared the same words as He had on earlier, but here to His favored disciples. Again, we read, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. <sup>34</sup>You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come.’” On this occasion, however, He did not include the words, “you shall not find Me.” He only stated that they could not come to Him where He was going.

Later in our passage we read that Jesus told His disciples that they would join Him later. But for the time being, He would be leaving them.

### **III. Jesus’ new commandment to His disciples (13:34f)**

Jesus then gave to His disciples a new commandment. In **verses 34** and **35** we read, ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”***

Jesus spoke of a “new commandment.” Actually, that we are to love others is itself not new. The Mosaic Law commanded the Lord’s people to love others. Here is **Leviticus 19:18**:

“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”

What then is “new” about this “new commandment”? It is the command to love one another, that is Christians are to love other Christians, in the same manner as our Lord Jesus loved His people. This standard of the love of Jesus that He manifested to His disciples was something new. This was the basis and nature of fulfilling this new commandment. Here are the words of **Leon Morris** (1914-2006):

“A new commandment” is in an emphatic position in the Greek. It is important. This is the one place in this Gospel where our Lord uses the term “new.” The content of the commandment is given very simply: “that ye love one another”. Jesus is not speaking here of love to all men but of love within the brotherhood. Love itself is not a new commandment, but an old one (Lev. 19:18). The new thing appears to be the mutual affection that Christians have for one another on account of Christ’s great love for them. A brotherhood has been created on the basis of Jesus’ work for men, and there is a new relationship within that brotherhood. “It was ‘new,’ because the love of Christ’s friends for Christ’s sake was a new thing in the world” (Dods). Jesus Himself has set the example. He calls on them now to follow in His steps. He is not asking them to do any more than He Himself has done.<sup>9</sup>

The Lord Jesus then made this statement: ***“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*** Our Lord declared that the one way in which all about us will know that we are the true disciples of Jesus Christ, is if we have love for one another. We might say that this is the visible sign of true, biblical Christianity, of those who are in the new covenant relationship with Christ.

---

<sup>9</sup> Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 632f.

When we consider biblical history and the various covenants that God has established with people, we commonly read of a visible, physical sign that visibly signifies or manifests that covenant relationship before others. Not all biblical covenants have a visible “sign” that points to and gives evidence of a covenantal relationship with God, but some of the major covenants of Scripture had accompanying signs that God gave to His people to distinguish them and to visibly set them apart in their relationship with Him. Let us consider some of these. But first, it would be helpful to define clearly what the Bible means by a covenant relationship. We may speak in terms more broadly or more narrowly. First, broadly speaking what is a covenant? ***A covenant is a guaranteed commitment between two parties.*** A covenant is a stated agreement on which a relationship exists. When we speak of biblical covenants, we focus on the relationship that God enters with His people, expressing both the nature of that relationship but also the terms or conditions upon which that relationship exists. An older particular Baptist, **Nehemiah Coxe** (d. 1688), defined a biblical covenant more narrowly. A biblical covenant is

“A declaration of [God’s] sovereign pleasure concerning the benefits He will bestow on [man], the communion they will have with Him, and the way and means by which this will be enjoyed by them.”<sup>10</sup>

And when God made a covenant with people as recorded in the Bible, commonly He gave them a physical sign that indicated or identified God’s (or man’s) commitment and participation in that covenant.

For example, the Bible speaks of the covenant that God made with all mankind through its representative, Noah. After God had washed the world of evil people by means of a world-wide flood, God entered into covenant with all mankind promising that He would never again destroy mankind by means of a flood. This covenant is set forth in Genesis 9.

<sup>8</sup>Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: <sup>9</sup>“And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your <sup>[a]</sup>descendants after you, <sup>10</sup>and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. <sup>11</sup>Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

<sup>12</sup>And God said: ***“This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: <sup>13</sup>I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.*** <sup>14</sup>It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; <sup>15</sup>and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup>The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” <sup>17</sup>And God said to Noah, ***“This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth.”***

Whenever you see a rainbow in the sky, it is a sign that God has given to us that assures us we will never perish from the earth due to God’s judgment of a world-wide flood.

When God made a covenant **with Abraham**, He gave Abraham and all of his male descendants a visible sign of their covenant relationship with God. We read of God’s establishment of a covenant relationship with Abraham in Genesis 17.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. <sup>2</sup>***And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.***” <sup>3</sup>Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: <sup>4</sup>“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. <sup>5</sup>No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. <sup>6</sup>I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall

---

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Renihan, **The Mystery of Christ; His Covenant and Kingdom** (Founders Press, 2019), p. 41.

come from you. <sup>7</sup>***And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.*** <sup>8</sup>Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

<sup>9</sup>And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup>***This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; <sup>11</sup>and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.*** <sup>12</sup>He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. <sup>13</sup>He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup>And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

Physical circumcision of the male Israelite was the visible, abiding sign of the Abrahamic covenant with Abraham’s physical offspring. This sign distinguished them in their covenant relationship with God from all others in the world.

What about the sign that God gave to Israel signifying **the Mosaic covenant** that God established at Mount Sinai when He gave to them the Ten Commandments? The Scriptures declare that Sabbath Day observance (in its ceremonial aspects) was the sign of the Mosaic covenant. This is stated in several places but we may consider Exodus 13:12ff

<sup>12</sup>And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>13</sup>“Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ***‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you*** throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. <sup>14</sup>You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. <sup>15</sup>Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. <sup>16</sup>Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. <sup>17</sup>***It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever;*** for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.””

<sup>18</sup>And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony (covenant), tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

Now again, not every covenant that God establishes with people that is recorded in the Scriptures has a sign accompanying that covenant. The Davidic covenant may not have a covenantal sign. But ***what is the sign of the new covenant that God has established with disciples of Jesus Christ?*** Is there one? Some have argued that baptism is the sign of the new covenant, just as circumcision was of the Abrahamic covenant. But a sign, by definition, is something that is visible and perpetual. Baptism was public and visible, but it was only for one occasion. No, the sign of the new covenant, we would assert, is what our Lord Jesus declared here in John 13:32, when He said to His disciples, ***“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”***

**Francis Schaeffer** (1912-1984) wrote a little book on this matter, in fact it was a short exposition of the passage before us, John 13:31-38. Here are his words:

Through the centuries men have displayed many different symbols to show that they are Christians. They have worn marks in the lapels of their coats, hung chains about their necks, even had special haircuts.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of this, if one feels it is his calling. But there is a much better sign—a mark that has not been thought up just as a matter of expediency for use on some special occasion or in some specific era. It is 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 looks forward to His death on the cross, the open tomb and the ascension. Knowing that He is about to leave, Jesus prepares His disciples for what is to come. It is here that He makes clear what will be the distinguishing mark of the Christian:

<sup>33</sup>Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. <sup>34</sup>A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:33-35, KJV)

This passage reveals that mark that Jesus gives to label a Christian not just in one era or in one locality but at all times and all places until Jesus returns.

Now there are many ways in which we can make known to the world that we are Christians. And there are many different efforts to do so. Christians bear bumper stickers or fish symbols on their cars, tattoos on their body, and crosses around their necks. Christians claim verbally before others that they are Christians. They go to rallies and conferences that reveal to others their Christian convictions. But the one sign that the Lord will bless in such a way that all will know that we are Christians, is if and when we possess and we manifest love for one another. If we hope that others will see evidence that we are true Christians, this is the best kind of sign that we can display before them.

Francis Schaeffer wrote of our need to manifest this sign:

Notice that what He (Jesus) says here is not a description of a fact. It is a command which includes a condition: “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, so ye love one another that all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love for one another.” And if 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 is that it is possible to be a Christian without showing the mark, but if we expect non-Christians to know that we are Christians, we must show the mark.<sup>11</sup>

And so, love is the great indicator, the great announcement, “We are disciples of Jesus Christ. He loved us and we love Him and one another.

Note, brotherly love is the badge of Christ’s disciples. By this He knows them, by this they may know themselves (1 John 2:14), and by this others may know them. This is the livery (badge) of His family, the distinguishing character of His disciples; this He would have them *noted for*, as that wherein they excelled all others—their loving one another. This was what their Master was famous for; all that ever heard of Him have heard of His love, His great love; and therefore, if you see any people more affectionate one to another than what is common, say, “Certainly these are the followers of Christ, they have been with Jesus.” (Matthew Henry)

Let us consider several matters regarding this new commandment.

### **1. This sign is present, to a degree, in every true Christian.**

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

Love for Christian brethren is a gift of grace that God imparts to every true Christian, everyone who has been born again (regenerated) by the Holy Spirit. God has implanted in each of us a true love for other Christians. When Paul was writing to the Christians in the church at Thessalonica, he wrote of this love that God had given to each of them by His grace.

“But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, *for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another*; <sup>10</sup>and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more.” (1 Thess. 4:9f)

## **2. This love that we have for other Christians is because we know or believe that they are true Christians, born of God as we were born of God.**

This love is misplaced or misapplied if it is directed to any and all that call themselves Christians, whose doctrine or practice, however, reveal that they are strangers to the saving grace of God. What knits our hearts with one another is the knowledge that we have this common life together that God has given us freely by His grace. The Apostle John wrote of this: “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and *everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him*” (1 John 5:1). Jesus was speaking to His disciples. Disciples are not Christians in name only, but whose life demonstrates that they are followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” A true Christian is a true disciple. The love that we are to have and demonstrate is for other disciples, those of like mind and purpose to live for Christ, and to follow Christ in faith and obedience.

## **3. The love that we have and show toward one another is to be according to the manner in which Jesus Christ has loved us.**

Jesus said to His disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; *as I have loved you*, that you also love one another.” This chapter opened with these words: “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” Our love for one another should be sincere and persistent. We should desire the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We should be committed to serving one another with the same desires and goals that our Lord Jesus has had toward us. We are to be patient with others, as He has been patient with us. We are to be always forgiving others, as He has always been forgiving us. How can you not forgive that one who has perhaps deeply offended you, when your Lord has so fully forgiven you of your repeated offences toward Him? We are to be willing to lay down our lives for the well-being of our brothers, as our Lord was willing to lay down His life for us.

## **IV. Peter’s inquiry and his expressed willingness to follow the Lord” (13:36-38)**

The Lord Jesus had told His disciples that He would be with them only a little while longer. It was due to this statement that Peter responded to Him.

<sup>36</sup>Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?”

Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.”

<sup>37</sup>Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.”

<sup>38</sup>Jesus answered him, “Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.”

Jesus told His disciples that they would one day join Him where He was going. Jesus said to Peter, but to all of them, and to us who are His disciples, “you shall follow Me afterward.” We will follow Him

through death into and unto glory, where we will be with our Savior. In the beginning of the next chapter Jesus will speak of the necessity of Him going away:

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. <sup>2</sup>In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:1-3)

Here we see Peter’s perception of himself and of his capabilities to be greater than what they were in reality. Peter seemed to have this aspect of his personality that seemed to lead him to be impulsive, *self*-confident, in a poor way, and somewhat proud of his abilities and capabilities. He was a proud man, in a sinful-prone degree. This event of Peter’s betrayal of Jesus would cure him completely of these weaknesses of character. This was necessary for Peter in order for him to become a true pillar in the church. This would be a great work of sanctification in his life. But it would be a very, very difficult experience for him to endure. One of the major works of God’s grace in the life of the Christian is to humble him, to remove any faulty presumption of personal capacity or capability. Some of us may be plagued with this self-conception. The Lord knows how to take us down a peg or two. Sometimes He does so gradually by degrees through prolonged dealings with us. But sometimes His spiritual surgery to cut this sinful pride from our souls takes place swiftly, with one swipe of His spiritual scalpel. Through this experience, Peter would be quite affected. He would no longer be the one reflected here in these verses as the self-sufficient presumptive follower; rather, we will see Him as he is described in John 21, humble before His Lord, looking to His Savior for His sufficiency and stability.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,  
and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,  
<sup>25</sup>to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power,  
both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24f)

\*\*\*\*\*