

Traits of a True Believer, Part 2

Scripture: John 13:31-38

Code: 43-71

John 13:31-38. Just to set the scene, we know where we are, those of us who have been here, going through the gospel of John. As we come to chapter 13, you remember we are in the Passion Week, the week our Lord died and rose again. Come into John 13 and running all the way through John 16, we hear the promises of the Savior given to His disciples and all who would believe after them, including us, the legacy of Christ to His own. These are the great, glorious promises of all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, delineated and laid out for the disciples and for all of us. They all come out of His love.

Verse 1 starts by saying, "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the," max, to the limit, to the capacity that only God has, so that all of the promises and blessings in chapter 13, 14, 15, and 16 are promises of His love. They are pledges of His love, His legacy of His love. All of this instruction, all of this promise came on Thursday night as He gathered in the Upper Room for the Passover, which He transformed into the Lord's Supper, and then the next day, of course, He was crucified as the Lamb of God. So this is His last time with His own as He pours out His love to them.

As the event that night began, Judas was there. Judas was there. As we come to verse 31, he is gone. Our Lord had already said to him back in verse 27, when Satan entered him, the Lord knew Satan had entered into him to do the dastardly deed of betraying Jesus. Therefore, Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly," and that was the initial event that inaugurated the sequence of things that would lead to the execution of Jesus, the next day at exactly the time that the Passover lambs were being slaughtered.

Verse 30 says, "Judas then went out immediately and it was night." Was it ever? It was night in the physical sense. It was night in the spiritual sense, and it would be night in eternal sense because he would hang himself and be dashed on the rocks in just a few hours. Judas is gone now. Judas is gone. The false disciple is gone, and Jesus starting in verse 31, turns to the true disciples and embraces all who would follow right down to this age until He comes and makes these incredible promises.

It all starts in verse 31 and we'll read that wonderful text to the end of the chapter. "Therefore, when Judas had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now, is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. Little children, I'm with you a little while longer. You will seek Me and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, "Where I am going, you cannot come." 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.'"

"Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, where are You going?' Jesus answered, 'Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later.' Peter said to Him, 'Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.' Jesus answered, 'Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly,

truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.”

As we look at this text, I want to draw out of this text the marks of a faithful disciple, the marks of a faithful disciple. Scripture is clear that the world is full of false Christians, false Christians. We are to expect that. We know that Satan is going to sow tares among the wheat. It's going to be hard to recognize them because they will be well-falsified. The kingdom of God is going to have all kinds of things contained in it as the parables of Matthew 13 tell us. “Many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and I will say to them, ‘Depart from Me, I never knew you.’” People who profess openly Jesus as their Lord and do many wonderful works in His name and so forth, have no relationship with Him.

Counterfeiting Christians, by the way, is Satan's primary strategy as an angel of light. He is disguised as an angel of light. His ministers are disguised as angels of light. They want to appear as representing heaven, but they are the minions of hell. Counterfeiting Christianity is a very important enterprise. It always strikes me as interesting as there are not a lot of false forms of false religions. False religions don't need to falsify themselves. Satan doesn't work on creating false forms of false religions. So you don't have a lot of heretical Muslims or heretical Buddhists or heretical Hindus or any other kind of religion. It's already heretical to start with. It's already a lie. It's already false. It's already a deception, so it doesn't need to be formed into something that is a misrepresentation.

But Christianity, we can't even keep up with all of the false forms of Christianity. We can barely recognize all of them, and every time we turn around, there's a new form because Satan is spending 99.9 percent of his time falsifying Christianity. You hear this kinds of discussion all the time. You even heard it from our president, “Well, there were Christians a thousand years ago who slaughtered Muslims.” Those weren't Christians, by the way, those were false Christians who belonged to a false Christian system, but that's the kind of strategy that goes on all of the time surrounding Christianity because the falsification of the truth is essential to the operation of Satan.

I always like to say if you see a false form of something, there's probably a true and the true probably has value because people don't counterfeit brown paper and sticks. They counterfeit something valuable. They counterfeit something valuable, and Christianity seems to be the most counterfeited of all things. So how do we know who the true Christians are? How do we know that? Who are the true followers of Christ? How can they be identified? How can I be identified not only to you, but to me? How do you know you're a true believer?

Well, it isn't by our profession. It isn't by the fact that we belong to some kind of religious organization that calls itself Christian. It isn't because we live a certain Judeo-Christian or even Christian ethic or morality. It's not outward. It's not about outward symbols or outward behaviors or outward professions. The way you know someone is a Christian is by the heart, the heart. This begins to be very clear in the Old Testament in the 36th chapter of Ezekiel. Very familiar chapter, and I want to just read these familiar words to you to set it in your mind, where the Lord describes what salvation is, and this is it.

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

There is the definition of regeneration. There is the definition of transformation, metamorphosis, new birth, being born again, conversion. It is to be cleansed from filthiness and false worship. It is to be given a new heart, a new spirit; and that new heart and new spirit is the home of the Holy Spirit who causes us to walk according to the statutes of God and to obey His ordinances. It's the heart that is the issue here. In John chapter 3, you remember Jesus talked to Nicodemus and He said eternal life and entrance into the kingdom comes to those who are, "Born from above." It is a spiritual transformation, a spiritual birth that is internal. It is a work of God. The Holy Spirit moves and does this to whom He will when He will, John 3.

Paul said it this way, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new - " what? " - new creation. Old things have passed away. New things have come." Paul writing to Titus in chapter 3 calls it, "The washing of regeneration, the washing of regeneration." And that's right out of Ezekiel 36. It is a washing from sin. It is a cleansing from filthiness and idols, and it is a new life implanted and Peter understood it and said this in 1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again." And over in verse 23, "You have been born again," or born from above, "not of seed, which is perishable, but imperishable through the living and enduring Word of God." By the truth in the gospel, by the work of the Holy Spirit we are literally transformed on the inside, on the inside.

The New Testament speaks of this many, many times. For example, the New Testament refers to this transformation as God, "Cleansing their hearts by faith," Acts 15:9. Romans 2:29, it is called the, "Circumcision of the heart," cleansing, purifying the heart. Second Corinthians 4:6, it is, "God shining the light of the glory of the gospel in Christ into the darkened heart." Second Timothy 2:22, "It is being given a pure heart." Hebrews 10:22, "Having your hearts sprinkled clean." It's always about the heart, and what is the heart? The heart is the inner person.

This is what identifies Christians; not structure, not symbols, not rituals, not ceremonies, not belonging to institutional forms of Christianity. It's about regeneration, conversion, new birth, being born from above, a spiritual supernatural miracle that changes you on the inside, and that becomes demonstrably clear on the outside. A true and supernatural work of God that produces a complete change, a new creation, a new disposition, new desires, new affections, new longings, new hopes, new priorities. Now, out of this new life come all the spiritual graces: love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. Out of this new life come all of the spiritual glories that are deposited in us, but at the most basic level, at the most basic level, the evidence of this transformation can be summed up in one word, and it is the four-letter word, love. Love. That is the foundation of it all. It is love that demonstrates a new heart. It is love that demonstrates a new heart. Love can do what the law could not do.

Paul in Romans 13 reiterates again that the law condemns, but love is the fulfilling of the law. We are described as those who love the Lord. "All things work together for good to those who love God." There's a God-ward direction of this love, but it's not limited to that. There's a man-ward direction of this love, as we've been saying; and there's even a personal aspect of this love. Again, false disciples are sometimes difficult to detect because they have maybe a visible morality. They have some knowledge, and they talk about biblical facts and have biblical information. They have attachment or involvement in some forms of Christianity, but what we're looking for in identifying a true believer is love, manifest love, because that is the evidence of a transformed heart.

Without that love, there's clearly no transformation. It's that simple. Listen to 1 John 4:13, "By this we know that we abide in Him." How do we know that? "If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us." How do we know God abides in us? If we love, if we love. Now, that love in our text goes in three directions. It goes toward our Lord. It goes toward others, and it has a personal component. Now, remember, all the promises of John 13 to 16 and even the prayer of John 17 is just loaded with love. In fact, the word "love" is repeated again and again and again through all these chapters. All of the promises of the Lord flow from His love to us and produce in us love in return. He sheds His love abroad in our hearts, Romans 5:5, and we are known by our love.

The Lord gives us a legacy of love. He gives us all the glories of His love. These are only for those whom He loves eternally, and we love in return. We love because what? He first loved us. So the genuine disciple is not only known because he has been delivered from error to truth, because he's been delivered from darkness to light, from Satan to God, from sin to righteousness. But the true believer is known because he's been delivered from hatred to love. You say, "Wait a minute. What do you mean hatred? You mean non-believers hate?" Yes, yes they do to one degree or another. They resent deeply. What do they resent? They resent God. They resent Christ. They resent the gospel. They resent the Bible.

Jesus said that, John 15, in this very occasion. Verse 18, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world; because of this, the world hates you." That's just the way it is. They hate. Hate for the things of God. Over in verse 25 He says, "They hated Me without a cause." There's no reason for this hate. This hate is bound up in fallenness. It's bound up in depravity. There's a hatred of God and a hatred of Christ and a hatred of the gospel and a hatred of Scripture.

One of the things that happens in salvation, and it's a dominating reality is all of the sudden, what you hated, you now love. You love God. You love His Word. You love His people, and you love to be loyal to Him. These are the dimensions of love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

Now, let's look back at these three aspects of love. Number one, a true believer is identified by love for his Lord's glory. We saw that in verses 31-33, love for his Lord's glory. We looked at that in detail. I'm not going to go back over that just except to say the Lord wants this arguing disciples who are debating about the fact that they want to be on the right hand and left hand and who is going to be the greatest in the kingdom. And they're just loaded with selfish pride and personal promotional ambition, and it's pretty sickening, and it's been going on for a long time. Our Lord wants to give them a redirection so He says to them, "Now, look," verse 31, "Now, is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately."

You've got to get your eyes off your own goals, your own ambition, your own desires, and you've got to begin to think about the glory of your Lord. Do you understand? I know you don't like that I'm going. I know this troubles you, John 14:1. Stop letting your heart be troubled. Verse 27, same chapter, end of the verse. "Don't let your heart be troubled. Don't be fearful," and more conversations go on that night about, "We don't want You to go. Where are You going? We don't know where You're going. Why can't we come?"

You've got to change your focus away from your positions in this kingdom to My glory. It is now time

for Me to be glorified. “Now is the Son of Man glorified,” looks at the cross. He is glorified on the cross. That’s where He puts His glory on display. Yes, He was glorified, of course, in His transfiguration in one way, but it wasn’t there that He said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified.” He was glorified in His baptism, but it wasn’t there that He said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified.” It is here at the cross that the Son of Man is truly glorified because He accomplishes redemption for all who will ever believe through all of human history. This is his greatest act of glory.

Not only that, God is glorified in the cross because God puts all of His attributes on display. Everything from God’s love to God’s justice; everything from God’s mercy and grace to God’s righteousness; everything from His forgiveness to His wrath, it’s all there. Further, a third thing, God will glorify Him immediately, which means you’ve got to understand not only is the cross going to glorify Me and the cross glorify the Father, but when it’s over on the other side, God will glorify Me immediately by resurrection, ascension, exaltation, glorification, coronation. You have to let this happen. You need to focus on My coming glory.

“Little children,” verse 33, “I’m with you a little while longer. You will seek Me and as I said to the Jews,” told them that earlier a couple of times. I’m saying to you again, “Where I am going, you cannot come.” Not now, not now, not now. Down in verse 36 He said, “You’ll come later.” In fact, in 14 He says, “I’m going to prepare a – ” what? “ – place for you.” It’s temporary. For the Jews, it’s forever. You’ll never come where I’m going. For them – temporary.

Don’t hold on to My humiliation. Don’t hold on to My humiliation. Remember when He said, “Don’t hold on to me,” in the garden to the lady who grabbed His feet? “I must go to My Father.” You can’t keep Me here. It’s time for My glory. Thirty-three years is enough. It’s time for My glory. I just make the point out of this, we did that last week. You can tell a true believer because the object of his love is the glory of His Lord. Whatever that means, whatever that cost, whatever the price you pay and we went over all that last time. For a devoted, true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, love demands that his Lord be glorified. Be glorified, Lord, be glorified. We sing it all the time, don’t we? We say it all the time. That’s the mark of a humble, selfless transformed, regenerated person.

Secondly, verses 34 and 35. This love goes in the direction of others. The new commandment, it was new. Why was it a new commandment? Wasn’t there a commandment to love that had been around a long time? Absolutely. It was way back in the Pentateuch. “Love your neighbor as yourself. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” It’s about as strong as a command to love can get. Sure, but why is it a new command? I’ll tell you why it’s new. Number one, the Jews didn’t do it. It was new to the Jews. They were full of animosity, bitterness, jealousy, rivalry, factions.

Number two, the disciples didn’t exhibit it. They were arguing about which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom, wrangling among each other. Number three, the Lord had just set a new example that demonstrated a kind of love that had never been demonstrated before and would add to that at the cross, “And greater love hath no man than that.”

Fourthly, they would have a new capacity to love in a new way because the Holy Spirit would come and shed that love abroad in their hearts. For all those reasons, this is new. So He says, “I’m giving you what is essentially a new commandment that you love one another 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.” You want to demonstrate that you are a truly regenerated, born-again, redeemed soul,

then your love will make that testimony clear. Your love will do it, your love. That's how the world will know. We talk about a Savior. We talk about transformation. We talk about a new birth. We talk about being literally given new life. We talk about how the Lord totally transforms us. How do we demonstrate that? It can't just be talk. We demonstrate it in our love to one another.

Yes, we love the lost like God does. Yes we love our enemies, Matthew 5. Yes, we want to do good to all men, but mostly we demonstrate the power of gospel transformation by a kind of love the world doesn't know anything about, okay? We take love to another level. Now, that's kind of where we ended last time. So let me pick up on that. I said that only the humble love. Only humble people love. Only broken people love. Only beatitude people love. The world is full of hate. Unregenerate people are full of selfishness, self-centeredness, and that leads to hate, animosity, anger, vengeance and violence. But for believers, we are marked by love. We are marked by love because we have been humbled.

God only give grace, James says, to the humble, right? Only to the humble. God gives grace to the humble. The proud, God rejects. What are we talking about? The humble are the meek. The humble are the hungry and thirsty, the beatitudes; those who know they are spiritually bankrupt, who recognize their sin, who confess their sin, repent of their sin, cry out to God for merciful salvation they don't deserve. That's as humble as you're going to get. When you literally will go to whatever extreme to get the salvation you know you can't attain or achieve, where if need be, you hate your father, your mother, and even your own life. Where you count the cost, and no cost is too high. Where you come broken before God and you say, "I'm hell-bound. I'm sin-bound. I'm hopeless. I have no hope. I have no way out of this. I have nothing to offer. I can't achieve anything. Lord, I cast myself on your mercy. Forgive me."

That's as humble as any soul will ever be, and that's what it means to come to the foot of the cross and cry out for grace. Now, once you enter the family of God, you've been humbled. A true believer has been humbled and Paul says in Philippians 2:1-4, you might turn to it, "If there is any consolation of love," if there is such a thing as a comforting love, "if there is real fellowship of the Spirit, if there is affection and compassion," if there is to be a, "maintaining of the same love united in Spirit, intent on one purpose." In other words, if there's going to be love, if love is really going to be present, here's how it works. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind, regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

In fact, "Have this attitude in yourselves, which was also in Christ, who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

You can't humble yourself more than Christ did. Only the humble love, and the humbler you are, the more you love. The prouder you are, the less you love. Now, we read the classic definition of this love in 1 Corinthians 13. I want to go back to it, but I want to remind you there's one line in 1 Corinthians 13. It's this: "Love seeks not its own." Philippians 2:4 says, "Look not unto your own things, but the things of others. Do nothing from selfish ambition." Well, 1 Corinthians says, "Love does not seek its own."

It is humble. It is selfless. It is indifferent to personal gain, personal satisfaction, personal fulfillment,

personal ambition. It is devoted to the well-being of the one loved, to the blessing, the good, the joy of the object of its love. High price attitude, by the way. Loving is expensive. It's expensive. I'm going to try to help you to see it in practical terms. I'll give you three points for sure.

One, we have to love enough to serve. We have to love enough to serve. We saw that in John 13 when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, remember? That's how the chapter opened. They were all arguing about which of them was going to be the greatest in the kingdom. None of them was going to take the lowliest role of a slave and wash the feet of the others; therefore, putting himself in a lowly position. That wasn't the desire of anybody. So since nobody did that, and their feet were all dirty from the dusty roads, our Lord did it, washed their feet. We went through that in great detail. It's a moving, amazing account of loving enough to serve, loving enough to stoop and serve at the most menial level in life, the most menial level, dirty feet. We love enough to do the base task, the simple humiliating task because we're concerned only about the well-being of the other, the benefit of the other, the blessing of the other, and demonstrating our love to the other. So we love enough to serve, and we've been through that.

But secondly, and I want to develop this a little bit, we also love enough to sanctify. We love enough to serve and we love enough to sanctify. What does that mean? Go to Matthew 18. In Matthew 16 we have the first time in the New Testament where the word "church" is used, Matthew 16. Chapter 18, we have the first time there's instruction given to the church, down in verses 15 and following. The church is mentioned. "Tell it to the church," verse 17. So, the Lord is now talking to His people. The church doesn't start until the Day of Pentecost. This is preliminary instruction for the church. This in chapter 18 is the first instruction given to the church before the church came into existence. This is a sub-floor, if you will. This is footings for life in the church. Before the foundation is laid at Pentecost, the rest of the apostles' doctrine is established.

What is the point of Matthew 18? The disciples come to Jesus. They're arguing again about who is the greatest in the kingdom. "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" They all wanted to be the greatest. "Can we sit on your right and left hand?" John and his brother asked with their mother helping them, to kind of illustrate that. So Jesus is going to give them a lesson on life in the kingdom, okay? So He calls a little baby to Himself. Some think this was actually Peter's house and one of Peter's relatives had a little baby, but whatever. Jesus has a little baby in His arms as an illustration. He sets the little child before them, and then He begins to speak to them, and what He has to say is so very important.

Remember now, these are the footings for the church. This is the first instruction given to the church. "Unless you are converted," verse 3, "and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom." That's the humility, the lowliness, the abject recognition of having accomplished nothing, achieved nothing, produced nothing. You come empty-handed, bankrupt into the kingdom. You come like a child. Children have accomplished nothing. They have to be cared for. They can't even care for themselves. They can't achieve anything. They don't have any history of accomplishments. That's how you come in. You come in with nothing. You come in bankrupt. You enter the kingdom. "You humble yourself," verse 4. You humble yourself to come in the kingdom. Then in the kingdom, you're all the greatest, right?

John the Baptist was the greatest man who ever lived up until this time, but everyone in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. Greatness is just being in the kingdom, and it's not relative. It's absolute. It's absolute.

Okay, now we're in the kingdom, and we came in like children, and we're still like children. Now we're taught what to do. "Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me." Wow. When you open up your heart, open up your life, open yourself up to fellowship with another believer, you are receiving Christ. Christ comes to you in that believer. You got that? That's the foundation. That's the footings of life in the church. Every true believer is literally Christ coming into your life. That has a lot to do with how I think about how I'm going to treat everybody. That's a pervasive reality as a pastor.

When I look out at you, I can honestly say I don't – I've known a lot of people, and I guess it says in there I've been here 46 years. I've known a lot of people. I don't have some kind of relative scale in my mind. Everybody is Christ to me. Everybody is Christ to me. You are Christs, and when you come to me, Christ comes to me. When I minister to you, I minister to one in whom Christ lives, for whom He died, whom He called, and with whom He will live forever in glory. This just changes everything about human relationships for believers.

It's not that I'm not willing to wash your feet, I am, or do some temporal thing or help people if they're sick or call on them and pray with them if they're in the hospital or provide financial resources if they have physical needs or whatever the issues of life are to kind of ease the difficulties, sure. But there's something far beyond that kind of external assistance. Something much more important, verse 6, and it come negatively, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble." Whoa, what does that mean? Stumble into sin. If you're the cause of another believer stumbling into sin, listen to this, "It would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

That's pretty extreme. I mean I don't know how you get more extreme than that. You'd be better off to be drowned in a horrible drowning, dragged down to the bottom of the sea with a rock around your neck than to cause another believer to stumble into sin. This is where we come to the point you love enough to sanctify. We all have to be sanctifying influences, not sources of temptation. You say, "Well, how would I cause another Christian to stumble?" Well, you lead them into sin. Tolerate their gossip, tempt them to do something that isn't right. You could do it overtly. You could also do it covertly by being a bad example, by setting a pattern if they follow, they'll fall into sin.

You could do it by failing to instruct them on the righteous path. You could do it by failing to warn them and admonish them, but I mean the objective here is that you want to live your life in such a way that nothing you do causes other people to stumble into sin. You would be better off drowned. Well, verse 7 says, "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks!" Woe to the world, damnation to the world. I'm glad the world is in there. We're not going to be damned when we cause each other to stumble. Husbands can cause wives to stumble. Wives can cause husbands to stumble, and you can do it pretty often. You know the button to push. Maybe it's, "You're just like your mother," or whatever it is. I don't know, but you know all those triggers.

You say, "Does this mean we could be damned? Damnation, the word 'woe'?" No. "Woe to the world." What is He saying? We expect it from the world. We expect it. By the way, the Lord will recompense the world. They're not going to get away with it. The world, and particularly today, of course, we're very aware of it. Our world is full of people who tempt people to sin, create temptation, literally work hard creating temptation, creating lies, deception, corruption, immorality at every possible level, every imaginable level of immorality. The world is working really hard, really hard to

push a whole generation into homosexuality. Woe to them! They will not get away with it. Whoever is advocating that will not get away with it. Woe to them! Damnation will come on those in the world who have done that.

"It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!" If you're the architect of something that tempts people into sin, woe to you, my friend, woe to you! Certainly, we don't expect that in the church. We don't expect that among believers. We are to have a sanctifying influence. We have to counter the culture. That's why you've got to be so careful even as a pastor not to play with the culture. And when importing elements of the culture, you wind up with not only the nose of the camel in the tent, but the whole camel.

Take drastic action before you cause somebody to stumble, and He uses kind of a proverb. "If your hand or your foot - " verse 8, " - causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. Better to enter into life crippled or lame than to have two hands, two feet, and be cast into eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. Better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell." Look, that's sort of proverbial. You better take drastic action against sin. This is for the world, folks. This is for the world, and this is also, of course, for us.

Then verse 10 gets even more specific, "Do not despise one of these little ones." So we already aren't supposed to lead them into sin. We aren't supposed to be the cause of stumbling; nor are we even to despise one. That is to think little, *kataphrone*, to think down, to belittle, to consider beneath us, another believer.

That might not sound like sin. That might not sound like causing one to stumble. Well, it isn't. It's another category. With God, there is no respect of what? Persons. James says you can't say to this poor man, "Get out of here. Get in the back. You smell." And to the man with the fancy clothes and the gold ring, "Sit down here." You can't do that. You can't show partiality. There's no respect of persons with God. You can't think little of people.

You want to be a sanctifying influence on all God's children because Christ comes to you in them all, and you want to be a sanctifying influence. God is so concerned about this that verse 10 says, "The angels who minister to the saints in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven." The angels are pictured in heaven looking at the face of God, metaphorically speaking and they're watching to see if God has any concern, and they're hovering around the presence of God to be dispatched to the aid of believers whom God is concerned about. So when you're tampering around in an unsanctifying way with the children of God, God is displeased and may have to send the holy angels to care for His own. The point is, heaven has got its attention on what we do.

God is concerned about everyone. Like a shepherd, "If he had a hundred sheep - " verse 12, " - and one went astray, would he not leave the ninety-nine and go find the one straying? And when he found it he would rejoice more than over the ninety-nine. So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones be devastated." He doesn't want you to disregard a little insignificant believer and consequently by ignoring that believer and not having a ministry in that believer's life, not being a sanctifying influence. That little believer kind of falls away and is somehow devastated.

It gets pretty direct in verse 15. “If your brother sins – ” do what? “ – go show him his fault.” If he doesn’t repent, take two or three witnesses. If he doesn’t repent, tell the church. If he doesn’t repent, put him out. This is what love does. Oh, by the way, when he comes back and repents, forgive him. How many times? Seventy times seven. All this is sanctifying ministry. All this is sanctifying.

So we love enough to serve and we serve, and you all do that better than any group of people I know of anywhere. You are amazing in serving, and I will say this, you also are committed to sanctifying. This is a sanctifying congregation. You care about each other’s lives. That’s how love acts.

So how can you tell a true believer? A true believer loves enough to serve and loves enough to sanctify, okay? Thirdly, we must love enough to suffer. We must love enough to suffer. It’s going to come to that. That’s kind of the price. By suffer, I don’t mean no bamboos up your fingernails or whips on your back or chains necessarily in our world, but there are some pretty dire prices to pay for being a faithful lover of the people of God.

In 2 Corinthians, I want you to look at chapter 12 and verse 15. Paul has poured out his heart now in two letters to the Corinthians that are in the New Testament. He wrote two more that he refers to that aren’t in Scripture. That’s four letters to one congregation, and they have drained his soul. That’s for sure. They have been a very difficult group to deal with, infiltrated by false teachers who have accused him of terrible things. He’s trying his best to minister to them. But notice what he says in 2 Corinthians 12:15, “I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls.”

I will spend. I will give anything I have, any commodity, any possession, anything, anything I have I will spend. And I personally, passively, will be expended. I will give up my life. I will give up my life for your souls. “If I love you more, am I to be loved less?” This is what he can’t understand. Why, as I love you more and more and more, and spend and am literally personally expended, why do you love me less?

Go back into chapter 11 and get a bit of an insight into the suffering that Paul endured. He says, verse 23, “In far more labors, far more imprisonments than any others who call themselves servants of Christ. Beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have spent in the deep; I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, danger in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren. I have been labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.”

Wow! That’s all the stuff that came at his body, at his humanity, but look what came at his soul. Verse 28, above that, above all of that, all those, “External things, is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.” He’s not talking about administrative duties. He’s talking about how the failures and weakness of the church tore at his heart. He says it this way in verse 29, “Who is weak without my being weak? I feel your weakness. Who is led into sin without my intense concern?”

His love cost him massive suffering: physical, emotional, and even spiritual suffering. There was a

thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan, chapter 12, verse 7, to humble him, keep him from exalting himself because he had so many revelations. I believe this was the false teachers, the leader of the false teachers in Corinth who were tearing up the church. He asked the Lord three times to take it away, remove it, agonizing, like a spear driven through him. And the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

"Most gladly, therefore," Paul says, "I will rather boast about my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." Wow. He suffered physically. He suffered emotionally. He suffered spiritually. He loved that much. You want to break his heart? Go down to verse 20. He'll tell you how.

"I'm afraid." What are you afraid of, Paul? Are you afraid of whips? Are you afraid of sticks? Are you afraid of beatings? No. Here is what I'm afraid of. "I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish." Isn't that amazing? I wonder if you'd lined up leaders in church or religion or even pastors and said, "What are you most afraid of in your church?" Well, it'd be an interesting question. Are you most afraid of empty seats? Are you most afraid of not having wide distribution for your message? Paul was most afraid that his people wouldn't be what he wanted them to be, and what did he want them to be? He said it in Galatians. "I am in birth pains until Christ is fully formed in you." That's what I want you to be, and I go on making whatever sacrifices need to be made to that end. I don't want to come and find you not to be what I wish. Then I have to be what you don't wish.

I don't want to come and find, "Strife and jealousy and angry tempers and disputes and slanders and gossips and arrogance and disturbances." Then verse 21 he adds, "I am afraid," again, "I am afraid that when I come my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn." What are you going to mourn over, Paul? Small congregation? What are you going to mourn over? No, "Mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality, and sensuality which they have practiced."

Look, loving the brothers is hard work. We love enough to serve. We love enough to sanctify, and if need be, we love enough to suffer. That is to say we get into their lives and feel the pain and the pressure of living life in a sinful, fallen world. When I look at a church like ours, I get those prayers of Paul. My greatest fear in this church is that strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances, immorality, sensuality, and impurity might take hold anywhere in this church, in your life or anybody else's life. This is the mark of true discipleship. You not only love the Lord and His glory; you love each other to this degree.

Okay, there's a third point. There's a third perspective with this kind of love, and it's personal. It's personal. It's love as defined by my own loyalty. Loved defined by focus on Christ's glory, focus on loving others, focus on my own loyalty, critical aspect of love. It comes as a warning to Peter. Go back to John 13.

"Simon Peter - " verse 36 " – said to Him, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus answered him, 'Where I go, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow later.' Peter said to Him, 'Lord, why can I not follow you right now? I will lay down my life for you.'" Nice try, Peter, but we know the truth. That's just blowing smoke. J.C. Ryle called this, "A very dangerous reality in the life of the believer, self-ignorance, over-assessing your spiritual maturity, over-assessing your spiritual strength."

Discipleship is more than promised loyalty. It is permanently practiced loyalty.

Peter made this promise repeatedly. Back in Matthew 16, back in Luke 22, Matthew 26. In fact, he made the same promise several more times this evening as recorded by Luke and Matthew. He was convinced of his unflinching loyalty. “I am ready to die for you now.” Verse 38, “Jesus answered, ‘Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow until you deny me three times.’” Whoa!

What does the rooster crow mean? They didn’t have clocks -I know you know that – so they segmented the night, sundown to three hours or so later, maybe 9:00 was called evening. Then from then to, say, midnight was called midnight. Then from midnight to 3:00 was called rooster crow because about 3:00, the roosters began to crow. Then morning followed from 3:00 to 6:00. Before 3:00 tomorrow morning, you’re going to deny Me three times, and he did, didn’t he? More than three times. In three separate locations, multiple times. Luke points out that Peter boasted too much, prayed too little, acted too fast, followed too far, and ended up denying his Lord. When it dawned on him what had happened, Luke 22:62, “Peter went out and – ” what did he do? He just wept bitterly, agonizing, agonizing, agonizing experience. Deeply grieved, deeply depressed, fearful, frightened, guilty.

The Lord finds him in Galilee, and what did the Lord say to him? “Peter do you – ” what? “ – do you love Me?” “Yes, Lord I love You.” “Peter, do you love Me?” “Yes, Lord, I love You.” “Peter, do you love Me?” “Lord, you know I love You.” “Then feed My sheep.” Peter never flinched after that, never flinched. He finally went to a cross where he was crucified upside down. He preached that great Pentecost sermon and a lot of those sermons that followed that in the city of Jerusalem. What was the difference? The Holy Spirit came, shed that love abroad in his heart, and it never waned, never waned. A loyal love.

How do you know when someone is a true Christian? Their love focus is on the glory of their Lord, on the well-being of their brothers and sisters in Christ, and it evidences itself in an undying, enduring, loving loyalty to Christ.

There’s one other wonderful benefit of this, and I want to close there. So go to 1 John, if you will. Let’s look at chapter 3, verse 18. “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue but in deed and truth,” okay, reality. Loving enough to serve, enough to sanctify, enough to suffer. Then look at the next verse. “We will know by this that we are of the truth and will assure our heart before Him.” You want to have a sure heart? You want to know you’re saved? You want to have that assurance? You want to have that confidence? That’s how you have it.

I said at the beginning, love is the mark. It’s not only the mark that puts our salvation on display to others. It’s the mark that gives us our own assurance. “We will know by this that we are of the truth and assure our heart before Him, and in whatever our heart condemns us.” In other words, our heart may condemn us. Blows of doubt and insecurity may come at us as temptations and our own failures may cause doubts to rise, but manifest love in all these directions removes that condemnation and gives us, “confidence before God.” What a great statement.

That’s what we saw, didn’t we, in chapter 4, verse 12. “If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us.” Verse 13, “By this, we know that we abide in Him and He in us.” How do

you know you're a believer? Because you've been given the Holy Spirit. How is the Holy Spirit manifest? In His fruit. What's the first? Love. Just an incredible portion of Scripture. The grand, distinguishing mark of true Christians is love. By the way, it's not signs and wonders. It's not gifts, influence, popularity. It's the simple, lovely grace of love. Grace from a humble heart, reaching toward heaven, reaching toward each other, and stabilizing our loyalty to Christ.

Father, we thank you again for your precious Word to us. How blessed we are. How blessed we have been even this morning to have considered these things. Be glorified, Lord, in the application of this truth to every heart. Give assurance to that doubting heart, assurance in the evidence of manifest love toward your glory, toward one another, and that deep passion to be loyal and faithful to you. Give us the joy of our salvation in that assurance. We'll give you honor and glory in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2018 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).