

## #109 “Five Distinguishing Marks of the Christian”

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We can make a difference, but we must do it God’s way. Something changes inside of us when we are born again (2 Corinthians 5:17). We become children of God, called by His name (John 1:12). What was old passes away, and a new creation comes to be. This inward change is of the utmost importance, but what is not so often emphasized in Christian circles is the reality that our outward behavior ought also to change in response to our decision to follow Christ. There ought to be fruit bringing evidence of a change, for it is by our fruit that we are known (Matthew 7:20).

It is rather remarkable that the greatest and most common rebuttal to an invitation to come to church or to become a Christian is that Christians are hypocrites. Now we all do stumble at times, sometimes more severely than others, but if we grant that we are no different than the world, what could possibly interest the unsaved about true Biblical Christianity? Christians are to be fundamentally different (2 Corinthians 6:17). The key is that our difference should be spiritually palpable such that it is convicting, an aroma of life to life for those who believe and of death to those who don’t (2 Corinthians 2:15-16). In other words, it is who we are on the outside because of a new inward reality that can open doors so that we can declare the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Sadly, the reputation of Christians and churches is very poor, but we can be the difference by faith. God’s Word never changes, so we can still be salt and light. People can still get saved, and how we live can be a means to God creating an open door for the gospel. As Colossians 4:5 says, “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.” Too many preachers and believers make concession to the helplessness of the hypocrisy of Christians, and, in so doing, snuff out the light that the church ought to be shining. There is to be a difference, and the unsaved should see it, sense it, and know it. This is God’s plan and design, and thus we must take how we live as believers seriously for the sake of the lost. We must make no mistake that the unbeliever is watching us in judgment. God has wired unbelievers such that they do watch us whether or not they even realize it. The proof is in the Scriptures that follow.

Here are five major ways given in the New Testament that a person can identify a believer. (Now, of course there are more if we start going through the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), for example, but these five are more than enough to start etching the importance of how we live upon our hearts.) First, believers can be identified by their *love*. John 13:34-35 says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” All men, believers and unbelievers, will be able to identify a true follower of Christ by their love for other believers and for unbelievers. Love is a distinguishing mark of the Christian. When we fail to love, we confuse the world and encourage them to stay blinded and enslaved to the evil one. When we practice love, light shines into darkness, whether they fully understand it or not and whether they receive it or not. 1 John 4:7-8 makes it clear that love is of God and that those who love are those who are born of God. The world cannot love as God

loves because they don't know God. Only believers can have a true, selfless care for one another that the world doesn't offer or even care to consider. The world looks for how things will benefit themselves, while Christlike love distinguishes Christians because it looks not for personal benefit but for the benefit of others (Philippians 2:4-5).

*Unity* is another Biblical characteristic by which believers are distinguished from the world in which they live. Jesus prays in John 17:21 regarding His disciples and all who would come after them through their testimony, "that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." If true Christian unity is seen among believers, then the world might believe that the Father sent the Son to earth. In an age where people believe almost anything, Christian unity cuts to the core of the matter, giving the greatest evidence that Jesus really did come to earth and die for the sins of the world. The world knows that people are evil, untrustworthy, and difficult to get along with. When believers actually get along with one another, this is strong evidence for the legitimacy of the Christian faith.

*Holiness*, which represents the summation of all Christian virtues, is clearly God's design for the believer in practical day to day living. Hebrews 12:14 tells us that no one will see God without holiness on the part of the believer. Our conduct must be righteous, or unbelievers will struggle to see how we are any different and why they should believe in the Jesus we claim to follow in word but not in deed. True faith has works that follow (James 2:17).

Matthew 5:16 tells us that if we do *good works* for others that some people just might come to glorify God because they see the Light of Christ in us. There are all sorts of kind things that we can do for others, ranging from holding a door open for someone to feeding the hungry. We cannot solve all of the world's problems ourselves in one fell swoop, but we can be part of the change that the world needs by meeting a need and doing something kind for someone. People know that it is not natural for someone to go out of their way to do something nice for another human being, so they do take note when Christians do something that is otherwise out of the ordinary.

Fifthly, 1 Peter 3:15 says that people will ask about why we have so much *hope*, presuming, of course, that they can see that we are hopeful people. Is there something supernatural (Christ) sustaining us that the world must have no natural explanation for? If there is and if it is visible and tangible, we should anticipate that God will open a door for us to share about the reason for our hope.

Let us pray that love, unity, good works, holiness, and hope would so saturate our lives that others would take notice. May God give us grace to answer boldly as we speak of Christ (Colossians 4:6), the reason for our new and very different life.

