

Introduction

We are in the midst of an overall series about basics. In both the Old and New Testament we are told to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Jesus said this was the greatest commandment. There is nothing more basic than loving God. Karen taught a few weeks ago about loving God with all our heart.

(Deuteronomy 6:4-5) ""Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! {5} "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

In the midst of the series on the basics, we have a mini-series on "Following God." It comes out of Matthew 4:19 where Jesus told Peter and Andrew to follow Him and He would make them fishers of men. They were both fishermen and they left their nets and followed God. Bill Lotgering shared on the cost of following God; they left everything to follow God.

(Matthew 4:18-20) "And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. {19} And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." {20} And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him."

Last week, the focus was on the mission of those who are following God, which is to be fishers of men. Bill shared on local missions. Lorraine Lamar shared on foreign missions, and in particular the Faith Love Hope (FLH) Children's Ranch. I received excellent feedback about the service last week. Hearts were stirred towards missions. We will be hearing more next month about missions from Ray Arambula and Charlie Harley.

This week is the final message of this mini series on Following God. We will be looking at how to identify a follower of Christ. I have titled the message, "The Earmark of a Follower."

An earmark is a method of identifying livestock. They use to brand livestock, but they have found easier and less painful ways of tagging and identifying animals. They now use tags which they put in an animals ear. My father had a pig and cattle farm in Tennessee when I was growing up. We had yellow plastic tags with permanent numbers on them that identified my father's cattle.

Although we are not livestock, the Scriptures tell us that we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. How are we identified as God's sheep? What is the earmark that He puts on us to easily identify us as belonging to Him?

(Psalms 100:3) "Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture."

The Bible gives us a pretty clear way to see if we are following God. In John 13:34-35, Jesus commanded the disciples to love one another in the same way that He loved them. Then, He gave the identifying characteristic or earmark of a disciple. He said, "by this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." How do we know and how do others know if we are following God? **The earmark or identifying characteristic of a follower is love.**

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(John 13:34-35) ""A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. {35} "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.""

Look what John says in 1 John 3:10, “by this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. The distinguishing mark of a Christian is love and it should not be something difficult to determine. John says that it is obvious. People in the world should be able to easily determine that we are Christians. Our actions and lifestyle need to make it readily apparent that we love them and love others. **The difference between believers and unbelievers should be obvious.**

(1 John 3:10) "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."

Unfortunately, in our culture, the children of God and the children of the devil are not always obvious. Christians are not known for righteous and loving behavior. Their lives are not much different than the lives of those in the world. And, sometimes it is obvious who the “Christians” are, and it is not love that people are basing their opinions on.

Take a restaurant at Sunday brunch. Ask any waiter or waitress who the Christians are and they will tell you. They are the ones who are all dressed up and leave the worst tips. Somehow that does not line up with what Jesus said should be the distinguishing mark of a Christian.

Many people today see Christians as hypocrites. That is what I thought growing up. I saw people, who were suppose to be religious leaders, living lives that did not match their message. They were not wearing this earmark that easily identified them as followers of Christ. It was a stumbling block to them being a fisher of men and reaching me with the gospel.

Many people in our culture have labeled us as gay haters. They have labeled us as unaccepting, judgmental, hateful people. Contrast that with how Jesus was known. The tax-gatherers and sinners came to Jesus to listen to Him. The Pharisees and scribes said that Jesus receives sinners and eats with them. The sinners did not go to Jesus because He was judgmental and hateful. Jesus loved people. He hated sin, but He loved sinners; and this was obvious to people. Jesus and His disciples had earmarks that easily identified them.

(Luke 15:1-2) "Now all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. {2} And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’”

At East Mountain vineyard, our vision is to be a people who love God, and who love one another. It is really important that we have this earmark, this distinguishing characteristic of a follower of Christ Jesus. If we want to become successful in becoming fishers of men, our lives must have this distinguishing earmark of a disciple. We must have love for one another.

This morning I want to talk about this distinguishing earmark of a follower. I want to investigate what it means to have love for one another. We will look at four realms of love this morning:

1. Love for God
2. Love for Family
3. Love for Brethren
4. Love for World

1. Love for God

I start with a love for God because God is love. He is the origination of love. **God is the source of all love.** John tells us that every one who loves is born of God and knows God. Everyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. God manifested His love in us through His Son Jesus.

(1 John 4:7-12) "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. {8} The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. {9} By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. {10} In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. {11} Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. {12} No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us."

In order for us to love others, we must first receive God's love. John proclaimed Christ so that people could have fellowship with one another. He tells us that his fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. Our relationship with God is vital to having fellowship with one another. **When we fellowship with God, we also have fellowship with others.**

(1 John 1:3) "what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

- a. Love by obedience to His commands

But, I want to talk about our part. God has done His part. The Scriptures tell us some ways to love God. **The first way is to love God by obedience to His commands.** Jesus tells us that he who has His commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Him. We can show our love to God by learning His commandments and keeping them. Our relationship with God is deepened by our obedience to His commands. Do you have His commandments in your heart and mind? Do you spend time putting His commandments in your heart and mind? Are you applying the things you learn? Are you keeping His commands. Jesus went on to say that when we do that, the Father pours out His love and discloses Himself to us. In meaningful relationships, people express love to one another in meaningful ways. In loving relationships, people are vulnerable and disclose themselves to one another. They trust one another and disclose themselves. As we spend time in His word, meditate on it, and apply it to our lives, He discloses Himself to us.

(John 14:21) ""He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.""

John repeats these words of Jesus in 1 John 5:2-3. He says that by this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments.

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(1 John 5:2-3) "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. {3} For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."

I want to take just a minute to say something about keeping His commandments. There are some today who want to put people in bondage to the Law. We are not under the Law. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death. Therefore, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

(Romans 8:1-2) "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. {2} For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."

One of the main reasons that Paul wrote to the Galatians was to correct this false teaching that was trying to infiltrate the church. He says, "you foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?...did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

(Galatians 3:1-3) "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? {2} This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? {3} Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

In Chapter four Paul talks about the free woman and the bondwoman. He says that we have been set free and not slaves any longer. Then, in chapter five, Paul says that "it was for freedom that Christ has set us free. Therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."

(Galatians 5:1-3) "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. {2} Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. {3} And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law."

We receive our salvation by faith, not works. We receive the Spirit by faith, not works. We are matured through faith, not works. Our obedience to the commandments is an obedience from the heart. Our obedience to His commandments is out of love, not bondage. We do it to love God, rather than to earn His love or our salvation.

b. Love by loving people

A second way that we can love God is to love people. John tells us that "if someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

(1 John 4:20-21) "If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. {21} And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

I have heard a number of people talk about how they are tight with God, but it is people that they have a problem with. According to Scripture, that is just not true. In fact, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that if you are presenting your offering to God and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering before the altar and go be reconciled to your brother. Then, go present your offering to the Lord. The Lord puts a premium on our relationship with one another. **God puts a priority on getting reconciled to others.** Part of loving God is loving our brother. The next three realms of love that I want to talk about are in this second area, loving others.

(Matthew 5:23-24) ""If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, {24} leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

2. Love in Family Relationships

a. Husbands love wives as Christ loved the church. (Eph 5:25-33)

The first institution that God initiated was marriage. We can go back to Genesis and find that it is not good for man to be alone. He created us for fellowship. And for this reason, a man leaves his mother and father and cleaves to his wife. What is so special about marriage? Paul tells us in Ephesians 5 that this mystery is great. It is a reference to Christ and the church. Our marriages are a picture or reflection of our love covenant with the Lord.

(Ephesians 5:31-32) "FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. {32} This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church."

The bulk of the responsibility for marriages lies on the husband. Paul tells husbands in Ephesians 5:25, "**husbands, love your wives**, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." He tells husbands some ways that they can love their wives. He tells them to give themselves up for their wives, sanctify their wives, cleanse their wives by the washing of the word, to present their wives holy and blameless. In verse 28, he repeats his command for husbands to love their wives as their own bodies. Then, he gives some more ways for husbands to love their wives. He tells them to nourish and cherish their wives. Finally, in verse 33 he tells husbands a third time to love their wives as themselves.

(Ephesians 5:25-33) "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; {26} that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, {27} that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. {28} So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; {29} for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, {30} because we are members of His body.... {33} Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband."

b. Wives love husbands (Titus 2:3-5)

In the Ephesians passage, the context is walking in love. When Paul tells wives to respect their husbands, it is a practical way that they can show love to their husbands. Oftentimes, people think that men should love their wives and wives should submit and respect their husbands. What they miss is that husbands and wives are to love one another. Each of them have different responsibilities and ways to show their love to one another, but both parties have a responsibility to love one another.

Wives are to love their husbands.

(Ephesians 5:33) "Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband."

(Ephesians 5:1-2) "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; {2} and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

In Titus 2:3-5, Paul tells older women to teach the younger women to love their husbands. Older women do not need to teach younger women to be attracted to their husbands. Much of what society calls love is not love at all; it is simply eros, not agape love. What we must learn to have for one another is agape love, a perfect love, for one another.

(Titus 2:3-5) "Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, {4} that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, {5} to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored."

c. Mothers and fathers love their children (Titus 2:3-5, 1 John 3:1)

In the same passage in Titus, he tells older women to teach the younger women to love their children. **Parents are to love their children.** When children do not feel the love of their father and mother, they are much more prone to seek the acceptance, love, support, and relationship outside the home. Many times they will get involved with the wrong people and in wrong kinds of activities. It is extremely important for mothers and fathers to love their children.

When Jesus tells us that by this all men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another, there is no place that is more important than love in the family. If we want to reach our children with the gospel, they must see that we are His followers by our love for one another in the home.

In Ephesians 3, Paul prays that they would be rooted and grounded in love, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. Our children must grow up in the soil of love. Our homes need to be planting pots full of the soil of love so that they can know the love of Christ. **Parents should raise their children in the soil of love.**

(Ephesians 3:17-19) "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, {18} may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, {19} and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God."

We need to find ways to communicate our love to our children through words, deed, and truth. It is important to tell them that we love them. It is even more important that we show them that we love them. We must find practical ways to demonstrate and pour our love into them. John tells us not to love with word or tongue, but in deed and truth. Solomon told us that open rebuke is better than love that is concealed. It is important to tell our children that we love them. It is even more important to love them in deed and truth. We need to make sure that our love is not concealed.

(1 John 3:18) "Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

(Proverbs 27:5) "Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed."

Karen does a wonderful job of loving our children. A couple of weeks ago she took Chad and his friend to see Myth Busters. She had heard they were coming to Albuquerque, so she bought tickets to it and gave them to Chad for Christmas. She knows that Myth Busters is one of Chad's favorite shows. She demonstrated love by buying those tickets and taking him to see Myth Busters.

d. Loving widows. (1 Timothy 3:5-8)

Loving family relationships does not just involve marriages and children. It also includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, and widows. Notice what Paul says about honoring widows. He says that we should honor widows so that we are above reproach. If we do not provide for our own, and for those in our household, we have denied the faith, and are worse than unbelievers. We have to especially show love and honor to those in our household. If we want to be above reproach in the world, we must take care of our households. If we want to make a stand for Christ in our neighborhoods, we must have loving relationships in the home. If we want people to know that we are His followers, **we must show love to widows, and other members of our household.**

(1 Timothy 5:3-8) "Honor widows who are widows indeed; {4} but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God... {7} Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. {8} But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever."

3. Love for Brethren (1 John 3:16, Gal 6:10)

The third realm of love is our love for the brethren. Our church is our extended family. Listen to what John says about loving the brethren. "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Paul told us in Ephesians to love one another in the same way that Christ loved the church, laying His life down for the church. Then, he tells husbands to lay their lives down for their wives. Here, we find that we are to love one another in the same way. **We are exhorted to lay our lives down for the brethren.**

(1 John 3:16) "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

In Galatians 6:10, Paul tells us to do good to all men when we have opportunity. Then, he adds, "especially to those who are of the household of the faith." It is really nice to have outreaches to the

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community. It is great to feed and clothe the poor. Jesus tells us to do those things. We have done it unto Him when we do it to the least. But, Paul tells us that we especially need to take care of those who are of the household of the faith. **We are to do good to all men, especially to our brethren.**

(Galatians 6:10) "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

In our culture we think of individual anointing. We think in terms of if I do this or that, God will use us to heal the sick, or other things. I want us to broaden our understanding and think in terms of corporate life. In Acts 4:32-35 we have a snippet of great power being released. There were lots of souls being saved. There were lots of miracles taking place. Look at what the Scriptures record about what was going on.

(Acts 4:32-35) "And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them. {33} And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. {34} For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, {35} and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need."

The congregation were in unity. They were of one heart and soul, and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own. They were sharing with one another as any had need. In verse 33, Luke says that with great power the apostles were giving witness. Then, in verse 34, he says that there was not a needy person among them. Notice that the great power that was being demonstrated was sandwiched between sharing with one another in verse 32 and sharing with one another in verse 35. **When there is unity and love of the brethren, great power is released in the church.** The result is that it will be obvious to those in the world that we are Christians. It is by this practical love for one another that all men will know that we are His followers.

In 1 John 3:10, John tells us that "the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." Then, in verse 16 he tells us how to love our brother. He says, we know love by this, that He (Christ) laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Notice that it is the brethren that we are called to lay our lives down for.

(1 John 3:10-16) "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. ...{16} We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Then, in verse 17, John tells us what this looks like in a practical way. He says that whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him."

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(1 John 3:17) "But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? {18} Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. {19} We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him,"

This is easy to preach, but difficult to flesh out. There are so many needs out there. One person may be in need because they are living beyond their means. He may be living a life of pleasure, and eating out a lot. He may be spending his money at the casinos or at the golf course. Proverbs says that "he who loves pleasure will become a poor man. He who loves wine and oil will not become rich." A person who is living beyond their means will be poor and needy. We should not have to make personal sacrifices to enable this person's spending habits. The most loving thing we can do for this person is speak the truth in love. We need to help them with a budget. We have to help them become good stewards.

(Proverbs 21:17) "He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich."

Another brother may be in need because he refuses to work. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians that if a brother refuses to work, do not let him eat. We have to have discernment. The best way to help this brother is to exhort him to work in quiet fashion and eat his own bread. This is tough love.

(2 Thessalonians 3:10-12) "For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat. {11} For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. {12} Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread."

We must compassionately love the brethren and help one another out. But, at the same time, **we must exercise wisdom and discernment when helping others.** Otherwise, we will not be good stewards. God expects you and I to be good stewards of the things that He has entrusted to us. There must be a balance of compassion and wisdom.

4. Love World

a. For God so loved the world (John 3:16, Gal 6:10)

The fourth arena that we must have love is for those outside the church, the world. When the Bible speaks about the world, it refers to everyone in the world. In 1 John 2:2, it says that "He Himself is the propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." Contrary to what some reformed theologians teach, the world does not refer to Christians. The "our" refers to Christians; the world refers to those outside the church. **God not only took care of our sins, but also the sins of the world.**

(1 John 2:2) "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

God loved the world so much that He sent His only begotten Son into the world so that whosoever would believe would have everlasting life. He did not love only the brethren. There would

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not have been any brethren if He had not first loved the world.

(John 3:16) ""For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Paul writes in Romans that **God demonstrated His own love toward us while we were yet sinners**; Christ died for us. God loves His bride. He loves the church. He lavishes His love on us. We are His children, the sheep of His pasture.

(Romans 5:8) "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

John says, "see how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God." He loves the church, but He also loves all people. He loved the world so much that He sent His Son to die for our sins. **God has shown great love by calling us His children.**

(1 John 3:1) "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him."

In the Introduction I mentioned that **Jesus associated with the sinners or the world**. He ate with the tax-gatherers and sinners. They were coming to listen to Him. They did not feel condemned, rejected, judged, or hated. They felt acceptance and love. They felt that they had the freedom to come to Him. Even the Pharisees and scribes grumbled that He received sinners and ate with them. In the same way that Jesus touched the lives outside His circles; to those who did not know Him yet, we must reach out in love to those outside the church. We must be willing to associate, and touch the lives of those outside the church.

(Luke 15:1-2) "Now all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. {2} And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

How do we do that? Let me give you some practical ways of loving those in the world. We work with people every day. We see people at the laundromat. We see people at the grocery store. We see people at the fitness clubs. We see our neighbors. There are people around us that do not know Christ. We must be willing to introduce ourselves. We must be willing to talk to them and relate to them. Ask them questions and take an interest in them. Invite them over to share a meal or to go workout with you. That is what Jesus did. He shared meals with people. There is something special about hospitality. **One practical way to reach out is through hospitality.**

In Romans 12, Paul says that we need to contribute to the needs of the saints. That shows love to the brethren. But, Paul does not stop there. He continues by saying, "practicing hospitality. The Greek word is *philonexia*. This is made up of two root words, *philos*, which means love and *xenos*, which means stranger or foreigner. We are not only to meet the needs of those in the church, but we are to love strangers. The normal use of hospitality is entertaining people in our home with either a meal or by providing accommodations. Normally we do this for people we know, but the Scriptural meaning of this is to do this for strangers.

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(Romans 12:13) "contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality."

G5381. philonexia, fil-on-ex-ee'-ah; from G5382; hospitableness:--entertain strangers, hospitality.
G5382. philoxenos, fil-ox'-en-os; from G5384 and G3581; fond of guests, i.e. hospitable:--given to (lover of, use) hospitality.

In 1 Timothy 5:10, Paul writes about taking care of widows. The church was to take care of those who are widows indeed. He gave qualifications to help churches determine who they should bear the burden of taking care of. One of the qualifications is that she must have shown hospitality to strangers. The Greek word is xenodochia, which the KJV translates as lodged strangers. I think this is a good translation. It is not just taking care of those we know, but taking in people that we do not know – strangers.

(1 Timothy 5:10) "having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work."

(1 Timothy 5:10) "Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work."

The writer of Hebrews also tells us not to neglect showing hospitality to strangers. He says that some of us may have entertained angels without knowing it. We may miss a message from a messenger of the Lord when we neglect hospitality.

(Hebrews 13:2) "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."

The very next verse gives us an example of reaching out in love to others. It says, "remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them." **Another way to love others is to reach out to prisoners.** There are believers in prison that need to be visited. At the same time, there are many unbelievers in prison that need to be remembered.

(Hebrews 13:3) "Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body."

I will never forget what the Holy Spirit spoke to me one day as I was driving to the maximum security prison where I was on staff. I had worked hard on preparing a message to preach and I was praying over my upcoming day of ministry. And, He said, "It is not what you say that is going to make a difference; it is just being with them." These prisoners felt remembered, loved, and cared for by my visits. To the men in the various dormitories that I visited, my visits were special. They looked forward to my weekly visits with them. Time with them meant love.

One inmate told me that what he appreciated about me was that I listened to him. It showed that I was interested and he felt valuable and honored. We must find ways to relate to people and show them the love of Christ.

Conclusion

You may be wondering this morning about how you get this earmark of love. John tells us In 1 John 4 that everyone who loves has been born of God. Those who do not love do not know God. If we know God and have experienced His love, we must love others. If we do not have love for others, we must really ask ourselves, “do I know God?” This is critical because the distinguishing mark of a follower of God is that we will have love for one another.

(1 John 4:7-12) "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. {8} The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

If you have not personally experienced the love of God, it is impossible to show that love to others. We must be born of God and know God. John tells us a few verses later that we love because He first loved us. We must first experience His love before we can love others.

(1 John 4:19) "We love, because He first loved us."

Being born of God is a single event. It is a simple matter of believing and receiving Jesus Christ into your life. John tells us that as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. Have you received Christ. If not, let me encourage you to simply say a prayer like this. Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God and that You died to forgive us of our sins. I ask You to come into my life and to forgive me of my sins. I receive You as the Lord and Master of my life. Amen.

(John 1:12) "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,"

The second part of what John said, to know God, is not a single event; it is a lifelong pursuit. We must spend time with the Father to get to know the Father. The only way to get to know someone is to spend time with them. Do you want to know your spouse, your children, or your neighbor, spend time with them. Spend time talking and asking questions. Learn to listen. Learn to observe. Find out what they like and do not like. Find out what they enjoy. Spend time working with them. Spend time playing with them. As you spend quality time with someone, you will get to know them. Our relationship with God is no different; we must spend time with the Father to get to know Him.

Jesus said that if we are going to abide in love, we must abide in God. That means that we are living and fellowshiping with the Father at all times. We are dwelling in His presence. We are spending time in His word. We are spending time in prayer. We are in constant fellowship with Him. When we abide in Him, we will abide in love.

(1 John 4:16) "And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

This morning you may be thinking that you have already received Christ, and you are spending time with Him, but your heart has been cold or indifferent towards others. You have not had the Good Samaritan's attitude towards others. You have not had a compassion towards those who are hurt,

Following God – The Earmark of a Follower

broken, wounded, or needy. Your heart has been hardened. This morning I encourage you to confess this to God. Acknowledge your sin to God. He says that when we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Repentance softens our heart. Repentance brings forth an outpouring of His Holy Spirit. The oil of the Holy Spirit softens up hard leathery hearts. Ask the Lord to forgive you for your lack of love for others. Ask Him to soften your heart. Ask Him to fill You full of His love for people. He would be delighted to do this in your life.

(1 John 1:9) "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Following God – The Earmark of a Follower

Introduction (Deut 6:4-5, Matt 4:18-20, Luke 15:1-2)

- An earmark is a method of _____ livestock. (Psalms 100:3)
- The identifying characteristic or earmark of a follower is _____. (John 13:34-35)
- The difference between believers and unbelievers should be _____. (1 John 3:10)

1. Love God

- God is the source of all _____. (1 John 4:7-12)
- To love we must first receive _____ love.
- When we _____ with God, we also have _____ with others. (1 John 1:3)
- We show our love to God by _____ His commandments. (John 14:21, 1 John 5:2-3)
- We are not under the law. Our obedience is out of love, not bondage. (Romans 8:1-2, Gal 1:1-3, 5:1-3)
- A second way that we can love God is to love _____. (1 John 4:20-21)
- God puts a _____ on getting reconciled to others. (Matt 5:23-24)

2. Love Family

- Husbands are to _____ their wives. (Eph 5:25-32)
- Wives are to _____ their husbands. (Eph 5:1-2, 25-32, Tit 2:3-5)
- Parents are to _____ their children. (Titus 2:3-5, 1 John 3:1)
- Parents should raise their children in the _____ of love. (Eph 3:17-19)
- We must communicate our _____ to children through words, deeds, and truth. (1 John 3:18, Pro 27:5)
- We must also show _____ to widows, and other members of our _____. (1 Tim 3:5-8)

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3. Love Brethren (1 John 3:16, Gal 6:10)

- We are exhorted to _____ for the brethren. (1 John 3:16, 10-19)
- We are to do good to all men, _____ to our brethren. (Gal 6:10)
- When there is unity and _____ of the brethren, great _____ is released. (Acts 4:32-35)
- We must exercise _____ and discernment when helping others. (Pr 21:17, 2 Thess 3:10-12)

4. Love World (John 3:16, Gal 6:10)

- God not only took care of our sins, but also the sins of the _____. (1 John 2:2)
- God _____ the world so much that He sent His only begotten Son. (John 3:16)
- God demonstrated His _____ to us while we were yet sinners. (Rom 5:8)
- God has shown _____ by calling us His children. (1 John 3:1)
- Jesus associated with the sinners or the _____. (Luke 15:1-2)
- One way to reach out is through _____. (Rom 12:13, 1 Tim 5:10, Heb 13:2)
- Another way is to reach out to _____. (Heb 13:3)

Conclusion (1 John 4:7-12, 1 John 4:19, John 1:12, 1 John 4:16, 1 John 1:9)

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