

Doctrinal Summary of Love: Evidence of Being a Disciple

In John 13:35 Jesus told His disciples that loving one another will be the evidence that they are His.

“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The word “by” is translated from the Koine Greek word ἐν (“en”) which more literally means, “in the instrumentality of.” It identifies something as the tool or instrument used to carry out an action. Its position at the forefront of the statement places an extra focus or emphasis upon that which is the tool used to accomplish the action of the main verb in the main portion of the statement. Furthermore, ἐν provides a way of grouping an entire idea into the means by which another the action of the main verb is carried out. The entire idea grouped together by ἐν is the phrase “if you have love for one another.” Having love for one another is the instrument by which men will know (the main verb of the statement) that Jesus’ disciples are His disciples.

The word “know” is translated from the Koine Greek word γνώσονται (“g’noh-son-tai”) which more literally means, “they really will participate in the action and be affected by the action in a point in time in the future to know something through experience that results in a personal understanding of how academic fact relates to circumstances.” This type of knowledge is knowledge that is understood when it is witnessed or experienced on display. Whereas academic knowledge comes through instruction or recognition of fact, experiential knowledge is the result of witnessing academic fact at work so that one comes away with a comprehensive, though not exhaustive, understanding of the mechanics of how the facts are applied and function. Thus, experiential knowledge requires one to be a participant in what is happening rather than a passive hearer or observer. Jesus’ statement is identifying that men will come to have a personal understanding that Jesus’ disciples indeed are His disciples as a result of having personal experience with the love that the disciples have for each other. If that is, the disciples actually have unconditional love for each other.

The word “if” is translated from the Koine Greek word ἐάν (“e-an”) which more literally means, “if, maybe or maybe not.” It introduces a conditional statement that is comprised of two parts: a protasis and an apodosis. The protasis first part of the statement and has the role of introducing the condition that must be fulfilled in order for the apodosis to be reality (the “if” part of a conditional statement). The apodosis is the second part of the statement which identifies what will take place should the protasis be fulfilled (the “then” part of a conditional statement). This is a third-class conditional “if” statement in Koine Greek, which identifies that the first part may or may not be fulfilled. Its fulfillment is possible, but not probable or expected. In other words, the disciples of Jesus might or might not actually have unconditional love for each other. That is left to their own individual obedience to God to love one another in the same way that Christ loved them. But, whether man experientially knows that they are Jesus’ disciples or not hinges on whether they do or do not have unconditional love for one another.

The body of Christ is comprised of disciples upon disciples upon disciples, generationally developed from the original disciples of Jesus. As such they are to have unconditional love for one another as a witness to the unbelieving world around them. Maybe they will and maybe they will not, but if believers fulfill Jesus’ instruction to have unconditional love for their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, they provide evidence to the unbelieving world around them that belong to Jesus as His disciples.