

John 13:35

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Analysis

Jesus declares 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples' (en touto gnosontai pantes hoti emoi mathetai este) - the identifying mark of genuine discipleship follows: 'if ye have love one to another' (ean agapen echete en allelois). The conditional ean (if) with present subjunctive echete indicates an ongoing condition, not a one-time demonstration. The phrase 'love one to another' (agapen en allelois) emphasizes mutual, reciprocal love within the Christian community. Jesus establishes that Christian identity is authenticated not primarily by doctrine, rituals, or moral purity, but by observable love among believers. This love serves as epistemic criterion - it provides evidence to watching world that disciples genuinely belong to Christ. The verse creates accountability: claims to follow Christ must be validated by loving relationships. Love becomes the apologetic that commends Christianity to skeptics.

Historical Context

In the context of first-century Judaism, sectarian identity was marked by distinctive practices - Pharisees by ritual purity, Essenes by communal property, Zealots by revolutionary zeal. Jesus establishes Christian distinctiveness through community love. The early church's radical care for poor, sick, and marginalized attracted pagan notice. Roman emperor Julian (4th century) complained that Christian care for the needy (even non-Christians) was winning converts. Medieval monastic communities and modern intentional communities have sought to embody this verse. However, church history also reveals failures - Crusades,

Inquisition, and denominational conflicts contradicted this command. The verse stands as both inspiration and indictment, calling each generation to authentic love. Francis Schaeffer's 'The Mark of the Christian' emphasized this verse as essential apologetic in skeptical age.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. Why did Jesus choose love rather than doctrine, worship, or morality as the defining mark of discipleship?
2. How does the observable nature of Christian love serve as evidence to unbelievers?

Interlinear Text

ἐν τούτῳ γνώσονται πάντες ὅτι ἐμοὶ μαθηταί ἔστε

By this men know all that disciples ye are

G1722 G5129 G1097 G3956 G3754 G1698 G3101 G2075

ἐὰν ἀγάπην ἔχητε ἐν ἀλλήλοις

if love ye have By

G1437 G26 G2192 G1722 G240

Additional Cross-References

1 John 2:10 (Love): He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

John 17:21 (Parallel theme): That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

1 John 2:5 (Love): But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

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