

Doctrinal Summary of Love: The Believer's Duty

In 1 John 4:7, John exhorts believers to love one another as a part their duty in the family of God.

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”

The phrase “let us love” is translated from the Koine Greek word ἀγαπῶμεν (“ah-gah-poh-men”) which more literally means, “might we perform the continuous type of action to self-sacrificially and unconditionally love regardless of the response received because of our character and decision to pursue what is best for another.” It identifies an exhortative command that expresses John’s instruction for believers to unconditionally love one another. The possibility for this to happen exists and believers are to perform the action to make the possibility a reality. This requires believers to develop the necessary character required in order to unconditionally love one another and for believers to make the decision to unconditionally love each other. This is a logical duty of the believer because love comes from God as have all believers. Only those who are born from God have the potential to love others unconditionally.

The word “born” is translated from the Koine Greek word “γενήνεται (“ge-gen-nae-tai”) which more literally means, “he has really been acted upon in a completed action in the past with results continuing on to have been birthed (spiritually).” It identifies that every single individual who engages in legitimate unconditional love towards another has been born spiritually by God. His spiritual birth occurred, and now he remains spiritually alive as a result. The spiritual birth occurred simultaneously to his faith in Christ for salvation (cf. 1 John 5:1) and now he has the potential and duty to unconditionally love his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. The spiritual birth takes place prior to any individual being able to unconditionally love another. But just being born spiritually by God does not mean the believer will actually love another unconditionally. Unconditional love comes from knowing God.

The word “know” is translated from the Koine Greek word γινώσκει (“gi-noh-skei”) which more literally means, he really performs the continuous type of action to know something through experience resulting in personal understanding of how academic fact relates to experience.” It identifies that a believer’s ability to fulfill his duty of unconditionally loving another is based on whether he has an experiential knowledge of God as a result of walking in his relationship with God. As the believer walks with God he knows how the facts of who God is relate to how God operates and the believer’s life. Consequently, the believer develops a firsthand knowledge of who God is and how He operates which in turn develops an ability in him to unconditionally love others in the same way God unconditionally loves him. Without this personal relationship and experience with God’s unconditional love in his own life the believer is not going to learn how to unconditionally love other believers around him.

John’s exhortation identifies that the ability to unconditionally love another is only possible after one has been born spiritually. Yet, despite having the potential to do so through spiritual birth, the believer’s understanding of how to love unconditionally comes from experientially knowing how God loves him as a result of walking together with God. Thus, both spiritual birth and walking with God are required in order for the believer to unconditionally love others around him. Because God has made it possible and commanded believers to walk in love toward each other, it is the believer’s duty to actually perform the action to unconditionally love his fellow brother and sister in Christ.