

Showing Up in Love

1 Corinthians 12:31b—13:13

Introduction

So far, St. Paul has talked about spiritual gifts, how we all have different ones and God uses these gifts to build up unity of faith in the church. Now, he is going to tell us a *more excellent way* (**1 Corinthians 12:31b**). As excellent as it is that God builds the church with spiritual gifts, there is something even more excellent, more important to the church—the way of love. Today, we see how **CHRIST SHOWS UP IN LOVE**.

Not Just Any Love

When speaking about love, we must always be clear as to what type of love we're talking about. The **KJV** reads "charity." This is how they translated the Greek *agape*. So, while we often use this Scripture for weddings, it has nothing to do with romantic love. Then again, a good marriage isn't built on romantic love. *Agape* is the love that comes only from God. It is a selfless, sacrificial love. We're going to take a closer look at this love and see how Christ shows up in it.

Love Completes Us (v. 1-3)

According to Paul, we could have all the gifts of the Spirit, including the greatest faith of all; we could have all understanding and knowledge, do great things, even die a martyr's death, but without love, we would be nothing. This love completes us. It completes us because it is the love that is the fulfillment of all the Commandments. We are justified by faith. This love is a fruit of that faith. In other words, God gives every believer this kind of love. So, we read in the Apology: *If anyone should cast away love, even though he has great faith, he does not keep his faith* (**Apology, Article V, p. 97-98**). This sacrificial love completes us.

Love Focusses on the Other (v. 4-7)

As I said, this is a selfless, sacrificial love. As such, we see in **verses 4-7** that this love focusses on the other. Other types of love focus on a relationship. They are two-way streets. Romantic love, if unreciprocated, dies out. Brotherly love is between two friends. Even mother love is directed only at the child of that particular mother. I love you because you are *my* child. But as we can see from these verses, *agape* is so selfless, it doesn't seem to expect to be returned, as it *bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things* (**v. 7**). This is the love that allows us to put the best possible spin on everything our neighbor does, as we see we are to do in the **8th Commandment**. This kind of love won't allow us to think evil of other people. This is the love that allows us to love the sinner while hating the sin.

Love Is Perfect (v. 8-12)

Love is perfect because it never ends. In the life to come, all the gifts of the Spirit will pass away. They are only partial. The gifts are given to us to help us make it through this life. We only need them now. When we see Him as He is, there will be no more need for faith and hope, for faith is the

conviction of things not seen (**Hebrews 11:1**) and we only hope for what we do not yet have (**Romans 8:24**). But perfect love is eternal.

Love Is the Greatest Gift from God (v. 13)

This is what makes love greater than faith and hope. In one sense, faith is greater because righteousness comes by faith. In fact, everything we receive from God we receive through faith. The hope in Christ that we have, we receive through faith. We receive His love through faith. Faith is the first gift of grace we receive. However, love is eternal, not just for this life. That's what makes it the greatest gift of grace we receive from God. Christ shows up in this because this description of love could be a description of Christ (read **verses 4-7**, substituting "Christ" for "love").

Receiving the Gift

As I said, this love is a gift of grace. It is a fruit of righteousness. We receive this love by grace through faith. God gives it in Word and Sacrament. When we receive the body and blood of Christ, He gives us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. He also gives us this love that only He can give, a love that shows the world that Jesus is the Son of God. Just as He said, *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (**John 13:35**).

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
