

In this chapter Paul is elevating love as the most excellent way (12:31), not merely the manner in which we do things, but the path we take in life. Without a life of love the exercise of spiritual gifts would not personally benefit the one who used them. Those gifts would pass away, but love would not end. Three virtues remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. This is the apex of Paul's presentation and its impact should not be missed. Therefore, it is good to carefully understand faith and hope and their relation to love.

I. *Faith*

1. *Definition:* Objectively there is "the" faith, i.e. that which believe. Subjectively there is "saving" faith and the spiritual gift of faith by which even miracles were done. But faith here is probably that general trust in God that He will do as He has said and will act according to His character. Faith has an object, a person trusts something or someone. The effectiveness of faith is dependent upon the object. The object of our faith is God.
2. *Its place in the Christian life according to Scripture:* For example, righteousness comes by faith (Hebr 11:7; Eph 2:8-9) and by faith alone (Gal 5:6); the waiting for that righteousness is done by faith (Gal 5:5); by faith we inherit what was promised (Hebrews 6:12); in faith we now may draw near to God (Hebrews 10:22); it is faith from which good works spring (1 Thessalonians 1:3; cf. James 2); without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).
3. *Its relationship to love and hope:* Faith expresses itself through love (Galatians 2:6). We obtain access to God by faith and thereby obtain our hope (Romans 5:1-5). As we trust God, he fills us with joy and peace, till hope overflows out of us (Romans 15:13).
4. *Its duration:* Faith, like love, never ends. As created beings, we will recognize forever our dependence upon our Creator-God.

II. *Hope*

1. *Definition:* Hope can be considered subjective, i.e., an expectation, or objective, that which is expected. Hope is not the same as a wish (desire without expectation) and is more likely to be associated with certainty. It is usually positive in the NT but can have either secular or spiritual examples. Hope is distinct from faith, when properly understood. Faith is the trust we have in God to bring something about. Hope is the expectancy for that which God will accomplish. We sometimes use the word "anticipate" in this sense.
2. *Its place in the Christian life according to Scripture:* We hope for righteousness (Gal 5:5); our hope is to receive God's glory (Romans 5:2); we hope with Paul in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6; Acts 26:6-7 w/ 22-23; 24:15; cf. 1 Cor 15). Hope is produced through suffering, perseverance, and character building (Romans 5:3-4); hope is a refuge to which we flee (Hebrews 6:18); hope is a firm and secure anchor for the soul (Hebrews 6:19).
3. *Its relation to faith and love:* Continued living in faith makes our hope sure (Hebrews 6:11); our love is the product of God's love in us which in turn guarantees that our hope will not disappoint (Romans 5:5). See also Romans 4:18.
4. *Its duration:* Hope is eternal. Although we will receive the glory and the resurrection, we will continue to live in expectancy for what God will do and reveal. His judgments are unsearchable (Romans 11:33). We will never exhaust His wisdom and knowledge. Eternity will not be boring.

III. *Love*

1. *Why is love the greatest?*

Although some commentators think this question unimportant, I am curious why such great virtues as faith and hope are eclipsed by love. There are perhaps at least three reasons.

 - a. Love belongs to the essential nature of God. He is love, which is not said of faith and hope. Love is acted out toward others, but faith and hope are not.
 - b. Faith and hope are described as modes or expressions of love (13:7). Love believes in all ways and hopes in all ways. As a way of life we move from love to faith and from love to hope. When love is a part of our character and a mark of our life-style, than faith and hope will also be a part of it.
 - c. Love is directed to the benefit of others. That which edifies is elevated in chapters 12 & 14 and love edifies. So it is elevated above faith and hope.
2. *How shall we then live?*

I would suggest two primary steps which summary much of what was said about the entire chapter.

 - a. Acknowledge love as the more excellent way (12:31b).
 - b. "Follow the way of love" (14:1). Submit to God (to His definition of love, to His truth, etc.). Evaluate your life. Is it loving? Take the initial to add new ways of loving.

Love is the more excellent way. But the natural sinful self of man is basically self-centered and cannot love this way. Our sin has separated us from God, offended God and requires judgment. But Jesus died in order that sin might be forgiven. When we receive that forgiveness, we also receive the Spirit of God who produces the fruit of love in our lives. Love – like it is described here – it the fruit of God's Spirit living and working in us. Such love becomes a mark of being a child of God, a most excellent way.