

Introduction

I'd like to begin by telling you about an unusual company that formed 20 or so years ago. I say "unusual" because of its purpose, to deflate overblown egos. For a \$35 fee, one of its employees would hit a pompous person of the customer's choice in the face with a pie. During its first two months in business, over 60 such hits were made. Picture it in your mind. A professor who gave you a lower grade than he should have or a boss who fired you for no good reason steps off the elevator and "wham," gets a pie in the face. One of the company's employees defended his newly discovered profession this way: **"A pie in the face brings a man's dignity down to where it should be and puts the big guys on the same level as everyone else."**

But that isn't true is it? A pie in the face, by itself, almost certainly won't bring a person's dignity down to where it should be. But there is one thing that will. That one thing is the agape love of 1 Corinthians 13. You can see what I mean in the last line in verse 4. That line reveals the fourth and fifth ways that agape love manifests itself in our everyday lives, both of which I want us to examine today.

Love Does Not Brag - Boast

The fourth way that agape love manifests itself is this. It **"does not brag."** The Greek word translated "brag" here is picturesque. It comes from a root word that connotes "windbag." So to brag means to be a windbag. People can be windbags in one of two ways.

The first is to boast. Some people have their own public relations department, themselves. They toot their own horns. They praise and promote themselves. They make the good things they are, have, or do known to others. They're windbags, in other words, because they boast.

Two years ago, I spent several hours with a group of people that included a Christian leader. During the time we were together, I overheard him tell various people, on separate occasions, that he wrote

two books, did pro bono (free) work when he practiced his profession, was a Colonel when he was in the armed forces, and is a sought after speaker. I knew a Christian physician in Akron who paid for specialized license plates that displayed his initials followed by "MD." He wanted everyone to know he was a physician. I once worked under a senior minister at a church who always signed "Ph.D." after his name and insisted that everyone on his staff call him "Doctor."

Those little anecdotes illustrate two things. One is what boasting is. It's people tooting their own horns, praising and promoting themselves. The other is how they do that – in a whole host and variety of ways.

That's *what* people do and *how* and here's *why*. I read about three rules that some children drew up for their newly constructed tree house: "**1. Nobody act big. 2. Nobody act small. 3. Everybody act medium.**" Those are rather perceptive rules aren't they, especially that first one. It reveals why people boast. It's to be big. They want others to admire, esteem, and perhaps even envy them and boast so they will.

But agape love, according to verse 4, doesn't do that. It doesn't boast. That clearly implies that it's unloving to boast, which is the case. There's an old adage that explains why it is, "**Self-praise smells bad.**" We say it differently today but the meaning is the same, "**Self-praise stinks.**" That vivid metaphor explains the effect of boasting on others. It does to them psychologically what a bad smell does to them physically. What do people do when they see a skunk? They run! What do they do when they see a boaster? They run! Boasting is offensive and turns people off. They know, if they're perceptive enough, what the boaster is doing. He's using them to make him bigger and them smaller. That's an unloving thing to do and believe me, no one likes it.

So don't boast. Be what you are, have what you have, and do what you do in secret instead. That's what Jesus tells us to do in Matthew 6:1-4. "In secret" doesn't mean that we hide the good things that we are, have, or do. It simply means that we disregard the human context when it comes to them. We make God's opinion the only one that we care

about. The result is that we utterly indifferent to whether anyone else knows about them or not. We are, have, and do those good things unto God and God alone - in "secret" in other words.

Love Does Not Brag – Dominate Conversation

People can brag and be windbags in a second way – by dominating conversation.

Here's a syllogism for you. People are most interested in what they love the most. Most people love themselves the most. Most people, therefore, are most interested in themselves. They're windbags, in other words, and it shows. They come to a person or group, impliedly say, "**Here I am**", and then become "**me-deep**" in conversation. They take the conversation over and focus it on their thoughts, opinions, interests, concerns, experiences, likes, dislikes, and so on. Just last week, I had a board meeting with a pastor who is known for dominating conversations. Unfortunately, I got stuck with him during a ten minute break in which he prattled on non-stop about several crucial issues, not once asking what I thought about either. We all know people who do that. They dominate conversation. They take it over and focus it on themselves.

But those who are like Jesus don't. They love people and are genuinely interested in them as a result. That makes them, according to James 1:19, slow to speak and quick to hear. They aren't windbags, in other words, and it shows. They come to a person or group, impliedly say, "**There you are**", and then become "**you-deep**" in conversation. They discern the thoughts, opinions, interests, concerns, experiences, likes, dislikes, and so on of others and then focus the conversation on that. They ask questions like "What do you think about that", "What is your experience with that", "What's going on in your life", "What do you prefer", and more. People who do that are so refreshing and affirming aren't they. They're the kind of people we want to be around because it adds value to us when we are.

There's a question all of us need to thoughtfully and honestly ask

and answer. Which kind of person am I? Am I the kind who says, “**Here I am**” and becomes “**me-deep**” in conversation? Or am I the kind who says, “**There you are**” and becomes “**you-deep**” in conversation. I hope it’s the second because that’s what love does.

That then is the fourth way that agape love manifests itself. It doesn’t brag. It neither boasts nor dominates conversation.

Love Is Not Arrogant

The fifth way, also in verse 4, is that it “**is not arrogant.**” That’s how the NASB translates the Greek word “arrogant.” I like how the KJV translates it better though because it’s more descriptive, “**is not puffed up.**” The word “puffing” is often used in modern advertising. It refers to a companies making exaggerated claims about their products or services: Visa – “everywhere you want to be”; WINS Radio in New York – “You give us 22 minutes and we’ll give you the world”; CNN – “the most trusted name in news”; Sherwin-Williams paint – “cover the earth.” Those are clearly exaggerations and that’s what the word “arrogant” connotes here. Arrogant people are those who have an exaggerated sense of their own importance. Paul says it well in Romans 12:3. They think more highly of themselves than they ought to think.

There was a *Peanuts* comic strip that captured the essence of arrogance. While Lucy is swinging on the playground, Charlie Brown comments to her, “**It says here that the world revolves around the sun once a year.**” Whereupon, Lucy abruptly stops swinging and quizzically responds: “**The world revolves around the sun? Are you sure? I thought it revolved around me.**” That really is the perspective of arrogant people. They think far more highly of themselves than they ought to. They think that the world and the lives of everyone in it revolve around them, exist for them. They wouldn’t admit that and might not even know it but they do.

I once witnessed a man give a bank teller a tongue lashing because he waited 15 minutes in line to be served. He angrily told her it was

ridiculous he had to wait so long and that he ought to move his accounts to another bank. Notice that he didn't give her the tongue lashing because everyone else had to wait so long. Also notice that what he impliedly wanted the bank to do. Call in an extra teller on her day off so that he'd have to wait only 5 minutes instead of 15 to be served. It's like the whole world, including the bank, revolves around him.

And that's precisely the point. Arrogant puffed up people think more highly of themselves than they ought to. That in turn dictates how they perceive and interpret things – as it relates to them. They see everything in terms of themselves, in terms of how their interests, desires, and concerns are affected.

Love, though, is humble. That's the flip side of the coin. Agape isn't arrogant. It's humble. Paul defines what humility is in Philippians 2:3. He writes there, **“But with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.”** They aren't of course, objectively, in the eyes of God. But we nevertheless regard them that way because we love them. We perceive and interpret things as it relates to them. We see everything primarily in terms of them, in terms of how their interests, desires, and concerns are affected.

I know a pastor who's being slandered by a Christian who left his church. One of the worst things a person can say about a pastor is that he doesn't preach from the Bible, which is what this Christian is saying about him. It's revealing though. He's more concerned about her relationship with God than his own reputation. He said: **“I'm praying for her because I don't want her to die and meet her Maker as a slanderer.”** He's humble and regards her as being more important than he is. He sees things primarily in terms of her interests, not his own.

How to Be Humble

We should be and do the same and Paul tells us how in Colossians 3:12-13, **“put on a heart of humility.”** “Put on” is something we do, which makes clear that we have a part to play in the Holy Spirit making

us humble. That part is to practice humility. I've chosen the word "practice" carefully. That's how we put it on, by practicing it, which means to purposely act as if others are more important than we are.

The opportunities to do that in our everyday lives are almost countless. Let me give you examples of what I mean. I want to expound on an issue to show the people I'm with how knowledgeable I am - but don't. I keep quiet and listen to them expound instead. Or I want to say something that makes me appear better to someone than I really am - but don't. I keep quiet and trust all appearances to God instead. Or I want to refuse someone's request for help because it'll put me out - but don't. I sacrifice and grant it instead. Or I want to turn down someone's offer to help me because I'm independent and proud - but don't. I let him help me and be blessed instead. Or I want to get my way in a situation - but don't. I let the other person get his way instead.

You get the idea. There are countless opportunities in our everyday lives to act as if others are more important than we are. So we purposely look for those opportunities and when they arise, we pursue them. We consciously and consistently submit or subordinate ourselves to others. Submitting or subordinating - done in, through, and for God - is a powerful spiritual act that the Holy Spirit honors. He transforms us, makes us more humble, in the process of our doing it. So put on humility.

Conclusion

You can see that the fourth and fifth ways that agape love manifests itself are interrelated. The fourth, bragging, is a natural expression of the fifth, being arrogant. That makes my closing thought germane to both. In his book *Winning with People*, John Maxwell gives 25 principles for developing mutually beneficial relationships. One of those is what he calls "The Big Picture Principle," which is worth remembering as you leave. That principle is this, **"The entire population of the world - with one minor exception - is composed of others."**

someone's wants to get his way and I want to get mine – but don't. I let him get one thing and I want another and want to get my way . am but don't. I keep quiet that puts me in a good light in or I'm talking with a group of people and want them t

s if others are more important than we are. Countless opportunities arise in those routines to do that. So, we look for those opportunities and when we see them, we pursue them. The Holy Spirit honors that kind of effort and transforms us as we do it.

1. bragging around license plates
2. tooting horns
3. self-praise

11, 65

62

7 – believes all things

90 – not seek its own

101 – believes all things