Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Accents of Love
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6:11-13; 7:2-4
Code: 47-43

What a joy it is for us to be touching deeply the heart of the Apostle Paul in our study of 2 Corinthians. And I want to invite you, this morning, to take your Bible and turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 6. We find ourselves right about in the middle of this wonderful letter. And we are in store, this morning, for some great blessing.

Through the years people have asked me many questions, obviously. And one of the most common questions that I am asked is, "What is the hardest aspect of ministry? What is the most difficult part of spiritual leadership?" And I have consistently answered, that the hardest part of ministry is to be misjudged. The hardest part is to be falsely accused, to have your integrity unfairly attacked, to have people say things about you that are not related to reality or truth.

That's difficult because it has obviously the potential to destroy your integrity, to destroy people's trust and confidence, to hinder God's work and thus to dishonor the Lord Himself. It's much easier to deal with weakness and failure and short-comings and sins, you just face them, you confess them, you seek God's grace on their behalf, His power to change and you go on.

But false accusations and unjust attacks and lies are very, very difficult. There's really no way to deal with them because those who spread them are not interested in truth. And so when you have done everything possible to bring the truth to bear, you still haven't solved the problem. That's why they're so difficult. People who...who set lies in motion are not motivated by a deep sense of virtue. They're not motivated by a love of righteousness, though they usually pretend to be. They are not motivated by a love for the one against whom they cast these untruths. But rather they are motivated by revenge, jealousy, bitterness, a desire for prominence, self-seeking. They do not long for the purity of the truth. They do not desire the unity of the church. They don't seek the good of the one they attack. They don't seek the honor of the Lord. They have their own twisted goals of revenge or prominence or position or influence, or whatever it might be. And consequently it's very difficult to deal with those things because when you speak the truth, they'll find another way to attack.

It's common, however, for those in spiritual leadership to have to endure this. And no one faced more vicious, more aggressive and more relentless and more unfair attacks than the Apostle Paul. In fact, it seemed and certainly was true that the whole kingdom of darkness starting with Satan down through the demons and through the humans who were a part of that kingdom were after him. And since there was nothing in his life that they could use as a genuine accusation, they fabricated one after another.

Specifically in the case of the Corinthian church, false teachers had come into that town and they had lied about Paul in a number of ways. They sought power. They sought money. They sought prominence. They sought the opportunity to take over the church and see their demonic doctrine. And so, in order to achieve their goals they went after Paul and because there was nothing genuinely scandalous about his life, they just invented things. And they attempted to convince the church that he was a hypocrite, that he wa wicked, that he taught lies, that he truly did not represent God at all but himself. And the sad fact is that many in the church, as they always do, bought into the deception and they turned against Paul and they listened to heresy.

Paul became aware of this, profoundly concerned about it he writes 2 Corinthians. This is a letter back to them to attempt to defend his integrity, not for his own sake but for their sakes because he was the channel of divine truth. He was the spokesman for God Himself. He wanted to reestablish the people's confidence in him, a confidence that had grown out of nearly two years of very intimate fellowship. He wanted to reestablish what the Corinthians had heard and seen in his life, that he was indeed a godly man, a true apostle who spoke the Word of God.

Now as I said, there were a number of false accusations that were given against Paul. They really marshalled all that they could imagine. But at the top of the list was the accusation that Paul did not love the Corinthian believers, that he frankly had no place in his heart for them. He was abusive, manipulative, he was using them. They were nothing more than a means to a personal end. They were simply to be ground up in the machinery of his own achievements. He had no affection for them, no concern for them, no care for them, no heart for them, he only wanted to use them to gain money and to gain whatever other ends fit his own ego.

And so, as he writes this letter one of the things that he must address is this issue of loving them. Obviously any faithful shepherd, any true pastor would love his sheep. Certainly the Great Shepherd loves His sheep. John in his gospel makes that abundantly clear, doesn't he, that the Good Shepherd loves His sheep. And it would be true then of any under shepherd, anyone who stands in the place of Jesus Christ that he should be able to speak to his church the way John spoke to his churches when he called them "beloved." But they said Paul had no love for the Corinthian church.

He address that, by the way, several times in the this letter. For example, back in chapter 2 and verse 4, he says, "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears, not that you should be made sorrowful but that you might know the love which I have especially for you." There in no uncertain terms is an affirmation of his love.

Over in chapter 3 and verse 2 he says, "You are our letter written in our hearts." And there again, without using the term "love" he says that they are in his heart.

Toward the end of this letter in chapter 12 and verse 15 he says, "I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls and if I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?" Again affirming his great and sacrificial love for them in spite of how they treated him. Down in verse 19, at the end of the verse, he refers to them as his beloved.

So there are other places in this letter where Paul in no uncertain terms expresses his genuine love for the Corinthians. But it's one thing to say I love you, it's something else to prove it. And what he does in the text before us is prove it. And he proves it by defining the character of love and tying it in to how he dealt with the Corinthians.

Let's look at chapter 6 verses 11 through 13. "Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart has opened wide. You are not restrained by us but you are restrained in your own affections, now in a like exchange I speak as to children, Open wide to us also."

Not turn over to chapter 7 because this same language of love continues starting in verse 2 of chapter 7, "Make room for us in your hearts, we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one. I do not speak to condemn you for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. Great is my confidence in you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am overflowing with joy in all our afflictions."

Now what you have in those two passages made up of six verses is a clear-cut definition of love. In fact, the parallel passage, the closest parallel you can find is 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verses 4 through 8. You know that familiar passage where Paul describes love. It is the closest parallel to what I have just read you and I'll show you that as we go through this text.

Now you also must note that we skipped one whole section, chapter 6 verse 14 down through chapter 7 verse 1. And that is a section which we will consider in our next study. But that section which deals with separation, holiness, and cutting yourself off from association with unbelievers, particularly with the false teachers that have plagued the church, that section is bracketed by this language of love. Paul expresses his love in those verses at the end of chapter 6. He then launches into his discussion on separation and holiness but he can't leave the subject, so when that's concluded he goes right back to the language of love which we read in chapter 7 verses 2 through 4.

Here in those two passages separated by the text in the middle we touch the essence of what real love is like, not only the love that a pastor has for his people, but the love that every believer should have for others. This is not just a sermon about pastoral love, though I've called it, "Accents of Love," I've subtitled it, "Attitudes of a loving pastor," it's really more than that. It is, in the first place, the attitudes of a loving pastor but for all of us it is the accents of love. It puts the accents in the right place. It tells us what love is like, how it thinks, how it feels and how it acts.

To begin with, look at verse 11, the last statement of the verse, and you get an idea here that sort of opens up this passage. "Our heart is opened wide," he says. That is a lovely expression, by the way. The Greek term means "enlarged." Here you have an enlarged heart, this is not a physical diagnosis of a cardiac problem, he's talking not about a physical heart but he's talking about our spiritual heart, he's talking about having room in his heart for the Corinthians. This phrase was first used in 1 Kings 4:29 and we don't think of it often. We remember that Solomon was given wisdom and that verse says God gave Solomon wisdom. And we also remember that Solomon was given discernment and that verse says he was given a very great discernment. But it also says in 1 Kings 4:29 that Solomon was given a large heart like the sand that is on the seashore. He had an immense capacity to love people, to be so wise and so discerning and to have a heart as wide as the endless strands of the beach. That was Solomon. He had a massive capacity to embrace people into his heart...that's exactly what Paul is saying here is true of him. Our heart is opened wide. Remember again he uses the plural pronoun so that he doesn't always speak in the first person which might be seemingly selfish or self-centered, so he likes to use a plural pronoun even though he's referring to himself. His heart is opened wide.

What is he saying? There's plenty of room in my heart for you. Don't ever think that I don't love you. That's not true.

Go over to chapter 7 and verse 3, he says the same thing in another way in this text, middle of the verse, "I have said before that you are in our hearts." My heart is wide enough to embrace you and you're there. I have you in my heart. He said the same thing to the Philippians in Philippians 1:7, I have you in my heart. It's a beautiful expression. I've often used it as a way to express love through the years when I write letters to people. I'll say I have you in my heart. This is the testimony of the great preacher, the great missionary, the great theologian, the great champion of doctrine, sound doctrine, the great fighter of heresy, the loving pastor, he's saying...My heart is large enough to embrace you and you're there.

And this is remarkable, friends, it's remarkable because of the disgusting way in which the Corinthians had been acting. It's remarkable because of the way in which they had treated Paul. They had rebelled against him. They had defected from him. They had criticized him. They had believed lies that were told against him. There seemed to be no room in their hearts for him at all. They had shut him out. But he hadn't done that to them. And love doesn't do that.

We remember 1 Corinthians 13, don't we, that love is patient, that love is kind, that love is not jealous, it is not easily provoked, that love does not keep a record of wrongs suffered, that love bears all things, believes the best about people, hopes the best, endures all things and no matter what comes along, love never fails. And the evidence of Paul's really genuine agape, his deep true love was that no matter how they were treating him, he still had them in his heart. So here in these two passages

without ever using the term for love, he defines what love is. He is a living illustration of genuine, spiritual love. And believe me, if he were the proud self-centered hypocrite that the false teachers were saying he was, then he would be angry and he would be bitter and he would be self-justifying and he would be aggressively hostile toward them. But he wasn't. His heart was wide open and he loved them and what they did to him didn't change that at all. He wasn't feeling anger, he wasn't feeling bitterness. What he was feeling was hurt and sorrow and sadness. And that's what he reflects on in this letter. But his wounded heart loved no less. What an example.

So here is an example of how agape love really works. And it's a refreshing reminder of the nobility and the character of the highest virtue to which we are called, namely love. We're to love one another in this way. This love is given toward a rebellious, critical, unkind, unfair people and it is described in a series of statements that are the accents of love.

I'm going to give you ten. I know you don't believe it but I'm going to do it. I'm going to give you ten descriptives, ten aspects, ten features, ten characteristics of this true love.

Number one, honesty...honesty. They said he didn't love them. He responds in chapter 6 verse 11, "Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians." The first thing about true love is that it is honest. It doesn't hold anything back that is important. It doesn't hold anything back that is beneficial. As Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:20, "I have held nothing back that is profitable to you." Love holds nothing back. And when a heart is filled with love, love will dictate that they...that that heart must speak. As Jesus said in Matthew 12:34, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks," and when the heart is full of love, the mouth will speak with all honesty. And that honesty will show up in three ways as it did with Paul.

A heart of love will speak honestly about God. It will speak honestly about the object of its love. And it will speak honesty about itself. If I really love, I'm honest. I'm honest about what God wants said. I'm honest about you. And I'm honest about me. That's the stuff of real love.

Now Paul was honest. Some people say it's not loving to confront people's sin, but it's honest and it is loving. Paul says that we are to speak the truth in love. And Paul did that. When he came to the Corinthian city, city steeped in sin, he said he came not to speak in superior words of man's wisdom, cleverness of human speech, he gave no opportunity to identify himself with any of the extant philosophies, he didn't try to find his way into their hearts subtlely through some cultural nuances. He confronted them. He preached the cross. He preached all that the cross implied. He preached the gospel. He called for repentance. He held nothing back. That was the truth and that's what he preached. And when he wrote to them, as he says in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 13, "I wrote to you exactly the truth, I wrote to you exactly what you read, there was no hidden agenda, there was nothing underlying that."

Later on he says to them, "I spoke what I believed." Remember that back in chapter 4 verse 13, "I believed, therefore I spoke." I gave you the truth, a truth about your sin, the truth about the gospel. And then when I wrote 1 Corinthians I told you the truth about the chaos in the church. I told you the truth about your iniquities. I told you the truth about the need to get things right. Always the truth...always the truth. Sometimes I think most often the truth hurts but it's loving because it's the truth.

He even had to confront them about whether they were really Christians. But that was important because that was the truth. He closes this epistle, 2 Corinthians 13:8, by saying, "We can do nothing against the truth but only for the truth."

Let me tell you, if you love somebody you tell them the truth about God, about God's Word, about God's standards, about God's requirement, or you don't really love them. If you don't love them enough to bring them into the knowledge of the truth from God, then you don't love them very much. Is that not so? Love doesn't hide saving truth. Love doesn't hide sanctifying truth. It speaks it because it cares so deeply about the object of its affection.

Secondly he spoke the truth about them. When it came to confronting their sin, he did it. The whole first letter is just filled with it. From chapter 1 all the way to chapter 16 he had to confront their iniquity. Well actually in chapter 15 it was their confusion over the resurrection and in chapter 16 some final miscellaneous notes, but all the rest of it had to do with their sin and he confronted it as boldly as he could possibly confront it because love is candid. It speaks with candor to the individual that it loves. That's true in a relationship. That's true in a family. That's true in a friendship. That's true in a church.

Here in 2 Corinthians he has to confront their sin. And he says to them in chapter 1 verse 18, "My conversation to you is not yes and no," because, you see, he had been accused of vacillating and he says I haven't vacillated, I've said yes, yes, and when it was no, it was no, no. In other words, I didn't say yes and no on the same issue. I didn't say one thing to one person and another thing to another, I was truthful. I was candid. I spoke the truth on all accounts.

In chapter 2 verse 9, "I wrote that I might put you to the test whether you're obedient in all things. I am concerned about your spiritual condition." Over in chapter 7 he says in verse 8, "Though I caused you sorrow by my letter I don't regret it," and down in verse 10 he says, "Being sorrowful to the point of repentance is the issue." And then in verse 10, "That is a repentance without regret." In other words, I...I made you sorry but I don't regret it because it led you to repentance. He was so direct. He was so candid. He was so straightforward. And that's what love does. Love always speaks candidly about a person's condition.

And then thirdly, he spoke the truth about himself. And that is probably what he has most in mind here. He is saying to them, "Look, I've opened up my heart to you and my mouth has let it out. My heart is talking, can't you hear it?" Already now for six chapters we've heard it. He has said I love you. He has said I've been truthful with you, I do not have a hidden life of shame. I am not a deceiver. I am not a manipulator. I have suffered. I've put my life on the line for you. This is my heart, don't you hear it?

Love does this, it speaks from the depth. It's deep. It holds nothing back that needs to be said about God, about the person, or about itself. It speaks with honesty.

How could they doubt when he's bared his soul? When he's honestly confronted their sin and when he's told them the gospel truth, how could they doubt his love? And all of that at great price. That little phrase "O Corinthians," he says that to the Galatians, "O Galatians," to the Philippians, "O Philippians," Galatians 3:1, Philippians 4:15, it's the evidence of an intense feeling. Now you're getting his emotion. Everything I've been saying to you, all these personal things, all the stuff that's right out of the depth of my heart, so much of it that we've read already. Don't they tell you, "I'm vulnerable, I've exposed myself, I've opened up my hurt unashamedly. I've given you my heart." That's evidence of love, honesty.

Secondly, affection. Verse 12, "You are not restrained by us but you are restrained in your own affections." Now the word "restrained" means narrow, confined, squeezed and he's saying you're restrained. You've squeezed me out of your heart. You've squeezed me out of your life. You've...You've...like a toothpaste tube, you've just squeezed me out of your church. There's no place for me. But this isn't due to anything I've done. Your restraint is not because of me, you're restrained, he says, in your own affections.

This is heartbreaking to Paul. If there is estrangement, and believe me there is, the cause is not Paul. He says I haven't done anything to hinder this relationship, it's not my fault, not all messed up relationships are a two-way deal. This one isn't. You've believed the lies. You've followed the false teachers. You've closed your heart to me. You've squeezed me out, there's a narrowness in your affections. You don't have any feeling for me. You don't care about me. No sympathy. And this hurt deeply.

Why? Because love demands reciprocation, doesn't it? And we'll say more about that in a moment. But they were hard-hearted toward him. He hadn't squeezed them out of his heart, but they had done that to him. You are restrained in your own affections. You've shut me out. You've allowed the lies, the false accusations, you bought them, you believed them. And so you fickle people have turned in your feeling toward me. Your hearts have become too narrow to have a place for me, you don't have any affection.

Now here's the evidence of real love again. Real love never loses its affection, it doesn't matter what you do to it. You can hurt it and you can wound it, but the real thing you can't kill if it's real, if it's the spiritual love. It can be wounded so profoundly and so deeply it will weep passionately. But it still feels deeply. It doesn't mean here that Paul tolerates their sin. He didn't. It doesn't mean that he tolerated their error. He didn't. He was intolerant of sin and error, he was committed to discipline and correction, but those things never stood in the way of affection. It's no different, really, than the Hebrews 12 passage which says, "Every son whom the Lord loves He chastens." Chastening, scourging, and all of that doesn't preclude affection. Paul felt deeply.

He's talking here not about some supernatural love, some spiritual love. He's talking about that, yes, but that it encompasses also his own affections. And you know how love works. When you love somebody, you feel for them. And he says, "I feel for you." And you've shut me out of your heart but I can't shut you out of mine, I have these strong feelings for you." That's evidence of love.

Thirdly, his love is evidenced by a desire for fellowship, it's marked by a desire for fellowship. Look at verse 13, "Now in a like exchange," he says, "I speak as to children," parenthetically, "open wide to us also." And here we go back to what I hinted at a moment ago, love longs for a response. Nothing in life...I say it again...NOTHING in life on a human plain is more painful than unrequited love. And all of us, to one degree or another, experienced that, maybe in your time, some time before you were married if you are now, sometime in your youth. Or some of you who are experiencing it now might be able to identify in the very present tense with this, you loved somebody. Some of you ladies loved a man, some of you men loved a woman, and it wasn't returned and you understood that feeling.

Then there are those of you who married and your love was in its full-bloom in marriage and your partner was unfaithful. And you gave love and you got back nothing and you know the pain and the tears and the sorrow and the heartbreak and the emotion of an unrequited love, spurned love, love that isn't reciprocated, you know that. And some of you have endeavored to make a friendship with somebody who meant a great deal to you and you gave love in that friendship and got nothing back, and you know the pain there. And many of you have raised children and you love those children with a love that is beyond description and they gave you back hate for your love, and you know the feeling, you know the pain. And Paul was feeling it.

I talked to a family on our trip to Israel who were telling me the story of their nineteen-year-old daughter, a beautiful young girl, who was killed in an automobile accident, I knew the story, I knew mutual friends and the whole account was familiar to me. And this family was recounting the story which is somewhat recent with tears and how the loss of their daughter so grieved their heart and yet their hope and confidence was that she was in the presence of Christ because she knew the Lord. And after trying my best to offer some sympathetic understanding to them, to sort of modify their sorrow at that moment, they said to me, "But apart from that we have another daughter and we would

like to have you pray for her." And I said, "Tell me the story," and they told me about a daughter who was alive but who had turned on them, turned against them. And I said, "That's a deeper pain, isn't it?"

And I'll never forget what the mother said, she said, "Yes, but people don't understand that." It's one kind of pain to lose a daughter in an accident, it's a far worse one to have one who is alive and turns against you. We understand those kinds of things. Nothing on the human plain is as hard to bear as unrequited love that runs deep. And that's what Paul is feeling here. He wanted them to return to him what he gave to them, so in verse 13 he says, "In a like exchange, won't you open to us? And I'm speaking to you as a father to his children. Do you understand what it's like...he says...to be your spiritual father and have you return my love with hate?"

Paul is feeling the penetrating sadness of an unrequited love, of spurned love. To love someone deeply and not have them love you in return is heartbreaking, it's crushing. You don't just walk away and say, "Forget you," not if the love is real. Real love doesn't do that.

So he says in that little phrase, "Now in a like exchange, I'm timestia(??)autane(??), it literally means "in an exchange that is exact," you ought to love me in exactly the way I love you, sacrificially, consistently, unbreakably. He was not content with a one-way street, no lover is. He wanted a heart partnership, he wanted his love returned. He, after all, was their spiritual father. First Corinthians 4:14 and 15, he says, "You have many paidagogos, that's a word that means moral guardians and instructors, but you have only one father, I am your father in the faith and we have a family bond and I want you to give me back love in exchange for the love that I give you. Return my love, love as I have loved you.

This is very tender, by the way. This is melancholy, really. Here is this great apostle needing the love of a troubled church and he doesn't hesitate to plead for it. He doesn't hesitate to beg for it. Here's another indication of just opening up his heart and letting them see that this is a broken hurting man because he wants the love of his people. You can't shake the need for their love in return. He can't shake it. As he...then in verse 14...launches into this discussion of separation, what he is really saying to them is "cut yourselves off from those false teachers, break yourselves off from those unbelievers, you shouldn't even have a partnership with those people. If you'll do that, then you can reattach yourself to me and we can have that love relationship that I long for."

And after having digressed in verses 14 to chapter 7 verse 1, he comes right back in verse 2 of chapter 7 to the same thought, "Make room for us," and the translators help us by adding "in your hearts." Same thought. Same thought, it's exactly what he said when he said, "Open wide to us...open your heart up and make room." He said earlier, in verse 11, "Our heart is open wide." He says here in verse 3, "There's room for you there." And now he says to them, "Open your heart" in verse 13. And then in verse 2, "Make room for us." Do just what I've done.

The verb choreo means to provide a place for. Paul is feeling that...that basic axiom that says if a man is in fellowship with his friends he can endure any suffering because he's not alone. And if they understood the instruction of chapter 6 verses 14 to chapter 7 verse 1, if they understood that instruction and would sever contact with unbelievers and break their links with the false teachers, and purge their souls, then they would come back to Paul. If they would get rid of their sin.

Oh that happens so often. You love someone, they fall into sin, and they can't return that love until the sin is dealt with. If they would do it, verse 1 says, cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfect holiness in the fear of God, they wouldn't have any trouble restoring that love relationship. That's what breaks up love relationships in marriages, that's what breaks them up in families and in friendships, sin...association with sinful people.

So Paul again evidencing his love evidences it by his honesty, his affection and his longing for fellowship, reciprocation. Love demands that. You can't question his love when this is the cry of his heart to be loved in return.

Number four, purity, his love was marked by purity. In verse 2 he says, "We wronged no one, we corrupted no one." There it is. Now you can believe that he had been accused of that. Back in chapter 4, you remember, I've quoted it a number of times, verse 2, they said he was...he was walking in shame, living a life of hidden shame, and all of that. They were accusing him of having a wicked life and covering it up with a hypocritical kind of religious facade. He says, "I haven't wronged anybody. I haven't corrupted anybody."

To wrong, adikeo in the Greek, means to treat someone unjustly or to injure them, to do something to cause them to fall into sin or iniquity. He had never done that. He had never done anything to cause them to stumble into sin. They have heard him. They've been unfair. They've lied. They've been unjust toward him. They've abused him. But he's never done it to them. He's never hurt them. He's never been unkind, unfair. He's never done anything to use or abuse them. He's never taught them error. He's never led them into sin. No matter what the false accusers were saying, he never mistreated anybody.

They might have been saying, "Well, you know, that man back in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 that he said to turn over to Satan, boy, what a terrible thing for a man to do. You can be sure he doesn't love you or he wouldn't have turned one of you over to Satan." Well that wasn't mistreating the man, that was dealing with his sin as God desired it to be dealt with.

Paul is saying I've never done anything to wrong you or to corrupt you. By the way, the term "to corrupt" could refer to doctrine, could refer to money, but probably refers most to morals. It's a term used in 1 Corinthians 15:33 to speak of bad company ruining good morals. The false teachers, he is

saying by implications, they're bad company, they're being unequally yoked and they're going to ruin your good morals, but I've never done that. Love doesn't do that.

I say this so often to young people, love doesn't come up to you young ladies and say I love you, now go to bed with me. That's not love. Love doesn't corrupt. It doesn't wrong. Neither directly nor indirectly, by his teaching or his example had Paul ever led anyone into impurity. Look at my life, if you wonder whether I love you, ask yourself if I've wronged you, ever. Did I ever take anything from you, did I ever steal your purity? Did I ever lead you into sin? Did I ever set a pattern that having followed you would have fallen and stumbled into iniquity? No...no. He caused the church no harm either through his teaching or his example. He had not corrupted or encouraged any kind of immoral conduct. And that's evidence of love. Love always seeks the ennobling of its object, it always seeks the elevation of its object, it always seeks the purity and the goodness and the godliness of its object.

And so his love is manifest in honesty, affection, the desire for fellowship and purity. Number five, humility. Obviously love is humble because the only person who can love is a humble person. You can't love if you're in love with yourself. The fact that you can love someone else with abandonment indicates that you are unselfish. And Paul indicates the very same thing, verse 2, end of the verse, "We took advantage of no one," pleonekteo is the verb, means to defraud someone for the purpose of gain. It means the selfish use of people, going to all lengths to gain your selfish goal. Paul says we never do it, it's...never have done it, it's used often in terms of manipulating people for financial gain, the idea of taking advantage of people for money.

Chapter 12 of this same letter, verse 17, "I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I? I urged Titus and sent the brother with him, Titus didn't take advantage of you, did he?" In other words, this must have been a continual accusation. And Paul says I didn't do it, nobody I sent did it, Titus didn't do it, nobody, none of us has taken advantage of you. In spite of all the accusations he had never used them for any personal gain, just the opposite. He gave up his life for them. And we've been through that already in this epistle. I mean, it was facing death every single day. Chapter 4, persecuted, afflicted, always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, constantly being delivered over to death, verse 11. Verse 12, "Death works in us but life in you." I haven't used you, I've given my life up for you, that's what love does. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his...what?...his life for his friends." That's the greatest love. He didn't take advantage of anybody. He gave his life. Love has the attitude of 1 Corinthians 13 again, it seeks not its own, its own goals, purposes, fulfillment, aggrandizement. Philippians 2 says that love doesn't look on its own things but on the things of others.

Paul says, "I've given my life for you. I face death every day for you. I'm beaten, shipwrecked for you. With rods, with whips, stoned three times, left for dead for you." Humility, love is so humble, self-effacing, sacrificial.

Number six, love is marked by another virtue, forgiveness. This is so wonderful, verse 3, after all that they had done he says, "I do not speak to condemn you." He uses the term katakrino which means to sentence someone to judgment. This is not a death sentence. I'm not rendering the final verdict on you. I'm not saying these words to damn you, to condemn you. This isn't anger. This isn't vengeance. This isn't wrath, this is isn't hostility.

Back in chapter 2 he pleaded with them to forgive a man and here he is showing the same heart. I'm not speaking this to condemn you, I just want to call you back to your goodness, I want to call you back to blessing. I'm not writing the final verdict on you...that's what he means...this isn't the end. Sure I protest your sin and call you to repentance, and yes I protest your rebellion and call you to loyalty, and yes I will protest your disaffection and call you back to love. But for your good and your blessing. I'm not damning you, I'm loving you.

How often have we said that to our children when we set out to discipline? In doing this I'm calling for your goodness, not your destruction. I'm disciplining you so that you can live in the place of blessing. That's what he's saying. You're in my heart. I'm not angry, I'm hurt. I'm not mad, I'm sad. I'm not hating, I'm loving. I want you to repent, I want you to regrip the truth. I want you to restore your love. I'm eager to forgive. Peter said to Jesus in Matthew 18, "When our brother sins against us, how many times do we forgive? Seven? Jesus said, Seventy times seven." That's the heart of our Lord. And if you don't forgive one another their sins, He won't forgive you, Matthew 6 says. And love doesn't keep a record of wrongs, 1 Corinthians 13, it is so eager to forgive, love covers a multitude of sins as rapidly as it can in the words of Peter.

So here's an accent of love that you can always note, love is eager to forgive. It longs for a person to repent and it is happiest when they do and are restored through forgiveness.

Number seven, the seventh accent of love is found in the phrase, "For I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together." This is loyalty...loyalty. Love is so loyal. Paul says I want you to know something, folks, you're in my heart to the death. That's what he's saying. This is a permanent deal. No fickleness, till death do us part...and even after that.

By the way, in the Papyri, some of the ancient writings, the expression to live together and to die together is found in discussions of mutual friendship and loyalty, and that's exactly what it's talking about. The idea is that those involved have a friendship that will sustained through life and that they are so bound to each other that they are willing to die for that relationship.

Paul put himself in the path of death every day...every day for them. There was no greater love than this, like the love of Ruth and her devotion to Naomi, a love so strong that even death can't break it. Here were these fickle Corinthians, a few false teachers pop into town. Their love grows cold and

they follow the new gurus. Paul says how shallow, how fickle, that's not real love, real love hangs on to the end, real love will suffer death and be unbroken.

Do you love like that? Do you love your wife like that? Do you love your children like that? Do you love your friends like that? Do you love your pastors like that? A love so strong that nothing can sever it?

They had reason to be rejected because of the way they treated him. But love can't do it. It's not in it, can't do it. Love is loyal to the very dying end. Don't tell me you love me if you're not loyal.

Number eight, it is also characteristic of love to have trust...trust. Along with honesty and affection and fellowship and purity and humility and forgiveness and loyalty, love is characterized by trust. Verse 4, this is really kind of amazing, "Great is my confidence in you." You say, "Boy, is he an optimist." Well love is like that. Love believes all things, according to 1 Corinthians 13, love hopes all things, it always looks at the best. Kind of interesting, later on in chapter 7 look at verse 13, he's talking about Titus and then in verse 14 he says, "If in anything I have boasted to him about you. I was not put to shame." And then he goes on to talk more about his boasting.

He had great confidence in the people. You say, "Well why? Based on their behavior?" No. "Based on their track record?" No. The Corinthian church was the most messed up church in the New Testament, right? Where does confidence come from? Love, love hopes, love believes the best. If I love someone and you come to me and tell me the worst about them, I find it very hard to accept that. Sometimes through the years I have been castigated for wanting to believe the best about people. That's how love works. When you have somebody in your heart, you're extremely reluctant to believe anything but the best and you always want to say like Paul said to people, almost against reality, "Great is my confidence in you." I love you so deeply that my love demands that I believe the best, you're going to change. In spite of your unfaithfulness, your disloyalty, your sin, your error, I'm still confident...I'm still confident.

They're not perfect. But the Spirit of God is at work. And Paul is confident because He who begins a good work finishes it. Love doesn't give up. It doesn't let go without a battle. It believes the best. And by the way, this doesn't mean positive thoughts make things happen. Positive thoughts make nothing happen. Thoughts make nothing happen, do you understand that? Any kind outside yourself. I can't make you love me by thinking it. That's one of the biggest lies of our society. If you think positively you can make something happen. It's not true. And that's not what I'm saying. I'm not saying that Paul is saying I have great confidence, I have great confidence...because if I say that enough times it will happen. No. He is saying I have great confidence because that's how love is. Love just believes the best. It may not make it happen, but it believes and hopes it will happen.

And then trust turns to number nine in our little list, pride. Not in the sinful sense but in the noble sense. In verse 4, "Great is my boasting on your behalf." Can you imagine this guy going around boasting about this crummy church, full of all kinds of iniquity? That's how love is. You tell me the worst about them and I'll tell you what's good about them and I'll boast about them. He boast to others, he exalts, he rejoices in them. He speaks proudly of them as trophies of God's grace. Down in verse 14 he says, "If anything I have boasted to him about you," here he was boasting to Titus. And it proved to be true because what happened back in chapter 7 verses 6 and 7? Titus came back and gave a good report and said they repented, they heard what you were saying and I want to tell you, things are much better and so Paul said I boasted to Titus and my boasting was well founded, he came back and gave me a good report.

You see, that's how love is. Love doesn't see the worst in people, it sees the best. It holds on to that. And even though chapter 10 verse 17 says, "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord," that fits in here because it's the Lord's work in them that Paul is so proud of. And he believes it will continue because love believes the best. Love has pride in its object. Look, see this beautiful person...look, see these lovely wonderful children of mine...look, see my partner...look, see my dear friend...see the one I love. Love is proud and that's the nature of love. Here is Paul saying to them I'm proud of you in spite of all of this, doesn't that tell you I love you, doesn't that tell you there's something in my heart other than hostility or disappointment?

And then finally, love is also marked by joy. It's really hard to imagine because of all the suffering Paul was going through, but here in verse 4 he says, "I'm filled with comfort, I'm overflowing with joy in all our affliction." I have comfort based upon a deep-down joy. Literally in the Greek the verb says, "I was filled and I still am." No pain, no suffering could steal his joy. It's just amazing, just amazing.

Verse 13, he talks about his comfort and joy together again which was even intensified when Titus came back with a good report. And, of course, Titus experienced the same comfort and the same joy. Whenever I think about those I love I rejoice. Whenever I think about my life partner, my wife, my children, my friends, you, I have the same response of comfort and joy, no matter what the struggles, no matter the problems, no matter what the issues. That's like love, that's how love is. It can't think about its object without joy. And so Paul says, in the middle of my suffering I find a tranquility based on joy that springs from my love for you.

Well, I told you it was a lot like 1 Corinthians chapter 13, it's a little more hidden. But there are the accents of love...honesty, affection, fellowship, purity, humility, forgiveness, loyalty, trust, pride and joy.

Now listen carefully to what I say as I close. By the way, that is exactly how God loves us. Right? He loves us enough to be honest. He loves us enough to have a deep affection for us so that we can grieve His heart if we do not reciprocate. He loves us so much He wants ongoing communion and

fellowship with us. He loves us enough to want us pure. He loves us enough to sacrifice Himself in an act of humility. He loves us enough to forgive our sins. He loves us enough to be eternally loyal in spite of our defections. He loves us enough to trust us with His gospel. He loves us enough to be proud of us and to boast about His children. He loves us enough that heaven rejoices over us. And we are to love in the same way. Paul is our model again and what a model he is.

Father, thank You for this great text tucked in, perhaps often overlooked, but revealing so much. Lead us to this kind of love that the world may know that we are Your children for we love like You love. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.

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