

Qualities of Love – Is Protective

1 Corinthians

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I'm going to ask you please to turn to the book of 1 Corinthians 13:1.

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends.

Let's bow together for prayer.

Father in heaven, we ask your blessing upon your word as it is preached, that you would, Lord, deal with our hearts. As it has already been voiced in prayer, Lord, you know each heart in this place and you know what our needs are and so, Lord, we ask that you, the living God, would now move and work in this place in our lives, meeting us, Lord, at the point where you know we are in need. I do pray, Lord, for those with us who do not know you. I do ask that you would open their hearts to respond to the things that they will hear today that, Lord, there would be repentance from sin and a true faith in your Son for life. But Lord, I also pray and especially pray for my brothers and sisters this morning because, Lord, we gather today as your church to be equipped, to be edified, to be corrected, to be washed. And Lord, I know that today in a special way, your church is your interest and I just ask that, Lord, where we are in sin there would be a broken heartedness over it and a turning from it and a fresh commitment to the way of truth. And Lord, where we are in the truth and walking in a way that would please you, I pray for encouragement and strength that, Lord, we would not grow weary in doing well but we would serve you all the more as we see the day approaching and that we would exhort each other all the more so that, Lord, we would in that way love each other and encourage each other. Lord, we ask you to bless, we ask you to move and work and we will thank you for what you accomplish. In Jesus' name. Amen.

There are a couple of things that I want us to bear in mind as we continue through this section that we are studying in 1 Corinthians 13, something we need to keep in mind all along the way so from time to time I want to remind us about it. The first thing I want you to keep in mind is that love as it is given to us in this section, love is practiced. Or we could say: love is action. Love is not just thoughts. It's not just some sort of sentimental thinking toward another person. Love is not just words. It's not just talking to someone in a way that we think or that they think would be loving. It's much easier to say I love you than it is to love someone. It's much easier to have emotions, at times, emotions that would say, "You know, I have love toward you," than it is to actually live it out. Yet what we're seeing throughout this entire section, he's using verbs here: love is patient and patient there is a verb. Love is kind and that word is a verb. It speaks of something we do, not just thoughts and attitudes that love doesn't ignore thoughts and attitudes, love does involve the right-thinking, love does involve the right kind of attitude. But it goes beyond just thoughts and attitudes and words and it does what is necessary on behalf of God and on behalf of others to seek the highest and the best for its object.

So love is active. In fact, it's very instructive to remember how Jesus defined what it means to love him and what it means to love each other. Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will," do what? "Keep my commandments." If you love me, you will keep my commandments. John 14:21, just 6 verses later, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Don't miss the fact that what is being described there is a genuine believer. When Jesus says, "We will manifest ourselves to him," when Jesus says that he, "will be loved by my Father who is in heaven," we are talking about believers and they are characterized as people who have the commandments of God and who keep the commandments of God and that's what it means to really love Jesus.

Next chapter, John 15:10, Jesus said, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love," listen, "just as I have kept my Father's commandments." Do you know for certain that the Son loved the Father here on earth? Did Jesus love the Father here on earth? What's the answer? Obviously yes. How do you know that? Well, one way you know it is he kept the Father's commandments and he says "abide in his love." John 15:14, 4 verses after, he said, "You are my friends if you do what I command you." 1 John 5:2 says, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."

So if you ask: what does love look like? The answer is: joyful obedience, right? His commandments are not burdensome so joyful, willing, desiring obedience toward God. That is what it means to love the Savior and the way we love each other, he tells us in 1 John 5, the way we love each other is by loving God and obeying his commandments. Listen, if I love God and obey his commandments, then I will treat you in a godly way. Isn't that true? If I love God and I am keeping his commandments, well, I've been commanded to be patient with you. I have been commanded to be kind toward you. I

have been commanded not to be jealous toward you. I have been commanded not to be arrogant or rude toward you.

So if I love God and I obey his commandments, that's what it means to love the children of God. It's not just thought. It's not just sentiment. It's not just words. It is action. It is defined in terms of obedience. It is so important for us to keep in mind because there are many people in this world this morning who would say they love God even while they knowingly, willingly violate the commandments of God. This morning on my mind is someone that I am praying for. He has committed recently, he lives in another state but someone that I know from my past, he has recently left his wife. He has left his children. He has determined to divorce her and he wants to sit down and to talk about what they are going to do with their finances and all the rest and his wife keeps challenging him with his profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Do you know what he said? He said, "Well, God will forgive me." So here he is claiming to still know the Lord, claiming to walk with the Lord, wanting to obey the Lord in the future because God will forgive him but he's not willing to obey God right here, right now, with what is put before him. Listen, whether he knows the Lord or not, only time and eternity will reveal, but what we can say for certain is: he is not loving God or loving his family in what he is doing right now. So if we love God, there will be obedience to the commandments of God. Love is active. It is practiced.

Now, something else we can say when you look at this section, something else you need to keep in mind: love is prescriptive in the sense that medicine is prescriptive. If we look at our problems, if we ask what is wrong in our life individually, in relationships, marriage, children, friendships, church, if we ask what's wrong and what is the answer, most of the time the answer is love because what Paul is doing in 1 Corinthians 13 is he is not giving us an exhaustive definition of everything that love is. I mean, the list could be longer, couldn't it? So this is not an exhaustive definition of everything that love is. What is he doing? Do you know what he's doing? He is applying love to the problems in Corinth. If you look at what's going on in the Corinthian church and you are walked through all these things he mentions in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, you would find that these are the very areas where the Corinthian church was struggling: arrogance, pride, rudeness, unthoughtfulness, lack of kindness. All these things, this is where they are struggling so what the apostle is doing is he is saying, "Listen, here is what love looks like in action in the specific areas where you are sinning right now. In the specific areas where you are failing, this is where the love of God is the answer."

Now, I wonder who sitting within the sound of my voice this morning, who is in desperate need of an application of the love of God? Where are you struggling right now in your marriage? Where are you struggling right now with your children? Where are you struggling right now with bitterness, unforgiveness, some problem in some relationship that you have? Where are you struggling perhaps even in your moral life that we can say this morning the answer for your life is an obedient application of what it means to really love God and what it means to really love others? Where do you need to heed the voice of God today through the word of God and say, "Lord, I will repent of my sin and I will apply your commandment to love. I will apply what love is right there in that specific

area where I'm struggling"? Are you willing to do that today? Where you have unforgiveness, are you willing to love? Where you have a lack of patience, are you willing to love? Where you haven't been kind, are you willing to obey the commandments of your Savior? Where there is some breach in a relationship, where there is some broken fellowship, are you willing to apply the commandments of your Savior when it comes to the matter of love? Love is practiced. Love is prescriptive. It is the answer to our problems. What is the answer? The answer is love.

Now, so far we have seen that love is patient. Love is kind. Love is not jealous. It is not boastful, that is, it doesn't brag. It is not arrogant. You may not be a braggart but if you have the proud attitude in your heart, it's still sin so it's not arrogant. Love is not rude. It is not selfish. It is not irritable, that is, it's not touchy, it's not easily angered. It is not unforgiving or, we could say, it doesn't keep a list. We saw that that means to put to account, didn't we? Love is not a list keeping kind of thing. Then we saw last time that love is discerning. This common idea out there that love, you know, isn't concerned about doctrine, that love isn't concerned about truth, is destroyed by this statement where he says it "does not rejoice at unrighteousness but it rejoices with the truth." So love recognizes error and truth and love sides with truth, chooses truth.

Now this morning, we come to the next quality. You see it in verse 7 where he says, "love bears all things." Love bears all things. Before we look at that quality specifically, there are a couple of things I want to point out that the last 4 qualities have in common, alright? Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Those 4 qualities, they have a couple of things in common I want you to notice. First of all, we want to notice the exhaustive nature of love because he says "all things," right? Love bears all things. Love believes all things. Love hopes all things. Love endures all things. The exhaustive nature of love. Now, obviously, he means all things that accord with what is godly and wise. In other words, when he says, for example, "love believes all things," he's not saying that love is naïve, that love is to be accepting of just anything anyone says. He is not saying, for example, that love would believe what the Mormons say or that love would believe what the Jehovah's Witnesses say. He doesn't mean love just believes anything. No, what he is saying, though, and this is still a supernatural standard, he is saying that love goes to the limits. Love goes to the limits. Love bears all things. It will go as far as it can go and still be submissive to God. Love will believe all that it can believe and still be submissive to God. Love will hope all that it can hope and still be submissive to God. Love will endure everything it can endure and still be submissive to God. So that love, the exhaustive nature of love, love will go to the ends of the earth. Love will go to the end of the possibilities. Love goes to the limits.

Luke 6:32, our Lord said this, he said, "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them." Right? That's just natural love. To love people who love you, to bear with those who love you, to believe for those who love you, to hope for those who love you, to endure with those who love you, lost people can do that. The standard is higher than that. Verse 33, "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners

lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil."

Toward whom is the Lord showing kindness today? Just those who love him? Or isn't our God in his common grace goodness showing goodness and kindness even to those who hate him? To those who blaspheme him? To those, listen, to those who even deny his existence? Isn't that an amazing thought, that God is sustaining people who say he doesn't exist, to sustain them? It's a good thing for them that we're not God, isn't it, because we would probably take out of existence everyone who didn't believe in our existence. But God is showing kindness, goodness, even to those who are his enemies and listen, he says, "Now that, is the standard for you. It's not just loving people who love you. It's not just doing good to those who do good to you. It's not just lending to those who will repay you. But rather, you demonstrate that you are sons of the Most High by living out his character so that you love your enemies." So the kind of love we're talking about here, the love of God, will bear and believe and hope and endure even with those who hate us. Even with those who mistreat us. To the full degree that we can bear and believe and hope and endure and still be obeying God, that is how far love will go. All things.

Now, something else these 4 things have in common is not only the exhaustive nature of love but the comprehensive nature of love. There is a sense in which love represents that which is whole. It covers it all. Doesn't leave anything necessary out. And you get a picture of that, not only in the statement "all things" but the organization of these last 4 qualities. You've heard me talk before about a chiasmic organization or a chiasm and what we're talking about is, and you see this a lot in the Psalms, an A, B, A pattern of description or A, B, B, A pattern. If you notice, the first quality mentioned has to do with endurance, doesn't it, love bears all things. Well, notice the last quality mentioned, end of verse 7, what does love do? It endures all things. So you have endurance at the beginning, you have endurance at the end, right? So you have A, A. In the middle you have a B, B. You have something that has to do with faith, it believes all things. Something that has to do with faith, it hopes all things. So you have endurance, faith, faith, endurance. And usually when you see a pattern like that, the 2 qualities mentioned in the middle are emphasized and in this case I think that's true because the endurance we're going to talk about requires faith. The reason why love will bear all things and endure all things is because it believes all things and hopes all things. Without the faith, the endurance would not be possible. So keep these 2 things in mind as we look at these last 4 qualities: the exhaustive nature of what love is and the comprehensive nature of what love is. It covers it all and it goes to the end of its possibilities on behalf of its object.

Now, we've looked this morning at the statement: love bears all things. What does it mean? And if you want to summarize it we can say this: love protects. Love is protective. The word here translated "bears" is very interesting, it's the word *stego* and it comes from a word that means roof, *stega*. *Stega* is used 3 times in the New Testament to speak of a roof. In fact, in Strong's when it refers to this word "stego," the word we have in our text here, when it breaks out the range of possible meanings the first thing it mentions is "deck; thatch; to cover; to protect or keep by covering." What does a roof do? It protects

by covering. It protects against water. It protects against damage from the elements. Also contained in the word is the idea of "holding out against"; or as it's translated in some places, "to endure," because it holds out against that which threatens. It protects against that which is threatening and it continues to hold out against it. It endures against the elements. That's the meaning of the word in terms of its lexical meaning.

Now, when you look at how Paul uses this word, you can see that. You can see the idea of bearing up under, right? A roof bears up under attack from the elements. Well, listen to what he says in 1 Corinthians 9:12. If you look back there just a few chapters back, 1 Corinthians 9:12, he uses this same word and he's talking about the fact that he did not take financial help from them when he was with them and now he is being attacked because he didn't. Alright, false apostles are questioning whether he really is an apostle because, after all, if he were really an apostle he wouldn't have to work to supply for himself. It's kind of how the argument goes. He says in verse 11, "If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure," there's that word, "anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ." We will bear up under anything rather than put the Gospel at risk, is what he means.

1 Thessalonians 3:1, he says of his desire to find out about the well-being of the Thessalonians, he says in verse 1, "Therefore when we could bear it no longer," same word, "when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this." He goes on to explain something about what they're going through but he says, "Here I was trying to be patient, trying to wait, but do you know what? When I couldn't hold out any more, when I couldn't endure it any longer, I sent Timothy to find out about how you're doing." So the basic meaning of the word is to bear up, to endure but contained in the word is the idea of protecting against. To cover. To protect against attack.

Now, what does that mean for us? Look back at 1 Corinthians 13:7. What does that mean for us in a practical sense? How does love bear up? How does it endure in this way? There are 2 basic things that it means for us. First, it means that we protect those we love. We protect those we love. Not in the sense, never in the sense of excusing sin. That's not the love of God. Never in the sense of defending what is indefensible. But in the sense that where love is operating, there is a desire to preserve, there is a desire to protect instead of a desire to destroy and this is true and I'm going to talk about this more in a moment, this is true even with our enemies. In fact, this is closely connected with the 2 qualities that we're going to begin looking at tonight where he says that love believes all things and love hopes all things. Here's the connection: I am wanting to protect, not destroy, because I hold out belief and hope concerning the future of this person. I want to protect in the present because I believe in what God can do in their life in the future. Even if they have harmed me, even if they have hurt me, mistreated me, and I have the opportunity for vengeance, I will say that vengeance is the Lord's, and it is, and I will

desire to love them by protecting them and preserving them to the degree that I can because I believe in what God can make of them in the days to come. How he can change the situation. How he can change their heart. How he can change my relationship to them for his glory. So love is stubborn in this sense. It is a stubborn kind of love that holds out belief and hope for the future so that it wants to protect and preserve someone in the present.

Now, I think we can understand this when we think about natural affection. We understand this in the realm of our natural affections. Those people in our family that we love the most in a natural sense, isn't it true that we have a tendency to protect our loved ones? To protect them against criticism, for example? To protect them against attack? Now, there may be somebody here who says, "Well, that's not me. You know, I'm a straight shooter and when it comes to my family members, if they are wrong, I just tell them they're wrong and we deal with their wrongs." I believe you. I mean, I believe that can happen in relationships. My family is a little bit like that. But isn't it true that even when we are open and honest with one another, completely transparent with one another, isn't it true that when the attack comes from outside or when the attack comes from someone we know doesn't care about them? You see, I can speak straight to someone I care about. What I'm concerned about is: what's the motive of a person who doesn't care about them? What are their words aimed at? What are their attitudes aimed at? What I don't want is this person I love to be destroyed, you see. Confronted with their sin, yes. Rescued in that sense, yes. But destroyed? That's not what I want.

So when it comes to the people in our natural relationships, we understand what it means to protect them and, in a sense, to cover. To cover what they have done. In fact, in our sinfulness, if you want to talk about natural affection and how it goes wrong in our sinfulness, it is very true to say that there are some people who will excuse their loved ones in a wrong kind of way. Who will actually keep their loved ones from what they need to be confronted with. From what they need to hear. From what they need to see. They are so desiring to protect them, they are willing to excuse what ought not to be excused. But in the natural realm, we can understand what it means that love wants to cover. Love wants to protect.

Now, think about supernatural affection because what God is talking about in verse 7 is not just toward your natural relations. This is not just your son or your daughter or your husband or your wife. No, love bears all things. First we can say: when it comes to spiritual brethren. Love desires to protect when it comes to your brothers and sisters in Christ but here's the supernatural and amazing thing about it: we can't even stop there, can we, if we're talking about the love of God? We're not just wanting to protect even our brothers and sisters in Christ, this quality even extends to our enemies: to those who do not do good toward us, to those who mistreat us, to those who would spitefully use us, to those who have attacked us. This is the love of God that even when it comes to those who have attacked us and sought to destroy us, we do not long for their destruction but, rather, we long for their redemption. And as far as we have influence, we will not work for their destruction but we will spend and be spent for their redemption. You see, now that is the

love of God. It protects not just its closest relations but its spiritual family and even extends to its enemies. That's the love of God.

Here is a great test of whether or not you are walking in God's love: do you pray for, do you desire, do you strive for, the redemption of those who oppose you or do you secretly long for the destruction of those who oppose you? Now, if we ask for an example of this, we don't have to look far to find it, do we? Who is the example of expressing a desire to protect and preserve even those who attacked him? The Lord Jesus Christ. Luke 23:33 says this, "And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, 'Father, crush them.'" Is that what he said? What did he say? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Now, here's what we tend to do, we say, "But that's Jesus. That's the Son of God. That's God Incarnate. I don't have that capacity." Well, thank God we don't just have the example of our Lord. We see this incarnated in someone just like us and that is Stephen. Acts 7:54, "Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul." I wonder why the Bible adds that? God wants us to know that Saul was there, doesn't he? Saul of Tarsus, the Apostle Paul as he would become. No doubt in some way that we don't know the fullness of it, God used Saul of Tarsus witnessing what happened with Stephen in some way, God used it in the conversion of this man. Next verse, "And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.'" What does he want for those who are stoning him to death? Does he want their destruction or does he want their salvation? Does he want their destruction or does he want their redemption? You hear it not just from our Lord, you hear it from one of his servants and we are his servants. This is what it means to be sons of the Most High. This is what it means to walk in the character of Christ. Love has a desire to protect, to guard, to bear up, to hold out against, that which would destroy its object and its objects are not just its friends but also its enemies. That's the love of God.

Someone says, "Well, Stephen was being stoned to death and maybe this was just some kind of supernatural grace, you know, for such a thing. I mean, is this really supposed to be my lifestyle?" Well, I want you to look at 1 Thessalonians 2 because I want you to think about something that we are going to look at in Romans 9 here in just a moment. But before we look at Romans 9, here's what I want you to remember: now we're going to think about Paul and we're going to think about his ministry, his mission's ministry planting churches, serving as an apostle and we're going to remember that this man has suffered greatly, hasn't he? Paul has suffered greatly all along the way. Everywhere he goes, he encounters opposition.

1 Thessalonians 2, look at verse 14, "For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own

countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind," I mean, they are standing in the way of what is best for the world, you see. Paul is on a mission to preach the Gospel of Christ, this is the need of all mankind but you have the Jews who are persecuting anyone who receives the Gospel and anyone who spreads the Gospel and in that way, they are opposing all mankind. Verse 16, "by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved - so as always to fill up the measure of their sins." What is happening? Their sins are stacking up. I mean, this kind of action, this kind of attitude, their sins are being stored up for the day of God's wrath. He is acknowledging that his countrymen are enemies of the Gospel. In that way, they are enemies of God. In that way, they are enemies of all mankind. Their sins are being stored up, stacked up for the day of wrath.

Now, what do you think this man, knowing the things he knows, knowing that these people, his countrymen, are driving him out from every city he goes into, what do you think his attitude then would be about his countrymen? I mean, this is a guy that I would think would walk around almost every day hating his own countrymen because of their position toward God, their position toward the Gospel, their position toward himself, their position toward all mankind. You would think that he would feel justified in having some kind of really negative attitude toward them. Well, I want you to look at Romans 9. What he's going to say here is so startling that he basically swears an oath to it. He wants us to know that this is the absolute truth. Romans 9:1, "I am speaking the truth in Christ - I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit." Now, just stop there and let that sink in. He wants you to know that this is the absolute truth, doesn't he? He says he is speaking in the presence of Christ and it is the truth. He says he is not lying. And he says the Holy Spirit will bear witness to the fact that his conscience is clear in what he's about to tell you.

Alright Paul, we're listening. What do you have to say? Verse 2, "that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh." Does he hate these people? Does he hate these people who have stoned him? Does he hate these people who have imprisoned him? Does he hate these people who have lied about him? Does he hate these people who drive him out of every city he goes into, threatening his life? Does he hate them? What's the answer? No, he so loves them that if it were possible, he could wish himself to be damned for them to be saved. Wouldn't you say that's protection? I mean, I am willing to be the one who suffers in order to save you? Isn't that exactly what we see in our Lord and Savior in our own salvation? That he was the sin offering? The Lamb of God slain for the sins of those who would trust in him for salvation? That Christ suffered for sinners? That he took upon himself the fullness of the wrath of God? The Bible says God was pleased to crush him. Why? That we would be delivered. That's the love of God, to cover, to bear up under and out against that which would threaten the object of our concern.

Paul says that's what he was willing to do if it were possible. This is really the level of anguish he has in his heart when he thinks about the lostness and the future damnation of

his kinsmen. It breaks his heart and he realizes what a loss it is when you look at verse 4 of Romans 9. He says, "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen." What a horrible day it's going to be when those who have been so blessed with so much light and so much truth and so much heritage miss their Messiah and perish forever. He says, "It breaks my heart." Do you know that kind of love? To have a heart broken over the lostness of someone who has made you the object of their hatred? That's the love of God.

So what does it mean practically? It means we protect. It means we cover. It means we suffer in the stead of those whom we love, even if those whom we are loving are those who hate us and oppose us and have attacked us. But it not only means protection, it also means perseverance. That is eventually what this word took on, endurance. Bears all things. The idea of holding out against in an ongoing way. Endurance. Again, the Apostle Paul is a great example of this and the greatest example that I can think of, of him living out this quality for us to be able to have a practical example of it, the greatest example I can think of has to do with the very text that we are studying because I believe the greatest test of the patience and love of the Apostle Paul was the Corinthian church. I mean, he is used by God to be their father in the Gospel. He has planted this church. These people came to faith in Christ through his ministry efforts and now they have turned a deaf ear to him. They have closed their heart to him. They have accepted all kinds of accusations against him by false teachers so that in 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, he is having to pour out his heart again to them and ask them to open their heart to him. He is loving people who don't love him, who ought to love him supremely.

Look at 2 Corinthians 12 and you get a picture of this. 2 Corinthians 12, look at verse 10 and notice what he's writing to this church now. He says, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong," and I really believe, beloved, that the things he just described in verse 10, this was the least of his pain. Any believer here this morning, you know a little bit about this. You have had a taste of this. You expect to be hated by and mistreated by enemies of the Gospel. The deepest pain, the deepest hurt is the disappointment, the betrayal, the lack of love coming from people who love the Lord. This is the greatest challenge he faced. This church, verse 11, "I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!" "Well Paul, you wouldn't take our money." Wow, well, forgive me that. That's what he's saying. "You didn't treat us the way you treated other churches." Really? In what way did I treat you inferior except I worked to supply for myself so that you wouldn't have to. Forgive me this.

Next statement, "Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you." You know, they were accusing Paul about

money and motives and he says, "Look, I don't want what you have, I want you." He goes on to say, "For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children." And here's the amazing statement, "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls." He says, "I will be used up for you." Then he says, "If I love you more, am I to be loved less? But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps? Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish - that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced." Can't you hear it? Can't you hear it? I mean, if anything broke his heart, it was them and yet what does he say? "I will spend and be spent for you." That's love. It doesn't just protect, it perseveres. It bears all things. It believes all things. It hopes all things. It endures all things. It keeps on going to the full extent it can go while still obeying God. If you are loved the less, you love the more. If you are loved the less, what it means for you is that you will love the more.

So let me finish by asking you: this is love, it protects, do you know that quality of love? Do you know what it is to protect those whom you say you love? And do you know it not just with your closest relations and not even with just your church family, do you know it even with those who have hurt you? Those who oppose you? Do you look to help them? Do you look to cover their faults in the appropriate kind of way? Folks, nail this down in your thinking: every act of gossip is a violation of this quality because in gossip you are not protecting someone. What are you doing? You are exposing them. You're not covering, you're promoting their faults. You are magnifying their failures and what's worse, you are taking delight in it because no one gossips who doesn't enjoy it.

Do you persevere in this attitude? Are you willing to live this out to the fullest extent? You say, "Well, do you know what? I did that for a while but I finally got tired of it. You know, I just reached the end of my rope." Folks, isn't it wonderful to know that when you feel like you've reached the end of your rope, God will give you his. He will give you the ability to love beyond what you can love. Have you gone to the full extent? Are you practicing this in an exhaustive fashion?

Finally, and I guess most importantly: will you repent where you have not been doing this? Will you repent where you have been looking for the false in others? I mean, instead of covering them, you've been looking for them. As we talked about last week, there are some people within the church, they're like prosecuting investigators looking for things that they can put on their list and justify not walking in the love of God. If you've been doing that, will you just confess it for what it is? It is a great sin. It is contrary to your

Savior. It's contrary to his commands. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will," what? What does he say? Wow, "keep my commandments."

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank you for these days that we are spending in this section of your word. These verses, Lord, they challenge us, they convict us, they open the wound, Lord, so that you can heal it. And I pray that wherever we are not walking in your love in this way, that this morning we would see it for what it is. It's sin and I pray that we would confess it and turn from it to follow you in a fresh and new way. Lord, this is our joy if we would just recognize it. This is our liberty to walk in your love. And I pray that we would examine ourselves this morning and honestly ask where our love is any different from any sinner and Lord, I pray that we would walk in that love and express that love that is only explainable by you. May the love of our Savior which has been shed abroad in our hearts by your Spirit be manifested in our thoughts, in our attitudes, in our words and in our deeds. We ask you for this in Jesus' name. Amen.