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The Characteristics of Love
6:11-13 and 7:2-4

Characteristics of love DIG: Why did Paul mention some of the sacrifices he had made? What is Paul asking the Corinthians (and us) to do? Why did some of the Corinthians question Paul's love for them?

REFLECT: For whom in your life have you failed to show appreciation? How can you show it now? What do you want to incorporate into the way you live from Paul's perspective? Which of these ten characteristics of love are you best at? Which one(s) do you need to work on?

These characteristics of genuine love are reflections of God's love for believers.

The most difficult, painful experience for a faithful shepherd is to be misrepresented, to be falsely accused, and to have one's integrity unfairly attacked. Such assaults have the potential, by destroying people's trust and confidence in him, of devastating his ministry. Such slanderous attacks are hard to retrieve and correct because those making the claims are not interested in the truth. Nor are they motivated by virtue, love or righteousness; rather, by hatred, revenge, bitterness, jealousy and self-promotion. Gossip mongers of such lies do not seek the unity and blessing of the congregation, the glory of **God**, or the good of those they attack irregardless of the false claims of piety they profess.

No one endured a more vicious, relentless, and unjust attack than **Paul**. The Adversary constantly assaulted **him**. At **Corinth**, **false apostles** (**to see link click Af – The Problem of the False Apostles**) slandered **him** by spreading lies about **him**. **They** sought power, money, prominence, and the opportunity to supplant the truth with **their** demon doctrines. To accomplish those goals, they had to destroy **Paul's** character and teachings by falsely accusing **him** of being a lying, self-serving hypocrite. The confidence of many of **the Corinthians** in **Paul** was affected.

Profoundly concerned, **Paul** vigorously defended **his** integrity, not for **his** own sake, but for **the Corinthians'** sake. **He** was **ADONAI's** personally chosen channel through which divine truth flowed to **them**. To allow **the false apostles'** lies to go unchallenged would allow that flow of divine truth to be stopped. Worse, it would allow it to be replaced with false doctrine. Again, here, **he** reminded **them** of the integrity **he** had shown during **his** long stay with **them (Acts 18:11)**; thus, defending **his love** for **them**.



Heading the list of false accusations against **Paul** was the charge that **he** had no real **affection** for **the Corinthians**. **The apostle**, according to **the false apostles**, was abusive, manipulative, and dictatorial; **he** was merely using **the Corinthians** to further **his** own personal agenda. Therefore, **Paul** repeatedly affirmed **his love** for the church **(2:4, 7:1, 12:15** and **19)**, and defined the character of **his love** for **them** by **his** actions toward **them**. In doing so, he provided a clear-cut description of **love** in action **(First Corinthians 13:4-8).** As **Paul** described the essence of what real **love** is like, **he** expressed **ten characteristics of love**.[157]

1. Honesty (6:11): O Corinthians, we have spoken frankly to you, we have opened our hearts wide. Paul had **spoken frankly** (candidly or honestly) **to the Corinthians** because **love** holds back nothing from the one **it loves (Acts:20** and **27; Mt 12:34)**. First, **Paul** spoke honestly about **God's Word** and **God's** standards. Earlier in **his** letter **he** defended **his** truthfulness, reminding **the Corinthians, "For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God (1:13** and **4:2).** In **4:13 he** noted that **he** spoke **the truth** because **he** believed **the truth**, while in **13:8 he**

declared: **For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth.**

Secondly, **Paul** spoke honestly about **sin**. Some argue that it is unloving to comfort people about their sin, but Scripture affirms that truth and **love** are inseparably linked **(Ephesians 4:15). Paul** lovingly and truthfully presented the gospel to **the Corinthians**, fully expounding the realities of sin and righteousness. **He** preached **Messiah** crucified and all that that implied. **He** also confronted sin and called for **their** repentance, and in this letter warned **them** that **he** would not spare disciplining **them (12:18-13:3)**. **He** even challenged **them** to test the genuineness of **their faith (13:5)**. In **2:9 he** explained **his** motive in writing the painful letter **(2:4)** that **he** sent **them** between **First** and **Second Corinthians, "For to this end I also wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things" (7:8-10 NASB).**

Finally, **Paul** spoke honestly about **his** affections toward **the Corinthians**. **He loved them** intensely, as the eloquent expression **O Corinthians** indicates. **Paul's heart** was **open wide** (Greek: *peplatuntai,* meaning *to make broad*) to **them (6:11)**; **he** had been open, candid and vulnerable **(4:2)**. The expression also means that there was plenty of room in **his heart** for **them**; in **7:3 he** told **them, "You are in our hearts."** That **Paul** could have **them in his heart** after all the sorrow **they** had caused **him** proved **his love** was genuine **(12:14-15)**.

2. Affection (6:12): Any restraint you feel has not been imposed by us, but by your own inner selves. Paul had not done anything to cause any estrangement or hinder the relationship between **them**. On the contrary, **they** had restrained **their affections** towards **him**. A number of **them** had shut **the apostle** out of **their** lives and closed **their hearts** to **him**. **They** had believed the lies about **Paul** and turned away from **him** to follow **the false apostles**. Consequently, **they** had left **their affection** for **him**.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **Your love** that is always so very deep and caring for me. How wonderful that **Your love** opens the doors of heaven to all who choose to **love You** as **Lord** and **Savior**, **for there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor freeman, neither male nor female, for in union with Messiah Yeshua, you are all one (Galatians 3:28).** Even **the angels** in heaven rejoice when **they** see how great **Your love** is to forgive repentant **sinners. In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10).** Thank **You,** for the demonstration of great **love** that the father shows to **his** prodigal **son** when **the son** returns home in*

repentance. ***And he got up and went to his own father. But while he was still far away, his father saw him and felt compassion. He ran and fell on his neck and kissed him (Luke 15:21).***

How hard it must be for ***You*** *dear* ***Father****, when people choose to* ***love*** *things more than* ***You****.* ***You*** *have such a gracious and generous heart and so want to reward your children. It is so important to spend time worshiping and praising* ***You****. It must hurt you when those who call themselves your children spend so little time talking to* ***You*** *and so much time busying themselves with other things. I choose to show* ***You*** *my* ***love*** *by praising* ***You*** *often and using my time, money and thoughts to honor* ***You****. In the holy name of* ***Your Son, Yeshua*** *and the power of His resurrection. Amen*

The Corinthians' rejection hurt **Paul** deeply. Yet, despite that, **he** never lost **his affection** for **them** because true **love covers all things** (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Df – Love Covers All Things**) and **endures all things** (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Di – Love Endures All Things**). That does not mean, of course, that **Paul** tolerated **their** sin and error. **He** disciplined and corrected **them** when necessary, but that reflected **his** true **love** for **them**. **Love** and discipline are inseparable even with **ADONAI** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Cz – God Disciplines His Children**).

3. Fellowship (6:13 and 7:2a): In like exchange, (I speak to you as children) open wide your hearts too . . . make room for us in your hearts. Few things in life are more painful than unanswered **love**, because **love** longs for a response. **Paul's** words here express the penetrating sadness **h**e felt over **the Corinthians'** failure to return **his love**. Though they broke **his** heart, **Paul's love** for **the Corinthians** would not allow **him** to abandon **them**. Instead, **he** pleaded with **them**, using the phrase **in like exchange** (Greek *autos*, literally *in an exchange that is exact*). **Paul** begged **them** to **love him** as **he loved them** – sacrificially, consistently, and permanently. **He** could **speak to them as children** because **they** were spiritual **children (First Cor 4:14-15)**. Here is a tender, almost melancholy scene. **The** noble **apostle** did not hesitate to plead for the **love** of the most troubled of **his** churches. **He** was not too proud to open up **his** heart and let **them** see that **he** was hurting.

Then **he** reached out to **them** again, pleading: **Make room for us in your hearts (7:2a).** Having reminded **them** that **his heart** was wide open to **them, Paul** begged **the Corinthians** to **make room** in **their hearts** for **him**. **The apostle**

knew that as long as **they** clung to **their** sinful associations with **his enemies**, **their love** relationship with **him** could not be restored. That made it all the more urgent for **them** to follow **his** instructions and sever all ties with **the false apostles** (see **Bi – Do Not be Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers**).

4. Purity (7:2b): We haven't wronged anyone, we haven't corrupted anyone. Paul's claim is especially appropriate in light of **his** call to separate from unbelievers. Despite the false charges leveled against **him (4:2), Paul had wronged no one.** Those who made that charge may have had in mind **Paul's** turning the incestuous man over to Satan (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Ba – Failure to Discipline an Immoral Brother**). But **the apostle** didn't mistreat him, but rather properly dealt with his sin. Actually, it was **the Corinthians** who had **wronged Paul; he** had neither **wronged** nor **corrupted** any of **them**. Again, it was not **Paul**, but **his opponents** who were guilty of ruining **the Corinthians'** morals **(11:3). Paul's love** for **the Corinthians** expressed itself both in **his** own purity and **his** concern for **theirs**.

5. Humility (7:2c): We haven't exploited anyone (Greek: *pleonekteo*)**. Love** necessarily involves humility, for only humble people can **love** unselfishly. Proud people who **love** themselves cannot **love** others. *Pleonekteo* refers to defrauding others by selfishly using them for gain. Specifically, it conveys the idea of manipulating people for financial gain as its use in **12:17-18** indicated. Neither **Paul** nor anyone associated with **him** took advantage of **the Corinthians** financially, despite the repeated accusations by **the false apostles**.

In fact, the opposite was true. Rather than using **the Corinthians** for personal gain, **Paul** sacrificially endured suffering and hardship for **them, "For we who are alive are always being handed over to death for Yeshua's sake, so that Yeshua's life also might be manifested in our mortal bodies. Thus death is at work in us but life in you" (4:11-12). Paul's love** for **the Corinthian believers** was so great that **he** was willing to risk **his** own **life** for **them (John 15:13). His** humble, self-sacrificing **love** was **not selfish** (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Db – Love is not Selfish**). **He** did not merely **look out for his own** personal **interests,** but for **the interests of others (Philippians 2:4).**[158]

6. Forgiveness (7:3a): I am not saying this to condemn (Greek: *katharsis*) **you. Paul** didn't want **the Corinthians** to interpret **his** strong defense of **his** integrity as an attack on **them**. *Catharsis* refers to passing final judgment. **Paul** was not passing a final verdict on **them**; **he** was not giving up on **them**. **He** did not

want to sever **his** relationship with **them**, but restore it. So **he** rebuked **their** sin and rebellion and called for **them** to repent and reaffirm **their** loyalty to **him**, and thus to **the Lord**. **Paul** knew the truth that **Solomo**n expressed: **Faithful are the wounds of a friend (Proverbs 27:6). Paul** was an example of genuine biblical **love**, which **keeps no records of wrongs (First Cor 13:5d), because love covers a multitude of sins (First Peter 4:8).**

7. Loyalty (7:3b): For I have already said that you have a place in our hearts, whether we live together or die together. Paul's declaration: **you have a place in our hearts** repeats **his** thought from **6:11**. The phrase **whether we live together or die together** reflects **Paul's** undying loyalty to **the Corinthians**. The idea is that **their** friendship would last throughout this life and keep **them** together even through **death** because **their** relationship would transcend **death** and last forever in the glory of heaven. **Paul's love** was loyal to **the death**, like that of **Ruth**, who said to **Naomi, "Don't press me to leave you and stop following you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die; and there I will be buried.**
May ADONAI bring terrible curses on me, and worse ones as well, if anything but death separates you and me" (Ruth 1:16-17).

8. Trust (7:4a): I am very confident in you. At first glance, this is an astonishing, even shocking statement. The **Corinthian** church was a mess. More than any other church in the B'rit Chadashah. Certainly, then, **Paul's** great **trust** and **confidence** in **the Corinthians** was not based on **their** track record. In fact, **their** actions called for cautious scrutiny, not open **confidence**. But true **love covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things (1 Cor 13:7).** That does not, of course, reflect the modern myth that positive thought makes good things happen. **Paul's hope** was not that a positive attitude would change **the Corinthians**. True biblical **love** does not make good things happen, but **it** believes and **hopes** for **them**. Therefore, despite **their** unfaithfulness, disloyalty and sin. **Paul** maintained **his confidence** in **the Corinthians** – not because of **them**, but because **he** knew that **ADONAI** would **complete** the saving work **He** had **begun** in **them (Phil 1:6).**

9. Praise (7:4b): Great is my boasting (Greek: *kauchesis*) **on your behalf.** That **Paul** would engage in **boasting** on behalf of a church filled with immaturity, disloyalty, doubt, and disaffection is amazing. Nevertheless, **he** praised **them**. Though *kauchesis* can have the negative connotation of pride **(Romans 3:27;**

James 4:16), it more often has the positive connotation of praise, as **it** does here **(Second Corinthians 7;14; 8:24, 11:10; Romans 15:17; First Corinthaisn 1:31).** Proper **boasting** is that which is done **in the Lord (Second Corinthians 10:17; First Corinthians 1;31),** and **Paul's** praise was of what **the Lord** was doing in the **Corinthian** church. **He** boasted about **the Corinthians** to other churches **(8:24). Paul** was eager to praise **the Lord** for **them in spite of their** shortcomings. That's true **love**.

10. Joy (7:4c): You have filled me with encouragement; and that in spite of all our troubles, I am overflowing with joy. Even more surprising that **Paul's** trust and praise for **the Corinthians** was that **they** brought **him joy**. Despite all the problems they caused **him, Paul** used the perfect tense of a verb (meaning *an action in the past with continuing results*) to say that **he** had been, and still was, **filled with encouragement.** No amount of **troubles** could stem **the overflowing joy he** felt.

These **ten characteristics of genuine love** are reflections of **God's love** for you. **He loves** you enough to be honest and has a deep affection for you so that **He** is grieved when sin disrupts our fellowship with **Him**. **His love** for you also causes **Him** to desire your purity **(Titus 2:14).** Because of that, **the Lord Yeshua Messiah humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:8),** so you could be forgiven. **His love** also ensures **God's** eternal loyalty to you **(Hebrews 13:5)**, and causes **Him** to **trust** you with **the Good News (1 Thessalonians 2:4)**. And **ADONAI loves** you, takes pride in you, and takes **joy** in you **(Psalm 149:4; Zeph 3:17).** And taking **Paul** as our model, you are to **love** others the way **God loves** you.[159]