

2 Cor 12:11-18 Expressions of Love for a Troubled Church

Like many churches, the church at Corinth had some troubling problems; we looked at them last week. They didn't appreciate Paul for who he was or what he was doing, they didn't defend him against false accusations, they falsely accused him over financial issues, and they lacked love for him in spite of his abundant love for them.

Paul, of course, endured this mistreatment. He was not willing to give up on these unloving, disloyal, unappreciative people. In spite of all of the problems, Paul expressed his love for this troubled church in various ways—that's what we'll be looking at today.

Paul shows us here how we can continue to express our love toward people even when they are unloving and unappreciative, even when they are disloyal and critical.

Anyone who serves in the church has to endure difficult people. I can just about guarantee that if you serve in the church, you may at some point feel unloved and unappreciated. Maybe someone will make false accusations against you. They may complain about you and even be verbally abusive.

Why does that kind of thing happen in a church, of all places? It's because we are all sinners; we all fall short of perfection. We all still struggle with sin. So we should not be surprised if people disappoint us and treat us unkindly.

Do we just quit when those we serve are unkind and unappreciative? Or do we keep on loving and serving people in spite of their failures?

Paul shows us here what it looks like to persevere in ministry even when you don't feel loved or appreciated.

Last time, we looked at several evidences of problems in the church; today let's consider...

I. Expressions of love for a troubled church

.15 "the more abundantly I love you..."

A. .14a Continued interest is an expression of love.

He'll be visiting again soon. He wants the church to be prepared for this upcoming visit. He's giving them fair warning that he'll be there soon.

1. The whole book of 2 Corinthians is an effort to prepare the people for another visit from Paul. When he arrives, he wants to have a pleasant and non-confrontational experience. He does not want another painful, severe, or awkward interaction with these people. So they need to deal with a few issues before he arrives.
2. This will be the third time he's visited the church.
 - a) He was there when he founded the church (Acts 18);
 - b) Then there was the "painful" visit in which there was a tense interaction and he left early (2:1).
 - c) His next arrival would be his third visit.

Paul had shown an incredible amount of interest in that church. In total they had received four letters from him, two visits, and he had sent several representatives (Silas, Timothy, Apollos, Titus, and "the brother").¹ And he planned for even more interaction with them. He retained his interest in them in spite of their lack of interest in him.

App: One sign of love is a continuing concern for the welfare of others, even for those who don't treat you well. Paul is not willing to quit on these people. He wants to continue interacting with them in the hopes that they move in the right direction.

Love is continuing to show interest and concern, to keep working with troublesome people, even when they don't show much interest in you.

Illus.: Like parents working with their children—sometimes kids are very difficult, but you don't give up on them.

Almost all ministry requires this same attitude—"I'm going to keep on working with these people even if they don't seem to appreciate it, even if they don't seem to love me or value what I'm doing." You don't quit even when people seem to be apathetic or critical of you.

Imagine what would happen if the nursery workers quit because the children were unkind or unappreciative. Same with SS teachers, children's church, even with adults.

¹ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 429.

We can serve people like that because our ultimate goal is to serve God by serving people. We can't control how they respond or what fruit they produce. All we can control is how we serve others.

By the way, churches do themselves a favor when show a little appreciation for those who serve. Some people are thoughtful in that regard. They hand out thank you cards and send little tokens of appreciation for SS teachers and others who serve in the church. When children can't express appreciation, their parents can.

We show our love for others when we persist in serving even when others seem not to care or not to express their appreciation.

B. Caring for people is an expression of love.

A couple of things demonstrate Paul's care for these people.

1. .14b Don't be a financial burden. He will not be burdensome—he won't ask for money.

a) His policy regarding the church at Corinth was to refuse financial support from them, and he's going to stick to that policy on his future visit. Even though he's faced criticism because of this, he's not going to change.

b) .14c His reason: he is seeking *them*, not their *things*. Paul has no interest in their money. His only interest is in the people themselves, not their possessions.

Philippians 4:17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.

c) .14b Illustration/reason: parents save up for (θησαυρίζω) the children, not vice versa. Paul viewed himself as the father of that congregation. Most of them had been converted to Christ through Paul's ministry. He was their spiritual father.

1 Cor 4:14-15, Paul calls the people his "beloved children" and describes himself as their father in the faith.

As such, did not expect financial support from the church that he planted. He did not want to burden them or be subject to accusations of financial fraud.

App: A true servant of God cares much more about people than about things. Our goal is to see people flourish and grow; all the other stuff is extraneous.

The church is the people, not the building or the property.

2. .17 Don't take advantage of/exploit (πλεονεκτέω) them.

The charge coming from the false teachers was that Paul had exploited or entrapped them in some financial fraud. But that was absolutely false.

2 Corinthians 7:2 ... *We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one.*

Paul was not guilty of this, nor were any of his colleagues guilty of financial fraud. Titus and the others were upstanding men of sterling reputation. No one associated with Paul was guilty of cheating the people out of their money. Paul absolutely denies any kind of fraudulent financial dealings associated with him or his co-workers.

Illus.: Sadly, financial misconduct within churches is quite common.

I recently read about a Missouri pastor who was caught on camera scolding his congregation for failing to buy him an expensive watch.

Pastor Carlton Funderburke of the Church at the Well in Kansas City was giving a fiery sermon about “honoring God’s shepherds” when he scolded the church people for failing to give him the pricey wrist watch he’d requested.

He said, “you can buy a Movado [watch] at Sam’s [Club] and you know I asked for one last year. And here it is all the way in August and I still ain’t got it.”

To his credit, the pastor later apologized. Good for him, but that kind of behavior disqualifies him as a pastor—not a lover of money.

Another example: A Colorado pastor of an “online church” is accused of defrauding parishioners out of millions dollars through the sale of cryptocurrency deemed “essentially worthless” by state securities regulators. The pastor and his wife allegedly sold the “practically worthless” tokens to support their “lavish lifestyle.”

Who buys cryptocurrency from an online church??

That kind of financial fraud and misconduct is quite common, even among so-called Christians.

Those who serve in the church must avoid all appearances of financial fraud or mismanagement. Our focus is on people, not on things or on money. Money is just a tool to help people.

- C. .15 Being willing to “spend and be spent” for the souls of people is an expression of love.
1. We all know what it means “to spend.” Those who serve in the church often sacrifice their own resources to serve. They are willing to spend their time, effort, and money for the benefit of others. Sacrificing like that is hard when it seems like no one appreciates your spending on their behalf.
 2. The words “be spent” suggests total exhaustion of personal and spiritual resources—to spend out, to spend all. “I will spend up everything I have and everything I am for you.”
 3. .15b “for your souls” – all of this spending of physical and spiritual resources is for their spiritual benefit.

Paul didn’t care about people’s money; he cared about their souls. “He loved their *souls*, not their *savings*.” He was glad to use his own resources for the benefit of these people— “very gladly” (.15).

Quote: Paul is saying that without any hesitation he would spend everything he possesses (money, resources, energy, time, and talent) [for] the welfare of the Corinthians. . . . he would wear himself out for them.²

App: That’s the kind of attitude we should have as we seek to serve others in the church. Serving others often requires that we “spend and be spent.” We may have to wear ourselves out as we seek to serve others. Sometimes it feels that way. A true and faithful servant of God is willing to spend and be spent for the benefit of others.

² Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 429.

It's sad that so many people these days think of church as a service agency—that is, the purpose of the church is to serve them; they come to church to be served. They are consumers of religious services provided by the church. They are here to be served, not to serve.

But here's what Jesus said:

Matthew 20:26–28 ... *whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*

Cf. John 13—Jesus washed the disciples' feet.

Joh 13:14 *If I then, [your] Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another s feet.*

Our attitude when we come to church is *not* that we expect others to serve us. We should be here to serve, and we should be willing to spend and be spent for the benefit of others. That's how we demonstrate love for others—by serving them.

I wonder how many of us come to church expecting to spend and be spent for the benefit of those we serve? Are we serving others, or are we expecting others to serve us? I hope that our intent is serving others.

- D. .18 Enlisting helpers of like faith is an expression of love.
1. Paul of course was traveling all over the place. In his absence, he sent Titus and other colleagues to work with the church.
 2. Those he sent were of the same spirit as Paul; they walked in the same steps. I.e., they were of the same attitude, same beliefs, the same way of thinking, the same outlook or viewpoint.
 3. The church could not charge Titus or the others with fraud or exploitation. And if they all walked in the same spirit and in the same steps, then they all had the best interests of the congregations in mind. No one had defrauded them or cheated them out of anything. This was a ridiculous, unfounded charge.

App: One of the marks of a good pastor is that he enlists the help of other Christian leaders of like faith and practice who can aid the strengthening of the church. We want to learn from and fellowship with people of like faith and practice. It's good to bring in other people occasionally to teach or to challenge or encourage us in the faith. That's one reason we have special guest speakers.

A note of caution: if we are going to listen to other preachers, we should make sure that they are of the "same spirit" and walk "in the same steps" as Paul and his colleagues. That is, they should be biblical and orthodox. We have access to many preachers these days, and some of them are not preaching the whole counsel of God. Some are very unorthodox and plain unbiblical. So we must make sure that those we listen to are going in the right direction. We must be discerning.

So a church has to be very careful whom they allow in positions of leadership. We want to recognize only those of like faith and practice—people of the same spirit who are walking in same steps.

I would totally understand if Paul had decided to abandon the church in Corinth. If they were so unloving and disloyal, he could focus on other churches that would appreciate his efforts.

Like Paul, we must persevere in serving those who may not show love and loyalty. If we really love people and want what is best for them, then we don't cut and run when they are unkind or unappreciative. True servants of God are willing to spend and be spent for the benefit of others. We are like parents who give, not like children who take. We are not expecting to *be served*; we are expecting to *serve*.

And we are willing to sacrifice and persevere for the souls of men. Even if people lack love and appreciation for us, we love them and are willing to spend and be spent for their benefit. "I do not seek your [things], but you." Our interest is personal. We want the best for others—that's what love is—seeking the well-being of another person.

Following Paul's pattern here, we must continue to serve God by serving others, even when they are unloving, disloyal, and unappreciative. We continue serving even when we have to spend our own resources, even when we feel spent in the process. We can do that because, ultimately, we are serving God by serving such people. Our highest goal is to serve God, and sometimes that requires serving others who are not so nice. But we persevere, we continue to serve because we love the souls of men.

And we should realize that we can make it far more pleasant for everyone when we show a little love, loyalty, and appreciation for those who serve. Don't be like these unloving, unappreciative, disloyal Corinthians. Appreciate those who spend and are spent in their service to the people of the church.