

August 10, 2014 “The Dominant Chord” 1 Cor. 13 vs.11

Adulthood is demanding stuff. That may seem to be a long way from the love theme for which 1st Corinthians 13 is so famed. Surprise! Surprise! The two are related. The apostle Paul has said a lot of things about love in this chapter. He has told us love is kind. He has told us that love never fails. For some of us that flies in the face of real life experiences. Time to remember some really basic things. We are not talking about the mushy portrayal of love in Hollywood films, new or old. We are talking about the love of God. We are being told about the love wherewith Jesus has called us to love others, inside and outside of the church circle. He has dared to lay down a money back guarantee....that the Holy Spirit of God will empower us to love as we have never loved before, if we will seek to love others in the name of Jesus. That is why it is the most excellent way. This lifestyle and ethic of loving others, is first and foremost about Christian lifestyle.

And there is one thing we must all understand. It is not easy. Sometimes it exacts a price which could even include life itself. If you are going to love your enemies, that is indeed one of the implications. Remember the teenaged girl during one of those horrendous High School shootings, who was asked at gunpoint if she believed in God. She could have said no. She could have said I have not figured that out. She might have said

a number of things that would have appeared to be safe answers. She told the truth. She said, “Yes I do.” And she was shot on the spot. And she died of her wounds. There are people who, if we love them, as Jesus would have us love them, will take advantage of us. If we do not lose our lives, we will get hurt. In fact it may well be more painful feeling taken advantage of, than actually dying. The pain potentially lasts longer if you continue to live with it.

We all know that it is challenging to live with change. That is why Paul reminds us that when Jesus comes again, everything is going to change. Loving God and loving like Jesus is not without its cost. Part of the price we are called to pay as believers in an unbelieving world and for the most part, an unbelieving nation...is coping with the pain and the changes we face as we continue to serve the Christ who will return. When perfection comes, all that is imperfect will disappear. That’s enough change to make the 21st century look like child’s play! And yet, even in this environment we are called to love to an extraordinary degree, and to a marvelous measure.

He turns to another facet of this question of love and loving, being the most excellent way to serve our Lord, our God and our Redeemer...in the sacred power and empowering of the Spirit. “When I was a child...” We all know something about childish ways. We make allowances for children in any

social gathering. We may have standards that we call manners, but we do not expect children to behave as adults would do. Being a Christian has parallels to the reality of human growth. When we were young in the faith we said and did things, we would not do, as people with years of experience in both the church and the world. Some would say they are more reserved. Some would say we are more cautious....maybe even too cautious. The thing is, the passing of time, brings a wealth of experience. And we filter what we say and do through our experience. The older we get the less is the likelihood that we will volunteer for tasks that we don't normally initiate. Old soldiers say, you never volunteer! Period. Being young, one is less aware of consequences unforeseen. Being young in the Christian faith that is equally true.

In fact one of the Christian realities is that we all know stories of individuals who gave themselves to the work of Christian mission overseas and served there the whole of their lives. Studies done by schools of Mission tend to reveal something Unforeseen. Young missionaries tend to be as a rule more effective than older missionaries. And young missionaries who are very new to faith in Christ tend to be the most effective missionaries of all. They do not know all the answers, or even most of them. They do not really know what is expected of them. They tend to cross cultural lines with greater ease....they expected life to be different where they

went to serve. They expected to have to adapt to their new world ...as opposed to expecting their new world to be totally changed by the great gift of the gospel. What I am saying is that Paul is not just talking biology here. He is also remembering what life was like when faith in Jesus was fresh and new for him, and how that shaped his interaction with the surrounding world of Judaism and the Roman Empire. At the beginning of his missionary career he always went to the local synagogue first, the center of the local Jewish population. By the end of his career he is more likely to head for the marketplace, the debating hall, or just deal with his guards in his prison and his fellow prisoners....almost all of them gentiles, non Jews.

“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.” When we are young in the faith there is one thing we are absolutely certain about. God is so good that if we just work at it hard enough, pray long enough, read and re read enough of the Bible, there is an explanation, a rational explanation for everything. We expect all things, in the end, and here on earth to make sense to us. “When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” In many ways that is the truth. Adults see the world differently than children do. Adults know that life is not carefree. We know there is an ugly side and a painful side to living. And we know that serving God, praying, studying the Bible and surrounding ourselves with Christian people like ourselves does

not mean “nothing will go wrong.” It does not mean life will be pain free. And it does not mean that everything will have a perfectly logical explanation.

In fact one of the things that characterizes our clinging to childlike ways as adult Christians is our expectation that all things will conform to a model of logical explanation. That is one of the reasons we are so easily blindsided by grief. It is logical that good behavior is ultimately safe behavior. Unfortunately it also overlooks a fundamental Biblical reality. We are indeed children of the King. Jesus saves and Jesus is our King. But and this is a huge but...because of the sin factor we are mortal. We know that with one part of our brains...and yet we are still surprised when someone we love, someone we know, someone we care about dies. Loss of husbands and wives, and children even more so becomes cripplingly painful. The best of Christians have to labour and I mean work, to harbor no bitterness. To force the pain not to influence the way we act and respond to everyone around us. We are tempted to seek solitude and then are surprised that we are depressed, and down, and uncared for. We want to be loved and yet we do not want to have to be loving.

Sin is the chaos factor. It was before we became believers. It is that we are continually tempted to revisit as new believers, and even as seasoned believers. And it always

causes us to behave inconsistently...more like children than adults. There is a reason we gravitate to the apostle Paul. Wrestling with the same realities with which we wrestle, he seems to have it so together. To have put childish ways behind him. We tend to say he never stumbles. That may be logical. It may even be theologically sound. But it is not entirely true. He was hard on some of his coworkers. He was responsible for the break-up of some of the mission teams of which he was apart. Paul is a giant as a model for us to follow. But he is not perfect. And in the end I believe it fair to say, he never claimed he was perfect...in that category, only God Almighty, only Jesus who is God's Son, only the Holy Spirit poured into us and into the midst that glory might be given to the Lord, qualify for that description...perfect. We strive and we need to strive to put childish ways behind us. That includes drawing lines we would not cross, refusing to love some because of what they have done and especially for what they have done to us. As the Lord's prayer says and means...Forgive us our sins (not just debts...sins) as we forgive our debtors...that is...those who sin against us.

As Paul sees it, maturity in faith as a Christian, is characterized by an ability to love even one's worst enemies. Paul died in Rome. He did not die cursing the Empire, or the Emperor, or the system that was so unjust when it came to trying his case. Paul died praising God for the privileges of

redemption. And he prayed for his jailors. And the soldiers who beat him. And those who ultimately demanded he cease to exist. What is so compelling about this chapter, is that Paul lived the balance of his life as though the love of God was, and is, the dominant chord in the symphony of life. The Corinthian Christians knew that. And the truth is, so do we.

If you want to live a testimony that proclaims to God be the glory, live as one who loves God passionately, and loves people constantly. There was a time, when that was simply described, as...the way.

Let us pray;

Lord we would that your name would be glorified by the way we live. Help us to put childish ways behind us, and help us to keep childish ways there...behind us. Help us to love those who are near and dear to us. Help us to love people we barely know. When we really meet strangers, give us the courage and the power and the faith in Christ, and through Christ, to love them like family. And into your hands we would entrust where that would lead. Amen