

June 8, 2014    “The Dominant Chord”    1 Corinthians 13:3

I love to sing. I love to play the guitar and sing, or the banjo and sing. And because I lack a measure of formal musical training, the arrangements are my own and based on what I have heard, usually from recordings. Occasionally from radio or television. What that means in the raw fundamentals is I start by identifying the chords used in the accompanying of the piece. Then the skills I have learned over the past 53 years result in the picking style I use. When asked how I play the way I do I usually say I pick through the chords. Always one is dominant. It is the key chord. You start with it. You end with it. You continue to come back to it as you play the song. Take it away and the arrangement is like a punctured balloon. It fails.

What the apostle Paul is trying to tell the Corinthian Christians, and we learn much when we pay attention to his message to them, is that there is an emphasis that dominates the Christian faith and the lifestyle that results from that faith centered in and on the person of Jesus. To put it as simply as can, self denying love, love that thinks about the needs of the other person should dominate our relationships inside of and outside of the church. Paul begins by telling us that Spiritual gifts, being Spirit filled Christians (and we should all want that) leaves us like broken musical instruments if the dominant chord of our living is not the love revealed in Jesus. Even if we are like

the prophets and the preachers of the church who should understand the mysteries of God's redeeming us, if are not loving others the way Jesus loved, we are nothing. Great faith, miracle working faith without the dominant chord of love is a failed testimony and song out of tune.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> verse of this chapter Paul offers an astounding insight. "If I give all I have to the poor, and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." If we analyse that verse there is much to learn and even more to do. And it all has to do with being Christ's man, Christ's woman, and together, Christ's church in an unbelieving world. In unbelieving times. Times such as these indeed are.

The charitable work of the early church was an astounding witness. We are told in the Book of Acts that many Christians sold everything they possessed, liquidated their assets, put the money in a common treasury and everyone shared from that common purse according to need. The Session and the Board of this congregation would never dream of asking that of you and I. We think of owning property as a fundamental right and even a duty. We love our things. My Martin guitar is a recent acquisition, the fulfillment in many ways of a life long dream. So was the purchase of the long necked banjo we have sung with. I am tempted to say I worked a lifetime to gain these things in the last few years.

Many Christians in the early church, sold all they had for the greater good of the church and to assist the poor.

As difficult as we would find that commitment to make, Paul writes to us and says, you could do that. You could do that willingly. Some of the world's poor would indeed be helped if you did. But if in the process you failed to be as loving as Jesus was, as the Holy Spirit of God Himself wants to empower you to love your friends, your neighbours, your brothers and sisters in Christ and....your enemies....those whose intention is to hurt you, get you, perhaps even kill you...if you fail to love all of these and each one whom you meet and as you meet them...you will gain nothing. You will not gain the satisfaction you sought. You will not gain the inner peace you desire. You won't score points with the King of heaven. I tell you my reaction....OUCH! That hurts.

His second statement in verse 3 hurts even more! If I surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Let me be clear. He is talking about martyrdom. He is talking about those who suffered in his time, Paul's time, people like Stephen who was killed for believing in Jesus. He is talking about the Christians he, Paul was hunting when Jesus apprehended him on the road of Damascus and claimed him as a Kingdom servant. He is talking about himself, one who served Jesus boldly and did so in the recognition that even his life

should be spent in the sharing of the gospel regardless of the dangers that brought his way. Paul is saying there is nothing in the list of our church work, our mission work, our ministry work, that gains us standing with our Lord if we fail to do it in the spirit of redeeming love, sacrificial love.

In the plainest language possible, he is saying there is nothing you can do to make the God who has redeemed you in Jesus be in your debt. There are no commandments or rules you can keep that will make you “better positioned” for heaven. Salvation is a gift God gives us for believing in Him and living the loving life style that may indeed lead to a cross, to suffering, to heartache and pain. No matter what we do, if we have not learned the simple lesson of love....we gain nothing.

How fitting it is that this should work out to be our message on Communion Sunday. Another name for the Lord's Supper is the love feast. For as we eat the bread and drink the wine we remember Jesus, suffering and rising the 3<sup>rd</sup> day to save us from our sin. How great is His love for your and me and all the others whose lives He has touched. And at least a part of what the apostle is saying here, a lesson we all need to heed, it matters not how religious we are, or how faithful we attempt to be, if as people look at us they cannot see, the love of our Saviour in us and our actions. To God be the glory. In the great theme of your witness to Him who died for you, may the

dominant Chord be that you love people even as Jesus has loved you.

Let us pray.....

Heavenly Father, Your love is forever and for us. We bow before you in gratitude. As we seek to serve you in the midst of this community during the coming week, spice our attempts at kindness with the love of Jesus. Grant that we might continually be putting the well being of others before the promotion of ourselves. Help us to serve rich portions of love in the service we give and offer. In Jesus name we pray. Amen