

June 15, 2014 “The Dominant Chord” Pt. 3 1 Corinthians  
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The subject explored in 1 Corinthians 13 is love. Specifically it is Christ-like love. In fact the apostle Paul in writing about this Christian love invented a new word in the Greek language....agapn... It means Christ-like love and there can be no question it has a sacrificial quality to it. Love that in imitation of Jesus puts the other person first. It implies that we are to carry the cross of Christ in our ability to love others. Paul is not talking about the love evidenced in friendship. He is not talking about the love we would anticipate in marriage. It is not sexual in nature. It clearly involves laying down one's life for the well being of others.

In verses 1-3 Paul says, as a follower of Jesus if I don't evidence the capacity to love others I am like a broken musical instrument. If I have miracle working faith in God, faith in Jesus, evidence of the Spirit of God in me...but do not love, I am nothing. I am not a big wheel. Even if I am willing to die for the Gospel and in the service of God, I gain nothing through my martyrdom. These statements might be cause for nervousness. So I want to say this as clearly as I can. He is not saying that failing to be as loving as Christians ought to be that we have put our salvation at risk. And I say that with certainty because Paul consistently says...we do not earn salvation by what we do. It is

the gift of God received simply because we believe in Jesus, crucified and risen. Salvation is a gift. That's what we mean when we say we are saved by the grace of God.

Everything said about love in this chapter assumes 2 things. 1) It is assumed we are believers, that is, Christians and therefore are saved by God's grace from the damnable reality of our sinfulness. 2) The second assumption Paul makes is that realizing we are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus, we are interested in and wanting to learn and pursue "the most excellent way" of being Christian in the church, in our neighbourhoods, in our communities, in our province, in our nation, and in the whole wide world. In verse 4 Paul starts defining the reality of what Christ-like love looks like. He gets concrete. This verse begins a portion of 1 Corinthians in which the apostle does not talk about ideas. He talks about conduct. He talks about how you and I do this loving. How we are to act it out in real life everyday.

First of all he says. "Love is patient." It is not easy to be patient. Patience requires a willingness to wait. If you are at all like me, waiting is one of the hardest things we do. I don't like to wait. I don't like to wait in line in a store or at a theater. Attending the 140<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, I had to wait in line every time there was a meal served. The way you cope with that is you talk to the people who are standing in line with you,

in front of you and behind you and in the case of a line up for food, the people beside you. We do that so the time will fly by. So that we will not be so conscious of the fact we are being patient. We want the food. The hardest, hardest one of all is waiting in line for a public washroom. I mean, there you are so aware there is a physical limit to the ability to be patient. In such a line we understand a real fact. Patience is painful!

Being patient means baring the pain that the other person still does not get it! Barbara has an I phone and an I Pad. And of course she is computer literate in a manner that leaves me in the dust. Recently two of our retired friends got I Pads. One of the things they both discovered quickly is that they had no idea how to do much more than turn them on. They did not know how to access their e mails. They were not sure they knew how to send an email. They did not know how to access pictures sent to them by friends and relatives. They did not know how to take a picture using the camera function. They did not know how to send that to their grandkids. So Barbara created an I Pad Circle. These friends come over and they do stuff with their I pads. When they don't know what to do. They ask. When they forget what they were told and shown, they ask again. When the little machine does not do what they thought they were telling it to do, they ask what they did wrong. Again. And again. And again. She is so patient. And I

asked her, how come you aren't that patient with me? She said, I know you have a brain.

Love has the patience to stick with people even when they ought to know and ought to do but don't. Patient love does not let relationships die simply because the other person fails. Fails to do. Fails not to do. Fails to remember. Patient love says, let's do that one more time...again and again and again. Jesus patiently loves us every time we stumble. Every time we fail. Every time we sin. Again, and again, and again.

Love is kind. The apostle says love is patient...no matter how much time is involved. He says love is kind. Kindness is the flavour of what we do even when we think it should not take more time to do it. At the recent General Assembly the longest time was spent on resolution # 6. The motion was that General Assemblies occur every two years, instead of the current practice of annual meetings. The idea was such a practice would save money. The idea was that such a practice would mean giving more power to the staff at 50 Wynford Drive. And there were other reasons. I was frankly amazed by the kindness of the debate. Resolution # 6 was debated on day 2. It was debated on day 3. It was debated and finally defeated on day 4, the last day of the Assembly. No one ever said...this is a stupid resolution, and I am sure I was not the

only one who thought it was. The language used evidenced Kindness. Thought about how others would feel as opposition or even support for the resolution was expressed. There were no lost tempers in evidence. The Moderator was kind to every speaker. Several who were extremely, dare I say, painfully nervous...he helped them to clarify their thinking, to find the words. Kindness involves thinking about everyone else's viewpoint even as you express your own convictions. Love is kind says Paul....as Jesus with the worst of sinners was patient and kind.

If love is kind, it does not inflict pain. If love is kind it does not reduce the other person's sense of personal worth. Kindness assists. Kindness builds up. Kindness smiles and means that smile to be encouraging.

The apostle says love does not envy. You know what envy does. "Boy, what I would do if I had his money. What I would do or say if I had his connections. I wish I had, I wish there were a way to get what he has. I would love to have his house. His hair. His strength. His health." Paul says love does not do that or think that way. Love does not make destructive comparisons. Comparisons that put down the value, the track record, the accomplishments of the other person. Love does not envy because love has no interest in terminating relationships. Jesus did not treat anyone in such a

way as to leave them thinking what He wanted was they not come to the meeting, that they not listen to His teaching. No sick person was abandoned to their fate when Jesus happened by. Envy does not build relationships. It tends to destroy them.

In similar fashion love does not boast. Boasting promotes me. Love promotes the other person with whom you are conversing. Likewise love is not proud. Pride is often called the deadliest of the seven deadly sins. Why? Because pride zeroes in on me and my accomplishments. Me and my worth. Me and my talents and skills, to the exclusion of others. Pride is utterly egotistical. That simply means pride's focus is always on our self.

The love of Jesus was and is totally focused on saving the person who is lost. The person outside the circle of faith. The person outside the circle of love. God's love....His love. You see, what Paul is saying is we are most Christ-like when we care about someone else, and when we care about them to the extent that we forget about ourselves. To the extent that we forget about protecting our own interests in the interest of caring about the other person. Love is the most excellent way, because it is God's way. It is the way of the cross.

Let us pray;

Lord in the everyday run of life we are tempted to think of love as though it were just an emotion. You, O Lord and our Redeemer have defined love that is willing to suffer and die in order to save others...even us...and each one of us able to say even me! We will be with other people when we leave this church building. We will do business with them. We will be friends with them. Some we will barely know and some will be strangers to us...just people passing by and passing through our experience. In the joy and power of your Spirit Lord, remind us that we never love anyone too much. And hard as it is to remember this remind us there is no one who does not deserve to be loved by us, because we are first and last your people, your children. Amen