

August 17, 2014 “The Dominant Chord” Pt. 11 1st Cor 13:12

The apostle Paul has been writing and teaching about the Christian ethical principle of being loving to your brothers and sisters in Christ, and to your neighbour as well. And he has been consistently arguing throughout this chapter that this is the most excellent way of serving our Lord and His body on earth the church. I have repeated myself a number of times, saying that every great and grievous mistake made by the church, as the most recognizable arm of the Christian cause has been the result of trying to make rules, specific rules, which cause us to lose sight of the challenge that Jesus so clearly laid out to us....to love our enemies. To love the neighbour even if he/she is someone with whom we uncomfortable because of our commitment to the Christian cause, the Christian way of life, being a believer in Jesus.

The problem is that following rules reduces our focus to a choice between right and wrong. That is not an insignificant reality. Living rightly ought indeed to be one of our goals. Leading moral lives is one of the things to which the gospel imperatives invite us. I will put it another way. It is hard to go wrong as a Christian living in an unbelieving environment to want to live and do things God's way. We define the right thing to do as Christians, as to do things God's way. God's way as opposed to the ways of man. God's word as opposed to the

opinions of man as to what is right as opposed to wrong. Doing things man's way leads to a corrupted relativism. We justify questionable deeds and decisions based on the fact that it depends on the circumstances, the times, the place, the alternatives.

The problem with focusing on the choice between right and wrong, is that we (being human) tend to couple that with the idea of reducing risk. If we all agree that the 10 Commandments produce a fundamental table of rules which being followed means we will live rightly as opposed to wrongly or sinfully, we develop a comfort Zone for the resulting lifestyle, the Christian lifestyle. The rules can even become a type of acid test so that you can tell the difference between "real Christians", who keep the rules, and "false Christians" who occasionally set the rules aside. Do you see the problem that results? Suddenly the mechanism of "the rules" begins to insulate us from the rest of the world, and even the rest of the society in which we are living. Real Christians living and doing business, and developing relationships and friendships with other real Christians....and literally losing contact with the unbelieving part of the community.

When Jesus said, "love your neighbour as though he were yourself," a sharp cookie asked the question, "who then is my neighbour?" We would say it this way. Define neighbour.

You see, the man to whom Jesus was speaking was trying to figure out what the rule is on what to do? In fact he was trying to find an alternative to the risky, sometimes dangerous, often uncomfortable call to love as God has loved us. God defines us as sinful and fallen. If He had followed the rules, He would have turned His marvelous, gracious and holy back on us. He did not. He did the riskiest thing you could imagine. He sent His Son into the world, to save sinners. The strategy was and remains, that Jesus died for us and rose again on the 3rd day. That is what it cost God to love us, you, me. It was not easy. It was not painless. And it broke the rules. It specifically broke the rule that you do not mix holy oil with polluted water.

This is not something Paul figured out. It is not the chief mark of his magnificent intellect. It is the direct result of his discovery on the road to Damascus, with blood in his eye and warrants in his brief case, that God loves and loved him, when he did not think that was possible. Redemption means change. Paul changed. Or more correctly, God changed Paul. As the Scripture says something like scales fell from his eyes and he suddenly could see....he was supposed to love those he called enemy. He was supposed to set aside his precious and beloved rule book, and follow the example of Jesus, even to the point of befriending, sharing food, and lodging and life....with people who were not Jews and never would be. The redemptive love of God, which we are called to model in our

living...breaks down barriers. It heals wounds. It sets people free of the chains which have bound them.

We have to remember all of that as we turn to verse 12 of 1st Corinthians 13. He is continuing to talk about the 2nd coming of Jesus and how that will change things even more dramatically than has happened in the past or is happening in the present. Here Paul contrasts the present, where we are with THEN, the future when Jesus has returned. “Now we see but a poor reflection in a mirror...” You might well think, my mirror works pretty good. In fact standing in front of the mirror I see things and my reflection rather well. The KJV says it this way...”For now we see through a glass darkly...” When Barbara and I were first married vacation time meant, we went camping. One of the do-dads sold back then was a camping mirror. It was a highly polished piece of metal. Like the surface of a tea kettle. You could sort of see yourself in it. And that mirror was a hundred times better, of higher quality, than the looking glass of Paul’s time. Few people had them. They were rare and expensive. And they were crude. You would not thank anyone who gave you such a poor example of a mirror.

What’s Paul talking about? He is not talking about camping and he is not talking about old, old, old technology mirrors. He is talking about our knowledge of God. He was a Bible scholar. Probably one of the leading intellects of his age.

He was a Christian who had been a Jew, who understood the grace and love of God as only a redeemed sinner can. And here is what he is saying. Our knowledge of God, in this time in which we cherish spiritual gifts and celebrate the Holy Spirit's leading and guidance....our knowledge of God is like the dim image, the distorted image, the clouded image one sees looking into these ancient mirrors. We see God and we understand God, we see Jesus and we understand Jesus....to a degree. That's going to change.

In the future...the then time....when Jesus returns, we will see God, and God in Christ, face to face. As clearly as we see each other. Up close and personal. Eye to eye. I personally expect that to be a rather humbling experience. I will be very surprised if I can look my Lord in the eye for more than an instant. My suspicion is that no one will have to accuse me...seeing Jesus face to face, I expect I will suddenly know more about my sinfulness than I have ever known, or than I have ever been willing to believe. Face to face with my creator. Face to face with my Redeemer. Face to face with the one whose Spirit I have desired to know and whose leading I swore I would follow. I expect it will be a humbling experience.

And that all comes back to something we have already talked about, as Paul has already taught us. In this present time, "I know in part." Even at the best of moments,

even when my insight is at its clearest....Now...I know in part. That is part of the reality of not seeing God as we see each other. That is part of life as we live it in this realm and era. THEN...when Jesus has come back to us.....we shall know fully. If you are like me you have been saving up questions you want to ask Jesus when you see Him face to face. I visited my close friend and colleague in the Nursing Home the other day. His eyes are open, and he is breathing. But he doesn't know who I am. Why? I am sure you have a list. Paul tells us here that face to face with Jesus we will know everything we need and want to know. I suspect I won't even ask a question....questions will seem irrelevant. That's my opinion. Paul says we will know God, we will know Jesus, we will know God's Spirit the way God knows us now...everything that matters will be apparent. We will know!!

Why should love be the dominant chord, the dominant theme in our lives? Because eternity is ahead of us. Heaven awaits. Being in the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords is not an idea. Paul says that's reality. It's just a matter of time. What Paul wants for himself, for the Corinthians, for every congregation and every Christian is that we be part of that moment. Love. Love the Lord your God. Love your neighbour the way you love yourself. It is in the Old Testament. It's in the New. It is the word of God and it is God's

word embraced by Jesus. If there is a question it is this, will we risk it, this loving others the way Jesus has loved us?

Let us pray;

Lord sometimes your word makes us uncomfortable. Sometimes the challenge your word throws out to us is so huge, we react by saying it is impossible. We know better. We know that with you all things are possible. Beckon us to follow you and to love those whom we meet in the journey the way you loved Zacheaus, the woman taken in adultery, the men who wanted to argue the rules. Create in us a patience and a kindness that would cause others to see you are real, you are present, and you are Lord. Amen