

July 20, 2013 “The Dominant Chord” Pt. 7 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 13

It is really important to remember that the New Testament,..the Old Testament too for that matter, was not written with the divisions we call chapters and verses. In the dark ages, when scholarship was restricted to the Christian institutions of the time and in particular the monasteries, two projects were undertaken for which we are so grateful. The one was to make copies of the Bible in a time when the printing press was not even in a dream in the western world and Europe in particular. So they labored to make copies by hand. And they made magnificent copies. Accurate to an amazing degree given that human hands and minds were involved.

The second project was the division of all 66 documents that make up the Biblical library into units that would make the finding of individual portions easy. Hence the chapters and verses approach. Everything numbered. Everything indexed. Everything locatable for the readers of God’s Word in its written form, in times yet to come. There is not a single piece of Christian literature including the weekly production of sermons and meditations that does not depend on the relatively quick identification and location of a verse or a small group of verses. Without those tools we would be...if not lost...finding the tasks of keeping track of Scriptural teaching so much more difficult, and at the very least time consuming.

Why is that important? Because we need to remember the divisions into chapters and verses is an arbitrary reality. Here in first Corinthians 13 if we only read the chapter itself we miss one vital piece of information. The apostle Paul is showing us the most excellent way. Showing us how to live the Christian life. Showing us the best model of the Christian life we can ever find. Ironically, the greatest theologian in the Biblical collection tells us that best way does not show itself in the life of faith, religious practice, but in this lifestyle he describes of loving other people sacrificially.

The proof of faith, he tells us is the presence of love. The ultimate test of faith is to love when it is hard to love. And it is in that light that Paul writes the 8<sup>th</sup> verse of this chapter. He says, "Love never fails." Our first reaction is to begin to list off instances in which we believe love has failed. Broken relationship. Failed marriages. Wayward sons and daughters. Paul is not just talking or writing about an emotion. He is teaching us about the love of God, revealed in the sacrifice of Jesus. And he dares to make the claim that we can access by means of the Holy Spirit the power of that sacrificial love. Everytime that brokenness is overcome, that lostness becomes foundness, everytime there is reunion. Paul hails the victory to be that of the risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Love is about the power of God overcoming the power of sin in the midst of real life, in the real world, in real time.

He makes two marvelous claims. The power of God to save the lost never fails, because His love is complete, perfect, one hundred percent. And yes, he is saying miracles really do occur. And there are moments when even the most callous of us will recognize that point. During the week we were visiting a friend's cottage up in the Coe Hill area. We got to talking about storms. And in our family that means we talk about the wind storm that blue up on Obonga Lake north of Thunder Bay on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1081. Every tree in the forest was knocked down. Debris was 15 feet deep. We were cut off entirely from the outside world for several days. And then Barbara's uncle and my brother in law Ken walked into the cottage site with chain saws slung on their backs to "rescue us." Under all the debris was my little station wagon. They cut tree trunks off the roof in two foot sections so as to not do further damage to the car. As it emerged from the rubble we all expected it would not run. When I was able to get in behind the wheel however I did so, and it started first try and I backed it up across an emerging clear space. Barb's uncle said, "Jesus Christ would you look at that!" And my brother in law replied, "Look who he works for!" The power of the love of God to save, to save us, never fails...even when we think He did fail...His love never fails. There is no one who cannot be touched by His loving power in Jesus Christ. The challenge to Christians is not to be religious, but to tools through whom that love is able to

touch others, and in some cases, dare I say, many cases, to transform others. Paul's point is that the problem does not lie with the limitation of God. His grace is amazing. His love never fails. If there is a problem it lies in us...an unwillingness to pay the price of loving without any expectation of receiving something in return. Loving without conditions. Loving without setting limits.

The Corinthian Church had a problem. There were divisions in the church. There were factions. The common problem was that people so celebrated their spiritual gifts and giftedness, they thought they were better than others in the church and the community at large. They thought certain spiritual gifts made you like royalty. They thought that those who could prophecy were really good Christians. They thought that those who could speak in tongues, or the language of the angels, were clearly more holy, more Christian than the balance of the community. And the spiritual gift of knowledge...wow. Imagine knowing something you had not been taught. Knowing it accurately. Knowing it exactly! Impressive stuff. Paul says no. If you want to talk about spiritual giants in the church, talk about people who can love when others when they themselves are in great pain, or have suffered loss, who have an excuse to be edgy or even judgemental.

And here is why he says that. With the wisdom that only God could give him, with the simple desire as a servant to serve the people to who he is ministering Paul looks into the future. He says, “You know, there is going to come a time when none of us will be alive on earth. There is going to come a time when if not through the persecution of those who hate Christians then through age and the ailments age brings, we will all be gone. Believing in Jesus we will still be alive but not here and not in this world. And yes, he is looking to that time when he and he hopes, most of the Corinthian Christians will be in heaven. And he is posing this question. What will you make of your so called rich spiritual gifts then? He is being very practical. And his conclusions are extremely practical. You see, this is not about theory...this love never fails stuff. It is not about theory that we need to love even our enemies, and always our neighbours. Neighbours defined as Jesus defined them in his parable of the good Samaritan; people whose neediness we can see, whose neediness we can reach out and touch, in circumstances where we have the power and the means to bring relief, to help, to alleviate pain. My friend Bob Schuller used to say....the best motto for a church is “find a need and fill it.” And he said, and he wrote, the greatest challenge an individual Christian faces, is to find and identify someone else’s need, and fill it.” Paul is saying when we get to

heaven we are still going to have to love. Love God and the people there with us.

What will happen to gift of prophecy? Paul is reminding them it will not be needed and it will no longer serve a purpose in heaven in the presence of God and the angels. Prophecy is only valuable in a world where you cannot know what the future will bring. The gift of tongues, will not have value anymore. We will all be together and we will all celebrate unity and diversity. The Scripture says it will be a wonderful, marvelous and joyous celebration with others who will be wonderfully, marvelously and joyously celebrating being God's people gathered round the throne. Tongues will cease. Won't be needed. There will still be a need to love and be loving of God and neighbour. Knowledge is used on earth to solve problems. The spiritual gift of knowledge, God given insight into a specific problem is given in order that problems might be solved. In God's presence that era of problem solving will be history. But we will still need the love that never fails. The love of God, the love of Jesus. Others will still need us to love them. We will still need to be loved.

Investing in sacrificial love is investing in something that has permanence. That is always going to be needed...even in heaven. Maybe, especially in heaven! Living in the everlasting presence of God changes the rules. And it is best

for us to start here and now while there is time to practice and yes, even time to mess it up and be forgiven for doing so. Love is the dominant chord. Without it there is no melody. It is where melody starts and where melody ends. It means there is harmony. It means there is unity.

Let us pray;

Lord sometimes we are so heavenly minded we are not as useful as we could be on earth, and even in the church. Perfect your love in us, that we might be examples of cups of love that overflow, that run over and splash others with blessing and comfort. Grant that we may love like Jesus. Grant that we may love in Jesus name. Grant that we might like Jesus love others in the midst of pain and beyond it, that as loving instruments we might taste your joy. Amen