

When Robyn and I first got married, we lived in a caravan for most of our first year of marriage. We were supposed to be living in a nice new home, but unfortunately, things didn't work out as we'd planned:

- *the people we bought the land from lost the deeds;*
- *they took 6 months to get re-issued;*
- *and then, after a significant payment and the delivery of the frames, the builder went bankrupt;*
- *And then there was months of haggling and delays, and it was just awful.*

So:

- *Robyn and I moved into a really old, **uninsulated** caravan.*
- *We lived in that caravan through a very hot summer;*
- *a very cold winter;*
- *a mouse plague (and yes, the mice moved into our caravan as well) ...*
- *for a toilet, I dug a hole in the ground, but we were living on a basalt ridge, and with my crow-bar and shovel, I could only get the hole about 2 feet deep before I just couldn't bash through the basalt any more. Good place for building houses – not a good place for growing crops or digging toilets.*
- *I sat my shooting rack over the top of the hole, and wrapped a tarp around as a bit of a privacy screen*
- *But, it was disgusting. Because the hole was so shallow, you couldn't very well use a bucket of dirt to cover up your business (otherwise the hole would be full in a couple of days) ...*
- *And so it stank. And then it got fly-blown. I bought a tin of fly-strike powder, and you'd put a bit of that on after you'd finished your business.*

- *And this is what I brought my new bride home to*

Is anyone feeling a little envious of our post-marital bliss??? It's disgusting, isn't it... And if I gave Robyn a chance to proof-read this, it would've been censored. She'd say, "You can't say that – that's just disgusting – it'll turn everybody off..."

Well, that's sort of the point. I want you to realise how much Robyn put up with. And it was alright for me – most of the day, I was at work. But as a new-comer to Dalby, the hospital wouldn't give her any work... So Robyn was at home most of the day, every day.

*And our friends would observe these conditions, and shake their heads, and say, "Robyn must **really** love Michael".*

When you really love someone, you'll put up with a lot.

1 Corinthians 13:⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends.

And we'll often read that at a wedding, because it seems to be just so fitting for a couple who are getting married and going

to spend the rest of their lives together... They look into each other's eyes, and feel all 'goeey' (they love them so much), and they'll put up with anything.

And our friends could see this in Robyn. She wasn't resentful; they saw that she **was** bearing a lot; but she had faith that we were going to come through it. And she had that hope, and she endured through it... That's what love does.

Robyn must **really** love Michael. Yeah, she must, because she still puts up with a lot now.

But you know, that 1 Corinthians 13 reading about love: It's not **about** husbands and wives. It's not about boys/girls. It's actually talking about "love in the church" – a love that **we** have for each other here.

Christian love (the love within a church):

- Is patient and kind
- Does not envy or boast
- Is not arrogant or rude
- Does not insist on its own way
- Is not irritable or resentful
- Doesn't rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth
- Bears all things
- Believes
- Hopes
- Endures

And that's what **today's** reading is about – the enduring love, that is the harmony of Christian discipleship.

Last week, we were talking about the **freedoms**. This week, we're learning about obligations.

We preachers talk a lot about grace, hey? (and rightfully so). And we think of grace as, well "We haven't earned our salvation." – it cost us nothing – Jesus died that we might be saved...

....

Do you realise, though, that the grace of God, leaves us with a debt? (*Just wait: Before you gather the sticks and light the fire, to burn me at the stake, listen to this:*) Right back in 13:⁸ **Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.** Alright, so we **are** left with a debt. What is that debt? To love each other.

And now, in Chapter 15, in the Greek, we've got basically the same word again: ^{15:1} **We who are strong have an obligation** (It's basically the same word debt; obligation; something we have to do; we owe it; we ought to do it) **to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.** ² **Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, to build him up.**

So, this is all part of "love". Just as "love" does not insist on its own way, well that's what we're being told here – we have an obligation, not to please ourselves, but to do what's best for our Christian brother or sister. We have this debt of love.

How does that work? How can the grace of God be free, but then we're left with a debt? Is that sort of like our Universities, where you get to do your course for free, but then you're left with a HECS debt, and you have to pay it off later??? No, it's not like that.

Let me give you a family example: my kids love it when I use them as examples.

Until he finishes his apprenticeship, or until he turns 21 (whichever happens first), Ben is free to stay at home:

- *We will feed him.*
- *He doesn't have to pay rent.*
- *He doesn't have to pay board.*
- *He doesn't have to pay for any electricity; or*
- *rates; or*
- *insurance.*
- *He doesn't have to fork out for the groceries; or*
- *For any ongoing maintenance on the house.*

By grace, he lives in our family home, fully found, free of charge.

But as a member of the Brumpton family household, he is obligated – he is indebted. Members of the family take their turn at doing stuff around the house – like unpacking the dishwasher or mowing the lawn... Or better still, doing any electrical work that needs doing about the place...

As a member of the family, he is obligated – he is indebted, to live and to behave as one of the family.

Now, the Gospel, is a message of “grace”. There is nothing we can do to **earn** our salvation – it’s a totally free gift. We fully depend upon Christ, to be forgiven of our sins, and to be made right with God. Jesus took care of all of that at the cross.

But **as** Christians (as disciples of Jesus) – as those who **are** saved, we are **obligated** – we are **indebted**, to love each other. Why??? Because that’s what the family of God does. We love each other. And love means we always put the other first.

None of this nonsense about “sticking up for our own rights”; None of this “looking after ourselves first”. It’s not **about** “What’s best for me”. It’s about “What’s best for my brothers and sisters in Christ?” “What’s best for the church?”

You see, this is the Jesus way. Disciples of Jesus, follow Jesus (that’s what it means to be a disciple). And Jesus didn’t live to please Himself. And He certainly didn’t **die** to please Himself. He did it all, for us.

He humbled Himself, and He became a servant of all, to the glory of God.

One day, Jesus told His disciples about, how in the world, those with power and authority, exercise that authority to look after themselves. And He said: ²⁶ **It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,** ²⁷ **and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,** ²⁸ **even as the Son of Man came**

not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

You see, the servanthood of Jesus, is meant to be a picture of the church in action – where **we** serve each other – always putting the other first.

Now, when we start putting others first, there **is a cost** associated with that (I'm not going to pretend there isn't), which is why Paul tells us (in V4) that the Scriptures (and here he's referring to the Old Testament), were **written for our instruction, that through **endurance** and through the **encouragement** of the Scriptures we might have hope.** (Are you getting this? To adequately love each other, we need endurance. And we need the encouragement of the Scriptures. It's not something that always comes easy and naturally) **V⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,:**

Alright, sometimes this doesn't come easy – this "Loving each other business" – **sometimes** it's easy – but sometimes it's jolly hard....

2 Christians were talking together about how difficult some of their brothers and sisters were to get on with. And one of them confessed to the other:

"I don't know mate, You and I are the only godly people in that church... And even then, I've got my doubts about you."

You know the old saying “*You can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family*”? Well we can’t choose our Christian family either. So there you go:- you’re stuck with me.

I remember a conversation I had with a Christian brother once, about how we as a church (and this is in a previous church) – how could we as a church, help a certain segment of the community, feel more welcome – how could we go about connecting with them and sharing the gospel with them. And his reply was “They’re just too different to us. We don’t have anything in common with them.”

*Alright, the way **he** saw it, our church was white; middle class; young families... - that’s what we did well – that’s who we attracted – that’s who we could relate to... and everything else was just too hard.*

But you know what? I see the church as a very different picture to that. Christ bridges every social; racial; and economic barrier, that could possibly divide us.

We see an example of this in today’s reading: In Rome, there was an enormous divide between Jews and Gentiles. There **is** no **greater** divide. But Christ came, to make 2 very different peoples, one. And the message is, “Welcome each other”. “We **all** belong”. If Christ has welcomed you, then you welcome the other.

And I really hope and pray, that you feel you welcome in this church. I also hope and pray, that you and I (that all of us) would go out of our way to make each other feel welcome.

And I pray that we would never have any cliques here, that makes somebody feel like they're an outsider. And I pray that whenever somebody new walks through that door, that they will feel welcome.

The Christian church, is not an organisation where **similar** people meet to enjoy their similarities. The Christian church, is a bunch of people with **vast** differences, who are thrown together, by one thing – our common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the hope that we have in Him.

Jesus chose you; and you; and you; and you; and you... Now, I don't want you to take this the wrong way, but I wouldn't have chosen you; and you; and you.... In fact, I have no idea why Jesus chose me... Why would He do that? There's nothing particularly likable about me...

But the point is, Christ brings us all together. And when you bring all these very different people together, that **can** be a recipe for "disaster". ... But in faith, we believe God does a miracle.

Here's a prayer that Paul prayed, and I want to make it our prayer.

⁵ May the *God* of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the *God* and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In music, do you know what a harmony is? It's when 2 notes that are very different, sound really good together. And that's the miracle that God does in the church – where a bunch of people who are very different from each other, are bound together in the love of Christ Jesus, to the glory of God.

I often have people tell me, “I don't need to go to church to be a Christian.”... Now, if that is so, then why did God ever create the church? What's its purpose? So, why **did** God create the church? It's for His glory.

Now, I've seen some churches that are anything but the glory of God – where people fight and bicker. Do you know why? Because they're all looking out for their own interests, instead of looking out for each other.

When people who are very different from each other, become a community of love, and the only thing they have that brings them together, is their common bond in Jesus Christ,,,,, that's a miracle of God.

This church, is a miracle of God... We love, for His glory. Do you think we give God glory by singing nice songs? To an extent we do. Do you know where He gets real glory? When we love each other.

And sometimes, when other Christians are hard to love, we need to depend on the Lord for endurance.

Righto: Today I want to finish off with V13:
And this can be a prayer for us as a church. But especially on this day of dedication of Isabella and Noah, I'd also like to make it our prayer for them:

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Can we say that together, to bless each other?

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Amen.

Enduring love, is the harmony of Christian discipleship.

Questions.