

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

BY HENRY DRUMMOND

Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians

THOUGH I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not LOVE I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not Love, it profiteth me nothing.

Love suffereth long, and is kind;
Love envieth not;
Love vaunteth not itself is not puffed up,
Doth not behave itself unseemly,
Seeketh not her own,
Is not easily provoked,
Thinketh no evil;
Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;
Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, Love, these three; but the greatest of these is Love. —I Cor. xiii. | More...

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INTRODUCTION

EVERY one has asked himself the great question of antiquity as of the modern world: What is the summum bonum—the supreme good? You have life before you. Once only you can live it. What is the noblest object of desire, the supreme gift to covet?

We have been accustomed to be told that the greatest thing in the religious world is Faith.

Well, we are wrong.

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians was speaking of faith. He says, “If I have all faith, so that I can remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. “So far from forgetting, he deliberately contrasts them, “Now abideth Faith, Hope, Love,” and without a moment’s hesitation, the decision falls, “The greatest of these is Love.”

Nor is this letter to the Corinthians peculiar in singling out love as the summum bonum. The masterpieces of Christianity are agreed about it. Peter says, “Above all things have fervent love among yourselves.” Above all things. And John goes farther, “God is love.”

“Love is the fulfilling of the law.”

If you love, you will unconsciously fulfil the whole law.

“Love is the fulfilling of the law.” It is the rule for fulfilling all rules, the new commandment for keeping all the old commandments. Now Paul had learned that; and in this noble eulogy he has given us the most wonderful and original account extant of the summum bonum. We may divide it into three parts. In the beginning of the short chapter, we have Love contrasted; in the heart of it, we have Love analysed; towards the end we have Love defended as the supreme gift. Henry Drummond/The Greatest Thing In the World | More...

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I THE CONTRAST

Love is greater than faith, because the end is greater than the means. What is the use of having faith? It is to connect the soul with God. And what is the object of connecting man with God? That he may become like God. But God is Love. Hence Faith, the means, is in order to Love, the end. Love, therefore, obviously is greater than faith.

It is greater than charity, again, because the whole is greater than a part. Charity is only a little bit of Love, one of the innumerable avenues of Love, and there may even be, and there is, a great deal of charity without Love.

Then Paul contrasts it with sacrifice and martyrdom. The universal language (Love) will take you years to speak in Chinese, or in the dialects of India. From the day you land, that language of Love, understood by all, will be pouring forth its unconscious eloquence. It is the man who is the missionary, it is not his words. His character is his message.

You can take nothing greater, you need take nothing less. | More...

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II THE ANALYSIS

I ask you to look at it. Love, through the magnificent prism of his (Paul's) inspired intellect, and it comes out on the other side broken up into its elements. We have what one might call the Spectrum of Love. Will you observe what its elements are? They are virtues which we hear about every day; that they are things which can be practised by every man in every place in life;

The Spectrum of Love has nine ingredients:—

Patience “Love suffereth long.”

Kindness “And is kind.”

Generosity “Love envieth not.”

Humility “Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.”

Courtesy “Doth not behave itself unseemly.”

Unselfishness “Seeketh not her own.”

Good Temper “Is not easily provoked.”

Guilelessness “Thinketh no evil.”

Sincerity. “Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.”

Patience; kindness; generosity; humility; courtesy; unselfishness; good temper; guilelessness; sincerity—these make up the supreme gift, the stature of the perfect man.

You will observe that all are in relation to men, in relation to life, in relation to the known today and the near to-morrow, and not to the unknown eternity. We hear much of love to

God; Christ spoke much of love to man. We make a great deal of peace with heaven; Christ made much of peace on earth.

The supreme thing, in short, is not a thing at all, but the giving of a further finish to the multitudinous words and acts which make up the sum of every common day.

Patience. There is no time to do more than make a passing note upon each of these ingredients. Love is Patience. This is the normal attitude of Love; Love passive, Love waiting to begin;

not in a hurry; calm; ready to do its work when the summons comes, but meantime wearing the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.

Kindness. Love active. Christ spent a great proportion of His time simply in making people happy, in doing good turns to people. There is only one thing greater than happiness in the world, and that is holiness; and it is not in our keeping; but what God has put in our power is the happiness of those about us, and that is largely to be secured by our being kind to them.

“The greatest thing a man can do for his Heavenly Father is to be kind to some of His other children.” For there is no debtor in the world so honourable, so superbly honourable, as Love. “Love never faileth”. Love is success, Love is happiness, Love is life. “Love, I say, “with Browning, “is energy of Life.”

Where Love is, God is. He that dwelleth in Love dwelleth in God. God is love. Therefore love. Without distinction, without calculation, without procrastination, love. There is a difference between trying to please and giving pleasure. Give pleasure. Lose no chance of giving pleasure. For that is the ceaseless and anonymous triumph of a truly loving spirit.

Generosity. “Love envieth not.” Envy is a feeling of ill-will to those who are in the same

line as ourselves, a spirit of covetousness and detraction. That most despicable of all the unworthy moods which cloud a soul assuredly waits for us on the threshold of every work, unless we are fortified with this grace of magnanimity. You have to learn this further thing, Humility—to put a seal upon your lips and forget what you have done. Love hides even from itself. Love waives even self-satisfaction. “Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.” Humility-love hiding.

Courtesy. This is Love in society, Love in relation to etiquette. “Love doth not behave itself unseemly.” Politeness has been defined as love in trifles. Courtesy is said to be love in little things. And the one secret of politeness is to love.

You know the meaning of the word “gentleman.” It means a gentle man—a man who does things gently, with love. “Love doth not behave itself unseemly.”

Unselfishness. “Love seeketh not her own.” It is not hard to give up our rights. They are often external. The difficult thing is to give up ourselves. The more difficult thing still is not to seek things for ourselves at all. The only greatness is unselfish love.

Christ’s teaching is that there is no happiness in having and getting anything, but only in giving. I repeat, there is no happiness in having or in getting, but only in giving. It consists in giving, and in serving others. "He that would be great among you." 'It is more blessed, it is more happy, to give than to receive.'

Good Temper. “Love is not provoked.” Bad temper is one of the most destructive elements in human nature. The peculiarity of ill temper is that it is the vice of the virtuous. This compatibility of ill temper with high moral character is one of the strangest and saddest problems of ethics. The truth is there are two great classes of sins—sins of the Body, and sins of the Disposition.

No form of vice, not worldliness, not greed of gold, not drunkenness itself, does more to un-Christianise society than evil temper. For sheer gratuitous misery-producing power, this influence stands alone.

What is Temper made of? Jealousy, anger, pride, uncharity, cruelty, self-righteousness, touchiness, doggedness, sullenness—these are the ingredients of this dark and loveless soul and disposition. Also, these are the ingredients of all ill temper. There is really no

place in Heaven for a disposition like this. Except, therefore, such a man be born again, he cannot, he simply cannot, enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Temper is significant in what it reveals. It is a test for love. A want of patience, a want of kindness, a want of generosity, a want of courtesy, a want of unselfishness, are all instantaneously symbolised in one flash of Temper.

Souls are made sweet not by taking the acid fluids out, but by putting something in—a great Love, a new Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Christ, the Spirit of Christ, interpenetrating ours, sweetens, purifies, transforms all. This only can eradicate what is wrong, work a chemical change, renovate and regenerate, and rehabilitate the inner man. Will-power does not change men.

Time does not change men. Christ does.

It is the deliberate verdict of the Lord Jesus that it is better not to live than not to love.
XXXX It is better not to live than not to love. XXXX ITALICS XXXXX

Guilelessness and Sincerity may be dismissed almost with a word. Guilelessness is the grace for suspicious people. And the possession of it is the great secret of personal influence. People who influence you are people who believe in you. Love “thinketh no evil.” To be trusted is to be saved. And if we try to influence or elevate others, we shall soon see that success is in proportion to their belief of our belief in them. For the respect of another is the first restoration of the self-respect a man has lost.

“Love rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.” Search for Truth with a humble and unbiased mind.

The supreme work to which we need to address ourselves in this world, is to learn Love. The world is not a play-ground; it is a schoolroom. Life is not a holiday, but an education. And the one eternal lesson for us all is how better we can love.

What makes a man a good artist, a good sculptor, a good musician? Practice. If a man does not exercise his arm he develops no biceps muscle; and if a man does not exercise his soul, he acquires no muscle in his soul, no strength of character, no vigour of moral fibre, nor beauty of spiritual growth.

The constituents of this great character are only to be built up by ceaseless practice. Above all, do not resent temptation; do not be perplexed because it seems to thicken round you more and more, and ceases neither for effort nor for agony nor prayer. That is the practice which God appoints you. Keep in the midst of life. Do not isolate yourself. "Talent develops itself in solitude; character in the stream of life."

Love itself can never be defined. Love is an effect. And only as we fulfil the right condition can we have the effect produced. Shall I tell you what the cause is?

"We love, because He first loved us." "We love—because He first loved us." Look at that word "because." It is the cause of which I have spoken. "Because He first loved us," the effect follows that we love, we love Him, we love all men. We cannot help it. Because He loved us, we love, we love everybody. And loving Him, you must become like Him. Love begets love. It is a process of induction.

Remain side by side with Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us, and you too will become a centre of power, a permanently attractive force; and like Him you will draw all men unto you, like Him you will be drawn unto all men. That is the inevitable effect of Love. Any man who fulfils that cause must have that effect produced in him. It comes to us by natural law, or by supernatural law, for all law is Divine.

There is no mystery about it We love others, we love everybody, we love our enemies, because He first loved us. | More...

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III THE DEFENCE

"Now abideth faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love."

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should have everlasting life."

That is, whosoever loveth Him, for trust is only the avenue to Love—hath everlasting life.

It is when a man has no one to love him that he commits suicide.

On the last analysis, then, love is life. Love never faileth, and life never faileth, so long as there is love.

Sins of commission in that awful indictment are not even referred to. By what we have not done, by sins of omission, we are judged. It could not be otherwise. For the withholding of love is the negation of the spirit of Christ.

Whoso shall receive a little child in My name receiveth Me. And who are Christ's? Every one that loveth is born of God.

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One of the most popular books in early A.A. was Professor Henry Drummond's study of 1 Corinthians 13. The title of the book, *The Greatest Thing in the World*, was taken from the last verse of the Corinthians chapter (1 Corinthians 13:4-6), and was one of three books Dr. Bob regularly provided to alcoholics with whom he worked. In fact, Dr. Bob's enthusiasm for Drummond's book is dramatized by the following remarks of the wife of A.A. Oldtimer Clarence S. Dorothy S. M. said:

Once, when I was working on a woman in Cleveland, I called and asked him [Dr. Bob], "What do I do for somebody who is going into D.T.'s?" He told me to give her the medication, and he said, "When she comes out of it and she decides she wants to be a different woman, get her Drummond's 'The Greatest Thing in the World.' Tell her to read it through every day for 30 days, and she'll be a different woman" (See DR. BOB and the Good Oldtimers, p. 310).

Henry Drummond himself had made a similar suggestion half a century earlier, at the close of the lecture in which he delivered his "greatest thing in the world" address (which later became incorporated in the best-selling) book. Drummond said:

Now I have all but finished. How many of you will join me in reading this chapter [1 Corinthians 13] once a week for the next three months? A man did that once and it changed his whole life. Will you do it? It is for the greatest thing in the world. You might

begin by reading it every day, especially the verses which describe the perfect character. "Love suffereth long, and is kind; loveth envieth not; love vaunteth not itself." Get these ingredients into your life (See Drummond, The Greatest Thing in the World, p 53).
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