

The
Greatest
Thing
in the
World

Experience the Enduring Power of Love

Henry Drummond

SPIRE

Henry Drummond,

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What is love? The renowned nineteenth-century Scottish evangelist Henry Drummond declares that it is the supreme good, and is only meaningful when it is lived. Following Paul's discussion in the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, he displays the nine components of love: patience, kindness, humility, generosity, courtesy, unselfishness, good temper, guilelessness, and sincerity. As one of the most thoughtful and uplifting sermons written, *The Greatest Thing in the World* has helped millions incorporate these elements into their lives. This stirring portrait of love will compel you to receive and share God's greatest gift of all.

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Foreword

I was staying with a party of friends in a country house during my visit to England in 1884. On Sunday evening as we sat around the fire, they asked me to read and expound some portion of Scripture. Being tired after the services of the day, I told them to ask Henry Drummond, who was one of the party. After some urging he drew a small Testament from his hip pocket, opened it at the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, and began to speak on the subject of love.

Foreword

It seemed to me that I had never heard anything so beautiful, and I determined not to rest until I brought Henry Drummond to Northfield to deliver that address. Since then I have requested the principals of my schools to have it read before the students every year. The one great need in our Christian life is love, more love to God and to each other. Would that we could all move into that love chapter, and live there.

D. L. Moody

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as 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 gave my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.

Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love wanteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Doth no 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.

1 Corinthians 13

Love

The Greatest Thing in the World

Everyone 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. That great word has been the keynote for centuries of the popular religion; and we have easily learned to look upon it as

the greatest thing in the world. Well, we are wrong. If we have been told that, we may miss the mark. In the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul takes us to Christianity at its source; and there we see, “The greatest of these is love.”

It is not an oversight. Paul was speaking of faith just a moment before. 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.”

And it is not prejudice. A man is apt to recommend to others his own strong point. Love was not Paul’s strong point. The observing student can detect a beautiful tenderness growing and ripening all through his character as Paul gets old; but the hand that wrote, “The greatest of these is love,” when we meet it first, is stained with blood.

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 further, “God is love.”

You remember the profound remark which Paul makes elsewhere, “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” Did you ever think what he meant by that? In those days men were working the passage to heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments, and the hundred and ten other commandments which they had manufactured out of them. Christ came and said, “I will show you a more simple way. If you do one thing, you will do these hundred and ten things without ever thinking about them. If you *love*, you will unconsciously fulfill the whole law.”

You can readily see for yourselves how that must be so. Take any of the commandments. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” If a man love God, you will not require to tell him that. Love is the fulfilling of that law. “Take not his name in vain.” Would he ever dream of taking His name in vain if he loved Him?” Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” Would he not be too glad to have one day in seven to dedicate more exclusively to the object of his affection? Love would fulfill all these laws regarding God.

And so, if he loved man, you would never think of telling him to honor his father and mother. He could not do anything else. It would be preposterous to tell him not to kill. You could only insult him if you suggested that he should not steal—how could he steal from those he loved? It would be superfluous to beg him not to bear false witness against his neighbor. If he loved him it would be the last thing he would do. And you would never dream of urging him not to covet what his neighbors had. He would rather they possessed it than himself. In this way “love is the fulfilling of the law.” It is the rule for fulfilling all rules, the new commandment for keeping all the old commandments, Christ’s one secret of the Christian life.

Now Paul has 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 *analyzed*; toward the end, we have love *defended* as the supreme gift.