





# The Greatest Thing: Love

## An Essay on 1 Corinthians 13

By Henry Drummond

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## 1 Corinthians 13:1–13

<sup>1</sup> If I speak with the languages of men and of angels, but don't have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but don't have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but don't have love, it profits me nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient and is kind. Love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag, is not proud, <sup>5</sup> doesn't behave itself inappropriately, doesn't seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil; <sup>6</sup> doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

<sup>8</sup> Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will be done away with. Where there are various languages, they will cease. Where there is knowledge, it will be done away with. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part; <sup>10</sup> but when that which is complete has come, then that which is partial will be done away with. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away childish things. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I was also fully known. <sup>13</sup> But now faith, hope, and love remain—these three. The greatest of these is love.

*The Holy Bible with Deuterocanon/Apocrypha.* M. P. Johnson, 2020. (World English Bible - WEB)



# Introduction

This essay was originally part of a series of essays written by Henry Drummond during his life towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and put together by D. L. Moody. I have chosen to reproduce this essay alone as it stands out as a powerful essay on the subject of love. As Moody explains in his introduction:

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 I Corinthians, and began to speak on the subject of Love.

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.

(signed) D.L. Moody.

This short essay on Love has been edited to bring it up to date for modern readers with slight changes to the text. This has been done sensitively so as not to change the meaning of what Henry Drummond has written. My hope is that modern readers will, like Moody, be allowed to see love in a new and powerful way that can help them live a life of love for God and for others.

## Who was Henry Drummond?

Henry Drummond (1851–1897) was a Scottish evangelist, writer, and scientist, whose work left a lasting impact on Christian thought in the late 19th century. Born in Stirling Scotland he was the son of William Drummond, a seed merchant. He spent his early education at Stirling High School, before graduating from Edinburgh University. Drummond had a strong inclination towards physics and mathematics but was also interested in theology, which he developed in the Free Church of Scotland. This became a lifelong curiosity



of how there can be a bridge between science and faith. In 1877 he became a lecturer on natural sciences in the Free Church College, Glasgow.

Drummond's early career as an evangelist and professor of natural science saw him involved with the Moody and Sankey evangelical campaigns, traveling across the UK and America to preach a compassionate gospel. His scientific studies, especially in the fields of biology and geology, infused his religious teachings with a respect for the natural world, making him a distinctive voice in the religious community.

Henry is best known for his essay 'The Greatest Thing in the World' in which he expounds on 1 Corinthians 13, the chapter often known as the 'Love chapter'. In this essay he captures the essence of Christian love and delivers a range of insights into the power of selflessness, kindness, and faith.

Drummond never married or had children and sadly died in 1897.

Rev. A. Walmsley



# Love: The greatest thing in the World

Every one has asked themselves 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 can you 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 key-note 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 and there we see, "The greatest of these is love." (v.13)

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." (v.2) So far from forgetting, he deliberately contrasts them, "Now abides Faith, Hope, Love," and without a moment's hesitation the decision falls, "The greatest of these is Love."

And it is not prejudice. A person is apt to recommend to others their 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." (1 Peter 4.8) - 'Above all things.' And John goes farther, "God is love." (1 John 4.8)

You remember the profound remark which Paul makes elsewhere, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." (Romans 13.10) Did you ever think what he meant by that? In those days people 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 fulfil the whole law."



You can readily see for yourselves how that must be so. Take any of the commandments (Exodus 20:1–17). "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." If a person loves God, you will not require to tell them that. Love is the fulfilling of that law. "Take not His name in vain." Would you ever dream of taking His name in vain if you loved him? "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Would you not be too glad to have one day in seven to dedicate more exclusively to the object of his affection? Love would fulfil all these laws regarding God.

And so, if they loved humans, you would never think of telling them to honour their father and mother. You could not do anything else. It would be preposterous to tell them not to kill. You could only insult them if you suggested that they should not steal — how could you steal from those you loved? It would be superfluous to beg them not to bear false witness against their neighbour. If they loved them it would be the last thing they would do. And you would never dream of urging them not to covet what their neighbours had. They would rather their neighbours possessed it than themselves. 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 *'analysed'*; toward the end, we have Love *'defended'* as the supreme gift.

## 1. The Contrast

Paul begins by contrasting Love with other things that people in those days thought much of. I shall not attempt to go over these things in detail. Their inferiority is already obvious.

He contrasts it with *'eloquence'*. And what a noble gift it is, the power of playing upon the souls and wills of men, and rousing them to lofty purposes and holy deeds! Paul says, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." (1 Corinthians 13.1) We all know why. We have all felt the brazenness of words without emotion, the hollowness, the unaccountable un-persuasiveness, of eloquence behind which lies no Love.



He contrasts it with 'prophecy'. He contrasts it with 'mysteries'. He contrasts it with 'faith'. He contrasts it with 'charity'. Why is Love greater than faith? Because the end is greater than the means. And why is it greater than charity? Because the whole is greater than the part.

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 humans with God? That they 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. "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." (v.2)

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. It is a very easy thing to toss a copper to a beggar on the street; it is generally an easier thing than not to do it. Yet Love is just as often in the withholding. We purchase relief from the sympathetic feelings roused by the spectacle of misery, at the copper's cost. It is too cheap - too cheap for us, and often too dear for the beggar. If we really loved him we would either do more for him, or less. Hence, "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, but have not love it profits me nothing." (v.3)

Then Paul contrasts it with 'sacrifice' and martyrdom: "If I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing." Missionaries can take nothing greater to the heathen world than the impress and reflection of the Love of God upon their own character. That is the universal language. It will take them years to speak in Chinese, or in the dialects of India. From the day they land, that language of Love, understood by all, will be pouring forth its unconscious eloquence.

It is the person who is the missionary, it is not his words. Their character is their message. In the heart of Africa, among the great Lakes, I have come across black men and women who remembered the only white man they ever saw before - David Livingstone; and as you cross his footsteps in that dark continent, *their faces light up* as they speak of the kind doctor who passed there years ago. They could not understand him; but they felt the love that beat in his heart. They knew that it was love, although he spoke no word.

Take into your sphere of labor, where you also mean to lay down your life, that simple charm, and your lifework must succeed. You can take nothing



greater, you need take nothing less. You may take every accomplishment; you may be braced for every sacrifice; but if you give your body to be burned, and have not Love, it will profit you and the cause of Christ 'nothing'.

## 2. The Analysis

After contrasting Love with these things, Paul, in three verses, very short, gives us an amazing analysis of what this supreme thing is.

I ask you to look at it. It is a compound thing, he tells us. It is like light. As you have seen a person of science take a beam of light and pass it through a crystal prism, as you have seen it come out on the other side of the prism broken up into its component colours - red, and blue, and yellow, and violet, and orange, and all the colours of the rainbow - so Paul passes this thing, Love, through the magnificent prism of his inspired intellect, and it comes out on the other side broken up into its elements.

In these few words we have what one might call *the spectrum of love*, the analysis of Love. Will you observe what its elements are? Will you notice that they have common names; that they are virtues which we hear about every day; that they are things which can be practised by every person in every place in life; and how, by a multitude of small things and ordinary virtues, the supreme thing, the 'summum bonum', is made up?

The Spectrum of Love has nine ingredients:

Patience	"Love suffers long."
Kindness	"And is kind."
Generosity	"Love envy not."
Humility	"Love vaunts not itself, is not puffed up."
Courtesy	"Does not behave itself unseemly."
Unselfishness	"Seeks not its own."
Good temper	"Is not provoked."
Guilelessness	"Takes not account of evil."
Sincerity	"Rejoices not in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth."

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



You will observe that all are in relation to humans, in relation to life, in relation to the known today and the near tomorrow, and not to the unknown eternity. We hear much of love to God; Christ spoke much of love to humanity. We make a great deal of peace with heaven; Christ made much of peace on earth. Religion is not a strange or added thing, but the inspiration of the secular life, the breathing of an eternal spirit through this temporal world. 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**

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. Love suffers long; bears all things; believes all things; hopes all things. For Love understands, and therefore waits.

### **Kindness**

Love active. Have you ever noticed how much of Christ's life was spent in doing kind things - in 'merely' doing kind things? Run over it with that in view, and you will find that He 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," says some one, "a person can do for his Heavenly Father is to be kind to some of His other children." I wonder why it is that we are not all kinder than we are? How much the world needs it! How easily it is done! How instantaneously it acts! How infallibly it is remembered! How superabundantly it pays itself back - or there is no debtor in the world so honourable, so superbly honourable, as Love. "Love never fails." Love is success, Love is happiness, Love is life. "Love," I say with Browning, "is energy of life."

"For life, with all it yields of joy or woe  
And hope and fear,  
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,



How love might be, hath been indeed, and is."

*Taken from - A Death in the Desert by Robert Browning*

Where Love is, God is. He that dwells in Love dwells in God. God is Love. Therefore 'love'. Without distinction, without calculation, without procrastination, love. Lavish it upon the poor, where it is very easy; especially upon the rich, who often need it most; most of all upon our equals, where it is very difficult, and for whom perhaps we each do least of all. 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. "I shall pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again." [Possibly attributed to Stephen Grellet]

### **Generosity**

"Love envies not." This is love in competition with others. Whenever you attempt a good work you will find other people doing the same kind of work, and probably doing it better. Envy them not. Envy is a feeling of ill-will to those who are in the same line as ourselves, a spirit of covetousness and detraction. How little Christian work even is a protection against un-Christian feeling! That most despicable of all the unworthy moods which cloud a Christian's soul assuredly waits for us on the threshold of every work, unless we are fortified with this grace of magnanimity. Only one thing truly need the Christian envy - the large, rich, generous soul which "envies not."

### **Humility**

And then, after having learned all that, you have to learn this further thing, 'Humility' - to put a seal upon your lips and forget what you have done. After you have been kind, after Love has stolen forth into the world and done its beautiful work, go back into the shade again and say nothing about it. Love hides even from itself. Love waives even self-satisfaction. "Love vaunts not itself, is not puffed up." Humility - love hiding.

### **Courtesy**

The fifth ingredient is a somewhat strange one to find in this 'summum bonum': 'Courtesy'. This is Love in society, Love in relation to etiquette. "Love



does 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.

Love 'cannot' behave itself unseemly. You can put the most untutored persons into the highest society, and if they have a reservoir of Love in their heart they will not behave themselves unseemly. They simply cannot do it. Carlisle said of Robert Burns that there was no truer gentleman in Europe than the ploughman-poet. It was because he loved everything - the mouse, and the daisy, and all the things, great and small, that God had made. So with this simple passport he could mingle with any society, and enter courts and palaces from his little cottage on the banks of the Ayr.

You know the meaning of the word "gentleman." It means a gentle man - a man who does things gently, with love. That is the whole art and mystery of it. The gentle man cannot in the nature of things do an ungentle, an ungentlemanly thing. The ungentle soul, the inconsiderate, unsympathetic nature, cannot do anything else. "Love doth not behave itself unseemly."

### **Unselfishness**

"Love seeks not her own." Observe: Seeks not even that which is her own. In Britain the Englishman is devoted, and rightly, to his rights. But there come times when a person may exercise even *The higher right* of giving up his rights.

Yet Paul does not summon us to give up our rights. Love strikes much deeper. It would have us not seek them at all, ignore them, eliminate the personal element altogether from our calculations.

It is not hard to give up our rights. They are often eternal. The difficult thing is to give up 'ourselves'. The more difficult thing still is not to seek things for ourselves at all. After we have sought them, bought them, won them, deserved them, we have taken the cream off them for ourselves already. Little cross then to give them up. But not to seek them, to look every person not on their own things, but on the things of others - that is the difficulty. "Seekest thou great things for thyself?" said the prophet; "seek them not." Why? Because there is no greatness in 'things'. Things cannot be great. The only greatness is unselfish love. Even self-denial in itself is nothing, is almost a mistake. Only a great purpose or a mightier love can justify the waste.

It is more difficult, I have said, not to seek our own at all than, having sought it, to give it up. I must take that back. It is only true of a partly selfish



heart. Nothing is a hardship to Love, and nothing is hard. I believe that Christ's "yoke" is easy. Christ's yoke is just His way of taking life. And I believe it is an easier way than any other. I believe it is a happier way than any other. The most obvious lesson in 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. Half the world is on the wrong scent in pursuit of happiness. They think it consists in having and getting, and in being served by others. It consists in giving, and in serving others. "He that would be great among you," said Christ, "let him serve." (Luke 22.24–27) He that would be happy, let him remember that there is but one way - "it is more blessed, it is more happy, to give than to receive." (Acts 20.35)

### **Good Temper**

The next ingredient is a very remarkable one: 'Good temper.' "Love is not provoked." Nothing could be more striking than to find this here. We are inclined to look upon bad temper as a very harmless weakness. We speak of it as a mere infirmity of nature, a family failing, a matter of temperament, not a thing to take into very serious account in estimating a person's character. And yet here, right in the heart of this analysis of love, it finds a place; and the Bible again and again returns to condemn it as one of the most destructive elements in human nature.

The peculiarity of ill temper is that it is the vice of the virtuous. It is often the one blot on an otherwise noble character. You know men who are all but perfect, and women who would be entirely perfect, but for an easily ruffled, quick-tempered, or "touchy" disposition. 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'. The Prodigal Son may be taken as a type of the first, the Elder Brother of the second. Now, society has no doubt whatever as to which of these is the worse. Its brand falls, without a challenge, upon the Prodigal. But are we right? We have no balance to weigh one another's sins, and coarser and finer are but human words; but faults in the higher nature may be less venal than those in the lower, and to the eye of Him who is Love, a sin against Love may seem a hundred times more base. No form of vice, not worldliness, not greed of gold, not drunkenness itself, does more to un-Christianise society than evil temper. For embittering life, for breaking up communities, for destroying the most sacred relationships, for devastating homes, for withering



up men and women, for taking the bloom of childhood, in short, *for sheer gratuitous misery producing power* this influence stands alone.

Look at the Elder Brother - moral, hard-working, patient, dutiful - let him get all credit for his virtues - look at this man, this baby, sulking outside his own father's door. "He was angry," we read, "and would not go in." Look at the effect upon the father, upon the servants, upon the happiness of the guests. Judge of the effect upon the Prodigal - and how many prodigals are kept out of the Kingdom of God by the unlovely character of those who profess to be inside. Analyze, as a study in Temper, the thunder-cloud itself as it gathers upon the Elder Brother's brow. What is it made of? Jealousy, anger, pride, uncharity, cruelty, self-righteousness, touchiness, doggedness, sullenness - these are the ingredients of this dark and loveless soul. In varying proportions, also, these are the ingredients of all ill temper. Judge if such sins of the disposition are not worse to live in, and for others to live with, than the sins of the body. Did Christ indeed not answer the question Himself when He said, "I say unto you that the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of Heaven before you"? (Matthew 21.31) There is really no place in heaven for a disposition like this. A man with such a mood could only make heaven miserable for all the people in it. Except, therefore, such a man be *born again* he cannot, simply 'cannot', enter the kingdom of heaven.

You will see then why Temper is significant. It is not in what it is alone, but in what it reveals. This is why I speak of it with such unusual plainness. It is a test for love, a symptom, a revelation of an unloving nature at bottom. It is the intermittent fever which bespeaks un-intermittent disease within; the occasional bubble escaping to the surface which betrays some rottenness underneath; a sample of the most hidden products of the soul dropped involuntarily when off one's guard; in a word, the lightning form of a hundred hideous and un-Christian sins. 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.

Hence it is not enough to deal with the Temper. We must go to the source, and change the inmost nature, and the angry humours will die away of themselves. 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.*

Therefore, "Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."  
(Philippians 2:5)

Some of us have not much time to lose. Remember, once more, that this is a matter of life or death. I cannot help speaking urgently, for myself, for yourselves. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones, which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18.5-6) That is to say, it is the deliberate verdict of the Lord Jesus that it is better not to live than not to love.

### **Guilelessness and Sincerity**

*Guilelessness* and *Sincerity* may be dismissed almost without a word. Guilelessness is the grace for suspicious people. The possession of it is *the great secret of personal influence*. You will find, if you think for a moment, that the people who influence you are people who believe in you. In an atmosphere of suspicion people shrivel up; but in that atmosphere they expand, and find encouragement and educative fellowship.

It is a wonderful thing that here and there in this hard, uncharitable world there should still be left a few rare souls who think no evil. This is the great unworldliness. Love "thinks no evil," imputes no motive, sees the bright side, puts the best construction on every action. What a delightful state of mind to live in! What a stimulus and benediction even to meet with it for a day! 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. The respect of another is the first restoration of the self-respect a person has lost; our ideal of what they are becomes to them the hope and pattern of what they may become.

"Love rejoices not in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth." (1 Corinthians 13:6) I have called this 'Sincerity' from the words rendered in the Authorised Version by "rejoices in the truth." And, certainly, were this the real translation, nothing could be more just; for they who love will love Truth not less than others. They will rejoice in the Truth - rejoice not in what they have been taught to believe; not in this church's doctrine or in that; not in this ism or in that ism; but in 'the Truth'. They will accept only what is real; they will strive to get at facts; they will search for 'Truth' with a humble and unbiased



mind, and cherish whatever they find at any sacrifice. But the more literal translation of the Revised Version calls for just such a sacrifice for truth's sake here. For what Paul really meant is, as we there read, "Rejoices not in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth," a quality which probably no one English word - and certainly not 'Sincerity' - adequately defines. It includes, perhaps more strictly, the self-restraint which refuses to make capital out of others' faults; the charity which delights not in exposing the weakness of others, but "covers all things"; the sincerity of purpose which endeavours to see things as they are, and rejoices to find them better than suspicion feared or calumny denounced.

So much for the analysis of Love. Now the business of our lives is to have these things fitted into our characters. That is the supreme work to which we need to address ourselves in this world, to learn Love. Is life not full of opportunities for learning Love? Every man and woman every day has a thousand of them. The world is not a playground; 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 person a good cricketer? Practice. What makes a person a good artist, a good sculptor, a good musician? Practice. What makes a person a good linguist, a good stenographer? Practice. What makes a person a good person? Practice. Nothing else. There is nothing capricious about religion. We do not get the soul in different ways, under different laws, from those in which we get the body and the mind. If a person does not exercise their arm they develop no biceps muscle; and if a person does not exercise their soul, they acquire no muscle in their soul, no strength of character, no vigor of moral fibre, no beauty of spiritual growth. Love is not a thing of enthusiastic emotion. It is a rich, strong, vigorous expression of the whole round Christian character - the Christlike nature in its fullest development. And the constituents of this great character are only to be built up by *ceaseless practice*. What was Christ doing in the carpenter's shop? Practising. Though perfect, we read that He 'learned' obedience, and grew in wisdom and in favour with God. Do not quarrel, therefore, with your lot in life. Do not complain of its never-ceasing cares, its petty environment, the vexations you have to stand, the small and sordid souls you have to live and work with. 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 your practice. That is the practice which God appoints you; and it is having its work in making you patient, and humble, and generous, and unselfish, and kind, and courteous. Do not grudge the hand that is moulding the still too shapeless image within you. It is growing more beautiful, though you see it not; and every touch of temptation may add to its perfection. Therefore keep in the midst of life. Do not isolate yourself. Be among people and among things, and among troubles, and difficulties, and obstacles. You remember Goethe's words: "Talent develops itself in solitude; character in the stream of life." Talent develops itself in solitude - the talent of prayer, of faith, of meditation, of seeing the unseen; character grows in the stream of the world's life. That chiefly is where men are to learn love.

How? Now, how? To make it easier, I have named a few of the elements of love. But these are only elements. Love itself can never be defined. Light is a something more than the sum of its ingredients--a glowing, dazzling, tremulous ether. And love is something more than all its elements - a palpitating, quivering, sensitive, living thing. By synthesis of all the colours, people can make whiteness, they cannot make light. By synthesis of all the virtues, people can make virtue, they cannot make love. How then are we to have this transcendent living whole conveyed into our souls? We brace our wills to secure it. We try to copy those who have it. We lay down rules about it. We watch. We pray. But these things alone will not bring love into our nature. 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?

If you turn to the Revised Version of the First Epistle of John you find these words: "We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) "We love," not "We love 'Him'." That is the way the old version has it, and it is quite wrong. " '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. We cannot help it. Because He loved us, we love, we love everybody. Our heart is slowly changed. Contemplate the love of Christ, and you will love. Stand before that mirror, reflect Christ's character, and you will be changed into the same image from tenderness to tenderness. There is no other way. You cannot love to order. You can only look at the lovely object, and fall in love with it, and grow into likeness to it. And so look at this Perfect Character, this Perfect Life. Look at *the great sacrifice* as He laid down Himself, all through life, and upon the Cross of Calvary; and you must



love Him. And loving Him, you must become like Him. Love begets love. It is a process of induction. Put a piece of iron in the presence of an electrified body, and that piece of iron for a time becomes electrified. It is changed into a temporary magnet in the mere presence of a permanent magnet, and as long as you leave the two side by side, they are both magnets alike. Remain side by side with Him who loved us, and *gave Himself for us*, and you, too, will become a permanent magnet, a permanently attractive force; and like Him you will draw all people unto you, like Him you will be drawn unto all people. That is the inevitable effect of Love. Any person who fulfils that cause must have that effect produced in him.

Try to give up the idea that religion comes to us by chance, or by mystery, or by caprice. It comes to us by natural law, or by supernatural law, for all law is Divine.

Edward Irving went to see a dying boy once, and when he entered the room he just put his hand on the sufferer's head, and said, "My boy, God loves you," and went away. The boy started from his bed, and called out to the people in the house, "God loves me! God loves me!" One word! It changed that boy. The sense that God loved him overpowered him, melted him down, and began the creating of a new heart in him. And that is how the love of God melts down the unlovely heart in man, and begets in him the new creature, who is patient and humble and gentle and unselfish. And there is no other way to get it. There is no mystery about it. We love others, we love everybody, we love our enemies, 'because He first loved us'.

### 3. The Defence

Now I have a closing sentence or two to add about Paul's reason for singling out love as the supreme possession.

It is a very remarkable reason. In a single word it is this: 'it lasts.' "Love," urges Paul, "never fails." Then he begins again one of his marvellous lists of the great things of the day, and exposes them one by one. He runs over the things that people thought were going to last, and shows that they are all fleeting, temporary, passing away.

"Whether there be 'prophecies', they shall be done away." (1 Corinthians 13:8) It was the mother's ambition for her boy in those days that he should become a prophet. For hundreds of years God had never spoken by means of any prophet, and at that time the prophet was greater than the king. People



waited wistfully for another messenger to come, and hung upon his lips when he appeared, as upon the very voice of God. Paul says, "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail." The Bible is full of prophecies. One by one they have "failed"; that is, having been fulfilled, their work is finished; they have nothing more to do now in the world except to feed a devout man's faith.

Then Paul talks about 'tongues'. That was another thing that was greatly coveted. "Whether there be tongues, they shall cease." (v.8) As we all know, many many centuries have passed since tongues have been known in this world. They have ceased. Take it in any sense you like. Take it, for illustration merely, as languages in general - a sense which was not in Paul's mind at all, and which though it cannot give us the specific lesson, will point the general truth. Consider the words in which these chapters were written - Greek. It has gone. Take the Latin - the other great tongue of those days. It ceased long ago. Look at the Indian language. It is ceasing. The language of Wales, of Ireland, of the Scottish Highlands is dying before our eyes. The most popular book in the English tongue at the present time, except the Bible, is one of Dickens' works, his 'Pickwick Papers'. It is largely written in the language of London street-life; and experts assure us that in fifty years it will be unintelligible to the average English reader.

Then Paul goes farther, and with even greater boldness adds, "Whether there be 'knowledge', it shall be done away." The wisdom of the ancients, where is it? It is wholly gone. A schoolboy today knows more than Sir Isaac Newton knew; his knowledge has vanished away. You put yesterday's newspaper in the fire: its knowledge has vanished away. You buy the old editions of the great encyclopaedias for a few cents: their knowledge has vanished away. Look how the coach has been superseded by the use of steam. Look how electricity has superseded that, and swept a hundred almost new inventions into oblivion. One of the greatest living authorities, Sir William Thompson, said in Scotland, at a meeting at which I was present, "The steam-engine is passing away." "Whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." At every workshop you will see, in the back yard, a heap of old iron, a few wheels, a few levers, a few cranks, broken and eaten with rust. Twenty years ago that was the pride of the city. Men flocked in from the country to see the great invention; now it is superseded, its day is done. And all the boasted science and philosophy of this day will soon be old.

In my time, in the university of Edinburgh, the greatest figure in the faculty



was Sir James Simpson, the discoverer of chloroform. Recently his successor and nephew, Professor Simpson, was asked by the librarian of the University to go to the library and pick out the books on his subject (midwifery) that were no longer needed. His reply to the librarian was this: "Take every text-book that is more than ten years old and put it down in the cellar."

Sir James Simpson was a great authority only a few years ago: men came from all parts of the earth to consult him; and almost the whole teaching of that time is consigned by the science of today to oblivion. And in every branch of science it is the same. "Now we know in part. We see through a glass darkly." Knowledge does not last.

Can you tell me anything that is going to last? Many things Paul did not condescend to name. He did not mention money, fortune, fame; but he picked out the great things of his time, the things the best people thought had something in them, and brushed them peremptorily aside. Paul had no charge against these things in themselves. All he said about them was that they would not last. They were great things, but not supreme things. There were things beyond them. What we are stretches past what we do, beyond what we possess. Many things that people denounce as sins are not sins; but they are temporary. And that is a favourite argument of the New Testament. John says of the world, not that it is wrong, but simply that it "pass away." There is a great deal in the world that is delightful and beautiful; there is a great deal in it that is great and engrossing; but *it will not last*. All that is in the world, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, are but for a little while. Love not the world therefore. Nothing that it contains is worth the life and consecration of an immortal soul. The immortal soul must give itself to something that is immortal. And the only immortal things are these: "Now abides faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love." (v.13)

Some think the time may come when two of these three things will also pass away - faith into sight, hope into fruition. Paul does not say so. We know but little now about the conditions of the life that is to come. But what is certain is that Love must last. God, the Eternal God, is Love. Covet, therefore, that everlasting gift, that one thing which it is certain is going to stand, that one coinage which will be current in the Universe when all the other coinages of all the nations of the world shall be useless and unhonoured. You will give yourselves to many things, give yourself first to Love. Hold things in their proportion. Let at least the first great object of our lives be to achieve the



character defended in these words, the character - and it is the character of Christ - which is built round Love.

I have said this thing is eternal. Did you ever notice how continually John associates love and faith with eternal life? I was not told when I was a boy that "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should have everlasting life." (John3:16) What I was told, I remember, was, that God so loved the world that, if I trusted in Him, I was to have a thing called peace, or I was to have rest, or I was to have joy, or I was to have safety. But I had to find out for myself that whosoever trusts in Him - that is, whosoever loves Him, for trust is only the avenue to Love - hath *everlasting life*.

The Gospel offers a person a life. Never offer a person a thimbleful of Gospel. Do not offer them merely joy, or merely peace, or merely rest, or merely safety; tell them how Christ came to give people a more abundant life than they have, a life abundant in love, and therefore abundant in salvation for themselves, and large in enterprise for the alleviation and redemption of the world. Then only can the Gospel take hold of the whole of a persons, body, soul and spirit, and give to each part of their nature its exercise and reward. Many of the current Gospels are addressed only to a part of human nature. They offer peace, not life; faith, not Love; justification, not regeneration. And people slip back again from such religion because it has never really held them. Their nature was not all in it. It offered no deeper and gladder life-current than the life that was lived before. Surely it stands to reason that only a fuller love can compete with the love of the world.

To love abundantly is to live abundantly, and to love forever is to live forever. Hence, eternal life is inextricably bound up with love. We want to live forever for the same reason that we want to live tomorrow. Why do we want to live tomorrow? Is it because there is some one who loves you, and whom you want to see tomorrow, and be with, and love back? There is no other reason why we should live on than that we love and are beloved. It is when a person has no one to love them that they commit suicide. So long as they have friends, those who love them and whom they love, they will live, because to live is to love. Be it but the love of a dog, it will keep them in life; but let that go, they have no contact with life, no reason to live. They die by their own hand.

Eternal life also is to know God, and God is love. This is Christ's own



definition. Ponder it. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." (John 17:3) Love must be eternal. It is what God is. On the last analysis, then, love is life. Love never fails, and life never fails, so long as there is love. That is the philosophy of what Paul is showing us; the reason why in the nature of things Love should be the supreme thing - because it is going to last; because in the nature of things it is an Eternal Life. It is a thing that we are living now, not that we get when we die; that we shall have a poor chance of getting when we die unless we are living now. *No worse fate* can befall a man in this world than to live and grow old alone, unloving and unloved. To be lost is to live in an unregenerate condition, loveless and unloved; and to be saved is to love; and he that dwells in love dwells already in God. For God is Love.

Now I have all but finished. How many of you will join me in reading this chapter 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 suffers long, and is kind; love envies not; love vaunts not itself." Get these ingredients into your life. Then everything that you do is eternal. It is worth doing. It is worth giving time to. No man can become a saint in his sleep; and to fulfil the condition required demands a certain amount of prayer and meditation and time, just as improvement in any direction, bodily or mental, requires preparation and care. Address yourselves to that one thing; at any cost have this transcendent character exchanged for yours.

You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments that stand out, the moments when you have really lived, are the moments when you have done things in a spirit of love. As memory scans the past, above and beyond all the transitory pleasures of life, there leap forward those supreme hours when you have been enabled to do unnoticed kindnesses to those round about you, things too trifling to speak about, but which you feel have entered into your eternal life. I have seen almost all the beautiful things God has made; I have enjoyed almost every pleasure that He has planned for humans; and yet as I look back I see standing out above all the life that has gone four or five short experiences, when the love of God reflected itself in some poor imitation, some small act of love of mine, and these seem to be the things which alone of all one's life abide. Everything else in all our lives is transitory.



Every other good is visionary. But the acts of love which no man knows about, or can ever know about--they never fail.

In the Book of Matthew, where the Judgment Day is depicted for us in the imagery of One seated upon a throne and dividing the sheep from the goats, the test of a man then is not, "How have I believed?" but "How have I loved?" The test of religion, the final test of religion, is not religiousness, but Love. I say the final test of religion at that great Day is not religiousness, but Love; not what I have done, not what I have believed, not what I have achieved, but how I have discharged the common charities of life. 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, the proof that we never knew Him, that for us He lived in vain. It means that He suggested nothing in all our thoughts, that He inspired nothing in all our lives, that we were not once near enough to Him, to be seized with the spell of His compassion for the world. It means that:

"I lived for myself, I thought for myself,  
For myself, and none beside--  
Just as if Jesus had never lived,  
As if He had never died."

Thank God the Christianity of today is coming nearer the world's need. Live to help that on. Thank God people know better, by a hair's breadth, what religion is, what God is, who Christ is, where Christ is. Who is Christ? He who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick. And where is Christ? Where? - "Whoso shall receive a little child in My name receives Me." And who are Christ's? "Every one that loves is born of God."