

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

**THE GREATEST THING
IN THE WORLD**

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THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD



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Foreword

I have edited this edition in order to increase ease of reading and understanding.

Misspellings and grammatical errors have been corrected. Many, if not all, of these “errors” were due to changes in grammar and spelling since *The Greatest Thing in the World* was first published (there were also instances of different “correct” spellings between British and American words).

Many of the longer paragraphs in the original edition have been sectioned into shorter paragraphs, but the original meaning is intact.

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There is a sentence of some significance that is included in certain editions of *The Greatest Thing in the World*, and missing in other editions. The sentence is: “For it is perfectly certain -- and you will not misunderstand me -- that to enter Heaven a man must take it with him.”

The earliest printed edition I found of Dr. Drummond’s speech (1880) *does* contain the sentence.

The London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, updated edition, circa 1920 also has it.

The Fleming H. Revell Company edition, copyright 1891, 1898 does *not* have it, and many modern editions leave it out as well (perhaps because they have utilized the popular Fleming H. Revell edition).

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At any rate, the sentence *is* included in this edition (under the analysis of Good Temper).

Any commentary that I have added is enclosed in square brackets.

Amor vincit omnia, (Love conquers all).

JP O'Neill St. Petersburg, Florida, 2008

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.

D.L. Moody 1891

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1 Corinthians 13

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 give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.

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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.

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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.

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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 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.

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I have taken you, in the chapter that I have just read, to Christianity at its source; and there we have seen, "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.

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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." And 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 people were working their passage to Heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments, and the hundred and ten other commandments that they had manufactured out of them. Christ 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.

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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 person loves God, you will not be required to tell them that. Love is the fulfilling of that law. "Take not His name in vain." Would they ever dream of taking His name in vain if they loved Him? "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Would they not be only too glad to have one day in seven to dedicate more exclusively to the object of their affection? Love would fulfill all these laws regarding God.

And so, if a person loved Humanity, you would never think of telling them to honor their father and mother. They could not do anything else. It would be preposterous to tell them not to kill. You would only insult them if you suggested that they should not steal -- how could they steal from those they loved?

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It would be superfluous to beg them not to bear false witness against their neighbor. 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 neighbors had. They would rather that their neighbors 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 had learned that; and in this noble eulogy he has given us the most wonderful and original account available 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*; towards the end we have Love *defended* as the supreme gift.

THE CONTRAST

Paul begins by contrasting Love with other things that men in those days thought much of. I shall not attempt to go over those 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 people, 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 as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." And we all know why. We have all felt the brazenness of words without emotion -- the hollowness, the mysterious emptiness, of eloquence behind which lies no Love.

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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 a person 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.

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.

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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 them we would either do more for them, or less.

Then Paul contrasts it with sacrifice and martyrdom. And I beg the little band of would-be missionaries, and I have the honor to call some of you by this name for the first time -- to remember that though you give your bodies to be burned, and have not Love, it profits nothing -- *nothing!*

You can take nothing greater to the world than the stamp and reflection of the Love of God upon your own character.

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That is the universal language. It 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 person who is the missionary; it is not their 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, men's 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.

Take into your new sphere of labor, where you also mean to lay down your life, that simple charm, and your lifework must succeed.

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You can take nothing greater; you need take nothing less. It is not worthwhile going if you take anything 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.

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. You have seen a scientist take a beam of light and pass it through a crystal prism, and you have seen it come out on the other side of the prism broken up into its component colors -- red, blue, yellow, violet, orange, and all the colors of the rainbow.

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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.

And 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 that we hear about every day.

They are things that can be practiced by every person in every place in life.

From a multitude of small things, and ordinary virtues, the supreme thing, the *summum bonum*, is made up.

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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.

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You will observe that all are in relation to people, 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 people. 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 that make up the sum of every common day.

There is no time to do more than make a passing note upon each of these ingredients.

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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.

Love suffers long; beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth 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.

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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 someone, "a man 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 -- for there is no debtor in the world so honorable, so superbly honorable, as Love.

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"Love never faileth". 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 and
woe*

*And hope and fear,
Is just our chance o' the prize of
learning love --*

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

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.

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.

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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."

Generosity. "Love envieth 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 disparagement.

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Even Christian work is little 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 "envieth not."

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 vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up."

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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 doth not behave itself unseemly." Politeness has been defined as love in trifles. Courtesy is said to be love in little things.

The one secret of politeness is to love. Love cannot behave itself unseemly.

You can put the most untutored person 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.

Carlyle 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.

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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. And that is the whole art and mystery of it. The gentleman cannot in the nature of things do an ungentle, an ungentlemanly thing. The un-gentle soul, the inconsiderate, unsympathetic nature cannot do anything else. "Love doth not behave itself unseemly."

Unselfishness. "Love seeketh not her own." Observe: Seeketh not even that which is her own. In Britain the Englishman is devoted, and rightly, to his rights. But there comes a time when a man may exercise the even higher right of *giving up* his rights.

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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 external. The difficult thing is to give up ourselves. A more difficult thing still, is to not seek things for ourselves at all.

After we have sought them, bought them, won them, deserved them, we have taken the cream off things already. Little cross then, perhaps, to give them up.

But to not even seek them; for each of us to look not after our *own* interests, but after the interests of *others* -- *id opus est* [literally: This is work].

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"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.

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I repeat, there is no happiness in having or in getting, but only in giving.

Half of the world is on the wrong scent in the 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. 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.

The next ingredient is a very remarkable one: **Good Temper**. "Love is not easily provoked." Nothing could be more striking than to find this here.

We are inclined to look upon bad temper as a very harmless weakness.

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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.

We all know people who would be all but 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.

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The truth is that 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 doubts 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 pardonable 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-Christianize society than evil temper.

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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 off 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 -- then look again 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. Look at the effect upon the Prodigal, and of the many prodigals who are kept out of the Kingdom of God by the unlovely personalities of those who *profess* to be inside.

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Analyze, as a study in Temper, the thundercloud as it gathers upon the Elder Brother's brow.

What is it made of? Jealousy, anger, pride, mean-spiritedness, cruelty, self-righteousness, touchiness, stubbornness, 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 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."

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.

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Except, therefore, such a man be born again, he cannot, he simply *cannot*, enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

For it is perfectly certain -- and you will not misunderstand me -- that to enter Heaven a man must take it with him.

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 take the liberty now of speaking of it with such unusual plainness.

It is a test for love; a symptom; an indication 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.

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It is a sampling of the hidden products of a poisoned soul dropped involuntarily when off one's guard; in a word, the lightning form of a hundred hideous and un-Christian sins.

A lack of patience; a lack of kindness; a lack of generosity; a lack of courtesy; a lack of unselfishness; are all instantly revealed 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 humors 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.

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This only can eradicate what is wrong, work a chemical change; renovate, regenerate, and rehabilitate the inner person.

Willpower does not change people. Time does not change people. Christ does. Therefore "Let that mind be in *you* which was also in Christ Jesus."

Some of us have not much time to lose. Remember that this is a matter of life or death. I cannot help speaking urgently, for myself; for you.

"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."

That is to say, it is the deliberate verdict of the Lord Jesus that it is better not to live than not to love. *It is better not to live than not to love.*

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Guilelessness and **Sincerity** may be dismissed almost without a word.

Guilelessness is the grace for suspicious people. And 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 a trusting 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 "thinketh 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 to meet with for even a day!

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To be trusted is to be saved. And if we try to influence or elevate others, we shall soon see that success is in direct proportion to *their* belief in *our* belief in them. Having the respect of another is the first step in restoring 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 rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." I have called this **Sincerity** from the words rendered in the Authorized Version by "rejoiceth in the truth." And, certainly, were this the real translation, nothing could be more just. For whoever loves will love Truth not less than humanity.

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* Church's doctrine; not in *this* "ism" or in *that* "ism," but "*in the Truth.*"

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They will accept only what is *real*; they will strive to get at facts; he will search for Truth with a humble and unbiased mind, and cherish whatever he finds at any sacrifice.

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, "Rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth 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 "covereth all things"; the sincerity of purpose which endeavors to see things as they are, and rejoices to find them better than suspicion feared or slander denounced.

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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 that we need to address ourselves to in this world -- learning 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.

The one eternal lesson for us all is *how better we can love*.

What makes a person a good athlete? Practice. What makes someone a good artist, a good sculptor, a good musician? Practice. What makes a person a good linguist, a good typist? Practice. What makes a person a *good* person? Practice. Nothing else.

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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 man or woman don't exercise their arm they won't develop any biceps muscle; and if they don't exercise their soul they won't acquire "muscle" in their soul: no strength of character, no vigor of moral fiber, no beauty of spiritual growth.

Love is not a thing of enthusiastic *emotion*. It is a rich, strong, hardy, vibrant, vigorous expression of the whole round Christian character -- the Christ-like nature in its fullest development.

The components of this great character are only to be built up by ceaseless practice. What was Christ doing in the carpenter's shop? Practicing. Though perfect, we read that He *learned* obedience. He *increased* in wisdom and in favor with God and man.

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Do not quarrel therefore with your lot in life. Do not complain of its never-ceasing cares, its petty environments, 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 the practice that God appoints you; and it is doing its work in making you patient, and humble, and generous, and unselfish, and kind, and courteous.

Do not resent the hand that is molding the still too shapeless image within you. That image is growing more beautiful though you see it not, and every touch of temptation may add to its perfection.

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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: *Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille, Doch ein Character in dem Strom der Welt.* "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 we 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.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

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, vibrating, sensitive, living thing.

By a synthesis of all the colors, we can make whiteness, but we cannot make light. By synthesis of all the virtues, we can make virtue, but we 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 fulfill the right condition can we have the effect produced. Shall I tell you what the *cause* is?

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

If you turn to the Revised Version of the First Epistle of John you will find these words: "We love, because He first loved us." "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* men. 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.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

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 the likeness of it.

So look at this Perfect Character, this Perfect Life. Look at the great Sacrifice as He laid Himself down, 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 a magnetized body, and that piece of iron for a time becomes magnetized. It is charged with an attractive force in the mere presence of the original force, and as long as you leave the two side by side, they are both magnets alike.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

Remain side by side with Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us, and you too will become a center of power, a permanently attractive force; and like Him you will draw all humanity unto you, like Him you will be drawn unto all humanity. That is the inevitable effect of Love.

Anyone who fulfills that *cause* must have that *effect* produced. 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 [clergyman, 1792-1834] 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," then went away. And the boy started from his bed, and called out to the people in the house, "*God loves me! God loves me!*" It changed that boy.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

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 us, and begets in us 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.

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*.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

"Love," urges Paul, "never faileth."

Then he begins again one of his marvelous lists of the great things of the day, and exposes them one by one.

He recites a litany of things that men *thought* were going to last, and shows that they are *all* fleeting, temporary, passing away.

"Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail" It was a 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 words when he appeared as upon the very voice of God.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

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." 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, to mean 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 to the general truth.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

Consider the words in which the New Testament was written – Greek [i.e. Hellenistic, or Koine Greek]. It has gone. Take Latin -- the other great tongue of those days. It ceased long ago.

The most popular book in the English tongue at the present time, except the Bible, is one of Dickens's works, his *Pickwick Papers*. It is largely written in the language of London's 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 vanish away." The scientific knowledge of the ancients, where is it? It is outdated, irrelevant, quaint, and passé. The schoolboy or girl of today knows more about more things than Sir Isaac Newton dreamed of.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

You put yesterday's newspaper in the fire. Its knowledge has vanished away. You buy the old editions of the great encyclopedias for a few coins. 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 Thomson, said the other day, "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, some wheels, a couple of levers, a few cranks, broken and eaten with rust. Twenty years ago that was the pride of the city. People flocked in from all around to see the great invention; now it is superseded, its day is done.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

All of the boasted science and philosophy of this day will soon be displaced as well.

Just recently, at the University of Edinburgh, the greatest figure in the faculty was Sir James Simpson, the discoverer of chloroform. The other day 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 that were no longer needed. And his reply to the librarian was this: "Take every text-book that is more than ten years old, and put it 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."

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

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 men thought had something in them, and brushed them aside like dust. 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 men denounce as sins are *not* sins; but they are *temporary*. And that is a favorite argument of the New Testament. John says of the world, not that it is wrong, but simply that it "passeth away."

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

There is a great deal in the world that is delightful and beautiful; there is a great deal in it that is great and enthralling; 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 also immortal. And the only immortal things are these: "Now abideth faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love."

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.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

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 last, 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 un-honored.

You will give yourselves to many things; give yourselves first to Love. Hold things in their proportion. *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 around Love.

I have said this thing is eternal. Did you ever notice how continually John associates love and faith with eternal life?

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

I was not told when I was a boy that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should have *everlasting life*." 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 trusteth in Him -- that is, whosoever loveth Him, for *trust* is the *only* avenue to Love -- hath *everlasting* life.

The Gospel offers a person *life*. Never offer them 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 us 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.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

Only then can the Gospel take hold of the whole of a person -- 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 our nature. They offer peace, not life; faith, not Love; justification, not regeneration. And people slip away from such religion because it has never really held them. Their nature was not all in it. It offered no deeper and gladder life.

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.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

We want to live forever for the same reason that we want to live tomorrow. Why do you want to live tomorrow? It is 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 than that we love and are beloved.

It is when someone has no one to love them that they commit suicide. So long as they have 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 and they have no contact with life, no reason to live. The "energy of life" has failed.

To have Eternal Life is to know God, and God is love. This is Christ's own definition. Ponder it.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

"This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Love *must* be eternal. It is what God is.

On the last analysis, then, love is *life*. Love never faileth, and life never faileth, 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.

Eternal Life 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*. ["...and you will not misunderstand me..."]

No worse fate can befall a man in this world than to live and grow old alone, unloving, and unloved.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

To be lost is to live in an unregenerate condition, loveless and unloved; and to be saved is to love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth 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 suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth 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.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

No man can become a saint in his sleep; and to fulfill the conditions required demands a certain amount of prayer and meditation and time, just as improvement in any direction, physical or mental, requires preparation and care.

Address yourselves to that one thing [Matt. 6:33 -- Luke 10:41,42]; 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 times when you have been enabled to do unnoticed kindnesses to those around you. about you.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

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 man; and yet as I look back I see standing out above all, 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 illusory.

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

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

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 soul 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 on 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 during that awesome indictment are not even referred to. By what we have *not* done, by sins of *omission*, we are judged.

It could not be otherwise.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

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."*

It is the Son of *Man* before whom the nations of the world shall be gathered. It is in the presence of *Humanity* that we shall be charged. There will be there those whom we have met and helped: or there, the un-pitied multitude whom we neglected or despised. No other Witness need be summoned. No other charge than lovelessness shall be preferred.

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

Be not deceived. The words which all of us shall one day hear, sound not of theology but of life, not of churches and saints but of the hungry and the poor, not of creeds and doctrines but of shelter and clothing, not of Bibles and prayer-books but of cups of cold water in the name of Christ.

Thank God the Christianity of today is coming nearer the world's need. Live to help that on. Thank God men know better, by a hairsbreadth, what religion truly 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.

“...the greatest of these is love.”

THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD