

A Man Called Paul & The Greatest Thing In the World



“To love abundantly is to live abundantly”



Author: Steve Kennard

Location: <https://www.innercirclestudies.com/Ephesus> Library

Date: 12/15/2020

Part of the

Doctrines of the Bible Series



A series of Bible studies to help guide the believer in lessons of his faith. Answering the question “Why” he believes what he believes.



“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;” Ephesians 4:14

The Greatest Thing In The World

Contents

One Man's Trash Paul	1
----------------------------	---



A Man Called Paul	5
-------------------------	---

Paul's Testimony

Paul's Message



The Greatest Thing in the World	
The Greatest Thing	11
Is It Faith	
The Greatest Thing Is	

The Law of Love	14
-----------------------	----

I Corinthians 13	16
------------------------	----

Love Contrasted	17
-----------------------	----

Love Analyzed	18
---------------------	----

The Colors of Love	19
--------------------------	----

 Patience

 Kindness

 Generosity

 Humility

 Courtesy

Unselfishness

Good Temper

Sincerity

Love Defended 24

The Three Types of Love 26

In Closing 26

I Will Testify To Love 30



One Man's Trash is Another Man's Pearl of Truth

One day while I was visiting my old Army Chaplain friend and as we were talking he reached over and picked up what looked like a crunched up piece of trash and tossed it to me, "Here I don't want this, but maybe you should give it a look," he said to me.

I looked at the crunched up wad of paper and stuffed it into my pocket for later. That afternoon I remembered that paper and pulled it out. It looked like someone had tried to make this into a small little book it was stapled in the middle and folder over and then stepped on many times. A Xerox copy of something that was hard to read, but I gave it a try. As I started to read it the Spirit of God prompted me to write this down. The message caught my heart and I could not put this wadded up paper down. I worked for maybe two days typing out everything I could make out to read. The text spoke of evolutionary discoveries merging with Christian teaching, but I clearly heard from God to edit these out while I updated the grammar away from the Queens English to a more modern form. When I finished my work what the Spirit of God had used me to create was a wonderful study on 1st Corinthians chapter thirteen.

Several years would go by when one day again I saw in my mind's eye a man in a hooded robe walking down a cobblestone street, torches on the walls used for light. So I sat down not knowing what I was going to say beyond the first paragraph. It turned out to be a short story of Paul's teaching on 1 Corinthians chapter thirteen. At least another year later while teaching the first study that started out as a wad of trash the Holy Spirit reminded me of the short story of the man in the hooded robe and told me it belongs here.

The combination of the two is what you will find it on the following pages. It is now as I believe God wants it to be. I hope you enjoy it and that God speaks to your heart as he did mine. I believe you will be blessed.

The Author

Note: I was able to run down who the original author was, a Dr. Henry Drummond, Scottish Evangelist of the 1850's. How his book got to me in the form I received it in is truly an act of God. Some things we will never know this side of glory.

Proper credit is given to Dr. Drummond for the original writing of this document, with the exception of "A Man called Paul."

Thank you Dr. Drummond.

The Greatest Thing In the World



“To love abundantly is to live abundantly”

LOVE



Bears

all things,

Believes

all things,

Hopes

all things,

Endures

all things.

1 Corinthians 13:7





A Man Called Paul

Place: City of Caesarea

Date: Approximately A.D. 55

Time: Just prior to the Feast of Pentecost¹

Based on the life of Paul as recorded in scripture

¹ 1 Cor. 16:8

There was a man chosen of God whose name was

Paul



It was close to evening and the sun was almost down and the narrow streets were already lined with torches for the night, when a man draped in a hooded robe and accompanied by two friends entered the house of a certain centurion named Cornelius. The small house was full of Jew and Gentile alike that had come to hear him speak. For this was no ordinary man, this was the Apostle Paul. After a time of rest and a meal, the group settled down for the evening. The owner of the house Cornelius then stood and turned towards his guest and said to him, “Paul, I welcome you to our city and to my house. We who are gathered here have heard much about you, and now we are eager to hear from you about what God has shown to you. Please speak to us now, that we may hear your teaching for ourselves.”

So the man of God stood to his feet and for a moment turned in all directions to see who it was that had come to hear what God had to say through him. Then being full of the Spirit of God Paul began to speak.

PAUL’S TESTIMONY

“I am Paul an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, but I tell you I was not always so. I am an Israelite of the seed of Abraham and of the tribe of Benjamin.² I was born a Roman³ in the city of Tarsus, but was raised in the city of Jerusalem. I sat at the feet of Gamaliel and was taught according to the manner of the law of our fathers,⁴ and as to the law, I am a Pharisee as was my father before me. So it was with great zeal that I sought out and persecuted to the death those of The Way.”⁵

At these words many in the room turned to one another with looks of unease of this man being in their midst. Paul stopped his message to assure the men, to hear him out

² Rom. 11:1

³ Acts 22:25-28

⁴ Acts 5:34-39

⁵ Jn. 14:6

and to know what great work God had done in him. With some hesitation the men settled back down and quieted themselves so Paul could continue.

“It is with great sorrow that I say to you that many I persecuted, binding them and delivering them into prisons both men and women⁶ and when the blood of the martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consented to his death.”⁷

Again the room was filled with concern, for Stephen was greatly loved. Paul raised his hands for calm as he continued. “I thank God in heaven that the account I have just given to you was of the man I used to be, named Saul, and not of this new man that now stands before you. For while I was on my way to the city of Damascus, there suddenly shone around about me a light from heaven.⁸ I was blinded and fell to the earth unable to see. Then I heard a voice from heaven say to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ I answered back, ‘who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you persecute.’

I could only ask, ‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’

And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into the city and you will be told what you must do.’⁹

I was then taken into Jerusalem where my sight was eventually restored and I began to preach of Christ in all the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.¹⁰ This is my testimony unto you that I am called to be an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and so it is with this calling that I come to you tonight.”

PAUL’S MESSAGE

“After much prayer the Spirit of God has led me to share with you what I have written to your brothers in Corinth. First, listen to my words of warning to you, that there is coming a great shaking and a time of testing for us all. When you are tested remember not to return hate for hate, evil for evil, for this the world does.

Brothers, I stand here tonight to say, let it be different with you. You have shown the world your faith that it is strong, but there are times that in your deepest of trials faith can also fail. You have shown the world acts of kindness and spoken of the hope that is in you, but these too can fail. I tell you my brethren that love will never fail. It is that one thing that you can receive here and then give it away to those the Spirit directs, but it also is that one thing you take with you into glory.

⁶ Acts 22:4

⁷ Acts 22:20

⁸ Acts 9:3, 22:6

⁹ Acts 9:4-6, 22:7-8

¹⁰ Acts 9:20

Love then becomes the greatest thing in the world for you. Do as your Father in Heaven does and love, for in this thing you show how you are different from the world.”

Then the small group began to talk between themselves of what Paul said.

“This man would have us to believe that love is greater than faith? Ever since Moses, who had great faith, no one has spoken these words.”

Then the leader of the group looked back to Paul saying, “We know that you teach that it is impossible to please God without faith.¹¹ But you say faith fails and we ought to love, so what say you now?”

“It is true that I have said that it is impossible to please God without faith and so it is. I will tell you even a greater truth that 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, but if I cannot love, I am nothing.”¹²

Again the group of men broke out in private talk and gesturing over what they are being told. Being Jews some of these things were hard to hear, for their ancestors suffered hard in Egyptian bondage and now the Romans are no better. Paul being full of God’s Spirit perceived their questioning between each other, and then he began to speak again even as they were still talking among themselves.

“Brethren, listen to me one last time, love is that one thing that a man not only possess on earth, but that he can take with him to heaven. The degree to which a man loves reflects the degree to which he knows God. Now I speak to you of a deeper truth, that if you love,¹³ you will unconsciously fulfill the whole law.”

This angered one of the men in the room who, being deeply religious, loved God with all his heart, He jumped to his feet, “But Paul, you speak of the law of Moses. How can only one thing fulfill all the law given to us by God, I tell you this is impossible.”

“Brothers, I understand your questioning for these are things each man must declare for himself. If a man truly loved he would not have to be told to honor his mother and father. If you truly love, there would be no need to teach you that you should not murder, steal, or bear false witness against your neighbor. For how could you do these things to those you claim to love? Love would not covet what a neighbor has, but rather be glad for your neighbor that God has blessed him. I tell you that love is the one virtue that fulfills the law. This is the rule for fulfilling all the rules, the new commandment for keeping all the old commandments. It is Christ’s one secret for those who believe. I tell you brethren it is what makes you different than the world around you.”

¹¹ Heb.11:6

¹² I Cor. 13:2

¹³ “Agape,” more than an emotion. Heart-felt genuine love which becomes the defining principle by which one deliberately lives their lives.

The room had grown quiet as everyone was now focused on Paul's words to them. "My brothers and sisters, I will end this teaching with these words given to me by God. 'Love suffers long and is kind. Love is not jealous; it does not brag and is not arrogant. Love does not act unbecoming and does not seek its own. It is not easily provoked nor takes into account a wrong suffered. Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.'

These are my final words to you tonight, that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. Now abides faith, hope and love, but I tell you that the greatest of these is love.'"¹⁴

¹⁴ I Cor.13



Based on the book by the same name

“The Greatest Thing In The World”

by Dr. Henry Drummond

A Scottish Evangelist (1851-1897).

First Published c1880

The Greatest Thing



If someone were to be asked what the “**Greatest thing in the World**” is, what kind of an answer would they get? I’m sure there would be a variety of answers. Certainly there are those who would immediately answer money and power, or maybe after some reflection proclaim “to have all the knowledge of all the books ever written.” A more religious person might answer world peace, goodness, faith, or giving to the poor. This one question can be summed up in the term “**Summum Bonum**” or what is the “Supreme good?”

While we all have an idea of what the supreme good is, none of us are really in a position to know, nor are we qualified to answer the question. We do not know all the facts, know all the variables, or know all the needs to even begin to answer the question.

We all have only one life to live, only one chance to make our mark, to make a difference somewhere. How will you be remembered? What will be your legacy? Have you found the ultimate satisfaction of your life’s ambition, have you found your Summum Bonum? One day, when you close your eyes for the last time and your spirit is released, you will realize that all you gained in life, all you have accumulated. All your earthly accomplishments cannot be taken with you and will not help you at all. Only that which is done for Christ is of any eternal good.¹⁵

James 4:14, “Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.”

I Tim 6:7, “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”

¹⁵ Mt. 6:19-21

The Greatest Thing In The World

A few family members may enjoy their part of an inheritance left behind, but soon it too will be gone. Will your possessions and the things you have worked so hard for your entire life stand the test of fire?



I Cor. 3:11-15, “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.¹⁶ If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Is It Faith?



What is it that can make an eternal impact in your life and on the lives of others and those you come into contact with? What can you leave behind yet take with you that contributed to your Summum Bonum?

What can you gain in life that will have an everlasting effect in your life? We have been told that the greatest thing in the religious world is faith, because it is faith that pleases God.¹⁷ If we have the faith even as small as a grain of mustard seed, we could command the mountains to be removed and it would be so. Yet faith is not our Summum Bonum, the supreme good in the world.



The Apostle Paul declares,

I Cor.13:2, “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, but have not love, I am nothing.”

I Cor. 13:13, “And now abides faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

¹⁶ 2 Cor. 5:10 (Judgment for works, crowns)

¹⁷ Heb. 11:6

The Greatest Thing Is ...



he Apostle Paul holds up faith, hope and love to us, then declares that the greatest of these is love. All of us have been in a position where our faith has failed, and we lost hope for what we once hoped for. Love, says Paul, will never fail. Love will never give up, love will never let go, and love will not seek its own. Truly it is **LOVE** that is the greatest thing. Love is that everlasting eternal variable that spans both this life and the next. It is love that we leave behind and yet take with us. Love is that one single thing that when put into practice becomes the Summum Bonum, the supreme good.



Love was not always one of Paul's stronger points. For Paul, otherwise known as Saul of Tarsus, had a lot of blood on his hands.¹⁸ Yet Paul, who once was Christianity's greatest persecutor, now in his letter to the Corinthians declares love as the greatest thing. Peter also echoes the words of Paul when he wrote.

1 Peter 4:8, "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins."

And John goes even further and declares to us that "God is love."¹⁹ Paul once again states that "love is the fulfilling of the law."²⁰ Even Jesus, when being questioned by the Pharisees about the law, gave this answer,

Matthew 22:37-40, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment, and the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

The Law that Paul and Jesus were referring to was the Old Testament Law or the Law of the Prophets. In those days men were busy working their way to heaven, busy trying to keep every letter of the law

¹⁸ Acts 9:1-4

¹⁹ 1 John 4:8

²⁰ Ro. 3:10; Gal. 5:14

The Greatest Thing In The World

and therefore assured of going to paradise when they died. The Jews had taken the Ten Commandments and manufactured one hundred and ten other commandments from them, laws that governed every aspect of their lives.

It was Jesus that first told the Jews that there is a simpler way. If you do one thing, you will do these hundred and ten other things, without ever thinking about them. If you love, you will unconsciously fulfill the whole law.

The Law of Love

Christ's one secret of the Christian life.



Hebrews 8:10, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

The Law of Love is written in our heart

Let's look at what Jesus was talking about. **"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."** If a man loves God, you will not have to tell him this. For that which you love you will always put first in your life.

Matthew 6:21, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

The Greatest Thing In The World

“Take not His name in vain.” Would you ever dream of taking His name in vain if you truly loved Him? *“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”* Love would be only too glad to have one day to devote to the object of ones affection. Love would fulfill all these laws regarding God. If you loved, you would want nothing else but to *“Honor your mother and father;”* you would not need to be reminded. If you loved, there would be no need to tell you that *“Thou shalt not kill, steal, or bear false witness against your neighbor,”* for how could you do these things to those you claimed to love? Love would certainly *“not covet what your neighbor has;”* a life based in love would rather be glad for your neighbor, glad that God has blessed him.

In all ten of these commandments, it is love that single handedly becomes “The fulfilling of the Law.”²¹ 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.

In the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul gives us a wonderful example of the Summum Bonum, the supreme good. This chapter can be divided into three parts, **love contrasted**, **love analyzed** and **love defended** as the supreme gift.



²¹ Ro.13:10

The Greatest Thing In The World

1 Corinthians 13²² (NASB)

Love Contrasted

1. If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
2. 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 do not have love, I am nothing.
3. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Love Analyzed

4. Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,
5. Does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own,²³ is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,
6. Does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

Love Defended

7. Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
8. Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.
9. For we know in part and we prophesy in part;
10. But when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.
11. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.
12. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.
13. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

²² 1 Corinthians 13 (NASB)

²³ Learning that "It's not about Me." * Not about what we deserve, but what we believe!

A Closer Look



Love Contrasted

(vs.1-3)

In these three verses Paul contrasts love against the other gifts and declares that no matter what other gift you may possess, if you do not have love, then you really have nothing. It is not that any other gift is of lesser importance but rather that they are built on a foundation of love and without that proper foundation, what you really have is nothing. Paul finally sums it up by telling us that even if we offer up our bodies to be burned yet have not love, it profits us nothing.

The book “Foxes book of Martyrs” is an historic account of the sacrifice made by many for the testimony of Jesus Christ. These saints of God laid a foundation of faith by their examples. When faced with such overwhelming hardships that called their faith into issue, they consistently and without malice chose love and the road that Christ walked. Such sacrifice would call into practice great love. To willingly lay down your life for the truth of the gospel, no matter how small or big an issue it may be, it’s love on a greater scale. However, Paul declares that if we are willing to lay down our life and have not love then we still have nothing.

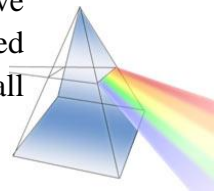
Clearly love is the greatest thing, the one thing worth striving for that we can give away yet take with us, the one thing that truly works for the supreme good.

Love Analyzed

(vs. 4-6)

In these next three verses Paul gives an amazing analysis of what the supreme good is. In a closer look at love, Paul later tells us that we see through a darkened glass, so our perspective may be skewed somewhat. Any science teacher can tell you if you pass a beam of light through a crystal prism, it will come out the other side broken into its component colors: blue, yellow, violet, and orange and many others colors of the rainbow. In these next verses Paul passes love through God's crystal prism. Then we can see the wonderful color of God's love, the full spectrum of His mighty love broken up into its primary components. Upon these colors of God's love we can find and only begin to understand the Summum Bonum, the supreme good.

This color spectrum of love has within it nine ingredients, you will notice that they have common names and are made up of virtues which we hear about every day. Paul is telling us that these things can be practiced by every man, in every place in life, and how, by a multitude of small things, the Summum Bonum is made up.



(NIV Translation)

1. **Patience** - (v4) "Love is Patient"
2. **Kindness** - (v4) "Love is Kind"
3. **Generosity** - (v4) "Love is not Jealous (don't envy, not rude)"
4. **Humble** - (v4) "Love does not Brag (boastful, exalt itself, or is proud)"
5. **Courtesy** - (v5) "Love is not Rude or ill-mannered (unbecoming)"
6. **Unselfishness** - (v5) "Love does not Seek its Own"
7. **Good Temper** - (v5) "Love is not Provoked (easily angered)"
8. **Guilelessness** - (v5) "Love keeps no Record of Wrongs, does not delight in evil" (Guile - deceitfully cunning)
9. **Sincerity** - (v6) "Love Rejoices in Truth (always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres)"

These nine colors of love make up the supreme gift, the statue of the perfect man and all can be found in the person and makeup of Jesus Christ. As we draw closer and become more like Christ, we take on more of the colors of God's love and start to reflect the image of His Son. Truly the reflection of Jesus Christ can be seen in those who love Him and draw

The Greatest Thing In The World

closer to Him. The Summum Bonum or supreme thing, in short, is not a thing at all, for it can be found in the many acts of every day living.

Let's take a look at these nine elements:

The Colors of Love

A Recipe for living Life²⁴

by Dr. Henry Drummond

(1851-1897)



Patience

1. **“Love is longsuffering,”** This is the normal attitude of love, love is passive, and love is not in a hurry but waits its turn. Love is calm, ready to do its work when the call is given. Love suffers long and bears all things, believes all things and hopes all things. Love understands all things and therefore is willing to wait.

Kindness

2. **“Love is Kind,”** love is active. Have you ever noticed how much of Christ's life was spent doing kind things? Christ spent a great deal of His time simply making people happy, and doing good deeds for people. There is only one thing greater than happiness in the world and that's holiness. God has put in our power the happiness of those about us, and we do this by being kind to them. It has been said that “the greatest thing a man can do for God is to be kind to His other children.” How much the world needs more kindness!

Generosity

3. **“Love Envies not, it is not jealous, it is not rude.”** This is love in competition with others. Whenever you attempt a good work, you will find others doing the same thing and probably doing a better job at it. Envy them not. Envy is a feeling of ill-will to those who are in the same

²⁴ Lifestyle of Grace

line as you. How Satan loves to come in and muddy the waters of even the smallest of Christian labors with a spirit of covetousness and un-Christian feelings. Envy is lurking to cloud every Christian's soul who is on the threshold of true service to God unless we are fortified with Grace. God grant us the grace to pray for and rejoice with others that are called to work as we are, and may we be blessed with a large, rich, generous soul which is free from envy.

Humility

4. **“Love does not boast or exalts itself, nor is it proud.”** After kindness has been given and love has gone out into the world and accomplished its beautiful work, you seal up your lips and quietly slip back into the shadows and forget what you have done. This is true humility. Sometimes love will hide even from itself. Love will waive even self-satisfaction. Love does not exalt itself and is not puffed up.

Courtesy

5. **“Love is not rude, or ill-mannered”** This is love in society, love in relation to etiquette. “Love does not behave itself inappropriately.” Politeness can be defined as love in trifles. Courtesy is love in the little things of life. Real love cannot behave itself unseemly because the true love that is inside will stop acts of rudeness and misbehavior. The word gentleman means “a gentle man,” a man who does everything gently with love. The whole mystery of a gentleman is that he cannot go against his nature and do an un-gentle thing.

Unselfishness

6. **“Love is not self seeking,”** True unselfishness is in not seeking that which is your own. Everyone is focused on their rights, but there comes a time when a man exercises a greater right of giving up his rights for the sake and benefit of others. The best example of this can be found in a Godly woman. As a wife and a mother, her life is spent in many continuous acts of unselfish giving of herself.

Yet love strikes even a deeper cord within us as it would have us not seek our rights at all, to ignore them and eliminate the personal element altogether. Selfishness is putting yourself in the center of the

The Greatest Thing In The World

focus and not God, demanding your right to be recognized. If the glory is truly God's, then we must get out of the picture, never look back, and slip into the shadow of unselfishness and truly give all the glory to God.

The Pursuit of Things

The pursuit of things is the most difficult thing to give up. The more difficult thing is to stop seeking after things at all. After we have sought them, bought them, won them, or deserved them, we have taken the best of it for ourselves already. It is then a little thing we do to give them up and the glory with it. Paul exhorts us "not to look everyman to his own things but on the things of others." It is more difficult not to seek our own at all, than having sought it, to give it up. Remember there is no greatness in things; things are not great. The only greatness is unselfish love.

For love, nothing is hard. Christ tells us to take upon ourselves His yoke for it is easy. I believe Jesus was trying to show us an easier way to live, His way of living life (Life Style), the unselfish road. There is no true happiness in having and getting, but only in the giving. The world is in pursuit of their happiness, the happiness of getting and being served by others. Christ showed us a better way. Jesus said, "For he who would be great among you, let him serve."²⁵ He that would be happy, let him remember that it is better to give than to receive.

Acts 20:35, "... remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Good Temper

7. **"Love is not easily provoked or angered."** The peculiar thing about a bad temper is that more often than not, it is the one blot in an otherwise noble character. There are men and women who would otherwise have an almost perfect character except for an easily ruffled, quick-tempered, or "touchy" disposition. There are usually two great classes of sins, sins of the **body**, and sins of the **disposition**. The story of the Prodigal Son²⁶ can be shown as an example of both sins. The prodigal son himself is an example of the first type of sin and his brother an example of the second.

²⁵ Mark 10:43

²⁶ Luke 15:11-32

The Greatest Thing In The World

To the world the prodigal son committed a sin that was worse than his brother's. But to a Father who is love, who grieved the Father more? A sin against love may be many times worse than any other. No vice can un-Christianize society more than an evil temper. It can make a life bitter, destroy relationships and devastate homes, steal the innocence of childhood, and produce sheer misery.

In the parable of the prodigal son, let's look at the elder brother. He is in the field working when his younger brother comes home and the father runs to meet him. He was not the one who ran off, spending his inheritance. He was hard-working, patient, and trustworthy. So let him have his due credit. However, where do we find this brother after the father forgives the younger son and puts on a feast in his honor to welcome him home?

Luke 15:25-32, ²⁵“Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. ²⁷And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. ²⁹But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; ³⁰but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’ ³¹And he said to him, ‘Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.’”

The Greatest Thing In The World

Did the elder brother join in? No, he is sulking outside the father's door, he is angry and the scriptures tell us "he would not go in." Look at the effect on his father. The servants knew first of the situation and could not convince him to join in, and finally the father had to come out to talk to him. Everyone at the feast knew there was a problem. The ill-tempered son made his feelings known to everyone, he basically ruined the celebration. Why? Because he was angry, jealous, full of pride, uncaring and self-centered. These are the ingredients of an ill-tempered person. Which is harder to live in and for others to live with, the sins of the body or the sins of the disposition?

Guilelessness

8. "Love keeps no record of wrongs, does not delight in evil."


To be guileless is to be without, or free of suspicion and critical judgment. In this love-less world we live in, there are still people that we can find that "think no evil." This has got to be the great unworldliness. Love, "thinks no evil," has no motive, sees the bright side, and sees the best motive for every action.

Sincerity

9. "Love rejoices in the truth." Love will ask before it takes action, love will seek out truth first. What Paul seems to be telling us is that this love is even more strict. This love has self-restraint which refuses to take gain from others faults, it delights not in exposing their weaknesses, but "covers all things." Love endeavors to see things as they are, and rejoices to find them better than suspicion feared.

Love Defended

(vs.7-13)

ot that love needs to be defended, but as for why it is the Summum Bonum, simply put, Love lasts. Paul urges us to understand that “love never fails.” This is not true with the other things Paul goes on to list. “Whether there are prophecies, they shall fail.” By this he means that the message of the prophet shall come and then be fulfilled; by their fulfillment they then pass, they are finished. Paul goes on to list Tongues, Knowledge and Wisdom that shall in time end.

Paul does not mention to us about money, fortune or fame for these are truly temporal things that will pass away. Instead Paul named some of the great things of his time, the things that the best men strived for and then brushed them aside temporarily. It was not that prophecies, tongues, knowledge and wisdom had no importance but that they don’t last. They are in themselves great things but they are not supreme things. There are other things beyond these that are eternal and everlasting; they simply do not pass away.

Likewise, who we are and what we are stretches past what we do and what we possess. There is a great deal in the world that is good and beautiful but it also will not last and neither are we to love it.

1 John 2:15-16, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world.”

It is love that endures. Love is that one great thing we can give away and use to influence people and lift one another up. To know love and to be able to give it away means you must know the author of that love. You must know the person in whom love is made of and whose very nature is love, your Heavenly Father. His love is given by His grace and fulfilled in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

What it comes down to is that, God is love! What Paul is exhorting us to do is to be more Christ-like. For Jesus was the summation of God’s love.

The Greatest Thing In The World

John 3:16, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”


Here all nine elements of love are manifested in those words. Love is the **“Greatest thing in the World.”** Love is the supreme good for all mankind. When we practice the lessons Paul declares to us in 1 Corinthians 13 we get a picture of what Heaven must be like. We will be with God and his love-nature will permeate our soul and we will become a reflection of the very image of Jesus Christ.

Nothing that the world contains is eternal and immortal, and the immortal soul must give itself to something that is immortal. Paul tells us that the only immortal things are these,

I Cor. 13:13, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”



The Three Types of Love


 It has been said that “to live is to love” and yet there are many who live their lives in loveless relationships or alone and long for that feeling of love. Love is too often confused and misinterpreted because we deal with different types or levels of love.

A very common word for love during the apostolic age was **“Philia.”** It is the word of genuine affection – heart love. It is seen in the name, Philadelphia (brotherly love). Jesus had this kind of love for his closest disciple John²⁷ and for Lazarus.²⁸ **“Eros”** generally has to do with sexual love. From this term we derive the English word “erotic.” This word, however, is never found in the New Testament.

The noblest form of love, however, is **“Agape.”** It is not simply an emotion which rises unrestricted in our hearts; it is a principle by which we deliberately live. This is the love to which Paul is calling our attention to and this is the love which is eternal and in which we find the Summum Bonum.

Agape love is eternal, for it is what God is. God is love. Love will never fail because God will never fail. That is the philosophy of what Paul is showing us, that in the nature of things, love should be the supreme thing, the greatest thing in the world, because it is going to last.

In Closing

 Paul has certainly opened our eyes to the love of God. We need it in our lives, in our hearts and in our souls. It is the only thing that we can give and yet take with us. We need to daily remind ourselves that love is long-suffering and patient, it is kind, it is not rude nor does it boast of itself. Get these ingredients into your life, then everything you do is eternal and lasting and worth giving your time to.

You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments that stand out, when you have really lived, were those moments that were given in a spirit of love. One day the acts of love that were offered in unselfish giving, and unnoticed kindness to those around you, will shine as your most supreme moments, moments that you thought were too small

²⁷ Jn. 20:2

²⁸ Jn. 11:3

The Greatest Thing In The World

or trifling to even speak of or to mention. Everything else in life is transitory and visionary, except acts of love which no man knows about, or will ever know about. These acts of unselfish giving will never fail, they are eternal, and they will last and be taken with you into eternity.

The true eternal test for man's final judgment will not be in how he believed, but how he loved. For the love he lived by in his life and the love he gave to others reflects the love he knew. To know love is to know God, the author of all that is good and alive and full of love.

The final test of a man's religion or faith is not the degree of his religiousness but his love. It's not going to be about what you have done or what you have believed or achieved, but how you have practiced the nine elements of God's love. The sins of omission are what we will be judged for. The withholding of love is to deny the Spirit of Christ, the proof that you never knew Him and He lived in vain and inspired nothing in your life, proof that we were not once near enough to Him to be seized with the spell of His compassion for the world.

For they will all be there at the judgment, those whom we despised and neglected and those to whom we met and helped and offered God's love, in all its forms. There will not be any need of any more witnesses for or against you. There will be no other words about our doctrines and creeds. No words of church building, theology or the saints, but rather of the hungry and the poor, clothing and cups of cold water given in the name of Christ. These are acts of love that help us draw closer to Christ. Jesus said,

Matthew 10:40, "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

He who feeds the hungry and clothes the naked, visits the sick and whoever receives a little child in my name receives me.²⁹ These saints are those who belong to Christ, for everyone that loves is born of God. Yes, it is love that is the supreme thing, the greatest thing in the world.

²⁹ Mt. 10:40

The Greatest Thing In The World

Back at the House of Cornelius

Finally after several hours of speaking Paul came to the end of his teaching of the things God has revealed to him. The crowd still seemed to be a little divided on this issue of Love being the greatest thing. The evening's crowd was mostly Jewish and they spoke among themselves privately.

Then one of them name Markus turned to Paul saying, "My brother you have certainly challenged us tonight and we believe your heart is true and your words come from God. It is no small matter to change a lifetime of tradition, but we concede that you speak the truth to us tonight. We shall hear you again, but for now we take our leave for you have filled our minds with much to dwell upon already. Shalom to you my brother." With that the Jewish men all left the house of Cornelius.

Now Cornelius and the other gentile believers embraced the teaching whole heartedly and remained there the longest asking Paul even more questions. The teaching Paul brought was like a breath of fresh air to their souls. Before Paul and his two companions left for the night Paul wanted to leave them with God's truth once again. "Brothers before I leave you tonight I want to say again one of God's great truths He gave to me. The degree to which a man loves reflects the degree to which he knows God. To know this and more importantly practice this is to keep all the law of God concerning you.

With those words Paul pulled the hood up over his head and he and his companions walked out into the night.



Historical Note: In his lifetime the Apostle Paul is attributed with at least thirteen epistles of the New Testament before his death in Rome as a martyr. The New Testament book of Acts 26 tells of Paul standing trial before the Roman Procurators Felix and then Festus. This information is used to suggest a date of about 59 AD. In Acts we are told that Paul was sent to Rome and that he arrived in chains. This was likely in about 60 AD. Early Church Fathers, like Eusebius, pass down a tradition that

The Greatest Thing In The World

Paul was martyred in Rome, although there is no reference to Paul's martyrdom in the New Testament.

In 64 AD Rome suffered a horrific fire that burnt much of the city. Nero, the Caesar, responded by blaming Christians and ended up persecuting them for a short period of time. Many scholars have suggested that it was during Nero's persecution of the Christians that Paul was killed. Well-known tradition is that Paul was beheaded in Rome about the mid-60s A.D.

I Will Testify To Love³⁰

All the colors of the rainbow
All the voices of the wind
Every dream that reaches out
That reaches to find where love begins

Every word of every story
Every star in every sky
Every corner of creation lives to testify

For as long as I shall live
I will testify to love
I'll be a witness in the silences when words are not enough
With every breath I take
I will give thanks to God above
For as long as I shall live
I will testify to love

From the mountains to the valleys
From the rivers to the sea
Every hand that reaches out
Every hand that reaches out to offer peace
Every simple act of mercy
Every step to kingdom come
All the hope of every heart will speak what love has done.

³⁰ Words by Avalon – *Testify to Love*

Acknowledgments

This study was taken from and portions revised, edited and updated from the book “The Greatest Thing in the World” by Dr. Henry Drummond a Scottish evangelist (1851-1897). First Published c1880