

LOVE: The Greatest Thing

Henry Drummond

Free eBooks from Hawk Stories

www.hawkstories.com

CONTENTS

Free eBooks from Hawk Stories.....	1
Preface	2
I. THE CONTRAST.....	4
II. THE ANALYSIS.....	6
III. THE DEFENCE.....	15
Conclusion.....	19

Preface

Everyone has asked the great question of antiquity: 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?

Perhaps the greatest thing is *faith*. That great word has been the keynote for centuries. We look upon it as the greatest thing in the world. Well, we are wrong. In the 13th chapter of I Corinthians, we see, "The greatest of these is love."

It is not an oversight. Paul was speaking of faith just before. He said, "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 abides faith, hope, love," and without a moment's hesitation, the decision falls, "The greatest of these is Love."

In addition, it is not prejudice. A man is apt to recommend to others his own favorite point. The student can detect a beautiful tenderness growing as Paul gets old; but the hand that wrote, "The greatest of these is love," when we meet it first, is stained with blood.

Nor is this letter to the Corinthians peculiar in singling out love as the *summum bonum*. The masterpieces of Christianity agree. Peter says, "Above all things have fervent love." And John goes farther, "God is love."

The profound remark that Paul makes elsewhere: "Love is the fulfilling of the law." What did he mean? In those days, men were working the passage to Heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments, and the many other commandments. Christ said, "I will show you a more simple way. If you do one thing, you will do these other things, without ever thinking about them. If you love, you will unconsciously fulfill the whole law."



You can see how that must be. Take any of the commandments. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." If a man love God, you will not require to tell him that. Love is the fulfilling of that law. "Take not His name in vain." Would he ever dream of taking His name in vain if he loved him? Love would fulfill these laws regarding God.

In addition, it is true about love for man. It would be preposterous to tell a person not to kill. You could only insult him if you suggested that he should not steal--how could he steal from those he loved? It would be superfluous to beg him not to bear false witness against his neighbor. If he loved him, it would be the last thing he would do. In addition, you would never dream of urging him not to covet what his neighbors had. He would rather they possessed it than himself. In this way, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." It is the rule for fulfilling all rules, the new commandment for keeping all the old commandments, Christ's one *secret*.

Now Paul has given us the most wonderful *summum bonum*. We may divide it into three parts. In the beginning of the short chapter, we have love contrasted; in the heart of it, we have love analyzed; toward the end, we have love defended as the supreme gift.



I. THE CONTRAST

Paul begins by contrasting love with other traits. I shall not attempt to go over these things in detail. Their inferiority is already obvious.

He contrasts it with eloquence. What a noble gift it is, the power of playing upon the souls and wills of men, and rousing them to lofty purposes! Paul says, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." We all know why. We have all felt the brazenness of words without action, the hollowness, the unaccountable impotence of eloquence without love.

He contrasts it with mysteries. He contrasts it with faith. Why is love greater than faith? The end is greater than the means. What is the use of having faith? It is to connect the soul with God. And what is the object of connecting man with God? That he may become like God. Nevertheless, God is love. Hence, faith, the means, is in order to love, the end. Love, therefore, obviously is greater than faith. "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

It is greater than charity, because the whole is greater than a part. Charity is only a small part of love, one of the avenues of love. There may even be a great deal of charity without love. It is easy to toss a coin to a beggar on the street; it is generally easier than not to do it. We purchase relief from the sympathetic feelings roused by the spectacle of misery, at the copper's cost. It is too cheap. If we really loved him, we would do more for him. Hence, "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, but have not love, it profits me nothing."

Then Paul contrasts it with sacrifice: "If I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing." Missionaries can take nothing greater to the world than the impress and reflection of the love of God upon their own character. That is the universal language. It will take years to speak in Chinese, or in the dialects



of India. From the day they land, that language of love, understood by all, will be pouring forth its unconscious eloquence.

For the missionary, it is not his words. His character is his message. In the heart of Africa, I have come across men and women who remembered the only white man they ever saw before--David Livingstone. 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. They knew that it was love, although he spoke no word.

Embrace this fact, where you also lay down your life, and your work will succeed. You can take nothing greater than love; you must take nothing less. You may be braced for every sacrifice; but if you give your body to be burned, and have not love, it will profit nothing.



II. THE ANALYSIS

After contrasting love with these things, Paul briefly gives us an amazing analysis of this supreme thing. It is a compound thing. It is like light. A scientist can take a beam of light and pass it through a crystal prism. As it comes out the other side of the prism, it is broken into colors--red and blue and yellow and violet and orange, the colors of the rainbow. Likewise, Paul passes this thing, love, through the magnificent prism of his inspired intellect, and it comes out on the other side, broken into its elements.

In these few words, we have *the spectrum of love*, the analysis of love. Observe its elements. Notice that they are virtues that we hear about every day; they are things that can be practiced by every man in every place in life. By a multitude of small things and ordinary virtues, the supreme thing, the *summum bonum*, is comprised.

The *spectrum of love* has nine ingredients: patience, kindness, generosity, humility, courtesy, unselfishness, good temper, guilelessness, sincerity. These make up the supreme gift.

All are in relation to men, in relation to life, in relation to the known today and the near tomorrow, not to the unknown eternity. We hear much of love to God; Christ spoke much of love to man. We hear much of peace with heaven; Christ made much of peace on earth. The supreme thing, in short, is not a thing at all, but the acts that make up the sum of every common day.

1. Patience

This is the normal attitude of love; love waiting to begin; not in a hurry, calm, ready to do its work when the summons comes, but meantime wears the



ornament of a quiet spirit. Love suffers long; bears all things; believes all things; hopes all things. For love understands, and therefore waits.

2. Kindness

Love active. Have you noticed how much of Christ's life was spent in doing kind things? He spent a great amount of His time simply in making people happy, in being kind to people. Only one thing is greater than happiness, and that is holiness. God has put in our power the happiness of those around us, that is secured by our being kind to them.

The greatest thing a man can do for the Heavenly Father is to be kind to some of His other children. Why we are not kind? How much the world needs it! How easily it is done! How instantaneously it acts! How it is remembered! How abundantly it pays itself back--for there is no debt so honorable as love. "Love never fails." Love is success, love is happiness, and love is life. "Love," I say with Browning, "is energy of life."

Where love is, God is. He that dwells in love dwells in God. God is Love. Therefore, love. Without distinction, without calculation, without procrastination: love. Lavish it upon the poor, where it is easy; especially upon the rich, who often need it most. Mostly, love our equals, where it is most difficult. There is a difference between trying to please and giving pleasure. Give pleasure, for it 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."

3. Generosity

"Love envies not." This is love in competition with others. Whenever you attempt a good work, you will find other men 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, a spirit of covetousness and detraction. That most despicable of all the unworthy moods that cloud our soul waits for us on the threshold of every work, unless we are fortified with this grace of magnanimity. Only one thing should the Christian envy--the large, rich, generous soul that "envies not."

4. Humility

After learning generosity, learn humility, to put a seal on 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 foregoes self-satisfaction. "Love vaunts not itself, is not puffed up." Humility is love hiding.

5. Courtesy

This is love in society, love in relation to etiquette. "Love does not behave itself unseemly." Politeness and courtesy is love in little things. You can put the most untutored persons into the highest society, and if they have a reservoir of love in their heart, they will behave appropriately. Carlisle said of Robert Burns that there was no truer gentleman in Europe than the ploughman-poet. It was because he loved everything--the mouse, the daisy, all things great and small. With this simple passport, he could mingle with any society, and enter courts and palaces from his little cottage on the banks of the Ayr.

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



6. Unselfishness

"Love seeks not her own." In Britain the Englishman is devoted to his rights. But there come times when a man may exercise the higher right of giving up his rights.

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

It is not hard to give up our rights. The difficult thing is to give up ourselves. The more difficult thing still is not to seek things for ourselves at all. After we have sought them, bought them, won them, deserved them, we have taken the cream off them for ourselves already. However, not to seek them, to look every man not on his own things, but on the things of others--that is the difficulty. "Seek great things for yourself?" said the prophet; "seek them not." Why? There is no greatness in things. The only greatness is unselfish love. Even self-denial in itself is nothing. Only a greater purpose or a mightier love can justify the waste.

It is more difficult not to seek our own than to give it up. I 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. And I believe it is an easier way, a happier way. The most obvious lesson in Christ's teaching is that there is no happiness in getting anything, but only in giving. The world is on the wrong scent in pursuit of happiness. They think it consists in having and getting, and in being served by others. No, 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 to give than to receive."



7. Good Temper

"Love is not provoked." Nothing could be more striking. We are inclined to look on bad temper as a harmless weakness. We speak of it as a mere infirmity, a family failing, a matter of temperament, not a thing to take into very serious account in estimating a man's character. Yet here, right in the heart of this analysis of love, it finds a place; and the Bible repeatedly returns to condemn it as one of the most destructive elements in human nature.

It is often the one blot on an otherwise noble character. You know men who are almost 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. No form of vice, not worldliness, not greed, not drunkenness, does more to un-Christianize society than evil temper. For embittering life, for breaking up communities, for destroying the most sacred relationships, for devastating homes, for withering up men and women, for taking the bloom of childhood, in short, for sheer gratuitous misery-producing power this influence stands alone.

Jealousy, anger, pride, cruelty, self-righteousness, touchiness, sullenness--these are ingredients of a dark and loveless soul. In varying proportions, these are the ingredients of all ill temper. Jesus 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 people in it. Except, therefore, such a man be born again, he cannot enter.

Temper is significant. It is not in what it is alone, but in what it reveals. A lack of patience, a lack of kindness, a lack of generosity, a lack of courtesy, a lack of unselfishness, are all instantaneously symbolized 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 anger will die. 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, penetrating ours, sweetens, purifies, and transforms all. This only can eradicate what is wrong, work a chemical change, renovate and regenerate, and rehabilitate the inner man. Will power does not change men. Time does not change men. Christ does.

Some have not much time to lose. This is a matter of life or death. "Whoever offends one of these little ones, which believe in me, it would be better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." By the deliberate verdict of Jesus, it is better not to live than not to love.

8. Guilelessness

Guilelessness is grace for suspicious people. The possession of it is the great secret of personal influence. People who influence you are people who believe in you. In an atmosphere of suspicion, men shrivel up; but in a trusting atmosphere, they expand.

It is a wonderful (in this hard, uncharitable world) to still find a few rare souls who think no evil. Love "thinks no evil," imputes no motive, sees the bright side. What a delightful state of mind! What a stimulus even to meet with it for a day! Moreover, if we try to influence or elevate others, we shall soon see that success is in proportion to their belief of our belief in them. The respect of another is the first restoration of the self-respect a man has lost. Our ideal of what he is becomes to him the hope and pattern of what he may become.

9. Sincerity

"Love rejoices not in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth." Certainly, nothing could be more just, for he who loves, will love Truth not less than men. He will rejoice in the truth, rejoice not in what he has been taught, but "in the

truth." He will accept only what is real. Striving to get at facts, he will search for truth with a humble and unbiased mind, and cherish whatever he finds.

But the verse actually calls for a sacrifice for truth's sake, literally, "Rejoices not in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth." No one English word defines this quality. It includes the self-restraint that refuses to make capital out of others' faults; the charity that delights not in exposing the weakness of others, but "covers all things"; the sincerity of purpose that endeavors to see things as they are, and rejoices to find them better than suspicion feared or aspersion denounced.

Now the business of our lives is to have these nine virtues fitted into our character. That is our supreme work in this world, to learn love. Is life not full of opportunities for learning Love? The world is not a playground; it is a schoolroom. Life is not a holiday, but an education. Moreover, the one eternal lesson for us all is how better we can love.

What makes a man a good athlete? Practice. What makes a man a good artist, a good sculptor, a good musician? Practice. What makes a man a good linguist? Practice. What makes a man a good man? Practice. Nothing else.

If a man does not exercise, he develops no muscle; and if a man does not exercise his soul, he acquires no strength of character, no vigor of moral fiber, no beauty of spiritual growth. Love is not an emotion. It is a rich, strong, manly, vigorous expression of character. It can only be built by ceaseless practice.

It is growing more beautiful, though you see it not. Therefore, keep in the midst of life. Do not isolate yourself. Be among people, and among troubles, difficulties, and obstacles. Remember Goethe's words: "Talent develops itself in solitude; character in the stream of life." Character grows in the stream of the world's life. That is where we learn love.

Love itself can never be fully defined. Light is a something more than the sum of its ingredients -- a glowing, dazzling, tremulous ether. Likewise, love is more than



all its elements -- a palpitating, quivering, sensitive, living thing. 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. Nevertheless, these things alone will not bring love into our nature. Love is an effect. Only as we fulfill the right condition can we have the effect produced. Shall I tell you what the cause is?

"We love because He first loved us." We cannot help it. Because He loved us, we love. We love everybody. Our heart is slowly changed. Contemplate the love of Christ, and you will love. Stand before that mirror, reflect Christ's character, and you will be changed into the same image from tenderness to tenderness. There is no other way. You can only look at the lovely object, and fall in love with it, and grow into likeness to it. Therefore, look at this Perfect Character, this Perfect Life. Look at the great sacrifice as He laid down Himself, all through life and upon the cross, and you must love Him. Moreover, loving Him, you become like Him.

Love begets love. It is a process of induction. Put a piece of iron in the presence of an electrified body, and that piece of iron becomes electrified. It is changed into a temporary magnet in the mere presence of a permanent magnet, and as long as you leave the two side by side, they are both magnets alike. Remain side by side with Him who loved us, and gave himself for us, and you, too, will become a magnet, an attractive force. Like Him, you will draw all men to you. Like Him, you will be drawn to all men. That is the inevitable effect of Love. Any man who fulfills that cause must have that effect produced in him.

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

Edward Irving went to see a dying boy once, and when he entered the room, he just put his hand on the sufferer's head, and said, "My boy, God loves you," and went away. The boy called out to the people in the house, "God loves me! God loves me!"

One word! It changed that boy. The sense that God loved him overpowered him, melted him, and began the creating of a new heart in him. That is how the love of God melts the unlovely heart in man, and begets in him the new creature, who is



patient, humble, gentle, and unselfish. There is no other way to get it, no mystery about it. We love others, we love everybody, and we love our enemies, because He first loved us.



III. THE DEFENCE

Now I have a closing about Paul's reason for singling out love as the supreme possession. It is a very remarkable reason. In short, *it lasts*. "Love," urges Paul, "never fails." Then he begins again one of his marvelous lists of the great things, and exposes them one by one. He runs over the things that men thought were going to last, and shows that they are all fleeting, temporary, passing away.

"Prophecies, they shall be done away." It was the mother's ambition for her boy in those days that he should become a prophet. For hundreds of years God had never spoken by means of any prophet, and at that time, the prophet was greater than the king was. Men waited wistfully for another messenger to come. The Bible is full of prophecies. One by one, they have have 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 also greatly coveted. "Tongues, they shall cease." Consider the words in which these chapters were written--Greek. It has gone. Take the Latin--the other great tongue of those days. It ceased long ago. Look at the Indian language. It is ceasing. The language of Wales, of Ireland, of the Scottish Highlands is dying before our eyes. The most popular book now, except the Bible, is one of Dickens' works, his *Pickwick Papers*. It is largely written in the language of London street-life; and experts assure us that in fifty years it will be unintelligible to the average English reader.

Then Paul goes farther, with even greater boldness adds, "Knowledge, it shall be done away." The wisdom of the ancients, where is it? It is gone. A pupil today knows more than Sir Isaac Newton knew; his knowledge has vanished away. You put yesterday's newspaper in the fire: its knowledge has vanished away. You buy the old editions of the great encyclopedias for a few cents: their knowledge has vanished away. Look how the coach has been superseded by the use of steam.

Look how electricity has superseded that, and swept a hundred almost new inventions into oblivion. One of the greatest living authorities, Sir William Thompson, said in Scotland, "The steam engine is passing away." At every workshop you will see, in the back yard, a heap of old iron, a few wheels, a few levers, a few cranks, broken and eaten with rust. Twenty years ago, that was the pride of the city. Men flocked in from the country to see the great invention; now it is superseded, its day is done. Moreover, all the boasted science and philosophy of this day will soon be old.

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

Is anything 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. Paul had no charge against these things. All he said about them was that they would not last. They were great things, but not supreme things. 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. That is a favorite argument of the New Testament. John says of the world, not that it is wrong, but simply that it "passes away." There is a great deal in the world that is delightful and beautiful, a great deal in it that is great and engrossing; but *it will not last*.

All that is in the world, the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, are but for a little while. Therefore, love not the world. Nothing that it contains is worth the life and consecration of an immortal soul. The immortal soul must give itself to something that is immortal. Moreover, the only immortal things are these: "Now abides 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. What is certain is that love must last.



God, the Eternal God, is Love. Covet, therefore, that everlasting gift, that one thing certain to stand. Hold things in their proportion. Let at least the first great object of our lives be to achieve, the character of Christ, built around love.

This greatest thing is eternal. Continually John associates love and faith with eternal life. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should have everlasting life." I had to find out for myself that whosoever trusts in Him--that is, whosoever loves Him, for trust is only the avenue to Love has everlasting life.

The Gospel offers life. Never offer a man 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 men a more abundant life, a life abundant in love, and therefore abundant in salvation for themselves, and large in enterprise for the alleviation and redemption of the world. Then only can the Gospel take hold of the whole of a man, body, soul and spirit, and give to each part of his nature its exercise and reward. Many address only part of man's nature. They offer peace, not life; faith, not love. It offers no deeper life. Surely, it makes sense 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 with love. We want to live forever for the same reason that we want to live tomorrow. Why do we want to live tomorrow? Is it because there is someone who loves you, and whom you want to see tomorrow, and be with and love in return? There is no other reason why we should live than to love and be loved. When a man has no one to love him, he commits suicide. As long as he has friends, those who love him and whom he loves, he will live, because to live is to love. Even the love of a dog will keep him in life; but let that go, he has no contact with life, no reason to live. He dies by his own hand.

Eternal life also is to know God. This is Christ's own definition. Ponder it. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." Love must be eternal. It is what God is. On the last analysis, then, love is life. Love never fails, and life never fails, so long as there is love. That



is the philosophy of Paul; love should be the supreme thing, because it is going to last, because it is an Eternal Life. It is a thing that we experience now, not that we get when we die; that we shall have a poor chance of getting when we die unless we are living now.

No worse fate can befall a man in this world than to live and grow old alone, unloving and unloved. To be lost is to live in an unregenerate condition, loveless and unloved; and to be saved is to love. He that dwells in love dwells already in God. For God is Love.



Conclusion

Read this chapter once a week for the next three months. A man did that once and it changed his whole life. Will you do it? It is for the greatest thing in the world. You might begin by reading it every day, especially the verses which describe the perfect character. "Love suffers long, and is kind; love envies not; love vaunts not itself." Get these ingredients into your life. Then everything that you do is eternal. It is worth doing. No man can become a saint in his sleep. Address yourselves to that one thing; at any cost have this transcendent character exchanged for yours.

You will find as you look back on 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 round about you, things too trifling to speak about, but which you feel have entered into your eternal life. I have seen almost all the beautiful things God has made. I have enjoyed almost every pleasure that He has planned for man. Yet, as I look back, I see standing out above all, when the love of God reflected itself in some poor imitation, some small act of love, and these seem to be the things that alone abide. Everything else in all our lives is transitory. But the acts of love, which no man knows about, they never fail.

In the Book of Matthew, where the Judgment Day is depicted in the imagery of One seated on a throne and dividing the sheep from the goats, the test of a man then is not, "How have I believed?" but "How have I loved?" The final test of religion, 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 kindnesses of life. By what we have not done, by sins of omission, we are judged. It could not be otherwise. For the withholding of love is the negation of the spirit



of Christ, the proof that we never knew Him, that for us He lived in vain. It means that He suggested nothing in all our thoughts, that He inspired nothing in all our lives, that we were not once near enough to Him, to be seized with the spell of His compassion for the world. It means

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

Thank God, the Christianity is coming nearer the world's need. Who is Christ? He who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick. And where is Christ? "Whoever shall receive a little child in My name receives Me." And who are Christ's? "Every one that loves is born of God."

Love is the greatest thing.

For More eBooks,

Visit Hawk Stories

www.hawkstories.com

