

## THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

In 1884, Dwight Moody published a book entitled, "The Greatest Thing in the World." The book was a compilation of the teaching of another man, Henry Drummond, on I Corinthians 13. I was introduced to the book a few years ago by one of our church members, when, after I had gone to pray with their spouse for a surgery that was taking place that day, I chose to encourage them by reading Paul's chapter on love. I'm sure now that it was not by chance that I turned to I Corinthians 13 on that day, for only a few days after, this kind member met me at church with a copy of "The Greatest Thing in the World" - a gift for my own personal library. I had always maintained an affinity for the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians. Possibly because I do believe that it is the most beautiful summation of true love, or perhaps it has to do with the fact that the moments and individuals which have greatly shaped my life have all had one thing in common - love. Better yet, *agape* love, or God's perfect love toward us.

As I began to read Drummond's book, however, my heart was stirred to a new depth within me. I have no doubt that it is now in my top five books that I have ever read. There is a practicality of application and a simplicity of implied obedience in Drummond's book that one cannot get away from. One author, in writing a summary of Drummond's life, wrote that he (Drummond) "*believed that Christ was the answer for the whole world and for people where and as they lived, not as a theology tucked safely inside churches.*" That is the manner in which I Corinthians 13 is written. Paul does not apologize when he pens, through inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "And now abide faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." And it is not that Paul was entirely prejudiced towards love. An individual is apt to recommend others to his own strong point, however, a quick history of Paul's life would tell us that this had been a growth of grace for Paul. Drummond points out that, "*The hand that wrote, 'The greatest of these is love,' when we meet it first, is stained with blood.*" D.L Moody said of this passage and of Drummond's teachings that, "*The one great need in our Christian life is love, more love to God and to each other. Would to God that we could all move into Paul's chapter, and live there.*" This morning I would like for us to do just that.

There's not a time that I read this passage when I don't think of how beautiful, true, and genuine love is. The phrases of that passage echo through the heart like the roar of a waterfall. It's so loud you can barely hear anything above it, yet it doesn't hurt the ears. The force of the water cascading downward is so incredibly powerful, yet the water below is often a calm pool of gentle waves. That's how love is. Strong and powerful, yet gentle and kind. The ripples of love touch other people's lives with a gently humility that shines forth, then retreats. One author likened this passage to

the passing of light through a prism. Here love is passed through the prism of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and on the other side emerges the elements of love: patience, kindness, generosity, humility, courtesy, unselfishness, a good temper, a lack of guile, and sincerity. These make up the stature of the perfect or fully mature Christian, the one in whose life the light and love of Christ shines undimmed by their antonyms. Let us look now at each element individually, and see what God might have for us this morning.

### **1. Love is Patient** - "Charity suffereth long..."

Patience, while seemingly hard to come by in today's society, is the normal attitude of Christ-like love. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 states: "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, *be patient toward all men.*" Regardless of the state one's desperation, despondence, or dastardliness, we are challenged from the Word of God to be patient. Patience is love passively waiting to begin, not in a hurry, a rush, or a time cramp. Too often we fly through life with so little time to invest in those around us that (while we do not say it, our lack of patience with others says it for us) we care not one for another, but rather only for what we can accomplish for ourselves. True love on the other hand, is calm, ready to do it's work when the time comes, but in the meantime, wearing the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. (Ecclesiastes 7:8, Romans 12:12, James 5:7-8)

### **2. Love is Kind** - "...and is kind..."

There is no other attribute of love which ought to be more active in our daily lives than that of kindness. Drummond comments on the life of Christ, saying, "*Have you ever noticed how much of the 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 spend a great proportion of His time simply making people happy, in doing good turns to people.*" The greatest thing, someone once said, a man can do for our Heavenly Father is to be kind to some of His other children. Where love is, God is. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, for God is love. Therefore, let us love. Without distinction, without calculation, without procrastination, love. Lavish it upon the poor, where it is very easy; especially on the rich, who often need it most; most of all upon those with whom we journey, where it is very difficult, and for whom perhaps we do least of all. William Penn said: "*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.*" Drummond again writes, "*I wonder why we are not all kinder that we are? How much the world needs it. How easily it is done. How instantaneously it acts. How infallibly it is remembered. How super abundantly it pays itself back - for their is no debtor in the world so honorable, so superbly honorable, as Love.*"

### **3. Love is Generous** - "...charity envieth not..."

Love does not compete with others. Whenever you attempt to do a good work, you will find yourself preceded or proceeded by someone else, and chances are they may be able to do that work better. Let us not envy them. Remind yourself of the One who has called you, and you will understand that He has been generous to you...so lavish that generosity of love upon someone else!

**4. Love is Humble** - "...charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up..."

And then, after having leaned all that, we have to learn this further thing, to put a seal upon our lips and forget what we have done. After we have been kind, after His Love through us has stolen forth into the world and done its beautiful work, we must go back into the shade again and say nothing about it. Love waives even self-satisfaction. (Isaiah 57:15; Matthew 18:4; James 4:6,10; I Peter 5:5-6)

**5. Love is Courteous** - "Doth not behave itself unseemly..."

This is love in society, love in relation to etiquette. Courtesy is said to be love in the little things. And the one secret to politeness and courtesy is love. 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. May we be a people whose most simple actions are most definite reflections of love.

**6. Love is Unselfish** - "...seeketh not her own..."

Pay attention closely to this point, for here Paul is admonishing us to be made aware that we will be tempted to seek that which is our own. Our rights, our deserved retribution, our return on our investments. Paul is not even saying that we acknowledge our rights and then proudly and openly lay them at the feet of Jesus, but rather, that we do not even begin to seek them at all. Love removes herself from the equation, and does not calculate the loss, for love is the victory in and of itself.

**7. Love is Good Tempered** - "...is not easily provoked..."

Often, and unfortunately so, we are inclined to look upon a bad temper as a very harmless weakness, part of our DNA which we will not be rid of until we cross the other side. But Paul plows through this point without giving a shred of allowance for those who might make excuse. Drummond says that, "*The peculiarity of ill temper is that it is the vice of the virtuous...This compatibility of ill temper with high moral character is one of the strangest and saddest problems of ethics.*" He goes on to make the application in the story of the prodigal son. When, at last, the son returns home and is welcomed by the father so openly, who might it be that raises the question of unfair attention being lavished on this prodigal? The elder and moral brother. Scripture even tells us that, "He was angry, and would not go in." Look at the effect on the father, the servants, and the happiness of the guests. Judge the effect upon the prodigal brother, and ask yourself the question of how many prodigals are kept out of the house of God by the unlovely characters of those who profess to be inside?

**8. Love is Guileless** - "...thinketh no evil..."

Guilelessness is the grace that we manifest for suspicious people. If you think for a minute, you will realize that those who have invested in you and made a difference have been those who have believed in you. Those to whom you could relate a story and they would not search for the wrongs done but for the actions to be made going forward. Who can we represent love to by choosing to see grace instead of guile?

**9. Love is Sincere** - "Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth..."

Drummond taught that sincerity "includes...the self-restraint which refuses to make capital out of others' faults; the charity which delights not in exposing the weakness of others, but in 'covering all things;' the sincerity of purpose which endeavors to see things as they are, and rejoices to find them better than suspicion feared or calumny denounced." May our sincerity with others be a window through which they can see, not just our love, but the love of Christ in us.

So it is no wonder why Paul says that charity, "Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth." For, if we truly endeavor to include the above ingredients of this so precious a commodity in our lives, it may be that in so doing, our lives will not fail, for we will have "hitched our wagon" to the one truth that God has promised never fails - love.

- Pastor Caleb

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