

# The Greatest Thing Is Love

by Ernest Barker

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*The greatest thing in the world is love, and it is the foundation of all virtues and the key to a successful Christian life.*

**Duration:** 47:33

**Scripture:** Proverbs 16:32, Ephesians 4:11, 2 Peter 1:5

**Topics:** "Love"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker uses a fable about two bears in the woods to illustrate the importance of self-control and unity among believers. The bears try to imitate the behavior of other animals, but they fail repeatedly. Eventually, one bear suggests placing a stone in the center of their den and claiming it as their own. This simple act of self-control and unity helps them overcome their destructive behavior. The speaker emphasizes the need for believers to be careful in their words, actions, and attitudes, as losing their temper can undermine their testimony. The sermon also highlights the value of self-control and its role in building a strong foundation for a godly life.

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## Transcript

Our subject tonight is the greatest thing in the world. And I want to read the 13th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians and chapter 13.

Now as we read this chapter I want to substitute the word love for charity in each case. 1 Corinthians 13. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become sounding brass or a stinging cymbal.

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, though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long and is kind.

Love envieth not. Love wanteth not itself, is not fastucked, does not behave itself unseen. Thinketh not her own, is not easily provoked.

Thinketh no evil. Rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. Feareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

God 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. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But with them that which is perfect is come.

And 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 glasser, 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. Now the greatest thing in the world is love.

And the greatest love in the world is the love of God in Christ. Now all love emanates from the heart of God. And because of this, you and I are exhorted to love one another as believers.

John says in his first epistle, chapter four, Beloved, let us love one another. And then he gives the reason. For God is love.

And everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God. For God is love.

Now I hope, beloved friends, that you and I are carrying out that exhortation. We are told to love all our fellow believers. Not merely the dear friends with whom we are particularly associated.

But all God's people, wherever they are. By whatever name they may be called. Now there are thousands and thousands of Christians going to heaven under various labels.

And you and I may not agree with many of the systems which are in the religious world today. I can't accept them. To me, many of them are absolutely contrary to the word of God.

But, I must love the Christians. There's a rather world of difference between loving the system, all these genuine reflections and bowing and scraping and all that sort of thing, which constitutes the word of God. There's a tremendous difference between that and loving God's people.

Now, I love all God's people. Paul loved them. He says again and again that he loved all the Christians.

And I love them too. And as I have opportunity, I seek to help them and receive the God. I love you here tonight, beloved friends.

And I love you intensely. I hope you love me. If you don't, I'm sorry for you.

But I know you do love me. And I have received a tremendous amount of love as I have travelled so far through the United States. But that does not limit loving one another to our own community or to our own meeting.

We have to love all God's people. Now, perhaps you say, there are many Christians who are very difficult to love. Some, of course, are lovable.

Quite easy to love such. But there are some who are very difficult to love. Well, that is quite true, sir.

And you're one of them. And I'm one of them. You know, we all have our rough edges.

And we all fail at times. But we have to love one another not because of what we are in ourselves, but because we belong to Christ. We are all members of one family.

And that makes all the difference. Now, I think the reason that so many Christians perhaps do not love their fellow believers as they do is because they don't love Christ as they should. You know, friends, if you and I were to love the Savior as we should, if our love for Him were deep, real, sincere, we'd have no difficulty in loving our fellow brethren and sisters in Christ.

You know, the closer the folks are to the hub of the field, the closer they are to each other. The farther away they are from the hub, the farther they are away from each other. And so, the closer you and I are to Christ, and the more real He is to us, the easier it will be for us to love one another as blessed.

It ought to be a very difficult thing, beloved friends, not to love one another. It should be a very difficult thing for brethren to squabble and divide. I don't know whether you have heard the fable of the bears in the wood.

It is not a true fable, but it has a splendid lesson. These two bears in the wood, well, they saw the other animals barking around the mountain and tearing one another to pieces. They thought they ought to do the same.

And they tried. And they failed. They tried again.

And again they failed. And the situation appeared to be absolutely helpless. And hopeless.

Then one of them suggested this. He said, Now I'll secure a stone. I'll place that stone in the center of the den.

I'll stand one side, you stand the other. I'll look at that stone and I will say very, very seriously, that stone is mine. Now you are to lose your temper.

And you are to say, it is not yours at all, it is mine. And then you'll quarrel. And then you'll fight.

And then you'll tear one another to bits. Well, it was a good suggestion. So they thought.

And the stone was secured and placed in the center of the den. And the bear this side looked at it and said very, very seriously, that stone is mine. And he was expecting the other to say, no it is not, it is mine.

Instead of which he said, all right old man, if it's yours, you keep it. I don't want it. You see they tried to quarrel but they failed.

And then it should be quite an easy matter for you and for me to love God's people. Now in the Bible, of all the virtues mentioned, love has the very first place. On one occasion a scribe came to the Lord Jesus and asked him this question, Master, which is the greatest commandment or the first commandment in the law? Now you remember, no doubt, our Lord's answer.

Thou shalt love. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and soul and spirit. Thy neighbor as thyself.

Now that's the first commandment. It is the greatest commandment. There's no commandment greater than that.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. Now that was in the Old Testament. And there, of course, the people were commanded to love God.

Now so far as I know, we have no command in the New Testament to love God. It ought to be, of course, spontaneous. We love Him.

Why? Because He first loved us. And as we realize His love toward us, in all its immensity, so, friends, our love will go back to Him and then our love will outflow to those that love us. Now I'm going to ask you, please, to turn with me to the epistle to the Galatians in chapter 5. Galatians 5 and verse 22.

But the truth of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, weakness, temperance, or self-control against such there is no God. Now the truth of the Spirit is in contrast to the works of the flesh in verse 19. The truth of the Spirit has nine properties, or nine ingredients, if you like.

Now it isn't necessary for me to remind you, dear friend, that the word here, fruit, is in the singular and not in the plural. It does not say fruits of the Spirit. It's the fruit of the Spirit.

And I say there are nine properties. Now the first is love. And love comes first because of its immense importance.

Now would you notice these other ingredients are very interesting? Love, joy, peace. They are the three. We start with love.

Now joy is love singing. Peace is love resting. The second three are long-suffering, gentleness, goodness.

Now long-suffering, that's love endurance. Gentleness, that's love greatness. That's gentleness that made me great.

Goodness, that's love in action. The last three are faith, or faithfulness, and neatness, and temperance, or self-control. Faith, or faithfulness, that's love character.

Neatness, that's love condescension. Temperance, that's love holding the reins. Whenever you read the word temperance in the New Testament, of course, it's always self-control.

Perhaps you and I know very, very little about that. But having mentioned these nine properties, the writer goes on to say, against such there is no law. There's not a law in this universe who can righteously condemn anybody who manifests these nine ingredients.

And another thing, if you and I are manifesting the first one, love, then the others will be quite easy, because they are all included in the first. Now we'll return to another passage, please. The second epistle of Peter, and chapter one.

To Peter, chapter one, verse five. Besides this, giving all diligence unto your faith, virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance. Here you have the word again, self-control.

To self-control, patience. And to patience, godliness. To godliness, brotherly kindness.

And to brotherly kindness, love. Now here love comes last. And it comes last because of its importance.

We have some very, very interesting items in these verses. Besides all this, besides this giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue. Now which part is faith? That's the foundation.

And that's how you and I began our Christian experience. We were saved by grace, through faith. Grace was the source of our salvation.

Faith was the channel by which it was appropriate. Now we are to add to our faith, virtue. Would you like a word? Courage.

And dear friend, you and I need courage. We need courage in our Christian life day by day. We need courage to testify for Christ at every given opportunity.

We need courage to nail our talents to the mast as Christians. We need courage to overcome temptation. We need courage in our service for God.

We need courage in every single detail of Christian life. And we have to add, or link on to our faith, courage. And then, to courage, we have to join knowledge.

Now friends, of course, this is divine knowledge. It doesn't refer to earthly knowledge. Of course, knowledge is absolutely essential.

We couldn't possibly dispense it. Knowledge is mentioned again and again in the book of Proverbs. It's one of the most indispensable items in our lives, or in any life.

That's why we have these schools and colleges and universities. That our young people might grow in knowledge. Now friends, here is divine knowledge.

And we are to add to our courage the knowledge of God. The highest of all knowledge. Now for all I know, some of you young people here, may be well versed in the world sciences.

You may know a great deal about archaeology, or biology, or sociology, or ethnology, or zoology, or any otherology. For all I know, you may have letters out to your name. You may be a BA, or you may be an MA.

You may be a BSC, or you may be a DSC. Or you may be an LRAN, or an XYZ. But friends, remember that this knowledge is divine knowledge.

It does not belong to this world. It belongs to that world. And you and I are to grow in grace under the mouth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And then we are to add to our knowledge, ten things. That is, self-control. Now I don't want to be unkind, but I want to ask friends, how much do you and how much does I, do I know about self-control? Possibly some of us know very, very little about it experimentally.

It's one of the most important chapters in our Christian life. There are two passages, I'm going to ask you to turn to them if you will, in the book of Proverbs upon this. And there we shall see what God thinks of self-control.

First of all, it's in the sixteenth chapter of Proverbs, and verse thirty-two. Proverbs sixteen, verse thirty-two. He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty.

And he that ruleth his spirit, and he that taketh his city. Now this is what God thinks about self-control. He that is slow to anger.

Friend, are you slow to anger? Or do you get angry very quickly? Well if you're slow to anger, you're better than the mighty. Can you rule your own spirit on all occasions? When everything seems to be up against you? Well if you are friends, you're greater than the man who takes the city. Now the city is here in those early days of course, a walled city.

Jericho was a walled city. And for a general to make up his mind to take a walled city, it meant patience, it meant perseverance, it meant courage, it meant fortitude, and quite a number of other necessary items concerning his character. And friend, if you and I, if we are able to control our own spirit, we are greater than the general who is able to take a mighty, strong, walled city.

Now I'm going to say something which may surprise you, and it is this. No Christian ought ever to lose his or her temper. Now that may surprise you, but you know it is quite true according to the word of God.

Oh you see at once, isn't there a passage which talks about righteous indignation? Yes there is, but that isn't the same thing. Righteous indignation is absolutely justifiable. That's when no Christian ought to lose his or her temper.

Now I'm not a builder. I know very little of anything at all about building. If I were to build a house in time transition, I really hope I could be the last person to live in it.

I could be the first. But I do know this, I do know this as well. That tempered steel is valuable.

It has its use. It is really useful. But when that steel has lost its temper, its use is gone.

It's nullified. Now dear friend, if you and I lose our temper, our use has thereby gone temporarily. And if we lose our temper, friend, it means that our testimony has gone.

Therefore you and I ought to be exceedingly careful how we live day by day in the home or anywhere else. We ought to be careful as to what we say and also how we say. We ought to be careful as to what we do and also how we do it.

Well now that's one passage in Proverbs chapter 16 and verse 2. Now would you please turn over to chapter 25 of Proverbs and the last verse. 25 verse 28. He that hath no rule over his own system is like a city that is broken down and without walls.

Now here again we have God's estimate of self-control, what He thinks of it and how He values it. He that hath no rule over his own system is like a city which is broken down. Now a city with walls in the ordinary way is useful.

And it's useful for commerce. But a city without any walls which is demolished is of no use at all. And where you have a city, beloved friends, whose walls are broken down, the enemy may come in at any time and take possession.

Now if you and I do not know how to rule our own spirit, if we don't know how to control ourselves, beloved friends, we are just like that. Our usefulness is gone. And the enemy may come in at any time and take possession.

Therefore, you and I ought to be very, very careful how we act and what we say. There's a dear man, he's in the glory now, that I told my friends here, that I owe to him a great deal of my Christian life. And he came from America to England.

He came on more than one occasion, Dr. A.T. Pearson. Now he once spoke upon the youth and abuse of the tongue. And he gave an illustration, I've never forgotten it.

He said there was a lady who was a Christian, but she had an uncontrollable temper. She just bawled over at the slightest pretext. Her poor husband was afraid of her.

I hope, dear sister, your husband's not afraid of you, but he was really afraid of her. But one day she gave herself to the Lord, spirit, soul and body. And soon after she was tasted.

She was in one room, her husband was in an adjoining room. Now the room in which her husband was, there was a lovely chandelier. Well, something happened.

That chandelier went wet. There was an awful crash. And the wife heard it in the next room.

And instantly, she began to join over. And she wanted to give her husband a piece of her mind. Do you ever say that, friend? I would like to give him or her a piece of my mind.

Now you're always thinking about the worst, please, when you say a thing like that. She thought she'd like to give her husband a piece of her mind. And then she thought she heard a voice.

Did you not give yourself to me, spirit, soul and body? She said, yes, Lord, I did. Did that not control your lips? Yes, Lord, it did. That was sufficient.

She went into the room where her husband was. Poor man, he was trembling in his slippers, wondering what was coming. And the first word she said to him was, darling.

That nearly swept him off his feet. Many, many months had gone by since he heard such a term of endearment. Darling, don't worry.

Possibly, my dear, she said, it could not have been avoided. In any event, it can soon be rectified. That man's curse, he knew his own wife.

There was such a difference. Oh, beloved friend, how careful you and I should be. What we say.

Because I believe more harm has been accomplished in the church of God through the indiscreet use of the tongue than anything else. You and I have two eyes, and we have two ears, and we have two hands, and we have two feet. We've only one tongue.

Thank God for that. I don't want to be unkind, but I scarcely can realize what would happen if you and I had more than one tongue, some of us. But death and life are in the power of the tongue, says the wise man in Proverbs.

It is as capable of as much harm on the one hand as it is capable of good on the other. Well now, friend, self-control is one of the most important factors in your daily experience in life. Tension.

And then, according to Peter, we are to link on to self-control of patience. And you know that's what we need. I need patience.

I need more of that. Every Christian needs patience. When things go awry, when things go wrong somehow, friend, and circumstances tend to upset us, how we need to exercise patience.

I often think of the exhortation, He had need of patience. And friend, that applies to you, and that applies to me. Now when you and I practice impatience, that leads very often to irritability.

Now irritability leads very often to bad temper. Bad temper leads undoubtedly to loss of testimony. Patience.

Patience has a perfect word. If a man is patient, James Lane is a perfect man. And then to patience we are to add, or to link, brotherly kindness.

Now brotherly kindness, of course, is love to the brethren. Peter speaks of that in his epistle. Love the brotherhood.

Love every brother, every sister in the assembly, or elsewhere. How to brotherly love we are to exercise. Love in all its character.

Love, not only to one another, but love first of all to God, and then love to Christ, and then love to our fellow saints, and love to this cold world in which we live, which needs the love of Christ so badly. But there is one item which I have not mentioned. The item I omitted from that list is this godliness.

To patience, godliness. Now you and I, friends, are, or should be godly. Now to be godly is to be Christlike.

The Lord Jesus Christ was God manifest in the human form. And if I have to be like God, then I must be like Christ. And so the more I am conformed to the image of Christ down here in this world, the greater blessing I shall be, and the more I shall glorify God.

Now if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be married, nor own fruitful in the night. Now I want to turn to another passage, please. Will you turn to John chapter 13, and verse 34.

John 13, 34. A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye have loved one to another.

Now here are our Lord's words. And then here is our greatest, our absolutely perfect pattern. And he says here now, I'm going to give you a new commandment.

What is it? That you love one another as I have loved you. A new commandment, of course, suggests that there was an old commandment, a previous one. And do you remember what the old commandment says? Thyself, love thy neighbor.

What does the new commandment say? Thyself, love one another as Christian. What did the old commandment say? Thyself, love one another, thy neighbor, as thyself. Now the new commandment says, the Lord says, ye shall love one another as I have loved you.

Now brother and sister, the standard is calibrated. And you and I are to love one another as... How greatly has he loved us? By saying he has loved us in such a way he could not love us more. He poured out his soul unto death.

He just gave himself for us. Now he says, that's the standard for you. You see how I have loved you? Now love one another.

Now I don't say that we've ever attained to it. I don't suppose we ever shall, so long as we are in this world. But the loving friend, far, far better aim at perfection, even though you fall short of it, than aim at imperfection and attain to it.

I am to love my fellow believers as Christ has loved me. What a standard! What an ideal! And he says, by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another. Now I've often said, if only we, who are known as brethren, if only we, as a company of God's people, had been absolutely united down the years, had there been no division, had there been no unpleasantnesses, had there been no misunderstandings, our testimony today, whether in the United States or in Great Britain, or anywhere else, our testimony would be irresistible.

And those who do not attend our meetings, who are not in our company, even many of them admit that themselves. But you know the enemy got in the thin end of the way. And it wasn't long before he got in the thick end of the way.

And consequently, there have been all these terrible divisions and misunderstandings right down the line. It's one of the worst things that could possibly have happened, and yet it has happened. You know, I cannot agree with our dear friends who say that, well, unless a believer has a letter of commendation, that's a believer cannot break bread on Sunday morning.

You know, I can't say amen to that. I remember on one occasion, away in Liverpool, in England, a meeting was held, and the brethren were very strict. And they would not allow anyone to break bread unless he or she had a letter with him or her.

A sister in that meeting had a very dear friend. He was a lovely Christian. And she took her to the meeting, and she said to the brethren, here's my friend.

She's a devoted Christian. She loves the Lord. She wants to remember Him in the breaking of bread.

They said to her, has she brought her letter? No, she hasn't brought her letter, but she's a very out-and-out Christian. Sorry, but she must sit at the back. She must not be allowed to break bread, as she hasn't brought her letter.

Now, when the meeting was over, the sister who was in fellowship and who had brought her friend there, went to one of the brethren, and she said, you know, you have been thoroughly inconsistent. She said, why, how? She said, during the meeting, you sang a hymn. Hear every saint that loves thy name our willing hearts embrace.

And yet you have refused a dear child of God just because she hasn't brought her letter. Well, they were honest enough to acknowledge their fault. And things have been different from that time to this.

Oh, beloved friends, I do feel that down the ages, down the years, we perhaps have discouraged as many people as we have encouraged. We have just, as it were, sent people away when they ought to have been received and they ought to have been welcomed and they ought to have been loved. And we've missed opportunity after opportunity.

Now, I know that that is not here, and I thank God it is not here. But now, I want to refer to two other passages. Will you please refer to Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 32.

I'm sorry, chapter 4. Chapter 4, verse 32. Be kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. Our friend, you and I ought to be kind one to another.

And why? Only because God has been so kind to us. And God has been kind to you, friend, and He's been kind to me. He has been kind to us far, far kinder than ever we deserve.

And because He's been so kind to us, we ought to be kind one to another. Not unkind, but kind to one another. Very often we say an unkind word behind another's back.

One of the worst possible things you can do. And then not only are we to be kind one to another, we are to be tender hearted towards one another. That doesn't mean to say that we ought to be chicken hearted.

It says just what it says. We ought to be tender hearted. And friend, the reason we ought to be tender hearted to one another is simply because God has been so tender hearted to us.

And how tender hearted He has been. He is not there for us according to our sins, neither reward us according to our iniquities. He might have.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Oh friend, God has been tender hearted to us. We ought to be tender hearted towards one another.

And then we ought to forgive one another. And how often are we to forgive one another? Peter, you know, once said to the Lord, how often shall my brother offend against me and I forgive him? Till seven times? No Lord, said the Lord, not seven times Peter. Seventy times seven.

And he went even farther than that. Now he said, if thy brother trespass against thee, and say I repent, forgive him. If he trespass against thee seven times a day, and seven times a day say I repent, forgive him.

Seven times a day. How many times a week? Forty-nine times a week. How many times a year? Well, seven times three hundred and sixty-five.

Two thousand five hundred and fifty-five times a year. And of course this is legal, so you have to ask seven more. Now dear friend, whenever you have to forgive me, you can.

And long before you get to two thousand five hundred and fifty-five times, you will have forgotten where you are. And you'll have to start all over again. Forgive one another when it is necessary.

Just like Joseph did. After the ill-treatment he had received from his death, being cast into a pit, thrown as a slave for twenty pieces of silver, Joseph forgave him. He said forget the past.

Let bygones be bygones. Let the past bury its past. I forgive you, forgive you freely.

Now the last passage is the most extraordinary passage in my judgment. It's in 2 Corinthians chapter twelve and verse fifteen. 2 Corinthians twelve, the fifteenth verse.

I will very gladly spend and be spent for you. There will be more abundantly I love you. The less I desire.

You know dear friend, no wonder a really great man could have written these words. Paul said to these believers, Dear brethren, I will very gladly spend and be spent for you. I love you.

I could not love you more. I love you because I love my Savior. And I'm willing to do anything for you.

Brethren, there will be more abundantly I love you. The less I desire. In other words he said, I must love you.

I could not do otherwise. I always remember death. It's the death of brotherly love.

I live in myself with a love also. I treat myself at your disposal. Now brethren use me.

I'm a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ on your behalf. So the more abundantly I love, the less I desire. Oh friends, I wish I could expound that passage as it should be expounded.

He said to these Corinthians, Whatever your attitude is toward me, my attitude toward you is one of love. You may misunderstand me. You may misinterpret my words or my actions.

The more abundantly I love you, perhaps the less you love me. But that's not my responsibility. My responsibility is to love you.

As Christ has loved me. Oh friends, what a heart. What a situation.

Oh what a lovely Christlike disposition. God give us something like that. I must love you.

You may not love me as you are, but I love you. Above all things. As servant of God.

Among yourself. For love shall cover a multitude of sins. Oh dear friend, you'll allow me to say this.

If there is real love among the brethren, and therefore in past times, real love, Christlike love, there's bountiful blessing. God will speak of that. How good and how pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

There the Lord commands a blessing. Where there is unity, where there is love, there'll be salvation of souls. There'll be an extension of Christ's peace.

God will be glorified. Hundreds of people around this district may have caused to thank God that they heard the word of God through your lips. And above all, that they saw it in your life.

Now God bless you. Talk to you and to me, friends. We all need it.

I need it. I don't want to be harsh. I don't want to be unkind.

But I do want to be faithful. And if you have any grudge against any brother or sister, oh friends, get that to Christ. Get it out of the way.

And let nothing hinder your spiritual progress. Oh God our Father, and notice how often we are saved.

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