

1 Cor 13 (Version 2)

by Leonard Ravenhill

Leonard Ravenhill's sermon explores the profound nature of God's love and its critical role in the lives of believers and the church community.

Duration: 40:01

Scripture: Romans 5:5, 1 Corinthians 13:4-5, 1 Corinthians 13:7-8

Topics: "Love"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares a story about an old couple who were brutally attacked by a man they had shown love to. The preacher emphasizes the importance of love and how it should be unselfish, unruful, unbreakable, and unending. He relates this to the love of God, which is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. The preacher also shares a personal anecdote about a colored preacher who challenged his congregation to show love to a despicable character coming out of jail. The sermon concludes with a story about a man who was physically attacked while preaching but responded with love.

Transcript

Because now the love of God again is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. Not easily provoked, seeketh not her own. This love beareth all things, it believeth all things.

This is unreasonable, isn't it? What is he saying? He says love seeketh not her own, therefore it's unselfish. He says love is never provoked, therefore it's unbreakable. He says love beareth all things, therefore it's unbreakable.

He says charity never faileth, that's unreasonable. And he said it's the love of God shed abroad in the heart, therefore it's unending because God indwells it. While ever you stay in obedience, you'll stay filled and overflowing with love.

Four years ago, four years ago we were living in Baton Rouge, and the Baptists were having their state convention down in the First Baptist Church in Baton Rouge. There's a very fine-colored preacher going to preach there, preach with Billy Graham. Graham's very fond of him.

He's a man that went into that awful, awful conflagration that they had in Watford. If the gospel works, let's try down here. And he's worked there and reconstructed that area until they've got new homes and a new style of living, all by one man who had a great compassion.

I wanted to hear him. And usually if something happened, he couldn't make it. He was fog-bound up in Birmingham, Alabama.

I don't know what the fellow preached about, to tell you the truth. I have the slightest idea about what he said or his text, until he got to the end. And then he told us about a place up in the Carolinas.

He said, you know what I'm convinced of? The supreme need of the Church of Jesus Christ is a baptism of love. Love that envieth not. What if the man can raise the dead? What if the man has the gift of dance? What if the man can prophesy? And you feel like a sparrow amongst among a lot of peacocks that can sputter out.

So what? You ought to glory in it. He said a minister up there, I believe he said in a Baptist church, had preached a series of messages on 1 Corinthians 13. And people were coming to hear this interpretation.

And one day he got a call from the chaplain in the prison. And the chaplain said, I understand that you're preaching a very disturbing theory on love within your church. People have been hunting each other.

And they're full of spite and envy and bitterness and backbiting. And it's all got straightened out. And your church is beautiful.

And he said, that's right. I'm glad you heard about it. He said, tell me this.

Has this love got under the doorway of the church as it got out in town, yeah? What's on your mind? He said, I'll tell you. I've got a man coming out of prison tomorrow, a jailbird, one of the roughest. And while he's been in jail, the essence of it was his wife has died, his friends disowned him, he has nowhere to go.

Would you like to ask your people this Sabbath day if there's anybody who would take in this man? He's dangerous to the nth degree. He's never known love. He's lived in a world where he thought they were all jackals and tigers trying to destroy him.

He doesn't know the meaning of love. Have you really got a love that will bear like that? I'd like to think so. Well, he said, if somebody will take this man for three months in their home, will you call me? So after the Sunday morning service, he said, would you take a seat? I want to ask you a question.

And he asked the question, the question I've just mentioned to you. There's a man coming out of jail, and he's not even a rough diamond. He's a despicable, horrible character.

Would you like to show that love you've been singing about and clapping your hands about and rejoicing about? Does it work out? Would you like to bring me? I don't know what he'll do. Now he said, if there's a couple here, we'll take this man in for three months. Some of us will have to send food.

We'll have to buy him clothes. We'll do some other things. Would anybody be willing to take this man in? If so, would any of you couples stand? He waited a second, and then the whole church stood.

He got no problem. He told the chaplain, and it happened a second time some months after, and it happened a third time. And then he said one day, well, I have the same request to make.

There's a man coming out of jail, and he is a character I understand, and he's in the same. Stood up two or three times and being pushed out of the choosing. They stood up, gray-haired, lovely people, and he said, thank you.

I've got the couple. He took the man in his car. He took him to the house.

They did everything for him, brought him from a rotten prison cell and gave him a beautifully furnished room with its own TV and its own bathroom, and they bought him clothes, and they fed him, and they looked after him. And man, his appearance changed. He got dressed well and got his hair cut, and his teeth were nice, and he was very personable, as he did out there, and put a little bottle of milk on the step.

He went the next morning, and the milk was still there. Well, then he said, there's something wrong, because the couple always leave a note if they're going away. So he climbed onto the window sill, and there lying on the floor were the old couple, battered, beaten, bloody, destroyed.

He called the minister, and the minister called the police, and he said, I'll tell you, we had some funeral in our church. Half the city wanted to come. Here is a man that had been given every bit of love he could be given, and he battered the old couple and stole everything he could steal.

Well, surely there was a lot of sobbing and weeping, and he spoke that beautiful word, which is beautiful in that setting, greater love hath no man than this. The man would lay down his life for his friends. Some weeks after, he got a call from the chaplain, and the chaplain was a little stammering, and he said, well, I've got a man coming out of prison on Monday, and I wonder would any want to take him after what happened.

And he said, well, I don't know, but I'll try them. He presented the case, and he said, I know that many of you are still shocked, and some of you at the first said it's too big a risk to take those men and never change. They didn't say three men had gone straight.

They said one man had gone bad. And he said, would you like somebody to, would somebody like to take this man? And the couple stood up, no. Nearly the whole church stood up again.

And he said, I'm very glad. I have been preaching a theory, but I've been preaching something which is really practical and very beautiful, that it works out to this degree that when somebody would try your patience, but love beareth all things, all the irritations, it believeth all things, as bad as some things may be, because it's the love of God. God doesn't give up on us.

The love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. Let me tell you one thing, and quit. Again, there's a difference, you see, in the day in which we live, all the values of God.

We don't know the difference between love and lust. Used to say, when you used to say, there's a young fellow in our church making love to another girl you met, he was spinning his overtures and trying to get a favor and so forth. You say making love now, it's a sex act.

We don't know any difference in this stupid rotten age between love and lust and laughter and leering. But I think the difference is this, that love gives and lust demands. Love will suffer.

Lust causes other people to suffer. Love produces pleasure and lust produces pain. Love produces rejoicing and lust produces remorse.

I preached part of this message in a church, a very stately, fashionable church. There was a young man sitting to the right, and he sat up at first and looked very bright. Actually, he worked in a bank, and his father was one of the outstanding citizens of the city.

And as I preached, that man kind of changed his atmosphere. He seemed to change physically, and he looked very worried, and he buried his head. And as soon as I gave the benediction, he shot for the door.

They were having dinner at the pastor's house. And I heard the pastor sobbing at the telephone, and he came back and he said, excuse me, but this is just a bit too much. Did you see so-and-so sitting on the right, a certain young man? I said, yes, I did.

He said, well, I want to tell you. He said that that boy belonged to one of the richest homes in town. They have a magnificent home.

He had a sister that was extremely beautiful. And a little, oh, maybe two years ago, she got tangled up with a fellow, and eventually she came home with a sad story. She was expecting a baby.

And mother said, well, this will kill your father. But one night when he was in a good mood, she shed the news. And the mother, well, they said, how shall we tell John? You know how proud he is of his heritage, of the fact that we live in a big home in the best part of town.

What in the world shall we do? One night they shared the news with John. They hit the ceiling. Get out of here.

The man, she's going with it. You warned her. He's a wastrel.

He's promised to marry her. Well, I won't go to the wedding anyhow. And I won't buy her a wedding present.

She's dragged our name in the gutter. Send her away to another city. That's exactly what happened.

I was preaching. He said, the Lord was saying, yes, you cannot love your enemies. You can't even love your sister.

When she needed a friend the most, you kicked her when she was down. And the Spirit began to apply truth, truth, truth. And that's why he was squirming and wriggling.

And he called the pastor. And he said, pastor, when I got home, I made a long-distance call to my sister. My brother-in-law answered the phone and said, is it John yet? Well, get off the phone.

You've caused us enough trouble. I must speak to my sister. It's a matter of life and death.

Oh, is it? Yes, yes. She came to the phone. He said, Mary, this is John.

Well, what do you want anyhow? I'm sick, and the baby's sick, and my husband's out of work. And you're living in your palatial home. We're living over a shop.

Well, he said, that's what I wanted to say to you. I'm sorry. I've been a coward.

I've not been a brother. I'm coming to see you. You're not coming to see me.

You wouldn't give us \$10 for everything. You're not coming to see me. He said, I know your address.

My daddy's taking a note to the bank tomorrow to say that I won't be there for a few days. And I didn't bring you a wedding gift. I'm going to give you \$500.

That's all I have in the bank. But I'm going to give you everything because I love you. Well, as he said this morning, he said, I was listening to a sermon this morning about love.

And you know, I've been a kind of a nice, easy-going Christian. I sat in a class and learned my Bible and learned my... But it never really got into any vital place. I still love the world.

I still love the pleasure of the world. I still love the success of the world. But he said, when that preacher finished today, I just said, dear Lord, will you empty my heart of earthly love, as Wesley said? Nothing on earth do I desire but thy pure love within my breast.

This, only this, will I require and freely give up all the rest. Wealth, honor, pleasure, and what else. And he said, I want to tell you anytime, anywhere that you can just come and count on me.

You see, it was that kind of love that sent men out to devastate the kingdoms of darkness. Do you know how old the average preacher was in the first 50 years of Methodism? Do you know how old he was when he died? Thirty-two. And when a young man went home and said to his bride, you know, darling, the Lord has called me to the ministry.

She said, oh no, no. Why? You're twenty-four. You've only got eight years to live and we've got a child.

What are we going to do? Well, I don't know, darling, but God has called me. The men that went with John Wesley were not his equal intellectually, but they were his equal spiritually. Sure to read their life stories, they've been written.

I was tempted to rewrite them myself. I'd love to do it. I might have got too flowery on it because I'd be biased.

But they've been written under the title of Wesley's Veterans. They're published by a friend of mine. I give David the title, the address, and you can get them.

Oh, man, dear, you talk about loving. One man was standing on a box in a marketplace in New York, twenty-two miles from where I live. Two men came and knocked him down and they wore clogs like those Dutch sabbos, those wooden things.

And they had a steel rim around. And he said, they knocked me off the pedestal while I was preaching. And one of them jumped on me and he tried to break my ribs.

He kicked me. And he said, we'll kick the Holy Ghost out of you. He said, you kick the Holy Ghost out of me? Do you wonder Methodism spread in a way, dear? Do you wonder William Bourne went into ninety countries in seventy years? Do you wonder the greatest young preacher and orator in America, Brangle? He was offered a building.

The man said, I'll build you a place like Westminster. I'll give you the most money of any preacher in America. Study Baker.

He wasn't making automobiles. He was making carriages for rich people. He said, Dr. Brangle, you stay here.

I'll build you the best church in America. I'll give you the best surrogate. You're an orator.

You're going to make a name for yourself. He went to the Salvation Army. The first day he was there, William Bourne said, who are you? He said, Dr. Brangle.

He said, we don't need doctors. See, their theology wasn't so sick. They didn't need any doctors.

So he said, we don't need any doctors around here. We need laborers. He polished the shoes of all the students.

And they wore those boots right up here. And they didn't have that stuff you lazy folk have where you spray it on, you know. Pardon me.

But they used to have some black mud. And you took it to the tap and turned the tap on and let the water run on it. When your mother wasn't there, you spit on it and mixed it anyhow.

That's what I did. And then you plastered it on these boots and then you let them dry. Can you imagine 100 boots? Because there was nobody with one leg.

There were 50 people there with two boots and he had to polish every one of them. And he said, I was polishing one of those boots and the devil came up and said, you're a fool. You could be living like a prince in America.

And here you are polishing the boots of fellows that don't know the difference between a Greek root and a rhubarb root. You're polishing the shoes of laborers and ignoramuses and you're a scholar with a D.D. degree and you know some Greek and other things. It is folly.

And he said, I looked up to him and said, Lord Jesus, I love you. Often when I'm praying, I sing the phrase out of that hymn we sang tonight. Not the whole hymn.

I just sing that, I love thee for wearing the thorns on thy brow. If ever I loved thee, Lord Jesus, tis now. And you see, love, if it's worked in, love will be worked out.

You know, maybe it will surprise your wife if you just turned to her tonight and said, darling, I love you. She hasn't heard that for years maybe. Huh? Squeeze her hand and say, I love you, dear.

Many a man breaks his heart at the sight of his wife's casket or the wife at the sight of the husband and say, oh, didn't he love her? Didn't she? No, no, they're not crying because they're crying with remorse many times. I treated her so badly. I was careless so often.

Oh, sometimes it's sorrow, but more often it's remorse. One of the most saintly women I just remember now, Mrs. McInnes in Sheffield, in the bombing. She was a marvelous woman of prayer and she died in a prayer meeting we were having one night.

And when they buried her, do you know her husband stood at the side of the grave and he wept and all? He could say the most stupid thing you ever said in your life at a grave site. Do you know what he said? To think I ate all the bacon. Do you know why? He had little strips like that when he came.

I want the bacon. And he said she never got a bite of bacon all the war. And all he could say at the side of the grave was to think I ate the bacon.

It was like a serpent biting him. But love gives priority to someone else. Love says you can't overburden me.

I can bear all things, leave all things, hope all things, and endure all things. As for prophecies, they shall cease. As for knowledge, it will pass away.

Now we know in part, but then we shall know as we are known. And the one supreme wonder of heaven will be that everybody there is in love. There'll be no hate, no bitterness.

It'll be a very beautiful place. Is that love shed abroad in your heart tonight? There's a chorus, you know the tune. Where's our good organist? You can keep seated.

I won't make you stand up like the other boy does there. At least not for a minute. And there's a beautiful chorus, you know.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Now there's another version to that that I've never heard sung. So let me teach it to you.

I won't sing it. I won't punish you so much. The word to thee is love of God, eternal love.

Pour thyself through me. Nothing less than cowardly love do I ask of thee. Fill me, flood me, overflow me.

Love of God, eternal love. Pour thyself through me. All right, let's go to school.

I'll say it and you repeat it. Love of God, eternal love. Pour thyself through me.

Nothing less than cowardly love. Do I ask of thee? Fill me, flood me, overflow me. Love of God, eternal love.

Pour thyself through me. Now that's a prayer. And if you're full of selfishness tonight, if you've got bitterness in your heart, if you've got some secret grudges, then you better be very careful singing this because God's going to deal with it.

Love of God, eternal love. Pour thyself through me. Nothing less than cowardly love do I ask of thee.

This could change the whole direction of your life. The Lord might take you at your word. You might have to give up a career.

You might have to stop studying what you're doing and go into something else. I sat here tonight looking at you and I said, Lord, don't let me ever look at people as though they're people. And what do I look at you? I look at you as eternally down people.

That a hundred million years from tonight you'll be living in one place or the other, having eternal hell. That a meeting like this, if that love is shed abroad in your heart, it may break your heart, it may cost you some tears. If you don't mean it, don't sing it.

We're not here for a performance. It's not a concert. But if you say, my heart is so cold, well, love is a fire, the Word of God says.

That's what it says. Love is a fire. If your heart is weak, love is strength.

Love is power. So if you've got a sour spirit, a grudging spirit, a bitter spirit, you're going to stand and sing this chorus and you come and kneel at this altar and put it right with God. Will you do that? I'm not going to beg.

I wouldn't have to beg if I said I've got the crown jewels here. Will you come and take them? Love is the answer to every problem you've got, don't care what it is. A prayerless heart, visionless eyes, powerless life.

It's there. So let's stand and try to sing this now. Love of God, eternal love.

Fill me, fill me. Is that love shed abroad in your heart tonight? Have you got grudges, bitterness, unforgiving spirit? My prayer is that this church, here in Marshall, this Presbyterian church, or the Bible believers church, or the Episcopalian church over there that the folk came from the other day, that people will say of these churches, see how these Christians love one another. It will work a miracle in this city that you'll hold the power up with your grudge and your bitterness and your selfishness.

As we sing it, quietly, you come and kneel here and meet God in this issue. Eternal love. Maybe you owe God an apology.

You love the newspaper, you love the sports page more than you love prayer. You love other things so that you excuse yourself not coming even to the prayer meeting or something else. Why don't you end it, get rid of it, this beautiful Sabbath evening in a very sympathetic atmosphere and say, Lord, end the wreckage of my cold, loveless heart.

Fill me with that love. That we'll ask no questions, that we'll carry any burden, that we'll share any burden. Come right now.

There's my last call. You come now. Bring it to the Lord.

God bless you. I'm going to ask you to take your hymn books and sing just once again that beautiful hymn that's blessed us so many times this week. 1-3-5, Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature.

If you want to stay here and pray, stay. Fairest Lord Jesus, 1-3-5. I'd ought to give you a smile from ear to ear or hear to yonder, I don't know which, but it ought to make us very, very happy.

Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer than all the angels heaven can boast. When we see him in all his glory, in all his majesty, all the burdens we had, all the problems they looked just childish and foolish and empty and nothing, just the same. So we're going to sing that stanza again and then the last one.

Jesus is, we praise our Lord. Let's not stop doing that. Our Father, we thank you, we praise you.

Grant that we may grow in thy grace and not just taste and quit. Help us to love with our love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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