

The Greatest Theme From the Greatest Book

by Leonard Ravenhill

Leonard Ravenhill emphasizes the paramount importance of charity and love in the Christian faith, using the Apostle Paul's life as a model for true devotion and service.

Duration: 57:12

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1

Topics: "Bible", "Love", "The Greatest Commandment"

Description

Leonard Ravenhill emphasizes the paramount importance of love, or charity, as the greatest theme in the Bible, drawing from Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 13. He argues that without love, even the most impressive spiritual gifts and actions are meaningless, highlighting that true love is selfless and sacrificial. Ravenhill reflects on the Apostle Paul's life, illustrating how his deep compassion and zeal for Christ were driven by the love of Christ. He critiques the modern church's focus on superficiality and urges believers to embody the love of God in their lives. Ultimately, he calls for a return to the foundational truth that love is the essence of the Christian faith.

Transcript

Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord, praise ye the Lord. Our Father, how we love you, we praise your holy name. We thank you, Father, for your presence that we feel right now.

Now, Lord, take this service and use it for thy glory. In Jesus' name we pray, amen. It's wonderful to praise his name here on earth, and one day we'll see him face-to-face and be able to praise him face-to-face.

May we join together now as we sing hymn 483, when we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be. Would you stand, please, as we sing the first, second, and last stanzas. Sing the wondrous love of Jesus, sing his mercy and his grace.

Let the mansions, bright and pleasant, feel prepared for us up there. When the burning gates will open, we'll sing and shout their praise. Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

Therefore be ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh. Deep in this wondrous Jesus, I heard him say, Come unto me. I came to my soul his Saviour and made me free.

He'll come for me someday, O come, Lord Jesus, in clouds of glory clean the skies. By waiting church we sing, victorious Jesus, for thee we come with eager heart. Jesus, O Jesus, wonderful friend to me, I can

but praise thee, my Saviour.

Help me to live for thy glory, thy mercies help me to sing. Help me to live for thy glory, thy mercies help me to sing. One day to earth he is coming for me, then with what joy his dear face I shall see.

O how I praise he's coming. He'll come for me someday, O come, Lord Jesus, in clouds of glory clean the skies. For all living he loved me, dying he saved me.

Marry me, marry, my sins are all clear. Rising he justified, free me forever. One day he's coming, O glorious day.

He'll come for me someday, O come, Lord Jesus, in clouds of glory clean the skies. For all living he loved me, dying he saved me. Pure and precious, O how blest to call him mine.

A heart that fills my soul, he is Lord of all. A heart that fills my soul, he is Lord of all. He is more than life to me.

I love him most, dear Lord. I'm not used to preaching twice Sunday morning. Not just because I'm lazy, but because I'm getting old.

It's a pleasure to share this day with you. And I want to talk to you on a theme that I'm sure is very vital in the day in which we live. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, the first letter in the 13th chapter, there are 13 verses.

And if I take as long over each text and preach the 13, you should be home for lunch tomorrow or maybe supper. It's certainly the greatest theme in the Bible. And if you're not familiar with it, let me just read the first part of it.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or as tingling cymbals. And 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 charity, I am nothing. Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass.

Though I give my body to burn and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long and is kind. Charity envieth not.

Charity vaunteth not itself. It is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, is not easily provoked, and thinketh no evil. Whenever I think of the life of the Apostle Paul, and I confess he's about my favorite Old New Testament character, I want to find what made him tick in the language of the modern child.

I'm faced with his outrageous sacrifice, his unquenchable zeal, his deathless compassion. Next week in the morning's services up in Brother Peter Lord's church, I hope to speak on the epistle to the Hebrews. It's a very embarrassing book, because all those people in Hebrews who subdued kingdoms and wrought righteousness and obtained promises and stopped the mouths of lions, never had a Bible.

Look at all they did without it, look how little we do with it. When I think of the days in which the Apostle lived, I remember his life. He was born in the ancient capital of the world, Tarsus.

He finished up in the military capital of the world, Rome. In between he visited the religious capital of the world, Jerusalem. He went to the intellectual capital of the world and reasoned with the Stoics and poets and Epicureans and philosophers in Athens.

In the 17th chapter of Acts, the religious capital of the world, Jerusalem, the immoral capital of the world, Corinth. He gives an explanation of the reason that he was able to go on, though he believed in the judgment seat of Christ, which is something we seem to have lost sight of. He says, knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men, and yet he says the one thing that made him do all that he did.

As I mentioned in the earlier service, it was nothing for him to be tied to a whipping post and lashed 195 times. He was in weariness, in painfulness, in fastings, in peril of the deep, in perils of his own countrymen. And if you ask him why he did this, he could have been an armchair theologian in a swivel chair, racking up the money.

But he had a deathless compassion for men and women. He had an unquenchable zeal. And he explains it in his second letter to the Corinthians when he says, the love of Christ constraineth me.

It was his constant motivation. The apostle Paul believed, of course, that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. But he said not only that Christ loved the world, he said he loved the church and gave himself for it.

And then when he surveyed the majesty of God's love for the world and that he loved the church, he says, but he loved me and gave himself for me. And the supreme miracle that God ever did, as far as Paul was concerned, was to lift him. He wasn't a jailbird.

He wasn't a drunk. He wasn't a sex pervert. He wasn't a liar.

He was a man of impeccable morality. He was a gentleman, a scholar. He had the most colossal intellect the world has ever seen outside of Jesus Christ.

And yet he threw it all away. Went on the Damascus road. He had a personal confrontation with Jesus Christ.

And he says, on that Damascus road, he revealed himself to me, but when he took me there into the university of silence in the wilderness, he revealed himself in me. In the 2,000 years of its very erratic and very dramatic history, the church of Jesus Christ has lacked many things. But she's never lacked critics.

The man who's a pro is never afraid of a critic. It's just the youngster that thinks he's a re-edition of Rembrandt, or she can sing like Gully Gertie, or play the violin like Yehudi Menuhin. The man who is the first class in his particular field, he welcomes the criticism of somebody who can just be criticized.

There are critics outside of the church. There are critics inside. We need them all, I think.

We're always trying to find out why the church has slowed down. Why instead of the church invading the world, the world has invaded the church. What's wrong with our pale, pathetic, powerless, paralyzed Protestantism? How is it you have to whip men to the mission field, but you can whistle and they'll go to the battlefield? The heroism seems to have gone out of Christianity.

We want to be safe from hell. We want to give a couple of dollars a week to keep the church going, but please don't ask anything further of me. Paul here is writing to a church that was raised out of the gutter.

And in the 12th chapter, he begins a very profound discussion, a theological discussion. He continues it in the 14th chapter. He kind of comes up to breathe in the 13th chapter.

In this 12th chapter, he is discussing the gifts of the Spirit. They're being discussed greatly these days. Everywhere you go, everybody's discussing this charismatic revival.

Somebody once asked Mr. Spurgeon if he would join the Society for the Defense of the Bible, and he said no. You never see a man walking with a sword in front of a lion. The Bible has suffered very often more from its exponents than its opponents.

And right now it's suffering. Now Paul here is writing to the Corinthians, remember, and they were Greeks. They did not have choirs.

They did not specialize in singing, they specialized in oratory. And they must have felt a kind of a stab when Paul says, I may speak with the tongues of men. You see, they went to the university and they learned to be eloquent, and they learned all the genius of orators, and they were masters of elocution.

And they competed in oratory. And I think when Paul says, I may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, their minds must have gone back to the supreme orator of all time, Demosthenes. He slurred his words worse than Winston Churchill.

He had an impediment. But he was so determined that he would become not only a great orator, but the greatest of all orators, that he went by the seashore and he put pebbles in his mouth, and he got his tongue round those difficult words and he shouted until he could shout beyond the roar of the waves. And he developed a beautiful voice as musical as an organ that could whisper or roar.

And not only did they have Demosthenes as the greatest of orators, they had the greatest of poets in Homer. They had great philosophers like Socrates, and these all provided ammunition for the speaker. They were used to the man stirring them and finishing with a peroration.

There was a man by the name of Cato, a famous orator. At that time, Rome had an enemy across the Mediterranean, Carthage. And every time this distinguished orator spoke, he finished his speech with this climbing peroration and he would thunder out, Carthage must be destroyed.

And when he said that, men would draw swords they weren't wearing and rush to a bridge that wasn't there to try and get over and destroy the enemy. Carthage did not destroy Rome. Personally, I don't think there's a nation under heaven big enough to destroy America.

She doesn't need any help, she's doing it well enough herself. Nobody will kill America, she'll commit suicide. You think that's outrageous? You don't know America.

I preached in one place, a lady got awfully angry. Ladies can get angry, can't they? All the men said... Well, I'll say goodbye to you after the service. Yeah, the lady got angry.

She came up and she said, what do you talk about America like this for? You're an Englishman. I said, that's right. What are you talking about my country like this for? I said, because Billy Graham's in my country talking to my country like this, that's why.

She was a lovely blonde lady, one of these suicide blondes, you know, dyed by her own hand. She was indignant. I'm an American, I'm a pure-blooded American.

I said, oh, what reservation are you from? She's about as pure-blooded American as you are and I am. You're all crossbreeds anyhow. People say, did you ever sail on the Queen Mary? Sure, I crossed the Atlantic 20 times, I think, on the Queen Mary.

The biggest boat in the world, forget it. The biggest boat that ever sailed, or ever will sail, was the Mayflower. Because everybody I met had a relative on it.

Must have been the biggest boat that ever sailed. Oh yes, Carthage must be destroyed. No, Carthage did not destroy Rome, Rome destroyed herself.

The five main reasons for Rome's destruction are destroying America today. One was divorce, one was immorality, one was high taxes, one was spending too much money in armaments. One was decline of family and national religion.

Paul says, I may speak with the tongues of men and of angels. Now he doesn't claim he speaks with all the tongues of men, or all the tongues of angels. True, in the next chapter he says, I thank God I speak with tongues more than you all.

But I don't believe Paul was a very brilliant preacher. He was a profound theologian. Nobody exceeded him in theology.

The great preacher of the day of Paul was Apollos. Some say I'm of Paul, some of Apollos, some of Cephas. Apollos, he'd make chills go up and down your spine.

He could paint word pictures. He was a fascinating preacher, put his soul into it. When Paul went to the intellectual capital of the world, Athens, and he was on Mars Hill arguing with men, they looked at him and they said, What will this babler say? That doesn't sound like an orator, does it? In the 2nd book and the 10th chapter and verse 10, he says there that those muscle men, you know these big Christian athletes, they looked down their noses at this shriveled up little man with a hump on his back and one on his nose.

And he staggered and he faltered. After all, he'd been beaten up. He'd been pickled in the Mediterranean for 36 hours at a stretch.

He'd been in more jails than you've had good dinners. And there wasn't much to look at. And they said his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible.

He was no orator. He didn't depend on some fiery language and brilliant illustration. But he's unsurpassed again, I say, as a theologian.

And when he says to these people, I may speak with the tongues of men and of angels. You see people today, one class, all you have to do is speak in tongues. You can live like the devil in some sections.

I can tell you two Baptist preachers who ran away from their wives and picked up with the charming secretaries and have babies by them. And they're moving in charismatic circles, well accepted. On the other hand, I can tell you some rascals still hiding in Baptist churches too.

So that balances. Paul is talking here, I may speak with the tongues of men and of angels. Now there is a valid experience of speaking in tongues.

And people say sometimes, Paul gathers all these gifts up and says, ask for tongues and knowledge. They're nothing, it's love that's everything. Listen, the Holy Spirit only talks with one voice.

God never argues with himself. He doesn't say if I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have no love, tongues are nothing. He says I'm nothing.

He doesn't say the gift of faith is nothing, he says I'm nothing. Now he doesn't say that if I move hills from this place to that and have no love, I'm a second class Christian or a third class Christian. He says you can even raise the dead, move a lot of hills from there to there, be the most spectacular man in your church.

But if you have no love, you're not a second class Christian or a third class Christian, you're a moral nobody. Now that's pretty rough. We were in a home fairly recently where one lady said, you know, I've just been over down there in Florida and I got some instruction.

And you know, everybody, if they're really filled with the Holy Ghost, will speak in tongues. Now I'm saying again, because I believe the word of God, there is a genuine gift of the Spirit. But there are three kinds of tongues, demonic, psychic and spiritual.

And I'm convinced of this, that not, I don't think ten people out of a hundred have a genuine gift. It's psychic or demonic, but not spiritual. Now everybody must speak in tongues.

Are you going to believe them or believe the Bible? What does the Bible say? It says in this 12th chapter, there are differences of administration by the same Lord. There are diversities of operation by the same God. To one, He giveth the word of wisdom.

To another, the word of knowledge. By the same Spirit. To another, faith.

By the same Spirit. And to another, the gifts of healing. By the same Spirit.

To another, the working of miracles. To another, prophecy. To another, discerning of spirits.

And to another, not to everybody. To another, divers kinds of tongues. What did Jesus say? Is He the supreme teacher? Do you believe Him or do you believe the magazine that you take? Do you know what Jesus says? By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you speak in tongues.

By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love. I can show you people who speak in tongues, they are the most bitter cantankerous. You know, whenever I see a congregation like this stand up and sing all for a thousand tongues, I always silently praise the Lord you don't have them.

If you women had another 999 to the one you've got, it would be purgatory. I'm not saying I'd commit suicide, but I'd be glad when the heavens opened and took me. Of course some men can do a bit with it.

A thousand tongues? Some people say I've got the gift of tongues. Some of you folk need the gift of silence, not the gift of tongues. What does Acts 1.8 say? Ye shall receive tongues, the Holy Ghost coming.

No, no, no, no. It says ye shall receive power. The Holy Ghost coming.

So, there are many gifts. Isn't it strange you can go to churches of a thousand people, and a thousand speak in tongues, and only one interpreter, and nobody has the gift of wisdom, and nobody has the gift of knowledge, and nobody has the gift of faith, and nobody has the gift of healing? Now I'm persuaded, and I

don't care a hill of beans if I never come in your church again. I'll come maybe if you ask me, and I'm not sure I will anyhow.

So, it doesn't make any odds. But I want to tell you this. That I believe that if the church doesn't soon move up to what the New Testament says about a New Testament church, he's going to bypass all our organized groups.

We're not going to go much longer like this. The church of Jesus Christ, as far as I'm concerned, and let me put it this way, I am embarrassed to be part of the church of Jesus today, because it's an embarrassment to God. Do you choose deacons because they're full of faith in the Holy Ghost, or because they own two Texas coast stations and a hot dog stand? Most churches I go in, the deacons are men of prestige.

Don't have to be. I'd rather have a dozen poor men that knew how to shut up heaven, and could discern between the flesh, and what is flesh, and what is spirit, and could tie up the powers of darkness, and release people who are oppressed by the devil, and open ears that are stopped, and open blind eyes, and raise people who are sick than a thousand millionaires. We kind of get the idea if we give God five dollars a week, we're going to get big inheritances in heaven.

God never said go into all the world and raise money. I may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but... Well, what does it say here? Well, of course, in this authorized version, which is indeed the very best version. We've got too many versions now, some are perversions.

And you won't do any better than find the good old King's English. It's sleepy Elizabethan English, admittedly. And there's an awkward word here, the word charity.

Charity. Charity suffereth long. Charity envieth not.

Charity... What do you mean by charity? Well, I know what we mean by charity in England. You see, charity in England means you give away your surplus clothes, and your spare cash. I used to have a lady come to my church, she got more clothes than the Goodwill shop.

Everybody gave her all clothes. Shoes? Goodness me. She'd need more legs than a centipede and wear them and change them every day for the shoes she had.

She had a cupboard full of shoes. She had a cupboard full of handbags. All hats.

One day she came to church in a glorious outfit. She went to the door, she said, how do I look? Well, you can always soften a woman up, you know. There's always one way you can say it.

I said, you look 15 years younger. We've been friends ever since. I said, you look 15 years younger.

She said, see this coat. Nobody ever wore it. Look, my shoes are new.

My handbag, my hat. Did you inherit some money? No, no. You know Mrs. Brown in the church? You know, every year, when it comes to autumn, she gets last year's clothes out and gives them to me.

I said, I kind of figured that. Well, how come you got a new outfit like this? Mrs. Brown was praying the other morning. And she was telling the Lord how much she loved him.

It's amazing how many people love vertically that love horizontally, isn't it? Telling the Lord how much he loved her. Do you know what the Lord said? Shut up. Never tell you to do that or can't he get a word in edgeways either.

You're saying you love me. That little lady across the aisle, that little widow, you give your old clothes. Yes, I'm just going to give her a lot of lovely new clothes from last year.

Okay, that's charity. Why don't you buy her the new clothes and you wear last year's old ones? That's love. You see, like this suit I have on, a friend gave it to me.

I went in and he said, that looks like a preacher's suit. And I said, I think it does. And he said, try it on.

I hope it fits. And I said, I hope so. So finally he said, you can pick it up tomorrow.

When I went in the shop, he said, there's your suit. I said, thank you. He said, I'm giving it to you.

I said, you're not. You're going to buy it? I said, not at \$120. So you're not going to take it? Oh, I'm going to take it.

Well, you're not going to buy it. You say, I'm not giving it to you. How are you going to take it? I said, you just watch.

And I hooked it over. I said, like this. You're going to take it like this.

You know, carry it over my shoulder. Well, you said, I wasn't giving it to you. You're not.

I don't understand. As soon as I hooked that thing over my shoulder, it said in the book up there, Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me. You didn't give me a suit.

You gave Jesus Christ a suit. Oh, you'll get to heaven one day and the Lord say, you didn't do so. Well, Lord, you've got things mixed up.

I wasn't living when you were. Inasmuch as you do it to the least and the poorest and the humblest in your church, you do it unto him. The word here is charity.

It's not a nice word, is it? Giving away old clothes, giving away surplus. All the modern versions, and they're right in this, starting with Moffat. They change that word charity to love.

Love suffereth long and is kind. Love envieth not. Love wanteth not itself.

I say this is the greatest subject, the greatest theme in the world because, first of all, the first being in the world is God and God is love. The first fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering. The first and greatest commandment, thou shalt love the Lord thy God.

The trouble with our English language, we only have one word for love. We use it for anything. I was in a home, a lady had a cat.

She said she loved it. I wouldn't like to tell her what I thought about it, but anyhow. I certainly didn't love the mangy thing, the way it came round sniffing at the bedroom door and you sat on it.

Oh, you're going to sit on my cat. I love my cat, she said. I love my husband.

Same kind of love too, but anyhow. You see, we've only got one word for love. The Greeks had four different words for love.

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