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Sodom Had No Bible By Leonard Ravenhill

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The Scandal of Grace: Unpacking Leonard Ravenhill's Sodom Had No Bible

In the landscape of 20th-century evangelical preaching, few voices carried the prophetic weight of Leonard Ravenhill. A British-born evangelist who spent his later years challenging the comfortable Christianity of America, Ravenhill is perhaps best known for his fiery sermon and subsequent book, **Sodom Had No Bible**. This phrase, deceptively simple, has become a rallying cry for those who believe the modern Church has lost its sense of holy urgency. It confronts the reader with a sobering truth: if God judged the ancient city of Sodom with such finality when they possessed no written revelation, no law, and no prophets, what will be the fate of a generation that has Bibles stacked on coffee tables but remains spiritually lukewarm? This article explores the profound implications of Ravenhill's message, diving into its biblical foundation, its critique of modern complacency, and its enduring call to a life of radical holiness.

The Prophetic Voice of Leonard Ravenhill

To understand the weight of **Sodom Had No Bible**, one must first understand the man behind the message. Leonard Ravenhill (1907–1994) was a man consumed by a singular passion: revival. He was not a builder of mega-churches or a seeker of popularity. Instead, he was a "troubler of Israel," a voice crying in the wilderness of a self-satisfied Western church. His preaching was marked by a relentless focus on prayer, repentance, and the fear of the Lord. A quote often attributed to him, "The opportunity of a lifetime must be seized within the lifetime of the opportunity," captures his intense urgency. He believed that the Church had drifted so far from the New Testament pattern that it no longer recognized its own spiritual poverty. His book, *Sodom Had No Bible*, is an expansion of this core belief—a stark warning that privilege without obedience invites severe judgment.

The Biblical Foundation: Accountability and Revelation

Ravenhill's central thesis rests on a critical biblical principle: accountability is proportional to revelation. The Bible is clear that God judges the world with perfect justice. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus Himself makes a striking comparison:

"But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you" (Luke 10:12, NIV).

Why would this be? Sodom was notoriously wicked. The sin of Sodom was so grievous that "the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord" (Genesis 19:13). Yet, Jesus declares that the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, which witnessed His miracles and heard His teaching, were in greater danger. The principle is clear: **greater light brings greater responsibility**. Ravenhill seized on this truth. He argued that if Sodom—a city without a single prophet, without a scroll of Scripture, without the Ten Commandments—was destroyed by

fire from heaven, then what hope is there for a nation like ours, which possesses tens of millions of Bibles, countless churches, and a historical foundation of Christian truth? The question is not whether God is just, but whether we are ignorant of the standard to which we are being held.

Ignorance Is Not an Excuse

A common modern response to judgment is the plea of ignorance: "I didn't know." Ravenhill shatters this excuse. Sodom had no Bible, yet they were judged. Their sin was not merely sexual perversion, though that was a part of it. The prophet Ezekiel gives us a more comprehensive indictment: **"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49).**

This is a devastating diagnosis. Sodom's sin was a combination of pride, gluttony, idleness, and a hard heart toward the suffering of others—all this without the moral clarity of Scripture. If God judged them for lovelessness and arrogance while they were in spiritual darkness, how much more will He judge a professing Christian nation that has the full counsel of God yet remains **overfed and unconcerned**? Ravenhill's message is a direct indictment of a comfortable church that has more light than ever but shows less fruit of repentance than the pagans of old.

The Modern Church in the Mirror

Reading **Sodom Had No Bible** is like holding a mirror up to the contemporary Western church. Ravenhill observed a Christianity that had become a shallow pursuit of blessings, entertainment, and personal fulfillment. He saw Sunday services filled with people who were "at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1), more concerned with their next meal or their next purchase than with the souls of the lost or the holiness of God. He famously quipped, "The Church today is not sick; it is dead. We are a generation of spiritual stillbirths. We have a name that we live, but we are dead."

This is the heart of the matter. We have the Bible. We have the history of revival. We have the promise of the Holy Spirit. Yet, the moral state of the Church often mirrors the world. Divorce rates, materialism, gossip, and a lack of prayer are rampant. Ravenhill would argue that we are not being judged like Sodom *in spite* of having the Bible, but *because* we have the Bible and ignore it. The very Scripture that should guide us is often used as a decorative ornament rather than a sword of the Spirit.

Rediscovering the Fear of the Lord

One of the most challenging aspects of Ravenhill's message is his call to recover the "fear of the Lord." This is not a slavish terror, but a profound, reverent awe that recognizes God's holiness and our own unworthiness. He lamented that the modern pulpit had lost its thunder. Sermons were no longer filled with the weight of God's majesty but with light anecdotes and self-help tips. He wrote, "The greatest issue in the world today is not between capital and labor, or between democracy and communism. The greatest issue is between God and man."

The concept of judgment is unpopular, but it is undeniably biblical. Ravenhill did not preach judgment for the sake of fear-mongering; he preached it to drive men and women to the Cross. He understood that repentance is the gateway to revival. When we truly believe that "Sodom had no Bible," we are forced to ask ourselves: What will happen to me? The answer drives us to the mercy of God. It strips away our false security in religious activity and leaves us desperate for the grace that alone can save. The fear of the Lord is not the enemy of love; it is the foundation of it.

Practical Application: What This Means for You Today

The message of **Sodom Had No Bible** is not merely a theological argument; it is a practical call to action. It demands a response. How can a 21st-century believer apply this heavy yet hope-filled truth?

• Examine your stewardship of Scripture. Do you treasure the Bible? Do you read it not as a duty but as a lifeline? Ravenhill would say that the possession of Scripture without the practice of it is a perilous position. Commit to not just hearing the Word, but doing it.

• Renounce complacency. The sin of Sodom included being "unconcerned." We live in a world heading to judgment, yet often our greatest concern is our comfort. The message of Ravenhill is a wake-up call to shake off spiritual lethargy and engage with the world as ambassadors of Christ.

• Prioritize prayer. Ravenhill was a man of the closet. He believed that prayer was the work. "No man is greater than his prayer life," he said. If we are concerned about the state of the Church and the world, we must not just complain; we must intercede.

• Live with eternal perspective. The judgment of Sodom is a historical fact that points to a future reality. The Bible speaks of a final judgment. The urgency of Ravenhill's message is that we do not have unlimited time. "Opportunity" is the keyword. We must seize today to serve God and love our neighbor.

The Paradox of Grace and Judgment

Some might hear the phrase "Sodom Had No Bible" and feel only fear or condemnation. However, Ravenhill's ultimate goal was not to condemn but to awaken. He was a preacher of the love of God, but he understood a profound truth: **love without holiness is sentimentality.**The Bible itself tells us that God is love, but it also tells us that "our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). The two truths are not in conflict; they are the two sides of the same glorious coin. The grace that saves us is the same grace that teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness (Titus 2:11-12).

The message of **Sodom Had No Bible**is a call to take God seriously. It is a warning that we cannot presume upon His mercy. It is a challenge to the comfortable Christian to wake from their slumber. But it is also an invitation. The fact that we are reading this message means that God is giving us time. He is not willing that any should perish. The same lips that pronounced woe on Chorazin also invited the weary to come and find rest. Ravenhill's legacy is to remind us that the kingdom of God is a matter of urgency. It is a pearl of great price. And it is worth selling everything we have to obtain it.

Conclusion

Leonard Ravenhill's provocative statement, **Sodom Had No Bible**, cuts through the fog of religious routine and exposes the condition of our hearts. It challenges the dangerous assumption that possession of truth equals obedience to truth. In a world drowning in information but starving for transformation, this ancient message is more relevant than ever. We have been given the very words of God. We have the history of Israel, the life of Jesus, and the writings of the apostles. We are without excuse. The call of Ravenhill is not to a life of grim duty, but to a life of passionate devotion. It is a call to fear God, to love mercy, and to walk humbly. Let us not be like Sodom, judged for what we had and ignored. Let us instead be a generation that trembles at God's Word, repents of our lukewarmness, and burns with a holy fire for His glory. The Bible is in our hands. The question remains: is it written on our hearts?

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