

# Love has the last word

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[ 0 : 00 ] It was a time when the pursuit of powered, piloted flight, everyone was kind of into it. And Langley had all the ingredients of success.

He was given \$50,000 by the United States War Department, another \$20,000 by the Smith's Odeon Institute to figure out how to get someone to fly in a flying machine thing.

And he was the guy to do it. He held a seat at Harvard. He was connected to all the great minds of the USA. He employed the best people that money could buy to be on his team to build this flying machine thing.

And the interest in his progress was so great that the New York Times followed him everywhere and everything he did. He was kind of a celebrity trying to build this flying machine thing.

A few hundred kilometres away in Dayton, Ohio, were Orville and Wilbur Wright. They, on the other hand, paid for their dream of powered, piloted flight from the proceeds of their bicycle shop.

[ 1 : 07 ] Not a single member of their team had a college degree, including the Wright brothers. And the New York Times virtually hardly knew they even existed and certainly didn't follow them around.

Langley was driven by the results of success. He wasn't as interested in the goal as he was in the product of the goal.

That is fame and fortune, personal fame and fortune. The Wright brothers were driven by a purpose, a cause, a belief. They were convinced that powered, piloted flight would change the course of the world.

It was the significant technology that needed to be nailed. And their team that they managed to form around them believed in this cause too, not in the paycheck that would arrive at the end of the week.

Each time they went out to do a test flight, they carried five sets of parts with them because that's how many times they crashed each day trying to get this thing to work.

[ 2 : 14 ] And still they kept on. And eventually, the Wright brothers, if you know history at all, took flight on the 17th of December, 1903.

And that very same day, Samuel Pierpont Langley quit the pursuit. He didn't even offer his team or his resources to sharpen the technology of the Wright brothers.

He simply walked away. That was it. You see, motivation was the key to the Wright brothers' success. They were able to answer the question, why?

Not how and what, but why? Why do you do what you do? Is it a paycheck?

Is it the honor of a memory? Is it because I can't do what I want to do? Why do you do what you do? Why do anything at all? In fact, you made a choice to be here tonight.

[ 3 : 20 ] You make a choice every day. You made a choice to be here tonight. Why? To be able to answer the why question will make all the difference in your ability to face what comes tomorrow, whatever it is that you do.

And that's the question that's right in front of us. As we come to the end of Leviticus. Why would we follow this God? Why?

Why? Why would we want our lives to be conformed by this God, be conformed by his word and all these laws and regulations? You see, it's not a popular option nowadays in the secular West, especially when the Christian faith touches on anything to do with sexual ethics or any kind of morality, and especially the stuff that we've seen here in Leviticus.

To be a proponent of the sexual ethics of Leviticus is to put your head on the chopping block in this society. The English actor, Sir Ian McKellar, he's famous for playing Gandalf in Lord of the Rings.

He is an outspoken gay rights activist. And he is on the record of saying that whenever he gets his hand on a Bible, he turns to Leviticus chapters 18 to 20, grabs hold of them and rips them out and throws them in the bin.

[ 4 : 42 ] Goes and stays in a hotel, pulls out the Gideon Bible out of the drawer, turns to Leviticus 18 to 20, rips them out and throws them in the bin. He is so offended by the historical Christian teaching on homosexual practice.

That's the mood of our society. He might not literally do that every time, but that's the mood of our society. Why would we want to follow this God? Why would we want to live lives by his word with all its limitations and restrictions?

That's verse 3. It's the chapter of Leviticus 26. It's the one core issue of this chapter, the one core command. And in fact, for all Leviticus, it's a summary here.

Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my commands. Verses 1 and 2 talk about total loyalty to God. Abandon all other loyalties and have total loyalty to this God.

Why would you do that in Australia in 2017? You see, the highest value in our society is freedom. You see this everywhere on social media.

[ 5 : 49 ] I should be free to live life as I see fit, so long as I don't harm anyone else. Who cares what anyone else thinks? I should be allowed to do whatever I want to do as long as it doesn't harm anyone else.

Choice is seen as a good thing in life, even the ultimate thing. And we have this view that the more choice we have, the happier we will ultimately be. The greatest level of freedom, the happier we will be.

And that's true. But in our society, all authority is regarded as inherently suspect.

Nobody should have the right to tell others what to think or behave. In much of our society, Christianity is seen as the arch enemy of freedom. It is seen as restricting and even enslaving people.

And so, is the choice that's before us today, as we get to the end of Leviticus, a choice that we need to make between freedom or faith?

[ 6 : 54 ] Faith, freedom. Freedom, faith. Is that the choice that's before us? Now, don't get me wrong. The idea of individual freedom in which society has done a great deal of good. It has led to, I believe, a far more just and fair society, and especially for minority groups.

But that shouldn't surprise us. Because the concept of individual freedom is a byproduct of the Christian gospel. It did not exist before Christianity existed.

Individual freedom didn't exist before Christianity. However, freedom has become to be defined as the absence of any limitations.

Modern freedom is the freedom of self-assertion. And it doesn't work. It can't work. If freedom is to be able to do whatever I want, what happens when my personal wants are in conflict with each other?

What happens then? For instance, imagine I'm a 75-year-old gentleman, not quite there yet, who has two major wants, desires, and passions in life.

[ 8 : 11 ] The first is, I want to spend the most amount of time possible with my grandchildren. And the other second major passion in my life is to eat KFC three times a day.

I would either have to accept the limitations of my eating, or the limitations of my health. You can't have freedom in both directions.

You've got to choose a limitation. At some point, my doctor is likely to mention to me that my want, my desire, my passion for KFC is going to get in the way of my want to spend time with my grandchildren.

Because of heart attacks and whatever else. You've got to accept one limitation over against the other. We all have to choose which freedoms we will sacrifice for others.

We all have to make that choice. And the real question is, which freedom is the most liberating freedom? What we should be looking for are the right freedoms, the most liberating constraints is another way to look at it, the most liberating constraints that fit our design as human beings.

[ 9 : 35 ] Christianity says that we're all created by God so that absolutely everything that we have is a gift from Him. Christianity says that the problem of this world, every one of them is all linked to human beings' rejection of their creator God.

But this same God has come into His world in order to rescue and redeem His rebellious creation. And not just rescue, but someday He's planning to renew it all. And Christianity says that this life, therefore, is not the only life. It's only part of life. It claims that this life is, in fact, a relatively small part of our entire existence. And that story shapes everything for the Christian. There is not an area of your life, not an area of your existence, that that story does not touch, that does not shape, that does not inform. And that's what we've seen right through Leviticus. God gets right down the nitty-gritty details of His new people as He forms a new community. Right down the very, very nitty-gritty details. God calls His people to live as He has called them to live. [10:46] And when you do, what you discover is life in abundance. And Leviticus 26, if you've got your Bibles, turn to that now, we have given three motivations here.

Three whys, three reasons as to why we would follow this God in Australia in 2017. Verses 4 to 13 give us the first motivation. It's the motivation of hope. God doesn't promise some vague blessing. He spells it out in detail. It's important to understand that these blessings were not blessings that were earned because of their obedience. These are blessings that God was under no obligation whatsoever to give His people as part of His adoption of them.

And in verses 11 to 12, God's own presence is promised amongst His people. All aspects of God's blessings in these verses echo the promises of God to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden right at the beginning of the Bible.

That is, there is one core key to all of God's blessings, and it's in verse 12.

[11:57] I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. The land is abundant because God is there. Where the source of life is, life flourishes.

That's the point. God's not there. It equals death. You see, abundant life and peace is only possible with the presence of God. God has rescued these people from slavery to be His people, and He calls them to be distinct people, and promises the ultimate blessing to His distinct people, and that is His presence.

I will be there with you. You see, hope shapes our lives. Every one of us, whether you're Christian or not, hope shapes your life. Whatever our hope is, determines the particular constraints that we are prepared to take on in our lives.

You can tell by what you do with your time, what values you want to instill in your kids, and what you do with your money, and what you dream about, and spend time talking about, and what you think about your vocation, and what you do with your leisure.

You can draw all of those lines out, and make the connections, and it all points to what your hope is. In our secular West, generally, our hope is a secure, secure retirement.

[13:23] Secure retirement until we die. That's our hope. Not the die bit, but the secure retirement until we die. Everything focuses on that. The Christian hope shapes every aspect of our lives too.

Although, the Christian hope is a certain hope. Too often, we associate the word hope with, you know, I wish kind of thinking, sort of like aspiration, you know.

I really hope so. You know, as we're sort of doubtfully unsure about what the outcome's going to be. That's what we usually mean by hope. And these words are meant to inspire a different kind of hope for us.

Not a hope that is an uncertain wish, but a kind of hope that is dependent upon the reliances on the promises of God. And that's why this section ends in verse 13, saying, That's what it's saying.

And this is a reminder to the people here, that God's promises were no mere aspirations. The hope that they have is no mere wish. It's a certain expectation that God will act towards his people as he promises.

[14:38] He's as good as his word. That's the first motive, hope. Second motive is a motive of fear. It begins with a six-point description of disobedience in verses 14 and 15.

But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all of my commands, and so violate my covenant, what's the result?

God's going to bring disaster upon the land. Notice the description here. Not listening, not carrying out, rejecting, abhorring, failing, violating. It all brings disaster.

There's disease in verse 16. There's enemies in verse 17. Their refusal to listen means that God breaks their pride through agricultural failure in verses 19 and 20. And the hostility towards God brings disaster in land in verse 22 through the wild animals.

God unleashes the wild animals. That's, you know, for us, we're sitting here in Chatsworth, that doesn't kind of mean a whole lot for us. We're kind of more used in the Western society to protecting the animals from us than us being protected from the animals.

[15:41] So that's generally the way, you know, unless, of course, there's some sort of rampant possum on the run or something like that. But that's about the worst we could kind of hope for, I think, you know, in our society. But imagine, you know, you're heading out this afternoon.

You've got to get some milk from here to get down to the corner store. And what you're doing the whole time is dodging lions and hyenas and every other thing that wants to chew on your leg and bite your head off. I mean, imagine that. That's the picture here.

The picture here is you will not get to the corner store and get back again with your milk. Your kids get out in a play on the trampoline and one's taken by a leopard sitting in the tree.

It's disaster. It's fear everywhere in the land. It says a little bit later, there'll be a rustling of a leaf because of a breeze that's come through and you're off we go.

It's just fear everywhere. Verses 25 and 26 go in the terrible description of disaster in the land. Verse 29 is shocking.

[16:45] It says you will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters. If you think this is a veiled threat here by God to see that, you know, this actually happened in history.

2 Kings 6, Jeremiah 19, Lamentations 2, Lamentations 4, Ezekiel 5, we see this wretchedness being worked out in the history of Israel.

The real heart of their rebellions in verse 25, the breaking of the covenant, as it says, this is not a list of individual sins and infractions. This is a sustained attitude towards God, a deliberate choice to go against his word and the consequence of their hostility toward God is God meteering out his punishment towards his people.

So fear is the second motive here. And in our day, fear is regarded as probably the lowest motivation for actions. American writer H.A. Overstreet suggested that to fear is to be psychologically ill.

It is in fact the consuming illness of our time, he suggested. Franklin Roosevelt said that the only thing we need to fear is fear itself. Now, there are some fears that we want to work to overcome.

[18:08] You know, the fear of flying. You know, the Wright brothers sorted that one for us. Closed spaces and ghosts and thunderstorms and darkness or what others think of me or what others might do to me.

These are the kind of fears that are false and they need to be overcome. But what if the fear is something real? What if it's a genuine and a true fear?

Are they not God-given guides for our good? You see, I do not want an entirely fearless heart any more than I want an entirely fearless child that would be happy to play out there on the traffic at Fuller's Road this afternoon.

I don't want that. The judgment of God that he threatens to in this passage was real. All you need to do is read the rest of the Old Testament to see that.

The very things that are threatened here are what happened in space and time. God was found to be good as his word. He warned them and it happened. Right fear can be an appropriate motive.

[19:15] But we get a sense of what is behind these warnings in Exodus 20-20 where it says, Do not be afraid. God, again speaking to Israel, do not be afraid.

God has come to test you so that the fear of God will not be with you to keep you from sinning. In other words, my translation of Exodus 20-20, fear God so that you don't have to fear God.

See, the fear of God does not sit by itself as a motivation. The Bible tells us that his grace and his mercy allows himself to be a place of refuge.

Proverbs 14-26 is, I think, quite remarkable. It says, Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress and for their children it will be a refuge.

The fear of the Lord is a secure fortress and a place of refuge. Now, that might be a decision that some of you need to make tonight.

[20:28] You've heard this word of warning. It might be time for you to hear it as Israel was meant to hear it and turn back to God, to repent, to come back to him and find refuge in him, in his love

and his mercy.

You see, this is not just a word of warning to Israel a few thousand years ago. We see the same sort of stuff in the New Testament. In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul gets up and says, Now he commands all people everywhere to repent for he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. Maybe that's a choice you need to make tonight is to actually turn away from your rejection of God, turn towards him, repent and find refuge in him.

And if that is you, then please, I would love to talk to you after the service. So the second motive is fear, but fear that's meant to drive us to him in refuge.

And that leads me to the third motive, and that is the love of God. His grace has the last word here. Now the word punish in verses 18 and again in 28 can be understood to mean the word discipline.

[ 21 : 39 ] You know, the discipline in the middle of this chapter is not evidence that God has finally gotten fed up with his people, but in fact it's the exact opposite of that.

His discipline is part of his careful love of his people, it's part of his covenant love. His discipline is designed to bring his people to repentance. Now every parent knows that we don't stop loving our children when we discipline them.

Our discipline of them is another expression of our love for them. It's one of the most difficult ways that we love our children, but it is still love for our children. And if you look at verses 18, 21, 23, 24, 27, sorry, you'd notice that the purpose of all of these punishments was to get the people to finally turn back to God and away from the road of destruction.

God sends them discipline in the hope that they will turn around and they ignore it and he sends them another discipline in the hope they'll turn around, but they ignore it again and again and again. The phrase that is used here over and over is listen to God, listen to me.

See the same thing in the New Testament. Jesus says in Luke 8 that those who are part of his family are those who hear God's word and obey.

[ 23 : 03 ] The difference between the wise man who built his house on the rock and the foolish man who builds his house on the sand is the difference between those who hear the word of God and those who hear the word of God and do it.

Jesus says, if you love me, this is how you show your love for me. You keep my commandments. So in verse 44, we see God's response to those who finally turn back.

They've finally heeded God's warnings, his discipline, they've turned back and these are the ones who have been humbled, they're turned back in repentance and he says, yet in spite of all of this, when they're in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely.

Why would God be so loving and so long-suffering? You see, the pressing question of Leviticus is not how can a loving God possibly send anyone to hell.

It's actually how can a holy God possibly ever allow anyone into heaven. That is the issue of Leviticus.

[ 24 : 18 ] Why is this God so patient with rebellion? There is no other answer but his love. All the covenant language of these last verses of Leviticus 26 is not the language of a detached, cold negotiating table in a courtroom.

It is the heated language of love. This God commits himself in love to his people like a marriage relationship.

And the Old Testament is, if you like, the panorama of God's patient, gracious, merciful, long-suffering. His passion to love his people.

Before she married media mogul Ted Turner, Jane Fonda said, for two people to live together for the rest of their lives is almost unnatural. As it turns out, that marriage didn't last long.

But there's a bucket of truth in that, is it not? I mean, it's one thing to say that, you know, love at first sight. That's kind of understandable. But how do you explain love when you've been looking at each other for 20 years?

[ 25 : 26 ] Or 52 years, as my parents celebrated this week. this sense of the difficulty of being faithful to someone else, especially when that someone has faults and failings, let alone that someone who is actively hostile towards you.

That's such an important aspect of the love of God. The tenacious love of God is always the basis of his relationship with his people. As 1 John 4 says, this is love.

Not that we loved God, but that he loved us. That's love. And frankly, you're not easy to love.

Neither am I, but, you know, I just want to drive the point home.

You're not easy to love. As long as we think of ourselves self-righteously, as long as we think of ourselves as people that are easy to love, then we can never, ever understand the good news of Jesus Christ.

You might be the founding member of the Pharisee Society, but you cannot be a Christian until you understand that you are not easy to love.

[ 26 : 40 ] only when we understand how difficult we are to love because of our sin and our hostility towards God can we begin to understand what God has done for us.

And if you doubt God's love for you and you doubt the consequence of your sin, look at the cross, you see them both collide there. Why would we follow this God?

2 Corinthians 5 says, for Christ's love compels us. Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died, talking about Jesus, one died for all and therefore all died and he died for all that those who live, that's talking about us now, should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Why would we follow this God? Because his love compels us. The New Testament declares that the creator God came to earth to die for our sins on the cross.

God says in the Bible, cursed is anyone who's hung on a tree and here we have in Jesus, God himself, God placing himself, willingly placing himself under his own curse.

[ 27 : 55 ] He forsakes his son, he turns his back on his son so that we might get the blessing of being drawn close to him and being in relationship with him. You see, Jesus is the one Lord, he's the one master, he's the one boss who when we fail him will not punish us but in fact forgive us.

You see, if you serve your career, if you serve your family, if you serve other relationships and if you fail them, it will crucify you internally internally with self-loathing.

But Jesus was crucified for you. Every single one of us, the same as every single person in this world, every single one of us here tonight, it lives for something.

And that something is your Lord, it is your master, it is your boss and it constrains your behavior.

You are not free. Whatever it is that you live for puts constraints on your behavior.

If you live to be an Olympic gold medalist, you don't eat KFC three times a day. Three times a week, you don't eat it probably. If you live for Olympic gold, if you live for a successful career or art or politics or a boyfriend or a spouse, they all put limits on your choices.

[ 29 : 20 ] There are things that you will not do. You are not free. Therefore, the question is not, am I free?

But rather, how do I know if I'm taking on liberating constraints rather than the constraints that will crush me and abuse me?

That's the more appropriate question. What constraints am I taking on? And the answer of Christianity, the answer of the Bible, the answer of Leviticus is that if we are living for the one who both created us and redeemed us and loves us, then by definition, whatever he calls us to do is a liberating constraint.

It's where true, true freedom is found. in the same way that you get a boat and put up its sail and let it go in the water, providing it doesn't hit any rocks or anything out, it is truly free.

It's doing what it was designed to do. Take that boat, put it out in the desert and plant it on a sand hill and put the sail up, wind comes along, it's not truly free.

[ 30 : 56 ] It's not doing what it was designed to do. We were made to know, to serve, to love God and if we try to live for anything else it leads to slavery.

Anything else leads to slavery. When we live for God and follow his will, we find that we are actually becoming who we are meant to be.

You see, the Christian offer is not merely complying with the regulations of a creator out of a mere duty. It consists of a new, growing, inward passion to love and be close to our God and Saviour.

You see, when a Christian grasps how Jesus saves them at infinite cost to himself, how he emptied himself of his glory and took a humble form to serve our best interest, what it does, it creates a grateful joy and it would move for us to please him and to know him and resemble him to be holy because he is holy.

Our happiness gets put into his happiness and serving him becomes our perfect liberation. That is why we follow this God even when it's not popular.

[ 32 : 21 ] And the call to God's people now, if you're a Christian, the call to God's people right now is still the same as it was to the first recipients of Leviticus.

Be holy because I am holy. 1 Peter 1 quotes that call to holiness from Leviticus when he exhorts Christians to look forward to the hope that they have of Christ's return.

And in looking forward to that hope, he calls us to be distinct now no matter how difficult it gets. He calls us not to be conformed to the evil desires we once had. He calls us to love one another deeply.

Why? Because that's the character of God. That's who we're becoming. Love one another deeply. To be holy as he is holy.

To get rid of everything that is not characteristic of a person who loves. He says, get rid of things like malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander. Christians are called to be distinct from everyone else.

[ 33 : 19 ] And as a church, we're going to set a core value just on the outside of that wall that you'll see them over supper. Turn to them, have a look at them. And those core values show a number of ways that we in this place are looking to be distinct.

We hold a course. We heard about it just a moment ago, Pathways. And that course is about membership in this Christian community. It's how our Christian distinction gets worked out here at St. Paul's Chatswood.

I don't care how long you've been here in this church. If you've never been to Pathways, get to Pathways. There's one on on the 19th of March.

Sign up for it tonight just out there on the Connect Desk. Why would we want to do that? Why would you want to be distinct? Why be constrained by God's word? Why go against the tighter society and be holy because I am holy?

Hebrews 12, 14 says this, make every effort, every effort, really work at it, really, really work at it to live at peace with everyone and to be holy because without holiness no one will see the Lord.

[ 34 : 29 ] Why does holiness matter? Because we get God back. We get to be in his presence. That's the goal of Leviticus.

That's the goal of the whole Bible. That's the goal of history in fact. Revelation 21, this is the end of it. This is our hope. This is what Peter calls us to look forward to.

Then I saw a new heaven and new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

And then I heard a loud voice from the siren saying, look, look, look, God is there. it says something like that.

It says, God's dwelling place is now amongst his people and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be their God and he will be with them.

[ 35 : 27 ] He will wipe away every tear. There'll be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. To the thirsty, I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life and those who are victorious will inherit all of this and they will be with their God and they will be my children.

That's the goal. But hear the warning. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars, those who refuse to listen, they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

That is the second death. There is no coming back from that. And so hear the warning of God tonight and find refuge in his mercy.

If this is a decision you need to make, speak to me. Please, please, please speak to me after this service. Choose today the blessing of God's presence forever or the curse of being cast away from him forever.

The 17th century Puritan preacher Thomas Goodwin once said, if I were to go to heaven and find that Christ was not there, I would leave immediately for heaven would be hell without Christ.

[ 36 : 55 ] Goodwin understood that the joy of our salvation, the joy of our hope is not the promise of a certain place, but in fact a restoration to a relationship with our glorious creator through the self-sacrifice for us of our great and glorious redeemer.

The heart of the Christian gospel as expressed throughout the Bible and these closing bits of Leviticus is the promise of eternal, joy-filled, totally free communion with God our creator.

That is why we are who we are and we do what we do. you or you