

Has God Changed?

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About fifteen years ago, Dr. Laura Schlessinger, a nationally syndicated radio talk-show host who offers advice on marriage, dating, and relationships, made a comment on her website about homosexuality that produced a great deal of attention. She said:

"I'm sorry – hear it one more time, perfectly clearly: If you're gay or a lesbian, it's a biological error that inhibits you from relating normally to the opposite sex. The fact that you are intelligent, creative, and valuable is all true. The error is in your inability to relate sexually intimately, in a loving way, to a member of the opposite sex – it is a biological error." (December 8, 1998)

In response, Kent Ashcraft wrote an open letter to Dr. Laura (who was a practicing orthodox Jew until August 2003). Later, he emailed a copy of his letter to a friend and it went viral over the internet within a few days. Since then, many variations of the letter and claims of authorship have appeared on the internet.

I learned of Ashcraft's letter a few days ago. Even after fifteen years, I think a biblical response to Ashcraft's letter is appropriate because he used the Bible in a clever way to challenge some of today's so-called modern mores. Many Christian churches have demonstrated their belief that God has changed His mind about homosexuality through an increasing number of homosexual clergy.

Ashcraft's letter most likely became popular because (a) he made God's laws look foolish, and (b) he appealed to two ideas which many Christians already accept as true. First, many Christians believe the God of the Old Testament is unlike the God of the New Testament, and second, not only was the Old Testament abolished at the cross, *it really needed to be abolished*. I do not know Mr. Ashcraft or anything about his moral or religious views except for the arguments set forth in his letter. I have included a copy* for your review:

Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate. I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God's laws and how to follow them.

1. Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighbouring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness - Leviticus 15:19-24. The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.
4. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord - Leviticus 1:9. The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?
5. I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself, or should I ask the police to do it?
6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination, Leviticus 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this? Are there 'degrees' of abomination?
7. Leviticus 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle-room here?
8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Leviticus 19:27. How should they die?
9. I know from Leviticus 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?
10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Leviticus 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? Leviticus 24:10-16. Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Leviticus 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively and thus enjoy considerable expertise in such matters, so I'm confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your adoring fan,

(***Note:** Some reports on the internet indicate that Ashcraft did *not* include items 8 through 10 in his letter to Dr. Laura. It is believed someone else likely added these items. Since the arguments in items 8 through 10 are compatible with items 1 through 7, they are included.)

How would you respond to Mr. Ashcraft's letter? My response is this:

Dear Mr. Ashcraft:

I have just learned of your letter to Dr. Laura and even though you wrote it fifteen years ago, it remains pertinent and I would like to offer a response. You have presented some sophisticated arguments and I found your examples, references, and logic to be quite clear.

You have framed a premise that appears to be this: If God's laws to ancient Israel are still intact, then God's declaration "that homosexuality is an abomination" is still intact. However, if the laws given to ancient Israel are not binding today, then homosexuality is no longer an abomination to God. Have I accurately summarized the basic premise of your letter? If so, please consider my three-part response:

1. God Seeks the Elevation of Mankind

God created seven categories of laws in the Old Testament. He gave Israel laws about health, religious conduct, civil conduct, war conduct, business conduct, sexual conduct, and moral conduct. These categories are not surprising because most nations today have laws in these same categories and have added more laws, such as environmental laws and maritime laws.

Your ten questions to Dr. Laura can be broken down into four questions regarding health, three questions regarding religious conduct, two questions regarding civil conduct (slavery), and one question regarding moral conduct (the death penalty for violating the fourth commandment, God's seventh day Sabbath).

Six of the seven categories of laws God gave to Israel came through Moses. God Himself spoke *only* the Ten Commandments (the moral law) from atop Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17) and wrote them on two tablets of enduring stone with His finger. (Exodus 31:18) Given the price that God paid to save sinners, Christians believe that God is love, caring, and generous.

Most Christians believe that God gave His laws for our benefit, not His. God has infinite wisdom and His laws are designed to continuously elevate those who obey and uphold them. This elevation process includes nations as well. (Psalm 33:12) Bible history teaches there is an inseparable relationship between compliance with God's laws and the well-being of those who honor them.

May I illustrate the elevating process which God's laws can produce? While Abraham's descendants lived as slaves in Egypt for 430 years, each passing generation assimilated deeper and deeper into Egyptian ways, thoughts, and behaviors. When the time came for deliverance, God foreknew Israel's mind-set.

The character transformation Israel needed to move forward with God's plan would be a significant challenge. From the time of the Exodus, God did everything possible to win Israel over to His ways, but many people did not like God or trust Him. Because of their constant rebellion against Him, God eventually refused to take the generation He delivered from slavery into Canaan. With the exception of Caleb and Joshua, all adults who were delivered from Egypt died in the wilderness because of defiance and stubbornness!

From the beginning, it was God's plan to transform a nation of slaves into a nation of priests. God wanted Israel to become a nation of loving and intelligent people who would not only tell the whole world about His love and salvation, they would demonstrate it! Notice the words God spoke to Moses:

"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."(Exodus 19:4-6)

There are several ways to change the behavior of people corporately. Sometimes, education will produce change. For example, when some people learn that illness comes through a direct exposure to disease, many people will avoid the exposure. Sometimes, financial policies will produce change.

For example, when banks do not pay any appreciable interest on savings accounts, many people will remove their cash from the bank and invest it elsewhere to get a better return on their money. Finally, laws will sometimes produce change. For example, when governments want people to change behavior, they make laws and impose significant penalties for breaking these laws.

Generally speaking, those who are wise will obey these laws and those who are foolish will go to prison. These three samples illustrate this point: Good education, policies, and laws can have an influence on people, but none of these will eliminate our natural rebellion toward authority.

When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He provided education, policies, and laws in addition to shelter, food, and water. God loved Israel, even though they were a nation of rebellious slaves, and His efforts to transform His people came through education, policies, and laws.

His commands were "stepping stones" so that Israel could eventually reach the high calling for which He had chosen them. However, God's education, policies, and laws could only be effective if Israel loved and admired Him. Notice how God's "stepping stones" applied to divorce. Moses wrote:

"If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance."(Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

Fourteen hundred years after the Exodus, Jesus came to Earth and the Pharisees tested Him to see what He had to say about divorce. Notice what Jesus said about Israel's condition during

the time of Moses:

"Some Pharisees came to him to test him[Jesus]. **They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?' 'Haven't you read,' he [Jesus] replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." ' ' "**

'Why then,' they asked, 'did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?' Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. *But it was not this way from the beginning.* I tell you[the truth, the Creator says] **that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.'** " (Matthew 19:3-9, insertions and italics mine)

Because God is loving, infinitely wise, and all-knowing, His laws are always appropriate and beneficial even though we may not understand their ultimate purpose or importance. When we do not understand the reasoning behind God's laws, believers must trust God's infinite wisdom. This explains why faith in God is so important, but sometimes difficult. In these types of situations, we must obey God out of faith instead of reason, and Israel's history proves that living by faith is not an easy choice.

Some of God's laws (like the Ten Commandments) are everlasting and some laws (like the religious laws given to Moses) were designed from the beginning to be temporary. Temporal laws are not unusual and we commonly use them today. For example, whenever we see a reduced speed limit in a construction zone, we see a temporary law. When the purpose for the temporary law is achieved, it expires. King David, a lawmaker himself, closely studied the wisdom behind God's laws and wrote:

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb."(Psalm 19:7-10)

Because some of God's laws are everlasting and some are temporary, there is a great deal of confusion and conflict today as to which is which. Orthodox Jews cannot accept the idea that some of God's laws were temporary and the arguments set forth in your letter may have had a profound impact on Dr. Laura since we now know she renounced Judaism in 2003.

On the other hand, many Christians, instead of taking the time to determine which laws were abolished by the death of Jesus, abolish everything written in the Old Testament. Given this "all or nothing" confusion, I would like to direct your attention to the issue of sexual behavior.

Consider this passage that Jesus spoke about sixty years *after* His ascension to Heaven.

Explaining what eternal life in the holy city, New Jerusalem, would be like, Jesus said to John (who, at that time, was exiled on the isle of Patmos for his faith):

"He who overcomes[the passions of the carnal nature – see messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3] **will inherit all this** [life in the holy city and Earth made new], **and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.**" (Revelation 21:7,8 insertions mine)

Jesus said that sexually immoral people, liars, and idolaters will not enter the holy city. Mr. Ashcraft, you may not be aware of this, but Jesus is the God of the Old Testament! (John 8:58, 1 Corinthians 10:4, John 12:41, Isaiah 44:6, and Revelation 1:17,18) More than ninety-five percent of the references in the Old Testament pertaining to "God" actually refer to Jesus.

Therefore, if you believe the words of Jesus in Revelation are factual, then you also must accept the words of Jesus in the Old Testament as factual. Given the serious consequences of the lake of fire and the second death, we have to ask: "What is sexual immorality?" God has defined sexual immorality and the definition is found in Leviticus 18.

However, like God's position on divorce, His position on sexual immorality has been clear from the beginning. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of sexual immorality a full 500 years *before* God spoke the words recorded in Leviticus 18.

Early Christians understood the curse of sexual immorality and in its first official action, as an organization, it outlawed among other things, sexual immorality. (Acts 15:20) Later, Paul condemned sexual immorality in many texts. (See Romans 1; Colossians 3:5,6; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3)

The New Testament must have had a basis for this condemnation and the basis for Jesus' warning in Revelation 21:8 had to be Leviticus 18. God has not changed. Sexual immorality has not changed. Jesus, the God of the Old Testament is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. (Hebrews 13:8) From the beginning, God united a man and a woman as one flesh (Genesis 2:24) and sexual relations were limited to the confines of a marriage between a man and a woman:

"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."(Hebrews 13:4)

Sexual conduct is very important to God because He uses sexual conduct as a way to renew and sustain the marriage relationship. When a husband and a wife are faithful to each other, society benefits. Healthy and happy marriages are far more likely to produce happy and productive offspring than children from broken marriages.

Our sexual conduct and actions have an important impact on society. Our sexual conduct matters to God. (2 Corinthians 5:10; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Revelation 22:12) James

wrote, "**Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.**" (James 2:18) Faith without works is useless. (James 2:20)

2. God's Temporary Laws Are Terminated, Never Changed

Previously, I stated that God created some laws to be temporary. When Adam and Eve sinned, the Father sent the guilty pair away from Eden, but not without a promise. God promised He would provide a way back to Eden through the death of His Lamb, Jesus. If a person wanted to show faith in God's promise of redemption, the sinner willingly offered a sacrificial lamb on an altar at appointed times. This law explains why the patriarchs offered sacrificial lambs. After the flood, Noah continued to offer sacrificial lambs as God required.

Centuries later, Abraham offered sacrificial lambs, and after the Exodus, God gave Israel further instructions about the offering of sacrificial lambs at appointed times. When sin began, God's law regarding sacrificial lambs began. This law was binding upon all who *believed* God's promise and this law remained intact until the "Lamb" of God came to Earth and died for our sins.

When Jesus died on the cross, the law requiring sacrificial lambs was terminated. The apostle Paul was punished by the Jews because he declared *the religious laws* given to Israel had been abolished. Paul argued that the Levitical system was terminated because it had served its temporary purpose and he showed how a new covenant having a new High Priest was established. After paying the price for our sins, Paul taught that Jesus had returned to Heaven to serve in the presence of God as man's intercessor. Notice his words:

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. . . . For when there is a change of the priesthood

[from the sons of Levi to the Son of God], **there must also be a change of the law** [a new law was put in place, a law different from what was given through Moses]. **He [Jesus] of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from [the tribe of] Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests** [serving at the altar. In fact, Moses limited services at the altar to Levites.]" (Hebrews 4:14,15; 7:12-14, insertions mine)

During the first century there was a great deal of confusion between early Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity. At first, Christianity appeared like a sect of Judaism because the first converts were Jews! As the gospel of Jesus made inroads throughout the Roman Empire, Gentile converts did not want to assimilate into Jewish culture (which they despised) and Jewish converts did not want to let go of their religious culture or traditions (which they cherished). Therefore, conflict came into each Christian church. Notice what the apostle Paul wrote to the newly formed church in Colosse:

"When you[Gentile and Jewish converts to Christ] **were dead in your sins** [unaware of your guilt] **and [living] in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God** [awakened you and] **made you alive with Christ** [through the ministry of the Holy Spirit]. **He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code** [the religious laws given to Moses], **with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us** [e.g., the religious laws which we Jews distorted through legalism and ignorance]; **he took it away** [abolished it], **nailing it to the cross.**" (Colossians 2:13-14, insertions mine)

Paul speaks clearly. The religious laws given through Moses were abolished at the cross. This does not mean that God also abolished those laws governing sexual conduct at the cross. "**I the Lord do not change.** . . ." (Malachi 3:6) Remember, Jesus spoke the words in Revelation 21:8 about sixty-five years after His ascension to Heaven.

In God's sight, sexual immorality has not changed since Creation week. Because God has infinite wisdom, He does not need to change or modify His laws. If a law has a sunset from the beginning, that law is temporary and when its sunset occurs, it is abolished, *not changed*. Likewise, the religious laws which God initiated in Eden and amplified through Moses were abolished because a *new* covenant was put in place with a *new* High Priest who lives in a *new* Jerusalem which is located on a *new* Mt. Zion!

3. How Should God Handle Defiance?

Finally, I would like to address item #5 in your letter. You argued that Exodus 35:2 indicates that Sabbath breakers should be put to death if God's laws are endless. Through the centuries, many Christians have offered this passage to prove that God's seventh day Sabbath rest was abolished at the cross. God's seventh day Sabbath was not abolished at the cross, but instead, the command to execute Sabbath breakers was abolished around 1000 B.C. when God ended His theocracy. Please let me explain:

When God delivered Israel out of Egypt, He set up a theocracy. A theocracy is a church-state government where God rules. In Israel's case, God served as Israel's king (in civil matters) and as Israel's lord (in religious matters). Four hundred years into the theocracy, rebellious Israel did not want a theocracy and it did not want God as king. Israel wanted to be like the other nations and have a human king. Heartsick, God terminated His theocracy and gave Israel its second king, a man named Saul. (1 Samuel 8)

This is an important fact to understand. God's theocracy began at the beginning of Israel's history. Within this context, Exodus 35:2 makes perfect sense and so does Exodus 22:18 which says, "Do not allow a sorceress to live." At the time of the Exodus, God knew how stubborn and rebellious Pharaoh's slaves would be. He knew that everyone within Israel would not want to observe His stepping stone laws and participate in His elevating transformation. Therefore, God said to the first generation of Israel (the generation that would later die in the wilderness):

"For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day shall be your holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord. Whoever does any work on it must be put to death. Do not light a fire in any of your

dwellings on the Sabbath day."(Exodus 35:2,3)

Mr. Ashcraft, thousands of writers have overlooked the setting of this law through the centuries. The theocratic context of this law gives this law its unique and timely application. As Israel's king, God could not tolerate anarchy, so He imposed death on those who would defy His commands.

God imposed a seventh day Sabbath on Pharaoh's slaves with the same authority and penalty that Pharaoh had previously imposed on forced labor. God *had* to do this with a nation of scofflaws (a nation who habitually ignored the law). The hardness and stubbornness of their hearts required God to be firm!

Think about this: When a military general gives a direct order to a subordinate, there should be consequences for defiance. When a person defies an arresting law officer, there should be consequences for defiance. When a governor signs a law, there should be consequences for defiance. What is the point of having a law if there is no authority to deal with defiance?

Summary

Mr. Ashcraft, I do not know whether you actually believe the ideas stated in your letter or whether you merely wished to compile some arguments to confront Dr. Laura, who openly claimed to be an orthodox Jew at that time. Nevertheless, you framed the Old Testament in a light that suggests the Bible is silly and unnecessary. This response may not change your mind about the Bible, but I hope you will give the whole Bible some reconsideration.

As Dr. Laura would say, "Let's be perfectly clear." Jesus said in Revelation 21 that sexually immoral people will not receive eternal life or have a place in the holy city. Sexual immorality did exist before Leviticus 18 was given to Moses. God's wrath destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of sexual immorality.

When Jesus explained divorce to the Pharisees from God's point of view, Jesus explained why the laws of Moses were given as "stepping stones." God wanted to elevate the nation of Israel from darkness to that of enlightened teachers and evangelists (priests) to benefit the entire world.

God does not change. He has infinite wisdom and He also knows the end from the beginning. Therefore, He has no need to change or modify a single law. He simply abolishes temporary laws when their sunset occurs. Since King Saul's reign, Israel has not operated under a theocracy. Therefore, God's commandment that Sabbath breakers must be put to death for defiance, as well as many other commands that pertained to His theocracy, has been null and void for 3,000 years.

Look around at the agony sexual misconduct is producing. This agony ranges from abused children, self-loathing teens, insatiable addiction in older people, and the cause of many diseases. If more people understood the sorrowful and painful harvest that sexual immorality

brings and if more people avoided sexual misconduct, then millions of people would be happier and the world would be a much better place for our children and future generations. The Bible teaches that nothing good ever comes from transgressing God's laws.

God gave us His laws for our benefit and contrary to what many people say, there is no evidence in the Bible where God has changed His mind about things He calls "an abomination." Sin began on this planet with the devil deceiving mankind and given the behavior of people we see all around us, obviously he has not stopped.

Larry Wilson