

Objections to Christianity #3

God enforces weird and inconsequential laws.

The logic against Christianity, and even Judaism, is that God gave specific laws that are not necessary and because He did, the unnecessary laws void all the other laws. A syllogism can be made that says No non-moral laws are necessary laws, some necessary laws are moral laws, therefore some moral laws are not non-moral laws. The logic is valid but the argument is not sound because the first premise “No non-moral laws are necessary laws” is false. The question is, “How are non-moral laws necessary laws?”

What type of laws are we talking about? A: Leviticus 11:6-8 says that a person is unclean if they touch the skin of a dead pig. Leviticus 11:10 prohibits the eating of shellfish. Leviticus 19:19 says that God’s people are not to plant two different crops in the same field or make a garment mixed with two types of thread. Leviticus 21:10 restricts those who can approach the altar of the Lord if they have a defect.

To discuss such laws in light of the many moral laws we better understand, let us first realize that we need to have perspective regarding the type of world in which Israel lived when these laws were given. Israel was to enter the land of Canaan and those who occupied the land were the Canaanites who had a primitive mythology. Their religion contained the most demoralizing cultic practices that existed in the near east. Human sacrifice, sacred prostitution, eunuch priests, serpent worship and brutal mythology. God, of course, knows the human heart for as He has said in Jeremiah 17 “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? ‘I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.’” God knew the temptations Israel would face as they lived in that land and Israel had yet to prove she, as a people, could resist such temptations. The pull to be like other nations was a besetting sin for Israel.

Let us look at each law listed. Swine became the symbol of what is considered unclean. The primary reason may have been the manner that they fed and wallowed. Also, many of the Pagan nations regarded the swine as an emblem of the productive power of nature. Hence they sacrificed them to those deities to whom they ascribed the fertility of the soil, and the fruitfulness of cattle. Thus, the Egyptians offered them in

honor of Isis and Osiris once a year at the festival of the full moon. The Athenians, too, offered the swine in their mysteries; so did the Boetians and the early Romans.

We could look at the restrictions on shellfish in terms of health as shellfish are one of the most common food allergens. But we should also compare shellfish to what is allowed to be consumed which are fish with scales. The difference is that one is able to move freely and thus escape its captors while the other cannot.

The planting of two different types of seeds was simply wise as different seeds require the same nutrients from the soil lessening the growth of each. But this law is placed next to one that prohibits the combining of two threads. What do they have in common?
A: They mix together instead of being distinct. Consider then what God wants Israel not to do.

The restriction placed on those with defects says more about God than about people with defects. It says that God is without defect and is only worthy to be approached by those who do not have defects. But we all have defects. God knows this, of course, and that is why He sent His Son so that we can be made clean and whole and thus able to approach Him.

The following is from the commentary of Matthew Henry, "What animals were clean and unclean. - These laws seem to have been intended, 1. As a test of the people's obedience, as Adam was forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge; and to teach them self-denial, and the government of their appetites. 2. To keep the Israelites distinct from other nations. Many also of these forbidden animals were objects of superstition and idolatry to the heathen. 3. The people were taught to make distinctions between the holy and unholy in their companions and intimate connexions. 4. The law forbade, not only the eating of the unclean beasts, but the touching of them. Those who would be kept from any sin, must be careful to avoid all temptations to it, or coming near it. The exceptions are very minute, and all were designed to call forth constant care and exactness in their obedience; and to teach us to obey. Whilst we enjoy our Christian liberty, and are free from such burdensome observances, we must be careful not to abuse our liberty. For the Lord hath redeemed and called his people, that they may be holy, even as he is holy. We must come out, and be separate from the world; we must leave the company

of the ungodly, and all needless connexions with those who are dead in sin; we must be zealous of good works devoted followers of God, and companions of his people.”

Number 1 is akin to a parent insisting on a child’s obedience because the parent said so. It is a testing of where the heart of a child is and it reflects the maturity of Israel for they behaved as children repeatedly.

Number 2 is what I see as the most important lesson. We know of Israel’s syncretism after these laws were given. Also, consider the symbolism that was to be understood. Because we are flesh and blood, physical lessons are necessary and powerful when we understand them. The Gnostic doesn’t appreciate such lessons and we are not Gnostics.

Number 3 was vital to being God’s people and in understanding the God they said they were worshipping.

Number 4 uses the phrase “constant care and exactness” which is necessary because we so easily choose sin. This is similar to a study of the Ten Commandments as a whole with the recognition that we are not only responsible not to break them but not to do things that make breaking them easier.

Cope makes the necessary point that these laws were never to be permanent for Jesus came to fulfill all the Law and as far as eating is concerned God changed that while ministering to Peter in Acts 10.

We also have evidence from certain passages in the New Testament that God was moving His people in a particular direction. What is that direction? A: It is to the end when His law is upon our hearts (Jeremiah 31). Hear these passages, Acts 17: 30: “Previously, God ‘overlooked the times of ignorance’ and is ‘now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent.’” • Romans 3: 25: “God has now ‘demonstrate[d] His righteousness’ in Christ, though ‘in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.’” These reveal the God we described last week which is the God who is patient, slow to anger and abounding in love.

The sin of slavery is an example. Whereas in every known place in history slavery was an accepted reality. The law of Moses, however, placed restrictions on how slaves could be treated until the New Testament when Paul advises Onesimus should be let free.

Because God was personable He was then practical. His laws were practical in that they addressed scenarios of everyday life. But they were also symbolic of something greater He would do for His people. Being created in His image we have the privilege of being blessed by the practical and the symbolic.