

**DR. LAURA AND THE 10 COMMANDMENTS
THE LAW WITHOUT THE LORD**

**WITHOUT HIS GRACE
WITHOUT HIS REDEMPTION
WITHOUT HIS FORGIVENESS
WITHOUT HIS POWER**

**"for it is by GRACE that you have been saved"
Ephesians 2:7-9**

Dr. Laura calls her radio program one of "moral health" in which, she says: "I 'preach, teach, and nag' about morals, values, ethics, and principles" (ix). The program focuses on moral behavior in a world where immorality has become the standard. This past year (1998) Dr. Laura, along with her husband and son, formally converted to Orthodox Judaism after a television program about the Holocaust initially inspired her to study Judaism (xx). Following that conversion, she and her rabbi (Rabbi Stewart Vogel) undertook the writing of a book about the Ten Commandments:

"Our decision to write about the Ten Commandments stems from our common **passion for the Bible** and our desire to share the Judeo-Christian values derived from it.... This is not meant as a biblically exhaustive, academic tome. This is a modern update and popularization of the words of God."

(xiv, emphasis added)

Dr. Laura notes initially that belief in God is something fairly new in her life (xv):

"I am still trying to figure out when and how I took that leap into an acceptance of God." (xix)

She describes herself as previously being "slightly condescending" toward religious people, and adamantly opposed to any mention of God, religion, or the Bible on her program (xix). Her "answers" were based on her own authority as a psychotherapist, professor, and author (xix).

Dr. Laura's father was a non-practicing Jew who saw God as a "sadist" and her mother a Catholic who "hated the priests because, as they walked around well-garbed and fed, the people starved" (xvi). The family began attending a Unitarian church when Laura was in her teens, one that advocated "no dogma" (xvi). Dr. Laura's parents taught her some standards of morality, but they were based more on consequences than any

concept of real authority behind the rules (xvii). The focus on consequences has by no means disappeared:

"I am especially trying to help young folks minimize the occurrence of such historical self-disappointment [such as Dr. Laura experienced in her own life], and the sometimes terrible or difficult consequences, by introducing and reinforcing the morals and values they ought to have received at home." (xix)

Although Dr. Laura acknowledges some important biblical truths about the "real authority behind the rules," the God of the Bible, her counseling is essentially a program of works-righteousness wherein salvation is earned by good behavior. There is nothing of the gospel, nothing of God's grace, mercy, and lovingkindness as demonstrated on the cross. There is outward holiness without inward regeneration. There is no solution for the devastating reality of guilt before a holy God. There is no satisfaction of divine justice. There is ultimately no hope to be found in Dr. Laura's counsel. In a nutshell, she preaches the law without the Lord.

Dr. Laura's rabbi co-author, Stewart Vogel, says that:

"I am a product of a generation that challenges all authority; a generation for which doubt and rebellion have replaced faith and belief." (xxvii)

In this generation, he says:

"We want the benefits of God without the obligations. Ultimately, the modern New Age movements are simply placebos, feeling better without necessarily being better." (xxviii)

At about age 15, Vogel's thinking radically changed, as he began to focus his religion on righteous living:

"I finally understood the purpose of religion is to lead us to holiness, a relationship with God, and an aspiration of living up to being 'made in the image of God.'" (xxix)

Vogel's concept of God changed over the years:

"I could now celebrate God--not the stern, judgmental God often emphasized in religion, but rather the Judge from whom authority and all goodness emanates.... After ten years as rabbi, I find myself talking more and more about

God and less and less about 'feeling good about oneself.' I hope to inspire them to search out God; not just a God who can make them *feel* good, but a God who can help them *do* good."

(xxx-xxxii)

God does indeed help us to *do* good. He is the lawgiver and judge of all the earth. He establishes standards of righteousness, and we ought not to be "feeling good" about ourselves. God's law is truly *the* standard for our lives. But His law also leads us to Christ. We cannot fulfill the law. We break it daily, even hourly. There is none righteous, not even one, except Christ. He fulfilled the law perfectly and His righteousness is imputed to believers as the legal ground for eternal salvation.

Christianity and Dr. Laura

Many Christians have rallied to Dr. Laura's moral cause. She says that:

"I have been encouraged by the strong and touching support I have received from the Christian community for my program as well as for my personal growth." (x)

Dr. Laura has been a television guest of Dr. Robert Schuller, at the Crystal Cathedral, on two or three different occasions. She utterly fails, however, to comprehend the nature of our faith, which is rooted in God's incredible grace:

"Even for Christians, who believe that **salvation is not found just in obedience to God's law** but also in faith in Jesus Christ, their religion demands that they put that faith into practice through the laws." (318, emphasis added)

Yes, we do put our faith into practice; the book of James attests to that, along with much other New Testament scripture. But *salvation* is through *faith alone*, in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:7-9). As noted earlier, Dr. Laura is blinded to the central message of the Christian faith:

"There is a commonality to the motivation of Jews and Christians to love and obey God: **salvation....** In the Christian view, the world is redeemed as each individual's soul is saved through Jesus Christ. In the Jewish view, **we are redeeming the world by our own efforts.**"

(13, emphasis added)

There is no such "commonality." While mentioning redemption through Jesus Christ, Dr. Laura has no idea as to what that "redemption" involves. Love and obedience to God are not the ground of salvation, but the natural *result*, the fruit of genuine saving faith. Also evident here is Dr. Laura's belief that man's efforts can *redeem the world*. Such a man-made salvation is anathema to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Salvation by grace alone--a salvation that is wholly the work of God apart from the efforts of man--is what sets Christianity apart from all of the false religions of the world. Any counseling system that promotes holiness without God's grace is doomed to failure. While some of Dr. Laura's applications of the Ten Commandments are agreeable to believers, not one of us is able to keep them perfectly so as to earn salvation. Attempts to earn salvation by the law will inevitably lead to despair.

By What Standard?

This book is about the Ten Commandments, given by God to Moses. However, we must inquire further into Dr. Laura's ultimate standards.

First, despite her moralistic counseling over the radio, Dr. Laura leaves room for therapy sessions in which morality is allegedly cast aside:

"It is all well and good to have a judgment-free atmosphere in a therapy session where the individual is comfortable to delve into interpretive associations in order to understand his/her motives and actions. It does not work when these techniques and therapeutic concepts become the dominant atmosphere of a society so that accountability is eliminated." (262)

Why should it be "well and good" to *counsel* people, whose lives are in shambles, without moral standards? It is one thing to counsel with gentleness, humility, and compassion, recognizing that we are all sinners. (Dr. Laura's radio counseling is distinctly lacking in these qualities.) It is quite another matter to counsel in a "judgment-free atmosphere." Actually, there is no such atmosphere. Where therapists attempt to "counsel" without moral judgments, such "counseling" implies the acceptance of whatever moral standards the counselee brings to the session. Counseling cannot be a morally neutral endeavor.

In addition, this quote fails to recognize that where people are counseled in a supposedly "judgment-free atmosphere" on the most important moral issues of their lives, this "judgment-free atmosphere" is bound to be carried over into real life, i.e., society. If morality doesn't matter in the counseling room where real life issues are addressed, why should it matter when people walk out of the counselor's office into real life situations?

Meanwhile, Dr. Laura asks pertinent questions about values and seeks a universal standard:

"Can the human population survive if it tolerates no standard of values for what is correct?" (4)

"Can we find more value, meaning, direction, and gratification from a life with absolute values than without? And whose values will they be?" (4)

Whose indeed? Unless values are anchored in a personal God, they are grounded in quicksand and subject to arbitrary alteration.

Dr. Laura proposes a pragmatic solution, asserting that we will enjoy a better quality of life if there are values:

"Values inform our conscience, which influences our behavior. Our behaviors determine the quality of our lives and the meaningfulness of our personal contribution to others, to life, and to history." (4)

Going back to the question of *whose* values should prevail in order to attain an objective standard, Dr. Laura acknowledges that there must be a foundation beyond mere human thought:

"Ultimately, the decision of what is right or wrong has to come from somewhere. Human logic and rational thought or nature's laws do not fully provide that framework in a universally just way." (18)

Looking back to a highly flawed school curriculum that attempted to emphasize values, Dr. Laura notes its failure to provide any such framework:

"The values clarification curriculum that was popular in schools a decade or two ago asked the students their views on certain ethical and moral situations. It was an attempt to emphasize the importance of values in making decisions.

The only problem was that teachers could not tell a child he or she was wrong." (131-132)

This is a real problem, resulting in the assertion that any "value" is acceptable. Dr. Laura notes that in the rebellious years of the 1960's, "the highest value became the self and its gratification, comfort, and glorification" (132). Legal protections guard against the results that would naturally occur if individual values were permitted to reign without restraint:

"Spouting subjective morality has little meaning when you are safely ensconced in a country where the law of the land protects you against those who would do objectively immoral things with the permission of their own personalized value system." (132)

Nevertheless, mere societal agreement cannot establish the necessary universal moral standards. There must be an eternal God standing behind the standards:

"The fact that something is approved of by society ['ethnic cleansing'] does not make it objectively right. If murder is objectively wrong, then there must be a reason that makes it so. That objective reason, superseding all emotions and tyrants, is that God said murder is wrong." (176-177)

It is the first of the Ten Commandments, wherein God states that "I am the Lord your God," that "lays down the *authority* of the one God, more than commanding *belief* in one God" (6). At the time those commandments were originally given, it was an age of "many gods" (not unlike today!). In this context, "monotheism (belief in one God) posited a single, objective morality" (12). This one, personal God called His people to be like Him in holiness and goodness. Dr. Laura sees an internal moral imperative to do good, rather than mere blind obedience:

"Perhaps we need to stop thinking in terms of blind obedience and subordination to an invisible authoritarian. Perhaps we need to start thinking in terms of an inner need to be and to do good for the sake of a special, only human, inner moral imperative--that moral sense being God, that which desires us to be as He, defined by goodness, justice, compassion, and holiness." (4)

Grounding morality in God, rather than man, tears down human rationalizations for immoral behavior:

"This external voice of divine authority can help us to do what is right for ourselves.... There are always rationalizations about the profane--there are none to get around the divine." (20)

Dr. Laura notes that in today's world, many people even in the church want to do away with God's commandments so as not to drive people away (317). But they are wrong:

"God's moral laws are still binding. They are the blueprint of God's expectations upon us and His plan for a meaningful, just, loving, holy life.... Unfortunately, ignorance or dismissal of the commandments has taken such a hold in society that fewer and fewer people have a clear idea of the difference between right and wrong." (318)

Dr. Laura could well include herself in this last statement. Despite pages of praise for God's eternal, universally binding moral standards, Dr. Laura caves in on one of the most controversial issues of our day: homosexuality. In discussing the adoption of children by homosexuals, Dr. Laura states that:

"...homosexuals are probably more than capable of providing for an loving a child...but, do we allow the personal desires of any one activist group to deny the inherent significance and importance of heterosexual reproductivity and parenting?" (52)

Dr. Laura urges homosexual couples to be available for older, harder-to-place children needing a home (52). *What happened here to biblical moral standards?* Whether looking at the Old Testament or the New Testament, homosexuality is biblically defined as sin. Does Dr. Laura hold to biblical standards when it is "politically correct" to do so, then abandon them when she might offend what she herself calls "one activist group"? To rephrase her statement to be biblically correct: Do we allow the personal desires of any one activist group to deny the inherent *infallibility and importance of God's Word?*

What we see here are some good statements about looking to God rather than man for eternal standards, and finding those standards in God's written Word. However, Dr. Laura is inconsistent with her own theme, on the controversial homosexual issue and within the context of psychotherapy. This means that extreme caution and discernment is required in order to evaluate her comments, both in writing and over the air.

Jewish Tradition

When Jesus conducted His earthly ministry, He often chastised the Pharisees and other religious leaders for adding external traditions to God's commandments. The outward righteousness of these people covered sinful hearts, and their traditions burdened God's people with superfluous man-made requirements. The Scriptures, meanwhile, caution against additions to God's Word. (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5-6; Revelation 22:18). Dr. Laura, like the Pharisees, adds man-made tradition to God's commandments. There are many points in her book where "Jewish tradition" is cited as binding, or at least as authoritative interpretation.

For example, Dr. Laura cites Jewish law as holding that the threat of death may validly excuse many sins but not the most serious:

"According to Jewish law, only transgressions involving idolatry, incest, and murder require the individual to suffer death rather than commit the transgression." (72)

We can sympathize with a person who sins because someone holds a gun to his head, and there are certainly examples in Scripture where godly individuals were willing to suffer death rather than deny their God. However, where is this particular teaching in the Bible?

Another Jewish tradition concerns the impact of one individual's repentance on the entire world:

"Rabbinic tradition holds that the power of true repentance is so great that even when only a single person repents, the whole world gains pardon through him. The interpretation is that even one individual's change toward goodness ultimately affects the world." (82)

Again, where in Scripture is any such teaching? This makes one person's salvation powerful enough to gain salvation for the entire human race. Nowhere in the Bible is there such a thought. What we do see is great rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15).

Distorted teachings about forgiveness also arise from rabbinic tradition:

"Jewish tradition holds that forgiveness can be sought from God only for transgressions of laws between a person and God. For transgressions between people, forgiveness must first be sought and obtained from the one who was offended.

A person is not required to forgive if the offense is too egregious and the damage horrendous and irreparable." (87)

This certainly flies in the face of New Testament revelation (and even some Old Testament Scripture). No offense is "too egregious" for the Christian to forgive, based on God's forgiveness of us in Christ. King David acknowledged that *all* sin is against God, even where other people are involved (Psalm 51). A full exposition of forgiveness is beyond the scope of this paper, but we can see that adding human tradition to Scripture is a dangerous venture.

Yet another example makes reference to the possibility of Gentile salvation *by works*. After listing the "Seven Noachide Commandments," Dr. Laura states that:

"Jewish tradition holds that these are universal divine expectations of God and that all non-Jews who observe the Noachide laws will participate in salvation and in the rewards of the world to come." (179)

The Old Testament does have numerous wonderful examples that point to the inclusion of all peoples in God's plan of redemption. However, that salvation is accomplished through the work of Christ, not the observation of these seven "Noachide laws." (These laws include (178-179): establishment of law courts, plus prohibitions against blasphemy, idolatry, sexual immorality, murder, theft, eating a limb torn from a living animal.) Dr. Laura assumes here that people are actually *capable* of keeping these seven commandments in order to earn their eternal salvation. The truth is that *no one* is able to keep God's commandments perfectly and to gain salvation by the law.

Some "Jewish tradition" is not objectionable to believers. For example, "traditional rabbinic interpretation [Exodus 21:23] forbids abortions for birth control" (190). Gossip and public humiliation are considered similar to murder (196). Jewish law forbids sharing harmful information about others even if it is true (200). Christians could agree on these points and cite some of Jesus' teachings as found in the gospels. However, we must be discerning about our acceptance of human tradition.

At one point, Dr. Laura gives us some insight about "rabbinic law," which involves much human interpretation:

"It is typical of rabbinic law and thought that the written text of the Bible is not followed slavishly but is interpreted and reinterpreted by Jewish scholars and teachers in order to preserve its dynamic qualities and

respect for the balance between compassion and justice."
(181)

It is not wrong for people to faithfully study Scripture and to interpret it. Some biblical teachings are more clear than others. The problem here for *Christians* is that Dr. Laura incorporates the biblical interpretations of those who reject Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, and cites those interpretations as *law*. Keeping of the *law*, rather than faith in Christ, is proclaimed as the way of eternal salvation.

The Jewish People

Christianity has its roots in ancient Judaism, and that relationship cannot be ignored as we examine Dr. Laura's teachings. Jesus Christ came into the world through the Jewish people, and God gave His revelation to this unique nation. We need to consider the role of Israel in redemptive history.

Dr. Laura describes the Exodus account as one of "redemption of a people from bondage into a covenant with God to bring to all peoples His character and desire for **universal love and ethical behavior**" (xvi, emphasis added). She believes the continued existence of the Jewish nation over the centuries is an important fact to note, and that the covenant at Mount Sinai was a real event in history:

"Rather than as metaphor, I take the covenant at Sinai as real and true.... I am moved to *faith* because the covenant between the people of Israel and God is *evidenced* by the continued existence of the Jewish people in spite of thousands of years of almost continuous attempts to eliminate them by great and powerful cultures, which have themselves become extinct." (xxii)

Dr. Laura believes that God called the Jews to set an ethical example for the nations of the world:

"By their adherence to a unique way of life, with laws of holiness, justice, generosity, mercy, ethics, and compassion, the whole world would come to know, love, and obey the One and Only God." (xxiii)

Dr. Laura sees the role of Jews as one of bringing God's presence and "basic values" to the world" (xxiii):

"The Jews were to be role models, and their behavior in personal and public life, as commanded by God, would draw

others to follow: ultimately resulting in God's kingdom on earth. God loves all people. We are all made 'in His image.'" (xxiii)

God's role in creating all mankind, however, not just the Jews, is important in the celebration of the Sabbath:

"The Jewish focus on celebrating Creation is important because of its universal message. God created all things and all people. Adam was not Jewish." (108)

Israel's unique status as God's people is not a factor that makes the Jews superior to other peoples:

"Judaism has always rejected all the caste and race ideologies of the ancient world that discriminated against people. The notion of 'chosen people' does not refer to a belief of superiority, perfection, or divinity." (122)

There is *some* truth in all of this. God created a covenant with the nation of Israel, and His people were indeed called to give a picture of holiness to the surrounding pagan nations. This did not make them inherently superior, nor did it cut off the possibility of salvation for people in other nations. On the contrary, God chose this special nation to bring the Messiah into the world with a glorious gospel message to be taken to the ends of the earth. But Dr. Laura misses this most important aspect of the Jewish nation. She sees the Jews bringing God's *law* into the world, but not His *gospel*. She fails to mention the Messiah or to deal with the many prophetic Old Testament texts that speak of His coming. God's *grace* is present in the Old Testament, pointing ahead to Christ, but Dr. Laura brings a message of Jewish moralism. She preaches the law without the Lord who gave that law and fulfilled it on our behalf.

The Nature of God

The First Commandment, notes Dr. Laura, appears as a statement rather than the standard type of commandment (5). She explains that:

"It wouldn't make sense for God to command belief that 'I am the Lord your God...' because, if you didn't already accept God as divine, then God wouldn't have the authority to command anything." (5-6)

Actually, God has the authority whether people accept Him or not. In fact, many do not.

Dr. Laura describes God as "a moral God who demands moral, ethical living, and justice from all mankind" (27). God's holiness, demonstrated in the struggle with Egyptian Pharaoh, allegedly "runs counter to those brutal laws of nature" (25). In discussing the Third Commandment (taking God's name in vain), Dr. Laura describes its purpose in terms of God's holiness:

"...the Third Commandment comes to teach us about the holiness of God, the sacred nature of our relationship with God, and our responsibilities to each other in His name."
(93)

"Giving God a 'bad name' might diminish or demolish people's belief, respect, and awe for God, a tragedy for a world that needs holiness." (63)

It is true that God is absolutely holy, righteous, and just. However, He is also longsuffering, compassionate, and merciful. Dr. Laura's view of God is slanted toward holiness without mercy, particularly since she lacks even an intellectual understanding of the gospel.

Dr. Laura recognizes correctly that God is the Creator, not part of the creation:

"Having '...made the heavens' (Psalm 96:5), God was not an aspect of nature but a reality greater than the universe"
(25).

She also rightly sees that God is infinite, thus exceeding our ability to fully comprehend Him. Having considered the question of whether we can "see" God:

"That we finite beings cannot fathom either the divine or infinity does not give evidence against God's existence, only evidence that there is more beyond ourselves." (26)

Dr. Laura recognizes that man cannot manipulate the God of the Bible, and He thus differs significantly from the false gods of pagan worship:

"This God is unknowable and beyond our finite perceptions. Ancient gods had specific names, usually denoting their specific, limited sphere of influence and power. By invoking their names in special rites, the ancient peoples could manipulate the gods to fulfill the will of people.

The possession of a name was thought to imply control."
(65)

The only problem here is that God *is* knowable because He has chosen to reveal Himself, in His creation, in His Word, and finally in His Son. We cannot have comprehensive knowledge of God, because we are finite, but we can have true knowledge through revelation. While we cannot control the sovereign Lord, He does have specific names in Scripture--many of them--which reveal His character. He is the Lord of Hosts, the God who heals, Creator, deliverer, redeemer, provider, comforter, counselor, judge, lawgiver, Ancient of Days, and many more. Dr. Laura sees God's holiness, and some of her observations about the Ten Commandments are valid applications. However, she has enlarged one aspect of His divine character and stifled other equally important aspects. His mercy, care, and concern for the brokenhearted are not evident in any of her writings.

God of all nations. Dr. Laura recognizes that the God of the Bible rules over all nations, not merely the Jews. She acknowledges something of His transcendence and sovereignty:

"This God [referring to the plagues in Egypt] was outside our prior experience of having a god *contained* by form and name. This God was a Universal God...not manipulated by our desires or magical incantations but had a divine, eternal intent that depended on our participation." (25)

God is not subject to human control, and thus He differs from the pagan idols created by man:

"The God of the Israelites was different from all other 'gods.' His name was to be used in blessings and not in magical incantations. By invoking His name, people could not manipulate this God to do their will." (65)

Unfortunately, Dr. Laura sees the universality of God primarily in terms of an overarching ethical standard applicable to all peoples:

"From the beginning YHWH is not just the Israelite God. He sent Jonah to the non-Israelite city of Ninevah, not to demand conversion but to establish righteous and just behaviors. YHWH is the God of all nations." (66)

It is certainly true that God's righteous standards apply to all people at all times. However, there most definitely *is* a conversion when people turn to Him in repentance and faith, as

occurred in ancient Ninevah. Dr. Laura seems more concerned about *what* God requires than *who* God is; "good behavior" is more important in her scheme than worship.

Religious pluralism. The central focus of this book is ethical standards. Important as that is, Dr. Laura espouses a type of religious pluralism because some of her statements imply that God's ethical standards cross religious boundary lines. In other words, she isn't very concerned with whether a person is a Jew, Christian, Muslim, Mormon, or whatever, as long as that person lives by certain universal ethical standards. For example, in discussing the Sabbath, she says that:

"Most religious faiths gather for communal prayers on the Sabbath, focusing on the importance of community in the social and spiritual life of people. Through this shared communal experience, the values of the community are taught and reinforced." (118, emphasis added)

In the same chapter, she blurs the critical distinctions between Judaism and Christianity:

"For Christians, the Lord's Day is rooted in the Resurrection of Jesus, which took place on the first day of the week (Luke 24:1; John 20:1). The two celebrations express **different theologies** but ultimately circumscribe the **same concept of holiness** or sanctity." (101, emphasis added)

Dr. Laura recognizes that *theology* differs between Jews and Christians, but she believes that they embrace the "same concept" of holiness. No, they do not. There may well be similar standards applicable to outward behavior, such as prohibitions against murder, stealing, and such. However, the New Testament teaches us about progressive sanctification (holiness) as a gracious work of God's Holy Spirit. Those who believe in Christ, *and only those who believe in Christ*, have the indwelling Spirit. Holiness is the result of salvation, not the basis for earning it. The radical difference in theology--Christians embrace the triune God (Father, Son, Spirit) while Jews do not--is reflected in a very different concept of holiness. Dr. Laura sees good behavior (keeping God's law) as a way of earning salvation. Christians do not.

In talking about ethical issues, Dr. Laura again blurs critical distinctions between different religions. For example, when she discusses euthanasia she says that:

"On the issue of euthanasia, Judaism, Catholicism, and some other Christian denominations are in agreement that active euthanasia is forbidden because it is murder." (191)

Elsewhere, Dr. Laura talks about the importance of parents teaching their children to lead godly lives:

"Most parents want their kids to believe in God and be religious, ignoring that a godly life requires more than speech; it requires commitment, sacrifice, and time." (114)

Although this sounds good, Dr. Laura proceeds to quote a *Mormon* listener, as if the particular religion is of no consequence. Mormons are known for high ethical standards, but their theology is a deadly distortion of the Christian faith. Dr. Laura is so overly concerned with ethics for the sake of ethics, regardless of the religious tradition, that sound theology is sacrificed in the process.

Dr. Laura's religion might best be termed *moralism*. For her, "doing good" substitutes for God. Some of what she says about God is correct, but ultimately, she worships good behavior. In a day where too many Christians embrace a "cheap grace," forgetting Paul's exhortations in Romans 6, it would be all too easy to applaud her. However, we must beware not to confuse the Christian concepts of justification and sanctification, which are vitally related but not identical.

Idolatry. Dr. Laura correctly notes man's rebellious desire to "be in control" and to serve self above all else:

"By nature, people prefer total comprehension and control of the outer world, with the intent of serving ourselves. When we live with that notion, we cease being a symbol of what is potentially so special about human beings. We become our own idols with a disturbed sense of sovereignty, filling the world with selfishness, hypocrisy, callousness, terror, and even death." (28)

Self can actually become an idol:

When we think too much of ourselves...we turn ourselves into idols." (42)

In an age when people are concerned with self-esteem, self-love, self-worth, and other selfisms, this is an ever present danger.

Dr. Laura warns that "idolatry is dangerous at a personal level because 'gods,' being created by man, are endowed with human characteristics," in particular, the "baser human desires"

such as unrestricted sex, gluttony, violence, and such (31). Although such desires have indeed characterized the gods of, for example, ancient Greece, Dr. Laura seems here to underestimate the power of underlying *spiritual* desires, such as power and pride, which can be even more deadly. Lusts of the flesh, biblically, are far more inclusive than mere physical desires of the body.

Superstitions and practices such as astrology are rightly condemned by Dr. Laura:

"Superstitions trivialize true religion when superstition turns into a religion of its own.... Ultimately, what we are to do and be is gleaned from the Bible--and not the stars." (36)

"Astrology is just another way for some people to avoid taking responsibility for their lives. By consulting the newspaper or astrologer, people can place the heavy burden of difficult decisions on the answers given by the stars." (37)

The Bible definitely condemns astrology and similar practices of divinization (37, citing Deuteronomy 18:10-12 and other texts). It is true that "to imagine that we can circumvent God is blasphemy" (38). Christians can agree wholeheartedly that Scripture forbids such practices. In today's New Age environment, such religious rituals are reappearing, and we must be prepared to follow God's Word.

Various forms of modern idolatry are noted. People often worship physical appearances:

"When an individual worships his or her looks, it is a form of idolatry.... We live in a society, much like the ancient Greeks, in which the body is worshipped." (56-57)

Excessive work is another modern idol (57-59). Also noted are religious practices wherein people "'use' religion to magnify their own person or personal beliefs" (61). More generally, idolatry may occur whenever any human desire is wrongly elevated:

"A pursuit of the satisfaction of desire without the context of godliness is akin to idolatry." (54)

"Idolatry occurs when one holds any value, idea, or activity higher than God **or morality**." (59, emphasis added)

This last quote does raise concerns. If Dr. Laura had ended the sentence after the word "God," we could wholly agree. However, her addition of the phrase, "or morality," places morality per se on the same level with God. While it is true that Jesus stated that those who love Him will keep His commandments, we face the same danger that captured the Pharisees of His day. When morality becomes an end in itself instead of a loving, worshipful response to God, we are in danger of making moral behavior an idol. Self-righteousness, with an accompanying lack of compassion for others struggling with sin, is the likely result.

The modern focus on feelings, facilitated by popular psychology, is a particular idolatrous concern. Dr. Laura notes the common desire to worship primarily on an emotional level:

"Unfortunately, we are more enticed to worship through our emotions rather than our righteous awe and respect." (41)

Feelings have reached idolatrous levels, thanks to popular therapeutic techniques:

"An almost indiscriminate, idolatrous reverence for feelings has been one of the most insidious consequences of the field of psychology gone 'pop.' Though it can be therapeutic to plumb the depths of an individual's emotional confusion while 'in session,' having feelings become veritable temples of worship has proven disastrous for civilization." (43)

Unfortunately, Dr. Laura fails to appreciate the dangers of concentrating on feelings within the confines of a therapy session. Such concentration is naturally carried out the counseling door and into real life. Nevertheless, Dr. Laura notes the sorry results of victim-oriented counseling:

"Pop psychology has provided a dead end for too many people who see their 'pain of victimhood' as the throne upon which they helplessly reign, sometimes for a sad lifetime." (44)

She recognizes, too, that feelings have replaced facts as a primary way of knowing truth:

"Feelings have been so glorified that facts, or proof one way or the other, are no longer required, because 'feelings' are their own facts." (44)

God, however, does not make feelings the basis for following His commandments:

"God doesn't make your doing good or right contingent upon *your* feeling state or *your* state of mind." (46)

To Dr. Laura's concerns about the exaltation and worship of feelings, we can say "amen." Emotions are one aspect of man, but they are not worthy of our worship, nor do we obtain knowledge simply by "feeling" that something is true or false.

Finally, Dr. Laura comments on the modern tendency to exalt famous individuals, then glory in their downfall:

"We live in a society that preoccupies itself with creating false idols from sports figures, movie and television stars, rock stars, and the like." (39)

"What is ironic is that we elevate them and then enjoy their downfall. We relish their collapse and humiliation, because it restores to ourselves the sense that they aren't better than us after all. Therefore, there is no need to feel bad about ourselves, and we are relieved not to have to grow at all." (40)

"The like," in the first quote, might well include well-known psychologists such as Dr. Laura! Her own popularity has reached unacceptable heights akin to the idolatry she condemns here. One of the biggest concerns about "super star" psychologists such as Dr. Laura is that people cling to their counsel without discernment. Popularity and worldly credentials lead to a reverence that approaches idolatry. That is why papers such as this one must be written!

The Nature of Man

Dr. Laura's view of man is one that contains hints of both evolutionary theory and a "divine spark." She holds a flawed view of sin that distorts the fall, insisting that man was originally created with the inclination to both good and evil.

Evolution and/or a "spark" of divinity. Dr. Laura's earlier books reeked of evolution. This book gives evidence of some departure from a strictly evolutionary view of the origins of man, yet hints of evolution emerge at many points when Dr. Laura refers to man using the term "animal."

At certain points, Dr. Laura appears to have softened or possibly rejected the evolutionary perspective that dominated her earlier books:

"We are not merely well-developed protoplasm; humans are unique in their essence because God 'blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being' (Genesis 1:27)." (177) (NOTE: The term should be *breath* of life, not *soul* of life; then, man being a living *soul*, in this verse.)

Similarly, in a discussion about parents and children, she says:

"Parents and their children both need to behave with the recognition that they are parts of a chain leading straight to God, the Ultimate Creator and Power of the universe, upon whom we are all dependent and grateful." (133)

This view is compared to that of an atheist encountered on an airplane, whose children saw him as merely one step closer to an ape. The comparison implies a rejection of evolution, in favor of a biblical understanding of creation.

Co-author Vogel, in his introductory statements, recognizes that man is not some evolutionary accident:

"To believe in God is to believe that humans are more than accidents of nature. It means that we are endowed with purpose by a higher source, and that our goal is to realize that higher purpose. If each of us creates his own meaning, we also create our own morality. I cannot believe this.... Without God there is no *objective meaning* to life, nor is there an *objective morality*." (xxix)

Unfortunately, there are also numerous occasions where Dr. Laura uses the term "animal" as an adjective to describe man's nature. For example, when she voices her rejection of subjective morality, she states that:

"If each of us designs our own morality, it would be to suit ourselves (that's the **animal** part of us)." (18, emphasis added)

In her introduction, Dr. Laura implies the possibility of progress from an "animal" existence to something distinctly "human":

"What too many people haven't learned about the Bible is that it's filled with wisdom and direction for all ages to elevate our lives above mere frantic, **animal** existence to

the sublime levels humanity is capable of experiencing."
(xiv, emphasis added)

Similarly, in discussing parent-child relations, Dr. Laura proposes an internal dichotomy between "animal" and "human" selves:

"In our internal struggle between our **animal and potentially human selves**, it is easy to disdain and exaggerate parental faults...." (146, emphasis added)

When talking about sex, the issue emerges again:

"Since sex is 'natural,' why should the human **animal** attempt to control its expression?" (214, emphasis added)

Dr. Laura appears to hold an evolutionary view, yet also a creationist perspective:

"When animals engage in sexual relationships, the act is instinctive...to ensure the **continuation of the species.**" (215, emphasis added)

"When two humans, **made in the image of God**, share sexual intimacy, it should have meaning, not simply to fulfill the **animal urges**. Animals do not have sexual relations, they engage in instinctual procreation." (215, emphasis added)

The concept of "continuation of the species" is distinctly evolutionary in tone. At the same time, affirming that human beings are "made in the image of God" contrasts with evolution. Dr. Laura makes a couple of statements comparing the human race to other created beings:

"The keeping of our faith with each other and with God is what separates us from the **rest of the animal world.**" (234, emphasis added)

"It is true that human nature desires more than it needs. **Lower animals** and plants function automatically to take from the environment what they basically need to survive and reproduce." (298, emphasis added)

Apparently, Dr. Laura sees some "animal" aspect to man yet distinguishes man from "lower animals." Her belief about evolutionary theory is not altogether clear in this book.

Perhaps she holds to some form of theistic evolution. There are certainly enough hints of evolution to raise serious concern.

At the same time, there are brief references to a "spark of divinity" in man, an equally unbiblical concept. For example, when discussing the use of language, Dr. Laura says that:

"Language is our way of communicating what we want and reflects who we are. By using bad language, we diminish the **divine spark** within us that defines our humanity. This certainly is not an emulation of God's ways."

(69, emphasis added)

Elsewhere, Dr. Laura roots the prohibition against murder in this same "divine spark" in man:

"Since the human gift of life is endowed with the **spark of divinity** that makes us different from all other life, to take another life wrongfully can be likened to stealing from God and even viewed as the murdering of **something divine.**" (177, emphasis added)

Has Dr. Laura moved from an evolutionary view of man to seeing human beings as "something divine"? At best her view is highly confusing. Man is the *image of God*, but man is not "divine" and has no "spark of divinity" within. This is a critical distinction. Confusing the image of God with divinity merges the Creator with the creature.

Free will. Dr. Laura affirms the moral agency of man, making him responsible for his actions:

"God gives us free will, and we must take responsibility for all aspects of human action. To blame God for our problems and evils is a form of scapegoating that allows us to avoid responsibility for the courage it takes to be willing to stand between evil and the innocent." (70)

"Free will" is taken too far, denying God's sovereignty and man's utter helplessness apart from His grace:

"Though God may have some grand plan for us, He has also given us free will to determine our fate." (72)

The Bible teaches that man's will is in bondage to sin. However, it is true that we are responsible for our actions and cannot blame God.

Sin. Many modern psychologists (and others) offer various "explanations" for man's sin. Dr. Laura professes her departure from such views, claiming instead that man sins out of choice:

"Some people find it unfathomable that people would choose to do something wrong or illegal. Since they wish to maintain their fantasy that 'people are inherently good unless something outside them makes them do it,' they search for economic and psychological motives rather than accept the fact that people choose to do evil." (251)

It is true that man is a moral agent, responsible before God for sin. We can agree that psychological explanations abound and that they are off the biblical mark. However, Dr. Laura has an explanation of her own, one that ultimately places the responsibility back onto God for the state in which man was created. She fails to recognize man's original righteousness, thus implicitly denying the reality and gravity of the fall:

"Judaism teaches that God created in man the inclination to good and the **inclination to evil**. Without freedom to sin, there is no freedom to act righteously."
(71, emphasis added)

This is wrong. God did not create the *inclination to sin* in man! God created Adam holy and righteous. This statement makes God the author of sin and minimizes the seriousness of the fall. Man was created with a free will, *able* to do good or evil, but not *inclined* to evil. Adam chose to sin, but not because God created him with any sinful inclination. The freedom of man's will was lost at the fall along with his original righteousness, so that man is in bondage to sin unless regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Dr. Laura doesn't see that bondage, evidently believing that it is theoretically possible for man *not* to sin:

"Sin is an option, not an inevitability." (71)

At this point in redemptive history, after man's fall, sin is inevitable. We are born with a sinful nature. That fact does not negate responsibility, however. We inevitably sin, yet we remain responsible for that sin.

Interestingly, Dr. Laura elsewhere recognizes human limitations, contrary to her assertion that sin is not inevitable:

"The reality is that one can believe and live by standards...but imperfectly. That is not hypocrisy, that

is the reality of the limitations of all human beings to attaining divinity." (293)

Here, Dr. Laura acknowledges that people are not actually divine and are not capable of perfectly keeping the law of God. This is much closer to biblical truth. She even believes in the possibility that man may be *unable* to follow God's commandments under certain circumstances. She would thus excuse some sins--but not all--where duress is present:

"Although God's commandments are the standard for our behavior, God is understanding about our possible inability to carry them out under duress.... To put all this into a contemporary context, certain sins are not to be committed, even under duress.... These kinds of behaviors profane the name of God because it is through our actions that His will, intent, and character is made evident on the earth for all peoples." (73)

Although we surely want to maintain a humble, compassionate spirit toward others struggling with sin, the Bible doesn't offer a "duress defense" for particular sins. What it does offer, however, is so much better: the gospel, wherein Christ has made the perfect, complete, and final sacrifice for our sins.

Dr. Laura waffles in regard to whether sin is purely external behavior or also involves the inner man. Her overriding emphasis appears to be external in nature:

"Though the pleasure of the flesh can lead us to sin, we can perform the righteous acts that God desires almost exclusively through the physical nature of our bodies." (186)

It is noted that "for **some** religious traditions, it is possible to 'sin in the heart'" (186, emphasis added). Elsewhere, Dr. Laura is at least willing to affirm that sin may *begin* in the heart:

"...the actual 'doing' of a forbidden, immoral, unjust, or unkind act doesn't begin with the act. It begins in the *mind* and *heart* with a sequence of feelings, thoughts, and planning that can and often do lead to the breaking of the first nine commandments." (300)

Rightly citing Old Testament Scripture, she acknowledges in her discussion of the Tenth Commandment that God is deeply concerned about the human heart:

"Why do we imagine that God would not be concerned with our thoughts and hearts when Psalm 15:1-2 suggests that the opposite is true?" (301)

"It would seem that God's concern is not only in commanding good deeds but our inner convictions and goodness of thoughts and desires is also required." (301)

Mere external holiness, unaccompanied by godliness in the heart, does not truly meet God's standards:

"We are not saints just because we've avoided committing commandments one to nine if we are filled with resentment against others for what they do or have, or feel empty for what we don't have. Our potential godliness is sullied by the rotting in our souls of envy, greed, and jealousy." (314)

Again, however, she sees sin--this time in the heart--as something "natural" to human nature, rather than an aberration:

"Covetous desires, though apparently natural to the human condition, are to be countered with a recommitment to values outside our ego and selfishness. When this is not done, we are ripe to add to the misery of the world." (306)

Concern about the heart emerges repeatedly throughout all of Scripture. References are numerous, but a couple of examples will illustrate the point. In Ezekiel 14:1-11, God expresses urgent concern about the idols of the *heart* in Israel. Jesus, similarly, taught that sin is rooted in the heart (Matthew 15:15-20). Dr. Laura recognizes at many points that sin is centered in the heart. However, the "righteous acts that God requires" most definitely *cannot* be performed "almost exclusively through the physical nature of our bodies" (186). Not even close! The Pharisees prided themselves in their external, rigid keeping of the law. Dr. Laura echoes them in her emphasis on external behavior.

God in relation to man. Many people today, even professing believers, have a distorted view of who God is and how He relates to man. That distortion is reflected in some of the calls Dr. Laura receives:

"Many people call my program and describe a relationship with God as one in which God loves and comforts them or sometimes does them favors." (2)

God does, of course, love and comfort His people. He has done the greatest "favor" in all of history by providing redemption. Nevertheless, it is true that many people have forgotten about His righteous and holy character. Dr. Laura, in general, seems to magnify God's holiness and to minimize His mercy and grace. Not knowing Christ, this is hardly a surprise. We live in a time where morality is unraveling and people need to be reminded of God's law, but the reminder must be accompanied by the hope of the gospel.

The relationship of God and man is often portrayed in Scripture as one of parent and child. Dr. Laura says that "the human-divine relationship can be compared to the child-parent relationship" in which rules appear arbitrary (10). She notes that God's law is authoritative because of God's identity as Father:

"The Ten Commandments are binding because they were given by God, the parent of all humanity." (11)

However, departing from Scripture, Dr. Laura believes that just as children grow up and become independent, so does humanity:

"From Eden to present time, the God-human relationship demonstrates a subtle evolution, if not in power, then in responsibility." (10)

"As a parent must finally let go of the bicycle seat and allow a child to move and balance on his own, God gives us all we need and lets us go.... With free will, we choose each minute of each day between the sacred and the ordinary." (11)

This is a most serious departure from God's Word. Man never "grows up" in relation to God, but remains forever in the position of child. The logical result of this line of reasoning would be man's ultimate autonomy.

Dr. Laura does correctly see that parents have a responsibility to teach their children about God:

"Parents are their children's introduction to godly love as well as authority. When that parental authority is misused...God is often the safest target for our hurt and rage." (23)

From child's perspective, she states that:

"What they use to **imagine God** turns out to be the authority model with which they're most familiar--their parents."
(23, emphasis added)

Parents are indeed called to teach their children about God and His Word. The only concern about this last quote is that the parent-child image is only of many ways in which Scripture describes the relationship of God and man. It is not the only way. Freud, an avowed atheist, taught that God is merely a "projection," an imaginary sort of parent. However, children do not merely "imagine" God.

Another problem emerges when Dr. Laura says that:

"We are all the children of God and share our unity through the experience of Creation." (108)

While God is truly the Creator of all mankind, not all people are "children of God," but only those who are adopted because they believe in Christ (John 1:11-13).

Dr. Laura also discusses God's relationship to our daily lives, including natural events. She rightly notes that God is personally involved in our lives *today* as well as in the past history of the human race:

"It is not enough to believe in the 'historical God'; we must also believe in the 'personal God,' i.e., to see God involved in our daily lives." (16)

After noting that "primitive cultures actually worshipped nature directly" (119), she cites Deuteronomy 11:13-14 as support for her statement that:

"Even our biblical ancestors believed that human behavior was a causal factor in explaining major natural events."
(120)

Dr. Laura rejects the thesis that human behavior causes natural events. She apparently also rejects the idea that *God* causes such events:

"Perhaps a more reasonable perspective than simple divine one-for-one retribution would be to appreciate that God created the universe and the physical forces like wind, moving earth plates, and tides, to name a few....

Certainly, **even if God were coordinating certain natural events**, it is in our response to these physical realities that we can show good sense and conscience--or not."
(121, emphasis added)

Dr. Laura denies God's providence, His ongoing care for His creation. He truly *is* coordinating natural events! In fact, He causes all things (including natural events) to work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes (Romans 8:28). Dr. Laura has a better view of biblical truth when she speaks of the dominion God has given to man:

"We can try to control ourselves by respecting the fact that God, while giving us dominion over nature, expects us to nurture, not deplete or destroy, nature for our short-sighted gains." (121)

Yes, God has entrusted us with the care of His creation. We are stewards, accountable before Him for our use (or abuse) of what He has created and provided for us.

As for human behavior "causing" natural events, we can find accounts in Scripture where God has used natural forces to accomplish His purposes. For example, in 1 Kings, He withheld rain for three years while Elijah called for repentance (1 Kings 17-19). In the text Dr. Laura cites, Deuteronomy 11:11-13, human behavior does not cause natural events; rather, God promises that *He* will cause the rain to fall if they obey His commandments. God is always in control of His creation, working all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11).

God's relationship to man is sometimes described in the Bible as analogous to marriage. Dr. Laura compares the 10 commandments to a "pre-nuptial agreement," noting that marriage is a "sacred covenant" (8). Elsewhere, she reminds her readers that such a covenant is far more than a mere humanly created contract:

"Marriage is not just a contract between two people, but rather it is a sacred covenant, much like the relationship between God and people." (218)

The concept of covenant runs throughout the Scripture, in both Old and New Testaments. There are both blessings and curses in biblical covenants:

"...covenants made with God represent a relationship of obligations and benefits...the First Commandment reminds us that our relationship with God is not *casual* but *covenantal*." (12)

Dr. Laura believes that God's first covenant was with Noah:

"Before Noah, there was no covenant. God made a 'legal relationship' with Noah, through which He made ethical demands through laws." (179)

God did make a covenant with Noah, but it wasn't the first one. God made an ethical demand on the first man, Adam. Adam broke the covenant, bringing sin and death on the entire human race.

Dr. Laura acknowledges the Mosaic Covenant, which she believes is alive and well today:

"Israel's continuous presence...serves as evidence that God is alive and well and has not abandoned his promises to Abraham, nor to all humanity--no matter how ungodly our behavior continues to be." (13)

She believes this particular covenant remains as an open offer to people of all times:

"These words were not spoken just to the generation of Moses but are addressed to you and me today, because God continues to offer his covenant for those who hear the call and are *willing* to respond." (15)

Dr. Laura's conclusion is based partly on the fact that in the original Hebrew, "your God" in the First Commandment is in singular form (15). Thus she would address the Ten Commandments to individuals, as well as God's call to enter into a covenant. She is correct about the Hebrew grammar, but fails to recognize God's frequent dealing with the nation of Israel as a single unit. In our individualistic culture, the corporate community of ancient times is a strange concept. The Mosaic Covenant was actually made with the nation of Israel, although God's moral laws are binding on all peoples, and the *gospel* is now taken to the ends of the earth. Dr. Laura never gets beyond the Mosaic Covenant, where the central focus is on the law. As the apostle Paul taught, God's law is good and holy. However, one of its prime purposes is to lead us to Christ, to show us our desperate need for God's mercy. In Jeremiah 31:31-34, God promised a new and better covenant. Christ is the Mediator of that covenant (Hebrews 9:15), as described more fully in Hebrews 10:15ff.

There is an overarching unity to God's covenant of grace with His people, as Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament law and prophets, including God's promises to Abraham. God gave the law, not only as the infallible guide for our lives, but to prove that we needed a Savior because we couldn't possibly fulfill it. Dr. Laura misses the point. She thus holds a truncated view of the relationship between God and man. God is Judge and Lawgiver in her scheme. That is true, but He is also Redeemer and Savior, providing the perfect and final sacrifice for our sins.

Specific Issues and Applications

In any critique, it is important to present a fair and accurate summary of another's teachings. For each of the Ten Commandments, Dr. Laura does offer specific life applications that would be agreeable to Christians. Some of these are:

1. **First Commandment:** Monotheism is affirmed, along with the authority of the one true God to give commandments to all people (6).
2. **Second Commandment:** Idolatry is condemned (see earlier discussion), from the carved images of ancient times to the idolatrous love of self and feelings of today.
3. **Third Commandment:** Blaming God, or displaying anger toward Him, is rightly condemned by this command (70). The conduct of religious leaders is discussed, and Dr. Laura rightly notes that scandals perpetuate erroneous conceptions of religion as being hypocritical (77). Political leaders, too, take oaths of office and then sinfully abuse their positions (86). Some such politicians wrongly use religion to gain the respect of the voters (87).
4. **Fourth Commandment:** Setting aside one day for rest reminded the Israelites about how God had freed them from slavery (122). It is a reminder to modern man that he is not indispensable, that only God is God (124).
5. **Fifth Commandment:** The obligation of parents, to teach morality and ethics to their children, is rightly noted (129). Honoring parents helps us to honor God (139) and helps ensure proper care for the elderly (155). Even where parents have been sinful, they cannot be blamed for all

problems in a person's later life (160). Teachers are also due respect (169-170).

6. **Sixth Commandment:** Abortion, euthanasia, suicide, and other wrongful forms of killing are condemned, but Dr. Laura distinguishes these from what occurs in war, capital punishment, and self-defense (175, 182).

7. **Seventh Commandment:** Our culture has accepted and even "glamorized" sexual immorality, but God's law still affirms that sex should remain within the covenant of marriage.

8. **Eighth Commandment:** Many different forms of theft are discussed, along with excuses people use.

9. **Ninth Commandment:** Dr. Laura laments the valuing of "rights" about responsibilities in our society. "Recovered" memories are discussed in this commandment about bearing false witness, along with various forms of lying.

10. **Tenth Commandment:** The difference between "needs" and desires is noted. Desire may be good or evil, depending on the object and means of achieving it.

In addition, there are particular contemporary ethical issues discussed at length. While deploring Dr. Laura's lack of grace, we might agree with some of her general observations on such issues.

Abortion. In discussing the Sixth Commandment (murder), Dr. Laura brings in this sensitive and controversial issue. Elevation of self above others is a factor she cites as contributing to the problem:

"Not identifying and regarding others as humans as important as ourselves is a major issue in the occurrence of murders. Liberal abortion laws and attitudes have contributed, in my opinion, to the horror of newborn murders and abandonment." (174)

She notes that "the 'pro-life' and 'pro-choice' activists do not agree on whether abortion is murder" (189). Exodus 21:23 is a passage that Dr. Laura cites as grammatically ambiguous on the issue:

"The Christian reading creates a very clear prohibition and punitive attitude toward abortion as murder. The

translation of the original Hebrew does not establish a biblical prohibition of abortion; however, traditional rabbinic interpretation forbids abortions for birth control." (189-190)

Although we should heartily agree that abortion is not an appropriate method of birth control, note the appeal to "rabbinic interpretation." This appeal continues, and does not lead to a very strong pro-life position:

"Although the fetus is not considered a full life for the purpose of defining murder, it is considered a potential life--not to be terminated without sufficient cause [danger to the mother's life or sanity].... In Jewish tradition, the status of the fetus as independent life does not occur until after the birth of some part of the fetus." (190)

There are certainly other texts to which we could appeal to establish the status of the unborn child as a "full life" (Psalm 139; Jeremiah 1:4; Luke 1:41). We might also note that pregnancies do not occur in a vacuum. There are clear *choices* involved prior to conception, in particular, the choice to engage in sexual intercourse. (It is strange that these pre-pregnancy choices are normally never discussed in connection with abortion.) Here, it is important to note that while Dr. Laura might be in agreement with many believers that abortion is wrong, she relies heavily on "Jewish tradition" for her position. We don't need a well-known psychologist (Jewish or otherwise) to think through these critical ethical issues and reach biblical conclusions. If God uses her radio program to cause people to think correctly about abortion and halt the slaughter, we can rejoice in His sovereignty. However, we need to be opening our Bibles for answers rather than turning on our radios. Also, we must critically examine the manner in which Dr. Laura reaches her conclusions. Sometimes we agree; sometimes we do not.

"Recovered" memories. Dr. Laura notes the controversial nature of this current phenomenon:

"The current scandals over so-called 'recovered memories' of childhood sexual abuse are emotionally and sociopolitically sensitive." (277)

Dr. Laura has not bought into the popular recovered memory thesis that permeates so much current therapy. She is aware that false accusations may result and wreak havoc on families involved:

"While in private practice years ago, I witnessed the devastation of a family because of the false accusation of child molestation." (278)

These comments come in the context of a discussion of bearing false witness (Ninth Commandment). On this particular issue, Christians concerned with biblical truth should agree with Dr. Laura's conclusions. Freudian psychoanalysis, creeping even into the church, has contributed to many false accusations and the damage that ensues.

Self-esteem. Unlike many contemporary psychologists, Dr. Laura rejects the self-esteem movement. (It is interesting that she has been the pulpit guest of Robert Schuller, who has promoted self-love and self-esteem theology in the church for many years! In today's psychologized church, strange alliances do occur.) She pits responsible living against some of the tenets of self-esteem theory:

"The movements' promoters held that blaming, which includes holding anyone responsible for his behavior, was a psychological assault on self-esteem, leading only to destructive behaviors." (47)

Dr. Laura rightly states that:

"It is not a love of self that permits, stimulates, and inspires decency and righteousness, it is a love of God." (47)

Indeed, the New Testament affirms that those redeemed by Christ are to live for Him rather than for self (2 Corinthians 5:15). Dr. Laura also observes correctly that while "the American public has turned the pursuit of happiness into a form of idolatry" (47), "the ultimate human happiness is in relationship to God" (48). Dr. Laura describes the "moral person" as "one who has come to enjoy the love of doing and being good" (48). This is true, although she fails to realize that the Holy Spirit is required in order to truly love what is good and to love God. Apart from Christ and His Spirit, man naturally loves and serves self rather than God.

Dr. Laura notes that even parental concern for children is too often linked to self-esteem:

"...the 'me-generation' folks often only see their children as extensions of their own egos and defend against any assault on their self-esteem." (134)

In addition, there are many groups in our society with agendas demanding their rights (homosexuals, feminists, and others), "based upon the notions of oppressions, hardship, prejudice, and entitlement" (135). Dr. Laura sees religion serving to shift the focus away from self:

"One of the main functions of religion is to return our focus to the bigger picture, instead of supporting the myopic view that only what affects me or mine is important." (135)

Meanwhile, self-esteem teachings have not achieved good results:

"The loss of respect, the emphasis on 'self-respect,' and the overempowerment of children are not positive changes." (137)

The reason such teachings are so dangerous is that man is inclined toward sin, not godliness. Dr. Laura sees something of the problem, but fails to bring in the work of Christ and power of the Holy Spirit as the biblical solution.

Rejection of self-esteem is not a total rejection. Dr. Laura evidently believes that elevation of self is acceptable so long as no one else is hurt:

"One can elevate oneself in whatever way one wishes, but it is unethical to do so by diminishing the worth of another." (204)

The second half of this sentence has some truth, but are we really free to elevate ourselves in any other manner that suits us (Philippians 2:3-5)?

Self-worth is evidently considered acceptable to Dr. Laura if it grounded in responsible behavior, such as honest work:

"If self-worth is judged at least in some part by one's profession, then we should respect all types of labor." (117)

We can be pleased that Dr. Laura does not buy into the entire self-esteem movement. Some of her comments are very good, but her teachings should be viewed with caution because she condones the elevation of self under some circumstances.

Suicide. Dr. Laura notes the fact that suicide is biblically prohibited:

"Since our bodies are not ours, not only is the taking of another life forbidden, but so is the taking of our own life." (187)

Unfortunately, her reasoning exceeds the bounds of Scripture:

"...taking one's own life potentially undermines the cosmic order of the universe. Our lives are endowed with purpose, and the challenge is to find that meaning." (187)

"Suicide is a crime against the self and against God.... Each suicide is a profound loss for all humanity and history, since that person's contribution and the subtle or dramatic impact that might have been [sic] lost." (188)

Suicide is a sin, but it doesn't undermine the "cosmic order of the universe." It is sinful because man is the image of God, and He is the author of life. The first quote above states a more biblical position, in that our lives are not our own (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Dr. Laura has no biblical counsel to offer concerning the eternity destiny of those who kill themselves:

"The eternal salvation of people who have taken their own lives is, of course, God's venue. By ways known to Him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance." (188)

There is no further opportunity for repentance after death. Man dies once and then faces God's judgment (Hebrews 9:27). It is possible to conceive of circumstances wherein a person who has committed suicide may nevertheless enter into heaven (beyond the scope of this paper), but that is because the basis for salvation is the work of *Christ*, not the works of man.

We can find specific instances where Christians would agree with Dr. Laura's general conclusions: abortion and suicide are prohibited, "recovered" memories can devastate families, and the self-esteem movement has created many dangers. However, it is important to carefully examine the basis underlying her conclusions. That basis is not necessarily biblical.

Conclusion

Dr. Laura's recurrent theme is good behavior, even godly behavior. Sometimes she hits the biblical target. For example, citing the *New Testament*, she notes that love for God is demonstrated by keeping His law.

"Love must be seen as a verb, and as a verb, it requires action; '...therefore love is the fulfilling of the law' (Romans 13:10)." (9)

Jesus, too, said that those who love Him will keep His commandments (John 14:15).

Noting that the Hebrew word "holy" is concerned with setting something or someone apart for a special purpose:

"When we live each day conscious of the fact that we are one of the ways in which God brings goodness and righteousness into the world, we become holy vehicles." (9)

Scripture does say to let our light shine before men so they see our good works and glorify our heavenly Father (Matthew 5:16).

It is also true that we show God our gratitude for His grace by keeping His Word. Dr. Laura sees this, but unfortunately fails to distinguish Christianity from Judaism:

"Whether by the covenant at Sinai or by Jesus' resurrection, we are all charged, through a sense of duty and gratitude, to demonstrate appreciation of God's saving grace through the way we act." (13)

The Jews at Mount Sinai had only a veiled revelation of God's saving grace, the promise of a Savior to be sent centuries later. As believers, we have the full revelation. Dr. Laura offers us a "Jewish moralism" at a time when society is decadent and even Christians take God's grace for granted. But people need more than the law. People need the *Lord*. Bare law without the Lord leads only to despair and ultimately destruction.

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