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July 4, 2015: Can God Do a New Thing?

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Title: Can God Do a New Thing?

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7/4/2015—This may seem a strange question for a hallowed secularism blog, but it is the gay marriage question. A controversy has broken out on a law and religion listserve about the view of the New Testament on gay marriage. Or on marriage generally. But this controversy goes beyond law. It is the basis for most of the opposition to gay marriage in America today—or a lot of it. One has to start with the acknowledgment that Jesus would have been horrified by the prospect of gay marriage. Of course he would, because such relations were unclean under the Old Testament purity code. But so was, most particularly, eating ham. Or not being circumcised. The purity code was plainly abolished by God when Peter appealed to it in the Book of Acts. “What God has made pure, you must not call unholy”—or in the underlying Hebrew terms, what God has made kosher, you must not call treif. The gentiles—today Christians—who condemn gay marriage do not understand that they themselves were regarded as unholy by the purity code and by Jesus--"It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."--until Jesus himself learned the lesson that Peter had to relearn after Jesus' death. That code is no more. So the only Gospel question about gay marriage is whether God has made it kosher. Even to a nonaffiliated former practitioner like myself, it is clear that God has done a mighty act, has broken down a new barrier. But it is as hard for some religious people to accept that God does a new thing, as it was to many Jews in Jesus' day to imagine that gentiles were now included in the Kingdom of God.