

Be Different
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Deuteronomy 14

"God loves us as we are, but he loves us too much to leave us that way." - Anonymous

We don't know who came up with that quote, but we hear Pastor Johnny cite it from time to time.

Put another way, when you and I become a believer in Christ, the change in our hearts should be evident to all around us. As the title of today's lesson says, we should "BE DIFFERENT" from who we USED TO BE and from the UNSAVED world around us.

Here's a "warm up" question: In what ways does your relationship with God through faith in Christ translate into a distinctive lifestyle? (In terms of both attitude and actions). (Discussion)

Examples: How do I respond when I am provoked or mistreated? What about my "wants and desires"? (T.W. Hunt - "God changed my 'wants'") What about my conduct, speech, habit?

We serve a DISTINCTIVE GOD, so we should LIVE A DISTINCTIVE LIFE.

As we look at Deuteronomy 14, in the Holman Old Testament Commentary, Max Anders gives us an overview of this part of Deuteronomy "in a nutshell":

"God decreed that the people of Israel should be distinctive in their behavior, their diet, and their worship practices. In everything...they were to remember their special standing before Him and rejoice in His goodness."

Deuteronomy 14:1-2

1 You are the children of the LORD your God. Do not cut yourselves or shave the front of your heads for the dead, 2 for you are a people holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession.

Remember the context and setting: The Israelites are about to go into the Promised Land (without Moses) so he has reminded them of the Ten Commandments and now is giving them very specific instructions for how to live their lives in this NEW LAND among PAGAN CULTURES.

- Verse 1 - What do CHILDREN ALWAYS ASK when you tell them what to do or not do?
- Children always ask "WHY?"

- Verse 1 starts with WHY they are to do what Moses tells them: "You are the children of the LORD your God."
- Then in verse 1 he gives them direction that is confusing to you and me: Don't "cut yourselves or shave the front of your head for the dead." Huh?
- You see, in pagan cultures in that day, lacerating (cutting) the body and shaving the head, were associated with mourning.
- Moses is saying "don't imitate the practices of the pagans around you."
- God had the power to overcome death; His people were to reflect his great power in their reactions to death itself. (Holman OT Commentary)
- Verse 2 really swings back to what this is all about:

2 for you are a people holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession.

- John MacArthur "Over 250 times, Moses emphasized to Israel, "the Lord YOUR God."
- Because they were God's "chosen people", His "treasured possession", they were to live DIFFERENTLY from the rest of the world. The same applies to BELIEVERS IN CHRIST TODAY
- In 1 Peter 1:14-16 (NIV) Peter quotes Leviticus 11...

14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

"God loves us as we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way."

- For the next few verses in Deuteronomy 14 Moses gives them instructions about what to eat and not eat
- In verse 3 he says "You shall not eat any detestable thing."
- Then he lists "these are animals you MAY eat" and "these you MAY NOT eat"
- And in verses 9-11 he again tells them WHY and WHY NOT
- You can eat what is CLEAN but not what is UNCLEAR
- He's calling them to live a CLEAN lifestyle
- People love to debate about this scripture and the book of Leviticus
- Why would God say it's an abomination to eat certain things?
- Some point to health and sanitation, that God was protecting them from eating things that, in that day without a modern kitchen might make them sick.
- It's possible that health concerns were a factor...one day we'll ask God that.
- But here is what commentators and theologians all agree on: God was using these rules to call His people to be DISTINCT and DIFFERENT from the PAGANS around them.
- Here's another thing we know from scripture: These rules about CLEAN and UNCLEAR foods were FOR THEM AT THAT TIME. With the NEW COVENANT through Christ those rules don't apply to you and me today.
- Paul wrote in Roman 14:14:

14 I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.

The new covenant in Christ did away with keeping rules about what was CLEAN and UNCLEAN to eat. Instead, we are governed by our relationship with Christ.

Paul also wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV)

31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Here's the question we have to PRAYERFULLY ASK ourselves: Does what I choose to DO, or how I choose to ACT, or what I choose to CONSUME GLORIFY GOD?

Though the rules of CLEAN/UNCLEAN in Deuteronomy don't apply to us in the same way, God does expect us to live a CLEAN lifestyle that is honoring to Him and makes us DISTINCTIVE.

Discussion Question: How do we balance maintaining a CLEAN lifestyle that is honoring to God, yet not becoming legalistic to the point that we repel or can't relate to the people we need to reach for Christ?

(Discussion)

I think it's the difference between OBEDIENCE and OPINION.

Here is what I've come up with as a way to try to measure if I'm being OBEDIENT or if I'm being LEGALISTIC in some area of life. If an UNBELIEVER asked me why I think something is wrong for anyone (sin) or just wrong for me...

1. Can I point to SCRIPTURE (IN CONTEXT) to show that I'm being OBEDIENT to a command and not just making up rules based on MY OPINION?
2. If I can't point to a specific command in scripture; can I share that through prayer I've determined something is wrong for ME...but may NOT be wrong for YOU?
3. Is the behavior illegal; immoral; or just unwise?

When it comes to INTERACTING with UNBELIEVERS...

1. Am I UNREALISTICALLY expecting an UNBELIEVER to act the way a CHANGED CHILD OF GOD would act? Pagans will be pagans, why are we surprised?
2. Do I SHUN those who don't think, act, or look like me? If so, I must ask myself, "Who did Jesus hang out with when He was on earth?"
3. Do I harbor an ARROGANT, HOLIER THAN THOU attitude or a heart of LOVE?

God called us to be DIFFERENT (HOLY) but to also be GRACE FILLED.

Two more areas in which we are to be DIFFERENT

Deuteronomy 14:22-23

22 Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. 23 Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.

- Deuteronomy 14:22-23 talks about TITHING. Not only is TITHING commanded, it teaches us an important concept.
- Question: When we are faithful in giving back to God the TITHE (and even more) what does it teach us about our relationship with God?
 - Tithing teaches me to TRUST GOD to provide for my needs.
 - It also teaches me to REVERE GOD as my SOURCE:

Warren Wiersbe writes:

The people of Israel were to be generous with tithes and offerings because the Lord had been generous with them. Each time they brought their tithes and gifts to the sanctuary and enjoyed a thanksgiving feast, it would teach them to fear the Lord (Deut. 14:23), because if the Lord hadn't blessed them, they would have nothing to eat and nothing to give. As David said, everything we give to God first comes from His hand and it all belongs to Him (1 Chron. 29:16). When we cease to fear God and fail to appreciate His bountiful provision, we become proud and start to take His blessings for granted. Then the Lord has to discipline us to

- Question: What blessings have YOU felt by being a TITHER?
 - I get to be a part of God's work in building His kingdom. I have "skin in the game".

We're not only to BE DIFFERENT by our STEWARDSHIP as a TITHER, we're to also be DIFFERENT by having a GENEROUS HEART

Deuteronomy 15:7-11 [If short on time...just verses 7,8,10, and 11]

7 If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. 8 Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. 9 Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," so that you do not show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the LORD against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. 10 Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. 11 There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

- Verse 11 makes it clear: "I command you to be openhanded (GENEROUS) to the poor and needy in your land."
- [OPTIONAL IF SHORT ON TIME:] But, let me clarify something: In verse 9 he alludes to "the seventh year, the year for canceling debts"
- If an Israelite was all about the money, they wouldn't lend to someone in need if the "Sabbath year" or "year of Jubilee" was near because they knew they'd have to forgive the debt and would miss out on seven years of payments.
- The point is: we're called to be GENEROUS to the poor and not DO THE MATH on whether it's good business or not.
- If we have it, they need it, and we can spare it...we should GIVE IT.

So, What's The Takeaway?

- God loves us as we are, but he loves us too much to leave us that way.
- While we are SAVED BY GRACE and NOT WORKS, still, we are CALLED TO LIVE A LIFESTYLE that is DISTINCTIVE and DIFFERENT from the world around us.
- Jesus said in Matthew 5:16 (NIV) 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.
- As we strive to BE DIFFERENT we also need to take care not to BE LEGALISTIC but LOVING...to make sure our DIFFERENCE is OBEDIENCE and not OPINION, PRIDE, or ARROGANCE.
- We can BE DIFFERENT by giving back to God while trusting Him to provide for our needs
- Any by, BEING GENEROUS to those in need around us.