

Message #19**Deuteronomy 14:1-29**

Doug McIntosh, in his commentary on Deuteronomy, told a funny story I want to use today (*Deuteronomy*, p. 179).

There was a minister who loved golf, but his schedule had not permitted him to play for weeks. So he sat at his desk one day and looked at his calendar trying to figure out when he could play a round of golf.

He finally determined that the only day he could play would be on a Sunday. The problem is, he had preached for years against skipping church to play golf. So he decided he would need to get a guest speaker in on a Sunday and then travel to a golf course far away where no one knew him.

As he arrived, he got out of his car and got his clubs out and went to the clubhouse to check in. He was nervous as he did this and he looked around at everyone he saw and breathed a sigh of relief. No one there knew who he was. Well he went to the first hole and took some practice swings and as he was practicing, an angel reported to the Lord that this minister was being a hypocrite and he was down there about to play golf on Sunday when he should be in worship services. So the Lord said, I know what I'll do.

Just as the minister swung at the first ball, God caused a gust of wind to pick up the ball in the air and drop it right in the hole for a hole in one. Well the angel was perplexed. So he talked to the Lord about this method of chastisement. The Lord said, "Now think about it; who can he tell?"

Someone said, "God does love His people as they are; but He loves them too much to leave them that way." God's people are to be different from the people of the world and that point is seen here in Deuteronomy.

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE TO LIVE THEIR LIVES IN A DISTINCT WAY THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM THE HEATHEN WORLD.

We are in a section of Deuteronomy in which Moses is establishing that a relationship with God is designed to affect every area of a person's life.

Verse 2 makes it very clear that God wants His sons and daughters to be holy and set apart as His children. He wants His people to reflect the fact that they have been chosen by God out of all the people of the world and that they are the property and the possession of God. That is what God wants for Israel and that is what God wants for us.

Now there were certain situations and applications of God's word they were to make in order to display that they were God's people in the world in which they lived. It did not matter what the rest of the world was doing, this is what God wanted His people to do to make a statement that we are God's people:

GODLY DIFFERENCE #1 – God’s people were to demonstrate to this world that they were God’s people in the way they mourned. **14:1**

God did not want His people mourning in the same way the rest of the world mourns, when someone dies.

Back in this culture, the pagan nations would mourn the dead by cutting themselves and by shaving their foreheads. These people would react to the death of a loved one in bizarre ways.

God says I don’t want My people acting like that when a loved one dies. What God’s people did externally or did not do externally was to make a statement about their spirituality.

In I Kings 18:28 we get a graphic description of what these pagan people did in their Baal worship—“So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their customs with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them.”

God says I do not want My people behaving like that. I do not want My people acting like that. When you face the death of a loved one, face it and trust Me. There is nothing wrong with being sad and mourning, but don’t fall apart and don’t do crazy religious things.

By your quiet steadfast faith in Me, you make a statement that you trust Me and are My people, even when you face the death of a loved one.

GODLY DIFFERENCE #2 – God’s people were to demonstrate to this world that they were God’s people in what they ate. **14:3-21**

Verse 3 begins with the statement that God’s people demonstrate they are God’s people by not eating “detestable” things. That word detestable means that these were things God abhorred that were repulsive to Him.

Now God made these animals, so what made them detestable was the way heathens were using them. The Canaanites and heathens were using these different animals in their heathen worship services and God did not want His people even eating the animals they were using.

We are not under these dietary restrictions today and you may eat anything you want because God has lifted the eating and dietary restrictions (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:14-15; Acts 11:9; Romans 14:14; I Timothy 4:3-5).

Back at this point in time, as Israel was about to enter the Promised Land, God was the One who determined what was clean and what was unclean as far as the animals were concerned. It was His prerogative as God. It was His declaration. So later in N.T. times, He will declare that all the animals are clean and good. But in this culture, these restrictions needed to be followed:

Dietary Mandate #1 - The animals God's people may eat. **14:4-6**

It is obvious from this list that Israel had plenty of good options of what they could eat. Any restrictions would not prevent them from having a good meal. They could eat ox, sheep, goats, deer, gazelles, roebuck, wild goats, the ibex, antelope and mountain sheep. They could eat any animal that divided the hoof and chewed the cud. All of these meats were permitted, so it wasn't like God didn't give His people options. They had a variety from which to choose.

Dietary Mandate #2 - The animals God's people may not eat. **14:7-8**

Many of these animals were used for pagan worship services so God, at that time made them off limits. God's people were not to eat the camel, rabbit, shapan (a badger), or the pig. There were some determinations God made in this selection of animals. Some of the animals had a split hoof but did not chew the cud—pig. Some of the animals chewed the cud but did not have a split hoof—camel. Some had padded feet—rabbit. As Israel entered the Promised Land, God wanted His people to demonstrate they were His people in what they did eat and what they did not eat.

Dietary Mandate #3 - The aquatic life God's people may eat. **14:9**

God's people could eat fish that had fins and scales. In order to be eaten, it had to have both fins and scales.

Dietary Mandate #4 - The aquatic life God's people may not eat. **14:10**

God's people could not eat fish that did not have fins and scales such as sharks, shellfish, eels, shrimp, lobster, octopus, and crabs were off limits.

Now some have suggested that one reason why God may have made these off limits is because they contained things that were harmful to humans who ate them, especially in a climate that did not have good refrigeration. It is true that there are poison and dangerous fish to eat. But we are not sure about that. Fresh shrimp or fresh lobster would not seem to me to be any more threatening medically than any other fish.

Dietary Mandate #5 - The birds God's people may eat. **14:11, 20**

God simply says you may eat any clean bird, but He does not list the birds.

Dietary Mandate #6 - The birds God's people may not eat. **14:12-19**

One common denominator among many of the birds listed here is that most were predator birds or scavenger birds that would eat carrion, which is the flesh of dead animals.

God has an entire list of birds that are not clean: eagle, vulture, buzzard, red kite, falcon, any kite (like vulture or sea eagle), ravens, ostrich, owl, seagull, hawk, little owl, great owl, white owl, pelican, carrion vulture, cormorant (web-footed water bird), the stork, the heron, the hoopoe (like a woodpecker with a crown of feathers), the bat and all teeming life (any bird in great teeming abundance).

Dietary Mandate #7 - The dead animals God's people may not eat. **14:21a**

If God's people came upon an animal that was already dead, God did not want them eating it. They could give it to an alien or sell it to a foreigner, but they were not to eat it.

Dietary Mandate #8 - The young goat prohibition God's people may not eat. **14:21b**

There are two other places where this is addressed—Exodus 23:19 and Exodus 34:26. There was a Canaanite fertility practice that invented religious rituals that they taught would make a harvest more productive. They believed if they mixed the mother's milk with the young goat being boiled, it would guarantee a better harvest and even add to the fertility of their flocks.

Now since we are no longer under these restrictions we may eat what we want, but the principle that does still prevail is that we are to make a statement that we belong to God by not doing the things that heathens do in their religious services. We are not to participate with them.

GODLY DIFFERENCE #3 – God's people were to demonstrate to this world that they were God's people in what and where they gave. **14:22-29**

When it comes to giving to God, some people want to know how little can I give and still please God and get the blessings of God. What is the minimum that I should give that will tap me into the acceptable giving category.

Now before we tackle this, I want you to notice the end of **verse 23**. Giving to God is something you learn and it is something that shows God we fear Him and we are to do this “always.”

God expects His people to give Him offerings. God expects His work and His ministers to be supported. There are six guidelines He presents here:

Guideline #1 - God's people were to give a yearly tithe of all the produce they harvested. **14:22**

Notice the adverb “surely.” This is a “surely tithe.” It had better be at least this amount. Now this particular produce tithe was a 10% tithe on everything that came out of the field every year. This was not the only thing that was to be given as an offering, but this was the field offering.

This tithe was not considered by God to be a voluntary offering or contribution. This was mandatory tithe and if someone from Israel did not give a tithe, they were living in direct rebellion against the word of God. These tithes went directly to the Levites (Num. 18:21-32; Heb. 7:5-9).

It appears to me that this particular tithe was to be based on a yearly take home or take out of the field income, rather than total assets. When the people harvested the crop, 10% of that harvest that year was to be given to God up front.

Guideline #2 - God's people were to take tithes and worship at God's place of worship. **14:23**

God's people were to go to God's place of worship and give their offerings. They were to give 10% offerings of grain, new wine, oil, firstborn of the herds and flocks.

By God's people doing this, they were showing God that they were thankful to God for all He had given them and that they feared Him.

Guideline #3 - God's people were to exchange tithes for money to give if the distance to the place of worship was too far. **14:24-25**

For some people who lived far away from the place of worship, it would be impractical for them to travel and bring all of these different tithe offerings to the Lord. It would be hard for people living a great distance to transport 10% of all their grain, new wine, oil and firstborn of herds and flocks. God made a provision for these people in that they could exchange it for money and then take the money to the place of worship and give it there. **What is certainly clear from this is that God monitored the giving habits of every family.**

Guideline #4 - God's people may spend their money on whatever they want at the place of festival and celebration worship. **14:26**

Three times a year, the people were to attend a festival—Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Families would travel to the place of worship and while they were there, they could spend some of their money on whatever their hearts desired for the festivals. They could purchase oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink or whatever their hearts desired as long as they ate before God and rejoiced at all God gave them.

The drinks mentioned in this context are alcoholic drinks and if you drink too much of them, they can get you drunk and drunkenness is a sin. Some ministers try to avoid a text like this because God doesn't demand total abstinence. So they twist the Bible and say these really weren't alcoholic drinks. But that is not rightly dividing Scripture.

For example, we read in Hosea, "wine and new wine take away the understanding" (Hos. 4:11). Isaiah writes: "And these also reel with wine and stagger from strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused by wine, they stagger from strong drink..."

God does not forbid drinking new wine, wine and strong drink. God forbids drunkenness. In fact, Paul said in Galatians 5:21 that it is a sin that will cost one their inheritance in heaven.

God expected His people to gather and worship Him and since He mentions these drinks two times in this context—**verse 23 and 26**—this apparently was part of Israel’s national festivals and corporate worship.

Guideline #5 - God’s people must not neglect God’s ministers. **14:27**

The Levites were scattered all over the land and they did not have a specific allotment. They went where the Lord led them and they were to be cared for. God wants His people to take care of His chosen ministers in both the O.T. economy and N.T. economy.

Paul would later say in the Grace Age that a minister is to make his living from the ministry (I Cor. 9:9-14) and that all expenses should be met (I Cor. 9:3-7). He also said that one of the things to look for was whether or not the minister worked hard to preach and teach and handle God’s word (I Tim. 5:17-18).

When God’s nation or God’s church obeys this, they display to God that they fear Him.

Guideline #6 - God’s people must give a three year tithe to their own town. **14:28-29**

Every third year, there was to be an additional 3 year tithe offering given to their own town and not the one taken every year to the place of worship. This tithe was not specifically for worship. This offering would be used to help the Levites in their immediate area, plus the widows and orphans as aliens.

Now notice the end of **verse 29**, if God’s people would do this, God will bless you in all your work that you do.

God wants His people displaying they are His people in a pagan world. He wants His people worshipping Him and living for Him and giving to Him in a way that makes a statement that says, “We are the people of God.”

Being holy is about living life in a way that pleases God that is consistent with the Word of God.

No matter what the people of this world do, this is what God’s people are to do.