

Shorter Catechism 53-56      “God’s Holy Name”  
Deuteronomy 14  
2 Corinthians 5:16-7:1

March 26, 2017

“You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

Haven’t you *always* wanted to hear a sermon on that!

Deuteronomy 14 includes at least 20 commands.

But *none of them* apply directly to the Christian.

Jesus explicitly repeals the food laws in Acts 10,  
and the laws about tithing all presuppose a central sanctuary –  
the tabernacle – and later, the temple in Jerusalem.

So why do we still have Deuteronomy in the Bible?

What does it mean to have large sections of Holy Scripture  
that are not supposed to be taken literally?!

I think that we often just ignore most of the Old Testament.

“That was for Israel way back then.”

We don’t know how to connect it to our lives today,  
so we just ignore it.

What we do with this?

It’s important to remember that this is God’s revelation to his people.

And God’s revelation always comes *in history*.

In Jesus, God came in the flesh as a first-century Jew.

God’s revelation comes to particular people at particular times.

Paul’s letters were written to particular churches facing particular problems.

Deuteronomy 14 was dealing with an ancient Israelite context.

The particular details may not be directly applicable to us,  
but the *principles* are.

Paul teaches us this way of thinking in our NT lesson.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

Paul takes a number of OT passages that deal with “clean and unclean”

and weaves them together to say that the Christian should understand this  
to refer to the distinction between belief and unbelief –  
the worship of God and idolatry.

In this way, Paul is building on what Jesus taught us.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, “I did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it.”

And then in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount  
he explains what that means.  
When God said “you shall not murder,”  
he wasn’t just talking about literally killing others.  
The command, “You shall not murder” applies to the heart.

It’s worth noting that Moses himself had made the same application.

Deuteronomy 6-26 contains an exposition of the ten commandments.

In other words, Moses sermon in Deuteronomy 6-26  
follows the same general pattern as the 10 Commandments  
as Moses organizes his exhortation around the structure  
of the Ten Commandments.

We saw a few weeks ago that Deuteronomy 6-11 talks about the first commandment –  
that we should have no other god besides the LORD our God.

Likewise, chapters 12-13 expound the second commandment –  
urging the people to do whatever it takes to avoid returning to idolatry.

Now Deuteronomy 14 turns to the third commandment –  
“you shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.”

Q. 53. *Which is the third commandment?*

A. The third commandment is, You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain.

Our catechism has a helpful summary of what is required and what is forbidden:

Q. 54. *What is required in the third commandment?*

A. The third commandment requires the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word and works.

Q. 55. *What is forbidden in the third commandment?*

A. The third commandment forbids all profaning or abusing of anything whereby God makes himself known.

And, since the third commandment has that last phrase,

“for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain,”  
the catechism asks:

Q. 56. *What is the reason annexed to the third commandment?*

A. The reason annexed to the third commandment is that however the breakers of this commandment may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment.

The third commandment says:

*“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain,  
for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”*

The details of what this looks like in the NT may be somewhat different than in the OT,

but if we would understand how this is so, we need to start by understanding the OT!

## 1. Holy People, Holy Food (Deuteronomy 14:1-21)

### a. A Holy People (14:1-2)

So let's look back at Deuteronomy 14 to see what Moses teaches us about what it means to keep the LORD's name *holy*.

Notice where the passage starts.

The first two verses command the Israelites not to

“cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead.”

These were practices of the pagan nations around them.

They would mutilate their bodies out of their grief for the dead.

Israel was not to imitate them.

Why?

Notice verse 1:

“You are the sons of the LORD your God.”

In the face of death,

the reason why you must not cut yourself or tear your hair out of your forehead,  
is because you are the sons of Yahweh.

The language of sonship is regularly used to talk about inheritance and service.

In our Exodus series we have seen the importance of when God said to Pharaoh,  
“Israel is my son – my firstborn.”

But it is actually rare to find the plural (“sons”) in the OT.

This is a striking statement.

You *cannot* act like the nations regarding death,  
because you are sons of Yahweh.

“You are a people holy to Yahweh your God,  
and Yahweh has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession,  
out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” (v2)

Your Father is holy.

His *Name* is holy (note that the name Yahweh is used three times in two verses).

Therefore do not treat death like a pagan.

The underlying idea is that “you must not view death as final.”

There is something contaminating about death.

Death is not holy.

Death is cursed.

But you should not think like the nations about death!

Today there is an alarming rise in cremation among Christians –

as though Christians seem to think that the body doesn't matter.  
But if your body still belongs to Christ after death,  
then you should not send that which belongs to Christ into the flames!  
If your hope is the resurrection of the body,  
then do not consign your body to a picture of hell.  
Obviously, if you get cremated,  
God will have no difficulty raising you from the dead,  
but cremation sends the wrong signal.

Just as Israel should not imitate the death-practices of the nations around them,  
so also we should not imitate the death-practices of the nations around us.

Which means, by the way,  
that we should also think seriously about the way that the “funeral industry”  
has embraced the “commercialization” of death.

This is why – when Rolf died in our home,  
Ginger and Shaina helped prepare his body,  
while Michael and I sang psalms and hymns,  
both of lament and of joy and the hope of the resurrection.  
God's name is holy.  
And you are the sons of the LORD your God –  
so you are a people holy to the LORD your God.

#### **b. Holy Food (14:3-21)**

Verses 3-21 then reflect on the holiness of the people of God with respect to food.

At the end of this lengthy list of clean and unclean animals,  
Moses says that animals that have died naturally  
may be eaten by sojourners or foreigners – but *not* by God's people:  
“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God.” (v21)  
God's name is holy.  
God's *people* are holy.

To be “holy” means to be set apart – to be distinct.  
When a priest is “consecrated” – he is set apart for *holy* service.  
The holiness of God does mean that he is set apart –  
that his name is *different* from all other so-called “gods.”  
But we also need to remember that God's majesty and holiness  
is *also* revealed in his revelation as the Holy One of Israel.

God's holiness is revealed in his great majesty and transcendence.  
But God's holiness is also revealed in his coming to take a people for himself.

And he did not choose the great and glorious.  
He did not choose Egypt or Babylon or China –  
the great powers of the ancient world.  
He chose slaves.  
He chose a weak and helpless people.

And he called them to be sons of the LORD –  
to be holy – to be set apart for his own possession –  
*so that* they be the instrument in his revelation to all nations.

And in these food laws, God is teaching his people about the importance of boundaries.  
Boundaries are important.

Have you ever dealt with someone who didn't understand boundaries?  
Someone who continually invaded your personal space?

A holy people will be characterized by being *different* from those around them.  
Do not be like the nations—do not do what they do.

Instead, through these distinctive practices and rituals,  
you are to create a different sort of community.  
—a holy community.

Holiness is maintained by staying within boundaries.

The Ten Commandments form the most important of those boundaries.  
This is the way of life that should characterize my people.

In the Old Testament, the food laws then develop boundaries in what Israel was to eat:  
unclean animals are those which cross boundaries.

There are three general categories of abominations that Moses discusses:  
animals, fish and birds.

Every animal that parts the hoof *and* chews the cud is clean.

Those that have one or the other, are not.

Some have thought that God gave these commands for health reasons.

There is no biblical evidence for this.

That is not the reason that *God* gives.

God says that Israel shall do this *For you are a people holy to the Lord your God.*

After all, he permits the sojourner in the land to eat of unclean things (v21),  
but not Israel.

This suggests that the reason is not simply one of health.

No, the reason for these commands is because of holiness.

In order to be clean, an animal must fulfill its proper function.

Fish are supposed to have fins and scales.  
If you see something swimming in the water that does *not* have fins and scales,  
then it is not proper—it is not clean.  
Carrion birds are unclean—they feed on dead things—which is improper for birds.  
Birds are supposed to eat fruits and insects.  
And winged insects are unclean.  
Birds are the only creatures that are supposed to fly;  
flying insects are an aberration!  
[can I get an Amen?!]

Now, God is *not* saying that unclean animals are *bad*.  
He is not saying that they are mistakes.  
Rather, God is teaching Israel about holiness.  
He is teaching them about the difference between that which is holy and proper,  
and that which is unholy and improper.  
So he takes these odd animals which *he created*,  
and uses their oddities to teach Israel about holiness.

The people of Israel are sons of the LORD their God.  
They bear the name of their Father.  
As a holy people, Israel must be separate – must be distinct – from the nations.

And the last sentence of verse 21 illustrates this idea of ‘proper function’ beautifully.  
“You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.”  
An act of killing should not be mixed with a life-giving substance.  
Boundaries would be crossed  
The mother-goat’s milk is life-giving.  
To cook a young goat in its mother’s milk would be a horrid image,  
mixing life and death in the same pot.  
The people of God cannot mix life and death!  
You cannot blend clean and unclean!  
If the unclean comes in contact with the clean,  
then the whole thing is ruined!

Modern orthodox Jews will not eat a cheeseburger out of respect for this command.  
But that goes too far!  
If you *know* that the milk did not come from the mother of this goat,  
then there is nothing wrong with boiling a young goat in milk!

(And I would say that while the Christian may not be literally required to keep this command,  
it is still inappropriate to *knowingly* boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.  
The thing that should bring life to a young goat, should not be used to *cook it*.  
To use the modern term, “that’s messed up!”)

Israel was to exhibit this corporate holiness through their communal life as the people of God.  
Keeping God's name holy has as much to do with the way you live your life,  
as it does the way you talk.  
Some people are too literal in their focus on the 3d Commandment.  
They hear the command not to take the Lord's name in vain,  
and so they focus on keeping their speech free  
from an empty usage of God's name.  
This does not please God.

If Jesus says that the command "you shall not murder"  
means "you shall not be angry and lash out at others with your words" –  
then also, the command "you shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain"  
applies to our conduct – and not just our words.  
We profane the name of God by our *deeds*  
every time we partake of that which is unclean.

Now, in the NT, Jesus makes it clear that this is no longer a matter of food.  
Jesus declared all foods clean.  
It is not what goes *into* a man that defiles him,  
but what comes out of a man.  
Our problem is not "out there."  
Our problem is *in here*.

## **2. Holy Economics (14:22-29)**

Verses 22-29 then apply the same principle of God's holy name to economics.  
Have you ever thought about economics as a matter of *holiness*?

But if we are to love God with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength,  
then we need to love God in the way we use our wealth.

Deuteronomy 14 calls Israel to bring their tithe to the place that God would choose,  
to make his name dwell.

[Notice the emphasis in verse 23 on God's *name* –  
"And before the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose,  
to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain...  
And again in verse 24, the provision for what to do if  
"...the place is too far from you, which the LORD your God chooses,  
to set his *name* there."]

The third commandment, "You shall not take the *name* of the LORD your God in vain,"  
includes what you do with your money!

Back in Dt 8:17 Moses warned Israel,

“Beware lest you say in your heart,  
‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’”  
Now Dt 14 gives Israel a practical way of remembering this:  
once every year bring a tithe of all the produce of your land to the sanctuary.

Notice that the tithe was *not* entirely given to the priests and Levites.

Every three years the tithe was given to the Levites and the poor (v28-29),  
but the other two years, you would bring the tithe and have a big celebration.  
(This would coincide with the Feast of Tabernacles–16:13ff).  
You would include the Levites and the poor in these celebrations,  
but two-thirds of the time, you would partake of your own tithe.

Does this surprise you?

Sometimes Christians have so emphasized “tithing”  
that we have forgotten that the OT economic system was considerably more complex!

First, there were the firstfruits.

Every year, at the feast of Pentecost,  
you were to bring a freewill offering of the first of your produce.  
The amount is not specified—only that you shall give  
“as the Lord your God shall bless you.” (16:10)  
The point of the firstfruits is to remind Israel that God is the giver of the harvest,  
and he deserves the first portion of all that we have.

Second, there was the tithe.

At the end of the harvest, at the feast of Tabernacles,  
you were to bring a tenth of the final harvest (Dt 14; 16).  
Only in the third year was the whole tithe given to the Levites and the poor  
The tithe was to remind Israel that the whole harvest belongs to God,  
and that he is their sovereign Lord.

Third, there were various sacrifices given throughout the year.

Various sin and trespass offerings would be brought in the case of serious sin.  
Peace offerings and freewill offerings would be offered as well.  
And in addition, the Israelites were not allowed to fully harvest their crops!  
They were forbidden to glean,  
but were commanded to leave the gleanings for the poor.  
(Probably another 5% of the harvest, at least)

And, of course, the firstborn of *every* clean animal was to be sacrificed to the LORD.

So the faithful Israelite would devote probably a quarter of his produce to the worship of God,  
and care for the poor.



You can imagine that I am not very impressed with the argument  
that says that Christians should simply tithe!  
We have received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.  
We have received the fulfillment of the promises made to Israel,  
and we only give 10%?

But we also need to remember that the whole economic system was different then!  
All these were *household* offerings based on *produce*.  
If you were a servant or a day laborer,  
your tithes and offerings would be given by your master.  
In other words, if we tried to implement the OT economic system today,  
then businesses would “tithe”  
and everyone who works for wages would not!

This practice of household tithing was taken up by the medieval church,  
which more or less tried to reproduce the Old Testament system.

The practice of voluntary tithing is only about 150 years old.  
In the mid-19th century the church was wrestling with how to conduct her finances.  
For centuries in Europe there had been a “tithe” of sorts that was essentially a tax,  
but in America that system didn’t last very long after the American Revolution.  
The church tried different methods of finance:  
the first was subscription,  
where people subscribed a certain amount of wood, produce, or whisky;  
but if the harvest was poor, then the pastor might not get paid very much!  
So they tried pew rents—where you would rent your pew for an annual fee;  
but that smacked of elitism—since only the wealthy could afford the best seats.

Finally the church combined the principle of firstfruits with the principle of the tithe,  
along with Paul’s comment about collections on the first day of the week,  
and developed the principle of “systematic benevolence.”

After all, the apostles do not refer to “tithing” in the New Testament.  
The economic world of first century Rome was a different place than ancient Israel,  
and the once-a-year tithe didn’t make much sense in an urban setting.

But the apostles use the same principles and apply them to the church.  
After all, in Christ, the church is the living temple of our holy God.  
God has chosen to make his name dwell in his people—his church.

Paul says in 1 Cor. 9:13-14  
“Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service

get their food from the temple,  
and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?  
In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel  
should get their living by the gospel.”  
The offerings of Israel were to provide sustenance for the priests and Levites.  
So Paul says that the church should pay their pastors.

Likewise, the church is to care for the poor and needy:

1 Cor. 16:1-2 says “Now concerning the collection for the saints:  
as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.  
On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside  
and store it up as he may prosper,  
so that there will be no collecting when I come.”  
In addition to paying the pastor,  
there should also be offerings for the poor and needy.  
This is why we distinguish between the regular offering  
(which goes for the support of pastors, and the general expenses of the church),  
and the diaconal offering, which is devoted to the care of the poor.

People sometimes ask questions about tithing:

do I tithe before taxes or after taxes?  
If you are focused on giving 10%,  
then your focus is in the wrong place.  
If God had wanted Israel to focus on a certain percentage,  
then he wouldn't have commanded so many ways of giving.  
And he certainly wouldn't have told them to partake of their own gifts!

If we consider the equity of what Deuteronomy is saying,  
then this is a complex thing:

- 1) obviously your offerings given in worship are included.  
Neither the OT nor the NT gives a percentage of your income  
that should be given specifically for the maintenance of the gospel.  
But both the OT and the NT declare that the laborer is worthy of his hire,  
so you should make sure that you give enough to provide for your pastor.  
But these offerings are not merely for the pastor and the church building;  
they also go for the spread of the gospel throughout the world.  
Paul mentions gifts from Philippi in Philippians 4,  
suggesting that they were the only church that gave him financial aid.
- 2) Part of your tax money is included in this  
(since our culture has chosen to have the state care for the poor).  
So when you pay your taxes,  
consider that portion that goes to the poor as a diaconal gift,

and pray that God will use it for the good of those in need.  
This is why I sometimes encourage Christians to seek government jobs—  
especially in the social services.

- 3) But also money you spend on hospitality, fellowship meals, going to the zoo together,  
or whatever you do together with the saints.  
The tithe was to be eaten together with the whole people of God,  
including the Levites and the poor.  
When you spend money on fellowship with the saints,  
you are tithing to God.  
“Spend the money on whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink,  
whatever your appetite craves!” (Dt 14:26)

Wait a minute!

We said earlier that Christians must beware  
of getting drawn into the consumer culture of our day.  
And yet God commands us to spend money on whatever our appetite craves?

Yes.

When we have come to the place where God has placed his name;  
when we have gathered with the saints,  
to worship God and fellowship with each other;  
then, with the holy name of God upon us,  
we may revel with holy joy in the good gifts which God has provided.  
Delight in the bounty of this good creation over which God has made you stewards,  
but delight not for your own selfish pleasure.  
Rather, delight in God’s good gifts with one another.  
Include one another in your celebration.  
And in the midst of your revelry,  
give thanks to God—because he is the one who has given you these good gifts.

### **3. Holiness in Christ (2 Corinthians 6)**

So what does it mean to be *holy* today?

What does it look like to “not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” today?

God’s holy name now dwells in Jesus – and therefore in those who belong to Jesus.

In Phil 2:9-10, after reminding the Philippians of the incarnation of Christ,  
Paul declares that through the resurrection,  
Jesus has received the name that is above all names,  
that at the *name* of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

In Romans 10:13, he says that whoever calls upon the *name* of the Lord will be saved.

In Col 3:17, he urges us to do all in the *name* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In these texts we see that it is through the *name* of Jesus—the *name* of the LORD—that salvation comes to the people of God.

So Paul in 2 Cor 6:17 says that we are the temple of the living God.

To use the language of Deuteronomy 14 –

*We* are the place where God’s holy name dwells!

Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father,

and so Paul insists that holiness still requires separation from the ungodly.

Of course, we do not have the old dietary regulations.

Jesus taught his disciples that

“whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him,  
since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled”  
(thus he declared all foods clean)

But rather,

“what comes out of a person is what defiles him.  
For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts,  
sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting,  
wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.  
All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Jesus is saying that the Mosaic regulations were designed to teach you about the heart.

They were given to teach you about true defilement—which comes from the heart.

You don’t defile God’s name simply by outward words or actions.

Rather, you take God’s name in vain every time evil thoughts come out of your heart.

The barrier between Jew and Gentile is being broken down.

The new standard of holiness (which was the point of the old standard),  
is beginning to draw new boundaries for the people of God.

Jesus has removed the specific dietary laws of the OT,  
but that does not mean that *everything* is clean.

No, as Paul says, “Since we have these promises, beloved,  
let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit,  
bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”

So what does the Third Commandment mean for us?

What does it mean to regard the Name of the Lord as Holy?

I would suggest that we must view ourselves in the position of the Israelites  
coming out of Babylon and heading for the restored Jerusalem.

Our Babylon is American culture

–the socio-economic power that sets itself up as the rival claimant for our affections.  
Revelation 18:4 warns 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians about the Roman world,  
and also 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians about the American world:  
“Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues;  
for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

You are elect exiles, as Peter calls you, sojourning in this modern Babylon.  
But remember what you are elect for!  
God has called you out of Babylon to come and dwell in the New Jerusalem.  
You can no longer set your affections on the things that this culture prizes.  
You must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.  
You must set your hearts and minds on things above,  
where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.  
To regard the Name of the LORD as holy means that your conduct reflects *his* holiness.  
Your Father is holy—therefore as his holy children, be holy in all your conduct.

We are exiles and sojourners.  
This is not our true home.  
We live in Babylon, but we must not share in her economic attitudes.  
We live in a consumer culture,  
where everyone around us is preoccupied with material things.  
We must not be consumed by such things.

And because God has become man,  
because the Word has become flesh,  
therefore his holy name has come to rest upon you.  
You have been baptized in the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Your baptism marks you with that holy name.  
The call to holiness is a call for you to *discover* who God made you to be.  
Our culture is all about “self-invention.”  
Our problem is that we cannot escape the fact that we are *creatures*.  
We were created by Another.  
The call to holiness is equally a call to humility –  
to recognize that you are not your own –  
you belong to Another.  
When God says, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain”  
it is equally an invitation to share in the holiness of God’s name,  
as you humble yourself before God and receive a new identity  
as a holy child of God!