

August 19, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Deuteronomy 14.

1. Compare God's choosing of the Jewish nation with God's choosing of the Church.
2. How much like the world do you think God is?
3. If God is the opposite of what pagans worship, how should that be reflected in the lives of God's people?
4. Does God's prohibition on particular foods establish a good diet for Christians?
5. Contrast the difference between offerings God required in the Old Testament and New Testament principles of giving.

OF SAUSAGE AND OFFERING ENVELOPES **Deuteronomy 14**

Try to imagine growing up in a home where the father creates rules to help his children appear to be different. For example, for the sons the rule is that beginning at age 10, the boys have to have their hair cut in a long mullet. Surely the boys are going to complain, "Dad, normal guys don't wear mullets." "I know," Dad replies, "But I just want people to know that you belong to me and I have worn a mullet for years." For the daughters the rule is that they must wear

frilly mid-calf length dresses, carry a parasol, and curtsy whenever they meet an elder. Of course the girls are going to chaff at that rule.

None of us would care to be a part of that family. Those folks are going to stick out in the 21st century American culture like a sore thumb. Of course some of teens would argue that their family is not far removed from such odd requirements. But in reality, your family is not even close. In fact, for the most part, the families of Community Baptist Church fit pretty well in the modern American culture. Is that a good thing?

Last week we learned that God intended for His people to worship Him in a way that was unlike the ways pagans worshiped their false gods. What if Community Baptist Church held to practices for worship that were distinct from the practices of unsaved people. But unsaved people are not known for worship, are they? Oh, but they are. The unregenerated world in which we live honors (dare we say worships) their heroes, their rock stars, their sports icons, their celebrities in very clearly identifiable ways. I'm sure that our practices of corporate worship are not at all comparable to how the unsaved world practices worshipping their manmade gods.

If we thought God's restrictions on worship listed in the previous chapter were too binding, we are really going to struggle with Deuteronomy chapter 14. Why did God impose these food and lifestyle restrictions on His people? They almost seem arbitrary in some cases. Ultimately, God was teaching His people how to be different. They were different because they were God's elect, just like we are. Maybe what we need more than vigorous debate about how we should be different from the world is an understanding about why we should be different. If we get the "why," the "how" might follow naturally.

God's Sons are Distinct in Appearance (vv.1-2).

Moses tried to help the people understand that it is a privilege to be sons of the LORD. We should let him help us understand the same thing. We, too, are God's sons. The opening words, *You are the sons of the LORD your God (v.1)*, apply not only to the Jews but to Christians.

Of course everyone born in the lineage of Abraham belonged to God. What an incredible privilege to be considered a “son” or child of God. With “sonship” come innumerable blessings and privileges. But the same is true for Christians. For us, who are now children of God through new birth by faith in Christ, not the least of our blessings is eternal life. An honest assessment of membership in God’s family should leave us in awe because of our privileges.

Yet, as hard as it is to believe, some of Abraham’s lineage were ashamed to be associated with God’s children. Many of them preferred to be accepted by and identified as children of the world. And such is still the case for many who try to claim association with God’s family for the purpose of eternal life, but association with the world’s family for purposes of real life.

Like those ancient “sons of God,” we are chosen out. *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth (v.2).* In real life, children are not given the right or opportunity to decide into which family they are born. Granted, later in life some kids can actually change families. But even then it is usually a matter of adoption that is not initiated by them.

The Jews are God’s chosen people not by right or virtue but by God’s sovereign choice. As a whole, they have never seemed to figure out that they were the ethnic/racial conduit through which the Father brought the Savior from sin. That was the promise God gave to Abraham. *“And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 26:4b).* There is no human way possible to fairly assess the value of being part of the family through which God sent eternal life. The ancient Jews should have been awestruck and humbled that God chose them as the conduit for the Savior.

Picture an ancient people group who settles in the desert regions of the Middle East. They build their towns and businesses and all seems to be going well. But one day they realize that their wells are running dry. A people group must have water to survive. The Roman Emperor becomes aware of the plight of these people and he orders that an aqueduct be built to transport fresh water over the desert for 20 miles to the people in need. Do you think the thirsty people are thankful to the Emperor? In some cases the people renamed their

cities after the Emperor to express their thankfulness for such expressions of help and kindness. I do not doubt that if I was one of those people, every time I looked at the aqueduct I would be thankful for it.

The Jewish race is the Creator’s chosen aqueduct to bring refreshing salvation from sin to thirsty sinners. And in the same way, the Church is still the conduit through whom our Creator reveals the wonderful news that the Savior has come to save. Like the Jews, God elects us to that privileged lot according to His sovereign wisdom. We are not the conduit through whom God reveals the Savior from sin because we are so wise or pious. We are not God’s chosen few because we are smarter than sinners sunk in sin. We are God’s *treasured possession, chosen out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth (v.2).*

Because this is our true situation, one should naturally conclude that God also expects us to reveal signs of our unique choosing. Should the elect of God, Christians, not also be distinct as God required the members of the chosen race to be? Yes. And because this is true, we must admit that privileged people look and act privileged.

Specifically, according to our text, that means no tattoos or piercings, right? Is that really what the command, *You shall not cut yourselves (v.1b)* requires? Actually this prohibition has first reference to something practiced while mourning for the dead. God’s law required: *“Never slash your body to mourn the dead” (Leviticus 19:28a GWW).* In some way, many of the “unchosen,” many of the normal worldly people who lived around the Jews would cut themselves as they mourned for the dead. Self-mutilation might also have a connection with out-of-control religious expressions among the pagans. That was certainly the case for the worshipers of Baal when Elijah challenged them on Mt. Carmel. *And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them (1 Kings 18:28).* God forbid His chosen people to do that and become just like the rest of the people in their world.

But to be fair, we also must conclude that this rule really was a prohibition against God’s people getting tattoos. The rest of that law we quote from Leviticus 19:28 states, *“. . . and never get a tattoo. I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:28b GWW).* There is plenty of secular

evidence discovered that shows that tattooing was a common practice of the ancient Canaanites, Philistines, and other such ancient people groups. The oldest record of tattooing is dated 3300-3100 B.C. That ancient evidence indicates that fingers were tattooed to ward off evil spirits and illnesses and to mark a member of a clan or society. Like it is in our day, the pagans tattooed most of their body parts for some reason known to them.

Notice that the reason why God prohibited His people from getting tattoos is, *“I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:28c)*. In some way, this was a matter of showing respect to the One to whom the Jews belonged. It is possible that it relates to the fact that God made humans in His image, and of all the people who ought to respect the “image” it is His chosen people.

This rule against cutting and head shaving applied especially to the priests. To them God said through Moses, *“They shall not make bald patches on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts on their body. They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God. For they offer the LORD’s food offerings, the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy” (Leviticus 21:5-6)*. If the Jewish people in general were supposed to indicate by their lifestyle practices that they were God’s people, the requirement would be even more expected among the chosen servants among the chosen people, the Levites.

That conclusion makes us wonder about people who make up a royal priesthood. Under Holy Spirit inspiration, Peter said about us elect Christians, *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9)*. Maybe we too should be noticeably distinct.

But what about that “no baldness” thing? – *or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead (v.1c)*. I know some good Christian men who might have a problem with that. The same law found in Leviticus applies to all the men, not just priests and Levites. *“You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard” (Leviticus 19:27)*. This was not an issue with men going bald naturally, like Elijah, but with men shaving their hair to look like pagans.

Again, review why God imposed such radical requirements on these people: *the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth (v.2)*. It seems right to conclude that God still expects His chosen people to appear to be distinct from the “NOT God’s chosen people.” How do we do that in the 21st century? That question makes for wonderful, spirited discussion. Whatever the answer, if being chosen by God is a special privilege, we should be happy to display the reality.

I knew of a seminary professor who was on a flight from Dallas to Los Angeles. It was delayed on the tarmac for over an hour and a half. All the passengers on the flight was cranky and spoke harshly to the flight attendants. The flight attendants were also agitated and threw the harshness right back at the passengers. But there was one flight attendant who was very patient and replied with kindness to each passenger, even when they did not deserve it. After the flight finally landed, the professor went to the attendant to ask for her name so he could write to the airline company to commend her. The attendant replied, “I don’t work for the airline. I work for God.” We should not be surprised at the revelation.

God’s Sons are Distinct in Diet (vv.3-21).

In verses three through eight, we find that God required an odd and specific diet regarding animals. The general rule was, *You shall not eat any abomination (v.3)*. Okay, that makes sense in light of the fact that God’s people should never engage in anything that God considers to be an abomination. But what food stuff does God abhor or loathe, and why?

We are given a small glimpse of God’s likes and dislikes when He described what kind of food was specifically allowed. For example, *These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, the deer, the gazelle, the roebuck, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope, and the mountain sheep (vv.4-5)*. Ox, sheep, and deer are pretty common foods to 21st Americans. The goat, ibex (little mountain goat), mountain sheep are not common to us, but apparently were to the Jews.

The general rule was: *Every animal that parts the hoof and has the hoof cloven in two and chews the cud, among the animals, you may eat (v.6)*. An animal with a parted hoof (two sides or crack down the middle) is easy enough to identify. So is the difference between a carnivore (animal that eats other animals) and a herbivore (animal that eats plants). In fact, the distinction is more specific than carnivore vs. herbivore. It is ruminant vs. non-ruminant. A ruminant is an animal that eats plants (grass), swallows it where it ferments in the “rumen” (a stomach). Then the animal regurgitates the fermented “cud” and chews it again. And we eat such gross animals for meat?

Read on and notice how the rules become more specific. *Yet of those that chew the cud or have the hoof cloven you shall not eat these: the camel, the hare, and the rock badger, because they chew the cud but do not part the hoof, are unclean for you (v.7)*. Okay. That meant no camels, no hasenpfeffer (rabbit stew), no badgers. The problem with those animals is that they only half qualified. They chew the cud but do not split the hoof. And especially pigs were off limits. No bacon, no sausage, no ham for Christmas dinner. *And the pig, because it parts the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch (v.8)*.

So what about other animals not listed? Maybe it is easier for us to answer the question, “What is the reason for the rule?” Okay, that points to a very important principle. God did not make distinctions about food sources based entirely on animal feeding habits, animal hygiene, or animal environments. This was not a matter of physical “cleanness.” Rather God simply chose which animals were “clean” (i.e. not loathsome to Him) and which were acceptable. Humans conclude that God is arbitrary, just like when they get agitated with the idea that God elects people for salvation.

Members of the Church in the 21st century should be careful not to insist on a diet based on God’s standards for 2nd century BC Jews. God gave these apparently arbitrary rules simply to mark His people as different.

Those rules included a specific diet regarding seafood (vv.9-10). The people could eat all the fish they wanted—and not just on Friday! *Of all that are in the waters you may eat these: whatever has fins and scales you may eat (v.9)*. However, they were never allowed to eat

shellfish. *And whatever does not have fins and scales you shall not eat; it is unclean for you (v.10)*. Nor could they eat eels, sharks, dolphins that have fins but not scales. Oh, rats! Shellfish don’t have fins or scales either. My favorite seafood is shellfish, clams, oysters, scallops and muscles. None of them qualify. It would have been useless for me to tell an ancient Jew about how good a plate of shrimp and grits is.

My wife and I have always wondered who the first person was to eat a shrimp and why? We figured it was Robinson Crusoe who did it out of necessity. What possessed the first person to split open an uncooked clam, suck out the contents and say it was good? Who invented balut, a delicacy in the Philippines where people suck the uncooked contents out of a duck egg? Someone told me last week that for many years the lobster was considered to be the cockroach of the sea. But it sure is expensive in fine restaurants.

God also included a specific diet regarding fowl as a way of making His people distinct (vv.11-18). He allowed them to eat all the clean birds (v.11). Again, God determined what constitutes a clean bird. We don’t have a list here, so you are on your own. God’s people also had to refrain from eating unclean birds. *But these are the ones that you shall not eat: the eagle, the bearded vulture, the black vulture, the kite, the falcon of any kind; every raven of any kind; the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk of any kind; the little owl and the short-eared owl, the barn owl and the tawny owl, the carrion vulture and the cormorant, the stork, the heron of any kind; the hoopoe and the bat (vv.12-18)*.

Parts of this list seem logical to humans. Vultures, falcons, ravens, are scavengers that love to eat road kill. It does seem like eating them would be a good source of disease. But owls are not considered scavengers and are more like grouse or pheasants which make a good meal according to meat eaters. And herons and storks are like ducks and geese which aren’t listed.

And don’t forget the specific diet regarding insects (vv.19-21). The rule was simple: Don’t eat unclean insects. *And all winged insects are unclean for you; they shall not be eaten (v.19)*. Most of us are good with this rule. But what about Christians in foreign nations who eat insects? Okay this was just a Jewish law. Yes, but look at the next verse and discover the people were allowed to eat all the clean

winged things they wanted. *All clean winged things you may eat (v.20)*. It must be that this was the locusts that John the Baptist, a devout Jew, was eating. I think “Clean Winged Things” would be a good name for a specialty restaurant.

In verse twenty-one we find two additional caveats. First, God’s people were allowed to give road kill to the visitors. *You shall not eat anything that has died naturally. You may give it to the sojourner who is within your towns, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner (v.21a)*. This is where the idea that these rules make for good diets today falls apart. Up to this point, it could be argued that God obviously knew that the things He prohibited were bad for people. Yes, but surely God was not in favor of His people causing sickness and clogged arteries for neighbors, visitors, and tourists.

The second caveat is don’t cook baby goats in their mother’s milk. *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk (v.21b)*. This also might have been a practice associated with pagan religion. But, the real focus is the first part of the verse: *For you are a people holy to the LORD your God*. These were rules God enforced for a time in order to cause His people to appear to be distinct from those who are not His people.

It seems that our safest conclusion about these strange laws is to remember what God told Peter, the good, devout Jew who observed dietary laws. God gave Peter a vision. Peter said, *Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But I said, “By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.” But the voice answered a second time from heaven, “What God has made clean, do not call common” (Acts 11:6-9)*. Here we are reminded that God is free to make rules that will identify His people as distinct from “not His people” whenever He chooses according to His timing and purposes. We have plenty such distinguishing and identifying rules for the Church listed in the New Testament.

God’s Sons are Distinct in Offerings (vv.22-29).

The distinct people were to take ten percent of all things to the temple (vv.22-23). This was the rule to set aside the tithe. *You shall*

tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year (v.22). The tithe was one tenth of all produce, all profit. The people set it aside for God’s purposes. Oh but wait! Next we read that God told them to eat the tithe. And notice where they were to eat it. *And before the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose, to make his name dwell there (v.23a)*.

What was going on here? This is reference to feasts in Jerusalem. Or before the temple in Jerusalem, wherever the tabernacle containing the Ark of the Covenant was. God told them, *You shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock (v.23b)*. God desired for His people to celebrate their uniqueness. They consumed what they set aside for God. Further instruction in the law makes it clear that these were offerings offered to God and also consumed by the people (Exodus 23:19; Deuteronomy 12:5-7).

Why was this God’s rule? *That you may learn to fear the LORD your God always (v.23c)*. The festivals reminded the people that God chose them and they are His people. Those festivals served the same purpose as the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s table remind us to fear the Lord.

Sometimes, God’s rule required the people to take money equivalent to ten percent to the temple (vv.24- 26). This was an exception based on distance. *And if the way is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, when the LORD your God blesses you, because the place is too far from you, which the LORD your God chooses, to set his name there (v.24)*.

The exception allowed for the exchange of the tithe for money. If the temple was too far away to carry a cow, *then you shall turn it into money and bind up the money in your hand and go to the place that the LORD your God chooses (v.25)*. And when the arrived at the temple, the people were to spend the money on their pleasures. Really! *And spend the money for whatever you desire – oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household (v.26)*. Oh, but notice all of this was in the presence of God. God reminded the people that He was a participant in their worship through these sacrifices. He was the focus of their celebration and worship.

In that process also, God required His children to take care of the “special people” (vv.27-29). Among those special people were the Levites who were God’s special servants. *And you shall not neglect the Levite who is within your towns, for he has no portion or inheritance with you (v.27).* God’s people must provide for the Levites and other needy people. *At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do (vv.28-29).* A portion of the tithe was to provide for the Levites who served the Lord. Also, some of the tithe served like a welfare system for the orphans, widows, and immigrants.

The ten percent tithe law is a good starting place. But it is somewhat confusing to us. God’s plan for the Church is: *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 (1 Corinthians 16:2).* Here we learn that we Christians give systematically and according to prosperity. Then too we read, *Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).* Here the rule is for us to give purposefully and give cheerfully. The needs of Christ’s Church will be met when people do this.

God determines that His people should order their lives distinctively, different from the rest of the world. God determines how His people will appear distinct. God has told us why we should be distinct (we are His holy people, His treasured possession). Only people who truly trust Him are interested in being different according to God’s rules.