

Deuteronomy 14

Psalm 106

2 Corinthians 5:16-7:1

Deuteronomy 14 is an exposition of the third commandment.

Deuteronomy 6-26 contains an exposition 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.

Chapters 12-13 expound the second commandment –

Chapter 12 talks about the importance of destroying idol-worship in the land, and teaches Israel about the true worship of God.

And chapter 13 warns against false prophets or dreamers who would lead Israel astray, urging the people to do whatever it takes to avoid returning to idolatry.

Chapter 14 now focuses on the third commandment.

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.

Our Psalm of response tells a story about this.

Psalm 106 was probably the Psalm that gave us the most difficulty in our committee.

It’s a long Psalm, so we wanted to find a good tune

that could communicate both the praise aspect in verses 1-5 and 47-48, and the lamenting storytelling aspect in the rest of the Psalm!

Needless to say, we failed.

So we asked Paul Jones of Tenth Presbyterian in Philadelphia
to write a tune that would capture all this in the correct meter.

As I often say with these longer Psalms,
the key is to let the tune get stuck in your head and focus on the story –
because we are singing our own family history in this song!

Sing Psalm 106

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-7:1

How should the Christian think about the Law?

The simple way to say it is that while Christ transforms the Ten Commandments,
he does not abolish them.

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. The Holiness of God’s Name in the Land (Deuteronomy 14)

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

Let’s go back to Dt 14 – Moses’ exposition of the third commandment.

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?

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

There is something contaminating about death.

It is not holy.

It is cursed.

But you should not think like the nations about death!

(Today there is an alarming rise in cremation among Christians
as if 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 to 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.

Instead, in the context of death, Moses says,

“You are the sons of Yahweh, your God.”

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,
but it is actually rare to find such a direct reference as this 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.

b. Holy Food (14:3-21)

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

God was teaching his people about the importance of boundaries.

Boundaries are very important to God.

The principle of separation—of holiness—is described by boundaries.

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 was 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.

The food laws then develop boundaries in what Israel was to eat:

unclean animals are those which cross perceived 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!

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 animals which he created,
and uses their oddities to teach Israel about holiness.

Remember, Israel bears the name of his Father.
As a holy people, Israel must be separate from the nations.

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!

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.

The holiness of God's name is profaned every time we partake of that which is unclean.

c. Holy Economics (14:22-29)

Verses 22-29 then apply the same principle of God's holy name to economics.

There is an interesting connection between holiness and economics in the Scripture.

We often think about holiness as a purely moral matter.

We don't usually think our finances in terms 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 with all 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!

Remember the three temptations of Deuteronomy 6-9?

One of them, in Dt 8:17 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)

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.

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!

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 offerings of the church should provide sustenance for the ministers.

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 the offerings for the maintenance of the gospel ministry,
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 how to tithe:
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.

2. The Holiness of God’s Servant in the Exile (Isaiah 52)

Now, both of these issues –
eating only that which is clean
and bringing their offerings to the place where God’s name dwelt –
were a problem for the Jews when they were in exile.

How could they maintain their ceremonial holiness in the midst of a pagan culture?

Daniel and his friends objected when they were expected to eat the Babylonian delicacies!
Daniel understood that there was a spiritual point to these laws.
Their separation from the practices of the nations was to be an entire way of life,
not just a few cultural oddities.
It had to do with maintaining the *holiness* of the name of the LORD.

This is why Isaiah calls out to those returning from exile in Isaiah 52:

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news,”
(The point is that the people of God are returning to Jerusalem!)
“Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem,
for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations,
and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

And then comes the call to those still in Babylon:

“Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing;
go out from the midst of her;
purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD.
For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight,
for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.”

In the midst of rejoicing and celebration for the deliverance that God has wrought,
the restoration from exile that God has promised,
there is a call to separation,
to Holiness.

Why, in the midst of celebration,
is this warning given?
Why this emphasis on avoiding the unclean?

Because the holiness of Israel is central for their calling to be the light to the nations.
After all, in *very next line*,
Isaiah says “Behold, my servant shall act wisely...” –
and speaks of the suffering servant
who will sprinkle many nations (v13-15).

Isaiah has just been talking to Israel about their restoration from exile in Babylon.
He is saying that they must maintain their ceremonial holiness,
and not fear the nations, because God is going to astound the nations.
The whole point of Israel’s holiness–separateness–from the nations
was not for their own personal benefit;
it was so that they would be a holy nation, a kingdom of priests,
mediating the blessings of God to the nations!
Isaiah is saying that Israel’s faithful suffering will work to the deliverance of the nations.

And yet, after Israel returns from the Exile,
it doesn’t happen.
The nations remain in darkness.
Israel dwindles to a third-rate vassal of several successive empires.
And nobody *really* understands what Isaiah was saying until Jesus came.

3. The Holiness of God’s People in Christ (2 Corinthians 6)

Jesus understood that all of God’s promises to Israel were really about himself.
Because in Jesus, the history of Israel is focused upon one man.
In Jesus, the return from exile has come.
Jesus, the true Israel, the Last Adam,
has been seated at the right hand of God;
Therefore we have already received the *firstfruits* of the blessings of the return

in the promised Holy Spirit, and in Him,
we have the guarantee that we will indeed arrive in the New Jerusalem.
Or to use the language of the third commandment,
God's holy name dwells in Jesus – and therefore in those who belong to Jesus.

Paul expands on this understanding of the name of the Lord Jesus.

In Phil 2:9-10, after reminding the Philippians of the incarnation of Christ,
he 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.

Indeed, what Isaiah had said about Israel's journey from Babylon to Jerusalem applies to us.
As Isaiah had called Israel to “depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing...”

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

We are the place where God's holy name dwells!

The signs of the return from exile were the restoration of the temple,
and the restoration of the throne of David.

Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father—which restores the throne of David,
and so Paul quotes Isaiah and several other places,
to insist 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 1st century Christians about the Roman world,
and also 21st 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.

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.