

Part 10: Family Distinctions

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It's hard to erase many of the influences our parents had on us. For instance, whenever I make an absolutely terrible dad-joke, my wife looks at me and says, "That's a Rob-joke." Pointing out how painfully similar my humor has become to my own father.

For some of us these imprints are good, for others painful. But social programs like Foster Care show how volatile yet transformative home lives can be.

For many foster children they are brought out of homes which are dangerous and broken, but they were their homes. Which means that despite how safe and loving a foster parent attempts to make the foster home, children wrestle with feelings of safety and security.

Gifts, patterns and healthy habits which are introduced by loving foster families can challenge or even threaten the hearts of the children. Maybe gifts in their own home always came with strings attached, a meal together possibly meant public confrontation, physical contact meant pain and distrust, chores meant labor and earning a warm night's sleep.

For some foster homes these burdens are never fully overcome, but for some of those children who are adopted through the program, change sometimes comes, though even then still slowly. In instances like this change comes not only because they know the patterns in the home, but because they know the people in the home. They experience the love of the parents and patterns slowly change. What was fearful becomes comfortable, things that once threatened become overwhelmed by the trust they now have in their new parent.

The implications of these transitions reach far beyond the foster program. Because the Bible makes it clear that each and every one of us are either children of this world, or children of God. And none of us start out as children of God. There are no orphans in this world on a spiritual level.

Which means that as broken as all of us might be when we come to Jesus, there are patterns and desires in our lives which we might know to be dangerous, but they are our patterns and when they are changed we can still feel threatened. But because God is the ultimate and true Father, he sees the dangerous things of our previous life and he seeks to change them by inviting us into his home. Into his love. Life as God's children changes us.

This transition into a new home is very much what Moses is preparing God's people for as they look out over his Promised Land. Moses has just spent a significant amount of time warning God's people of the ways in which they should not worship God. And now he is beginning to tell them in what ways they should worship God.

And far from being a foreign and alien concept look at how Moses grounds these changes:

Deuteronomy 14:1a.

You are sons of the Lord your God. Just as different homes have different rules and experiences, so too does life as one of God's children. And if we want to understand what it's like to live like a child of God we must not only understand the changes God calls for, but also the nature of the God who changes us. God doesn't ask for us to change and then love us. He loves us and his love changes us.

From Deuteronomy to present day those who follow God have been different. In fact as early as the second century Roman officials called Christians "a third race." They weren't Jew, they weren't Gentile. They were different. Christian or non-Christian, I'm sure there have been times when you've asked yourselves, "Why do these people do this?" And the answer lays in the nature of our salvation and the goodness of our God.

We are going to fly through nearly three chapters of Deuteronomy today, so we are not going to read all of the text this morning. And what we are going to see today are three ways life with this God changes his people: **Life as God's children changes how we live, why we give and why we gather.**

So let's look together at our first point today: **Life as God's children changes how we live.**

Moses has been making this point broadly throughout Deuteronomy, but he is being specific in these legal portion of his sermon. Our passage beings like this: **Deuteronomy 14:1-2.**

And then Moses goes into list of dietary laws. He says in verse 3, "You shall not eat any abomination." And then goes on to describe the land animals you can eat, and the ones you can't eat, then the ocean creatures you can eat, and the ocean creatures you can't eat, then the winged creates you can eat and the winged creatures you can eat.

What is going on in this text and why is this so important to God's people? These are important to God's people for a couple reasons. The first being health reasons and the second being religious reasons.

From a health standpoint most of the animals that Moses allowed God's people to eat were animals that were the safest to eat. On the flip side, a majority of the animals which Moses prohibited the people to eat are animals that have some of the higher risks associated with it.

In a pre-scientific world God has graciously made Moses the first ambassador to community health by steering people away from food which might pose a public hazard, like undercooked fish, or pork and animals that fed on dead animals which might contain all sorts of fun diseases.

While its easy from this perspective to see why some foods are clean and others not, we don't know comprehensively why God picked certain foods and not others. But what we do know is that God cared. It mattered to him. Why? Because they are a people holy, meaning set apart to the Lord. Some of their food is to be set apart because they themselves have been set apart.

This leads into the religious reasons behind the prohibitions. Religiously there were deep pagan worship rituals which affected not only the ways in which people grieved and handled death, but also the way they ate. This is part of the reason why the pig was so prohibited. Not only was it an unclean animal by the standards God gave, but it was also the animal of choice for all sorts of pagan worship surrounding death and graveyards (Is. 65:4, 66:17).

Now, perhaps you've heard people quote passages like this in order to prove that Christians don't really listen to the Bible. Why do you care what the Bible says about sexuality if you are out there eating bacon?

Well it's important to remember that Jesus fulfilled the whole law. In fact once in Jesus' ministry and once in the book of Acts, God declares all food to be clean. This isn't because God doesn't believe his people shouldn't be distinct anymore, but it's because our distinction as believers is no longer in what we eat, but in belonging to Jesus.

Jesus is our chief distinction. But that doesn't mean we tear up the whole Old Testament. Instead we see in this text a holistic distinction which is echoed even in the New Testament.

Here Moses is showing God's people how their view of death and food was influenced by their salvation. Now there are few things more common than death and diets. The idea that we should today eat and drink for tomorrow we die shows up as early as Ecclesiastes in the Bible, Paul quotes something similar in 1 Corinthians 15, and pop-culture and movies use it in our own present day.

Life is summarized by our need to eat and our inevitability to die. And our salvation influences how we view the whole scope of it. From things as monumental as death and minute as a meal.

For instance death is tragic and universal, but the ways in which believers mourn, process and understand death ought to be different than those who are not believers. When it comes to the universality of death, it reminds us that this world has a problem that not culture has been able to solve. But Jesus solved it. Jesus' resurrection really beat it. Death became undone in the work of Jesus Christ.

Death reminds us of our need and our hope. This is what Paul means when he says **1 Thessalonians 1:13-14**. For believers not only does death remind us of our need, but we are comforted in the loss of fellow believers because we know that one day they will be raised to new life in Jesus Christ.

When it comes to our food, do you actually think that God cares about what you are eating? Now this is true in the sense that we are not to be gluttons or slaves to food, but it is also true that God cares about the good food that we eat. Whenever we sit down to eat a meal together we don't have to worry about which food has been set apart, because in Jesus Christ you have been set apart. If the food is this good, imagine how good Jesus' freedom is for all of life.

As Paul is helping the Corinthians church understand the freedom we have to eat he says this: **1 Corinthians 10:31**. Here at Sovereign Hope we fight for this idea of gospel change for all of life because the gospel changes all of our life.

Moses now transitions away from what we bring to our table and focuses on what his people give to God. This is the second point today: **Life as God's children changes why we give.**

Our membership process here at Sovereign Hope includes a couple things, one of which is a membership interview with an elder. As an elder, this is one of my favorite parts of the job because we get to hear first-hand the ways in which Jesus has saved these people.

But as part of the membership interview, we want to prepare people for what it's like living life as part of God's church. And despite my affinity for membership interviews, I always cringe when I have to ask

people if they are willing and able to financially support the church. In fact I'd much rather talk about church discipline than money!

But God's word talks about our generosity towards his church and towards others a lot in scripture. If you are a son or daughter of God, that relationship will have ramifications on your giving.

And it is here in Deuteronomy where Moses begins to talk about the generosity of God's people. In the end of chapter 14 through chapter 15 Moses does this by talking about the yearly tithe, the every three year tithe, and the year of release. And what's interesting is that a portion of scripture which seems to be about giving to God ultimately ends in giving to others.

In fact we see the groundwork of God's remarkable system for social care which isn't fueled by a corporate state or tax, but instead is fueled by individual people reflecting on what God has done for them.

In this portion we see so simply that believers are to give to God because they are grateful, and they are go give to others because God has been gracious to us.

First, we give because we are grateful. Read with me **Deuteronomy 14:22-27**. So here we see that every year, each Israelite family is to take a tenth of their fruits and labors, and travel to the place where God will put his name, and offer them there to the Lord.

Did you notice what was at the heart of Israel's giving? Here whole families are traveling large distances to give to God ten percent of their annual income and at the center of all of it was this command: And you shall eat and rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your household.

For us who put so much hope and comfort into our money, our time, or what we produce, giving up a tenth can seem like a threat not a treat. But what's interesting here is the posture Moses is taking as a preacher. In the book of Leviticus there are far more detailed laws on these tithes, what you do with them, how you offer them, their content...etc. But did you notice the recipients Moses emphasizes here?

He said you go and you offer your tithe, which generally was some sort of food product, and your whole family would feast on the tithe before the Lord! And then he says, but be sure you share it with the Levite. Do you hear what is absent in this text?

God's receipt of the tithe. God doesn't need your money. He doesn't need your wine. He's after your worship. You do not give because God has a need, or a lack. You give because God is worthy of being given to.

Yet as much as God didn't need the tithe, the Levite did. You've seen this theme of Levite a number of times in Deuteronomy and it's always noted that the Levites don't have an inheritance in the land. The Levites were those who would keep the tabernacle and temple. Their work was not tilling the field their work was full time ministry. The ministry to God's people was to be supported by God's people, and even the Levites tithed off the tithe they received.

In other words while God didn't need the tithe, the people did. In order for the corporate worship of God's people to continue, the community of faith contributed to the ministry. I made mention of this at

our Open House, but I heard of a pastor who toured the Middle East and noticed all the elaborate mosques over there. He asked a local pastor how these mosques afforded to be built, and the local pastor said the state funded them.

Even in the times of Israel God didn't choose to create a state which took funds for ministry, instead the church has always been funded by the generosity of believers. We give not because it earns us a standing before God, we give because it is a privilege to worship God with what he has given us, and God has planned that those gifts will serve the expansion of his church.

This is the wonderful reality Paul captured in **2 Corinthians 8:1-5**. Giving to God is a response of gratitude which God uses to build his church. We give to God because we are grateful for what he has done in saving us and we want more and more people to know that good news.

What's unique is that at the end of chapter 14 Moses says that every third year the tithe is not to go to God's special place instead it is to be collected in the middle of your towns and the Levite, the fatherless and the widow will all take from the tithe.

As Christians we are called not only to give to God, but to give to others. And Moses emphasizes this by preaching on the Sabbath Year, or the Year of Release. If you have time this week, read through all of Deuteronomy 15 and notice the amazing social program that God designed this year to be. We are going to spend next week looking at the social justice which defines God's people, but this chapter frames the ground work for it.

It opens up with Moses saying this: **Deuteronomy 15:1-2** consider also **Deuteronomy 15:12**.

So basically every seven years two things would happen. First, land which was being leased or debts which were being paid would be suspended for one year. The goal of this was simple, that your brother and sister Israelites who were lower economically would have a year to get back on their feet.

Contrary to what you might hear in history books, Christianity is not a religion of power. Here from the beginning of God's people concessions are made to serve those who are economically disadvantaged. Why? Because this is what life is like in God's house.

Secondly, any Hebrew slaves which were taken would be eligible for release in this sabbatical year. This is why we need to be careful when talking about slavery in the Bible that we not assume all slavery looks like American chattel slavery. In this specific instance Moses assumes that these slaves are fellow Israelites who had to become slaves in order to pay off some sort of economic debt.

But look at how astounding this release was: **Deuteronomy 15:13-15**.

Here is what I love about this text. We live in a world where money is king to the degree that if you have money you are capable of blessing others and if you don't have money, too bad.

And here Moses says that God's people blessed others out of the abundance which God has blessed them. When we hear this we hear: God made you rich so you can give money to others. Now it's not that God isn't saying that, but he's also saying something more. How do we know this? Because Moses defines the blessing: "You were once a slave in Egypt and the Lord redeemed you."

Does God care about your money? Yes. Should you financially support God's church and the neglected to the degree you can? Yes. But more importantly God wants to see his people serve his church and their communities out of the overflow of their redemption. This includes your money, but also includes your time, your homes and your hands. To have been saved by Jesus is to have been given the resources for radical generosity.

You see in the New Testament there are no prescriptions for tithes, nor is there a sabbatical year. But look at a unique passage of scripture which Jesus read about himself in **Luke 4:18-19**.

Why is it that despite cultural location, despite historical context, despite economic status, despite the amount of saving in the bank Christians have been throughout history the most generous to the disadvantaged?

Because Jesus has proclaimed a perpetual Sabbath year in our hearts. In our salvation he has proclaimed a year of favor. We stood under debts of sin we could never move, and he moved them for us. He took them from us and died on the cross to make a payment for them.

Because of that it should typify God's people that those who are his children leak generosity wherever they go. It's our prayer that as we move into our new building in a new neighborhood that our neighborhood is better cared for because of our church.

Thinking of this gathering, are members of your church better cared for because you are here? Does your heart give to others because you have seen first-hand what God has given to you?

The community of God which knows the salvation of the father begins to over time give like the father. And this rolls into the last point of distinction today: **Living as God's children changes why we gather.**

For many of us, we have had vices, sins, or experiences which make us far more comfortable on our own than with other people. But as we learn more and more about the God who has set us apart in Jesus Christ, it draws us closer to others for one primary reason: we have something to celebrate.

In chapter 16 Moses outlines three celebration feasts that Israel is to keep: **Deuteronomy 16:16**

Passover took place in the spring, the Feast of Weeks was at the beginning of the harvest, and the feast of booths was at the end of the harvest. These three feasts were the time pieces of God's people. The time of year was pretty much determined in relation to these feasts.

It's interesting to notice that we all do that with various things in our own life. For me winter is playoff season for football, spring is draft season, summer is training camp and fall is regular season.

For you maybe it's the school year, hunting, travel, but we have a way of placing something at the center of our time to where we are either preparing for, experiencing, or remembering something.

And central to Israel's feasts was the memory of God's great works: **Deuteronomy 16:1,3,6, 10, 12.**

The people of Israel gathered so that they might celebrate and remember three wonderful truths: first that God had redeemed them from slavery out of Egypt. Second, that God had brought the fruit of the

harvest to them. And thirdly, that now that the hay was in the barn, they were reliant upon God and grateful to him for his continued favor.

Each feast remembered the wonderful works of God and what's interesting is that each of these feasts had an effect that went broader than the nation of Israel: **Deuteronomy 16:14-15**.

The community of God was designed in such a way that the beauty of God's redemption brought joy and celebration to the whole community: the sojourner, the widow, and the orphans. It was attractive to those who were outside, but it was attractive for the right reasons. It was attractive because what was made visible was the joy of being saved by this God. The delight of being a son of a father like this.

Now here is the wonderful transition point in this text. Look at this wonderfully subtle point Moses makes at the end: **Deuteronomy 16:16b-17**.

Make no mistake, despite the celebration these feasts offer, there is something needed to be given. And yet, here we see that everything which God demands from his people, he also provided for them.

God demanded their tithe, their firstborn of their flocks, their offerings, but it was also God who provided all those things to them. And it's this pattern which points forward to our new community celebration in the New Testament.

Just as it was with food laws, just as it was with tithes, we don't see commands to keep these feasts in the New Testament because Jesus fulfilled the law. But rather than abolishing the Passover feast, Jesus transformed it.

On the night of the Passover, Jesus provided for his disciples a new feast, the Lord's Supper. Look with me at **Luke 22:14-20**.

The centerpiece of fellowship for the church is this new covenant meal. A meal which, for the first time, no longer is celebrated by what we bring, but by what Christ has brought for us.

Jesus was killed as the true Passover lamb that we might have life, he is the true harvest which satisfies, and he has given us his Holy Spirit which will endure us through this life.

This deliverance is the center of our community. And we want to make strides to make the center of our homes, our community groups, our weeks and our lives. Why are Christians different? Because there is nothing like salvation in Jesus Christ.

You see Christianity doesn't start with having a different world view. Christianity doesn't start with tithing or generosity. Christianity doesn't even start with religious services or assemblies. Christianity starts by knowing first-hand God's deliverance.

That's what it means to be made a child of this God. Everything else stems from this truth. Everything else is changed by this truth.