

9. Be different

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When I was growing up, I didn't fit in well with any of the groups in the schools. I certainly was not a jock because I was too clumsy with any sport that used a round ball; I was not among those who were top of the class because I didn't want to study; I was not among the tough and rough crowd because I was too timid and too chicken to fight with anyone. But as a typical kid who wanted to fit in, I did dumb things that other kids did. Consequently, "Be different" was a regular mantra from my mama during my growing years.

Now that I am much older, I really don't care what others think. I just do what I need to do and want to do, of course, within reasons.

We find the same command "Be different" from the Lord to the Israelites in more practical ways. Since Moses reminded them what they needed to do spiritually in chapter 12 and 13. But in chapter 14 and 15, we find him reminding them more practical instructions – in mourning, in eating, in tithing, in finance, in handling the poor, and in human resource issues. God wants our daily lives to reflect His presence in us, not just any way we want to live.

A. BE DIFFERENT IN MOURNING

Deuteronomy 14:1-2 "You are the children of the Lord your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave the front of your head for the dead. 2 For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

We must never take for granted that we are "the children of the Lord God" and "a holy people to the Lord God". These are privileges that we don't deserve and that we could never earn, and we enjoy them only because of God's love and grace.

Because of their unique relationship to the Lord as His chosen people and special treasure, the Israelites were responsible to obey Him and truly be a holy people. Without the Lord, Israel would be like all the other nations. As a holy people, they had to learn to distinguish the things that differed.

Our English word "holy" comes from an Old English word meaning "to be whole, to be healthy." What health and wholeness without any disease are to the body, holiness is to the inner person.

As a holy people, the Jews were set apart to be different from all the other surrounding nations because the holy presence of the Lord was with them and they had received God's holy Law. Because they were to be holy people, they were not to imitate the wicked practices of their neighbors, such as cutting their bodies or shaving their foreheads in mourning.

1 Kings 18:28 So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them.

Jeremiah 16:6 Both the great and the small shall die in this land. They shall not be buried; neither shall men lament for them, cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Speaking of cutting oneself, nowadays, it is 'in-thing' to cut their own bodies among the young people, especially high schoolers. They call them 'cutters'. It is not unusual for those young people to cut themselves so much that they literally risk their own lives. You even might have seen some young people who hang themselves in the air with big fish hooks and wires. They call it "body suspension". It is a really disgusting thing to see. All these fads are based on occultic and heathen religious rituals.

The believers of Jesus Christ are supposed to be different. We ought to be holy and separate ourselves from the defilement of the world and seek perfect holiness in the fear of God.

1 Peter 1:15-16 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

1 Peter 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

B. BE DIFFERENT IN EATING

From v3 to v21, we find Moses reminding the Israelites about what to eat and not to eat by telling them "clean and unclean animals, creatures and birds" – Kosher and unkosher.

God expected the Israelites to be different from their neighbor nations even in their eating.

We do not know any particular reason why God separates 'clean and unclean' among His creatures because He didn't explain it to us and I am not even going to venture to do so. Some of you may wonder if we still have to follow this dietary law. No. My answer is based on the Scriptures from the NT.

Mark 7:14-15 When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand: 15 There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man.

Acts 10:14 But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." 15 And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." 16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

Romans 14:14-18 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

Some Christians think that they are better than other believers because they are eating or not eating particular foods, or observing particular day more holier than other days. That is plain unbiblical and prideful.

What is the main principle behind the dietary law of Israel? God even wanted the Israelites to be different in eating foods than their heathen nations. It prevented them from having easy fellowship with Gentiles.

One thing I must mention is in the last portion of v21:

Deuteronomy 14:21c You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

In Israel or anywhere around the world, having a cheeseburger would be an insult to orthodox Jews. Because the rabbis insist that the meat in the hamburger may have come from the calf of the cow that gave the milk for the cheese, and the cheese and the meat would "boil" together by one's stomach acid, and be a violation of this command.

But you can find cheeseburgers at the McDonalds in Jerusalem, Israel. Their cheese is a little different than typical American Cheese in the United States. It came from soy milk. It tastes a little different, but it is totally Kosher with the Jews. After having Israel foods for nine days, eating Kosher cheeseburgers sounded very nice to Karen and me in our last trip.

C. BE DIFFERENT IN TITHING

Deuteronomy 14:22 "You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year.

The people of Israel were to be generous with tithes and offerings because the Lord had been generous with them. Each time they brought their tithes and gifts to the temple sanctuary and enjoyed a thanksgiving feast, it would teach them to fear the Lord, because if the Lord hadn't blessed them, they would have nothing to eat and nothing to give.

Some believers who choose not to tithe will question about this portion, "If we should not to follow the dietary law of the ancient Israel, why do we follow the law of tithing now? Why do we even need to tithe? Jesus in the NT had never told us to tithe." Yes, there is no mention of tithing in the NT. But it mentions about generous giving throughout the NT. Besides, Jesus always talked about tithing in a positive way and had never told us not to tithe.

What the New Testament does speak about with great clarity is the principle of giving; that giving should be regular, planned, proportional, and private. It also mentions that we must be generous, freely given, and cheerful in giving according to 2 Corinthians 9.

Since the New Testament doesn't emphasize tithing and if we have to come up with a certain percentage of our income as giving, ten percent is a good benchmark and starting place. Because for some to give ten percent is nowhere near enough; for others, at their present time, five percent may be a massive step of faith.

If our question is, "How little can I give and still be pleasing to God?" our heart isn't in the right place at all. We should have the attitude of some early Christians, who essentially said: "We're not under the tithe. We can give more!" Giving and financial management is a spiritual issue, not just a financial one.

Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

D. BE DIFFERENT IN YOUR FINANCE

Deuteronomy 15:1-2 "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. 2 And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent any-

thing to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the Lord's release.

Wouldn't you like to have this system in America? If the Israelites kept this one of God's commandments, they would never have had a permanent under-class in Israel. God established an economic system wherein no one had to be chronically poor.

But we find something all together different in v11:

Deuteronomy 15:11 For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'

Does this mean that God is self-contradicting? No way, Jose. He knew that though He had established a system where no one had to be poor all the time, the Israelites would not obey Him and there would always be the poor in Israel. Jesus confirmed this in Matthew 26:

Matthew 26:11 For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always.

The Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee were part of God's wise plan to balance the economic scales in the nation so that the rich could not exploit the poor or the poor take advantage of the rich.

They did not observe the Sabbath Year every seventh year, nor the Year of Jubilee every fiftieth year, and because of this failure they paid a great price. Their seventy years Captivity in Babylon gave their land the Sabbath rest that it missed during those years of disobedience.

Also the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee were tests of faith for the Israelites just as giving to the Lord is a test of our faith. In other words, if you are not tithing to the Lord monetarily, you are choosing to fail the test by your own choice.

E. BE DIFFERENT IN HUMAN RESOURCES

Deuteronomy 15:16-18 And if it happens that he says to you, 'I will not go away from you,' because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, 17 then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise. 18 It shall not seem hard to you when you send him away free from you; for he has been worth a double hired servant in serving you six years.

Then the Lord your God will bless you in all that you do.

Not only the Jews were told to release the debt at every seventh year, they also were told to release any servant who had been a servant in the last six years.

This portion of the Scripture gives us the ground for that famous phrase among Christians – "Bondservant." However, in my opinion, it is a wrong translation.

Please allow me to define this from the original Greek words. We must distinguish this 'doulos' which should translate as a 'bondslave' from a hired servant 'diakonos' in Greek.

In other words, for six years, a Jew was a servant by a contract since he could not pay his debt to the master. But at the seventh year, he becomes a free man since his contract with his master was expired by God's commandment. When a contracted

servant chooses to remain at the Master's home as a bonds slave, he is stepping down from a servant to the position of 'slave' by his choice and love permanently.

Our Lord Jesus beautifully fulfilled this with His own action.

Psalm 40:6 Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.

Remember in v17 of Deuteronomy 15 says, "take an awl and thrust it through his ear to the door." That is their way to say "open one's ear."

Prophet Isaiah also declared it in his Book:

Isaiah 50:5-7 The Lord God has opened My ear; And I was not rebellious, Nor did I turn away. 6 I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting. 7 "For the Lord God will help Me; Therefore I will not be disgraced; Therefore I have set My face like a flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed.

We Christians are bonds slaves of Jesus Christ. Once we were slaves of satan. The Lord Jesus set us free from the bondage of sin and the devil. We became free people. But because the Lord loved us first, we wanted to love Him in return and wanted to be His slaves for eternity, we let Him open the ears of our hearts and became His bonds slaves.

F. APPLICATION

Being set apart for the Lord doesn't mean that we do not associate with the people of the world. It is insulation from the defilement of the world, not isolation from the world. Be different.